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A Silent Monk Speaks

Religious books are hard to sell. Any bookstore clerk will tell you that the general buying public does not spend its book money easily for piety and mystic philosophy.
But the talk of the book world today is a fast-selling, new and most extraordinary religious autobiography. It's the fascinating story of the transformation of a young pagan into a Catholic Trappist monk.
The book is called "The Seven Storey Mountain." Vividly it tells the journey of the author, Thomas Merton, over the dark slopes of mental mountains from collegeboy confusion, and sophisticated denial of religion, into the eye-opening dawn of Thomistic philosophy and the peace of Catholic faith.
Today at the age of 33, Thomas Merton lives under the name of Frater Louis in the silence of a Trappist monastery in Kentucky.
This highly praised book holds a certain fascination as a true story, but it is also a crushing indictment of the confusion of soul in our modern world and of the futility of living without the faith. It is a book worth reading for people of every church and people of no church at all.

THOMAS MERTON REVEALS repeatedly in the Seven Storey Mountain that he was a modern of moderns, an inquiring student who was skeptical of ethical values, self-centered, and sensual. The autobiography of his conversion and the steps which led him to the severe life of prayerful contemplation in a Trappist monastery shows the ultimate triumph of God's grace in melting cynicism and filling an empty heart.
There have been many stories of conversions in recent years, but none show better than The Seven Storey Mountain, how the truths of the Church are the answer to the stumblings of the modern mind.
The author, Thomas Merton was born in France, 1915. His parents were both artists; his father from New Zealand and his mother an American. Not at all concerned with any formal religion, they gave their two sons no religious instruction at all and no habits of church-going.
THE PARENTS DIED when Merton was quite young. After an erratic education in France and England, he wound up at Columbia University in New York City. There he was positive that the joys of sex and alcohol and waiting and intellectual rebellion were the major concern of living.
He says honestly about his soul: "There was no room for God in that empty temple full of dust and rubbish. I jealously guarded my soul against all intruders in order to devote it to the worship of my own stupid will."
Merton admits that his scholastic days were filled with feverish self-indulgence and that his rambling, sharp mind dabbled in everything. At Columbia he became a confirmed Communist. He read everything, loved jazz and enjoyed several romances.
He also traveled a good deal and once while in Italy a study of Christian art led him to dis-

cover for the first time the personality of Christ. He began to read the Gospels and to pray occasionally without quite knowing why or how.
But the big change came when Merton was twenty-one. He happened out of curiosity one day to buy a book on medieval philosophy. Amazed to learn what Christians meant by God, he began to see the principles of Christianity and the virtues of Christ.
From that time on with the help of St. Thomas's philosophy, the Catholic Church exerted an intellectual attraction. All by himself he started to go to Mass; he discovered the Blessed Virgin Mary; he found peace in prayer, and discipline in Catholic morals. In November of 1938, he was received into the Church.
He took a teaching job at St. Bonaventure's College and toyed with the idea of becoming a priest. And then, a weekend retreat, made at the Trappist monastery in Gethsemani, Kentucky, definitely pointed out that the monk's cloistered contemplation and silent work close to God was to be his life calling.

MOST OF THE FINAL hundred pages of The Seven Storey Mountain are a striking description of the life which the author is living and has now lived for six years as a Trappist Monk.
The severe Trappist discipline — the most rigorous in the Catholic Church — is a life of prayer, fasting, spiritual contemplation and unending hard work. For a Trappist, sleeping, eating, and talking are luxuries.
From two o'clock in the morning when his day of prayer and work begins, till seven at night when each monk goes to sleep in his coarse, monastic robes on his wooden plank bed, the whole day is dedicated to God.
Although they follow a pattern of life 1400 years old, the Trappists are as modern as television in their answer to the world's needs.
In living by mortification they counteract the world's dissipation; in glorifying the physical labor of farming and building and crafts, they shame our age of luxury and softliving; in serving God with a complete exclusion of all worldly distractions, they practice the finest type of charity for their work and sacrifice is prayer for the welfare of all mankind.
Most interesting of their practices, all so mysterious and yet so intriguing to our world, is their perpetual silence. From the time they enter the order, Trappists never speak except with permission on certain occasions. They do not consider their silence an ordeal or hardship, for men concerned endlessly with thoughts of God have little need for conversation.
THE SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN is more than just another drama of God's grace achieving a conversion. For every reader, Catholic and Protestant and agnostic, it makes very real the power of faith and the mystery of God's inscrutable ways to win a soul.
"The Seven Storey Mountain" — Thomas Merton (425 pp., \$5.00, Harcourt, Brace.)

Protestant Unit Backs Plan For Church Merger

Chicinnati — (NC) — A move toward the merger of virtually all Protestant denominations in the country and a broad human rights declaration demanding complete abolition of racial segregation marked the close of the 40th anniversary meeting of the Federal Council of Churches in America here.
The declaration, calling for a non-segregated church and society, endorsed President Truman's civil rights program and followed a message to the convention from the President, in which Mr. Truman voiced a plea for greater unity among religious groups of the nation "at a time when a materialistic philosophy is widespread."
AS A MOVE toward unity, the Council passed a recommendation that its member denominations speed action on a proposed merger of the organization with the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Honors

John G. Liebert, of Bethesda, Md., director of the American office for the Rehabilitation Committee for the Catholic Church in Japan, has been made a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Sylvester by Pope Pius XII. Jacques Maritain, distinguished Thomist philosopher and former French Ambassador to the Holy See, has been presented the 1948 Leo XIII award of the Bishop Sheil School of Social Studies, Chicago, for his outstanding contribution to Christian social education. (NC Photos.)

A Look at Labor Labor's Love Lost

This is the story of a mistake made by the board of directors of a large department store. It was a small mistake, but a smart management would not have made it.
This famous department store, known the world over, has a union. It is a good union. The president of the union is a Catholic and a good one. He is hardworking and he is honest.
The department store in question is lucky because this is one of the few department store unions which is not controlled by the Communists. The workers had organized several years ago over the opposition of the management. Fortunately for the company the Communists never got their hands on it.
For the past few years the company has found the union to be quite reasonable. Their demands have never been excessive. They have never violated their contract. Labor relations have been peaceful and strikeless. Because of the union the workers have bettered their wages and working conditions, but the company, too, has prospered. The profits have been much greater than they ever were.
LAST MONTH the Wholesale and Retail Employees of America — C. I. O. held their annual convention. This local union, of which we speak, had a few delegates authorized by their members to attend. These delegates in the main worked in the store.
They had to take time off from their jobs to attend the convention. It was important that they do attend because they could help defeat the Communists at the convention. They received nothing from the union for attending, save their transportation and hotel expenses.
The big question was: Were they to get their salaries while they were away from the store? They had no other income save their salaries. They needed that money. The other workers, not attending the convention, agreed to do their work while they were away. The company would lose no money on the transaction. But — would the company allow these men to receive their pay?
Here was an opportunity for the department store to create

Catholic-Trained Unionists Break Red Domination

New York — (NC) — It happened in New York this year a group of "amateur" rank-and-file union men, using knowledge gained in a Catholic labor school, rose up and sundered the stranglehold which "professional" communist-line leaders had upon their union.
THE HEADLINES told how Michael J. Quill, president of the CIO Transport Workers Union, had dramatically turned away from the communists whom he had apparently listened to for many years, but the real story, according to Jules Weinberg in the November issue of Harper's Magazine, centered upon a number of men from the ranks who gave Mr. Quill no choice.
In his article, "Priests, Workers, and Communists," Mr. Weinberg described the struggle for union power of a man named Raymond Westcott and another named John Brooks. When Mr. Quill broke with the communists by resisting their appeal to take the Transport Workers out of the national CIO, the significant fact, according to the Harper's writer, was that Quill couldn't have done otherwise because "the factions controlled by Westcott, Brooks and their friends would simply have stayed behind within the fold."
THE BLOCKING of Mike Quill began, the story related, in 1943 when Mr. Westcott and Mr. Brooks, both clerical workers for a bus company, went to see the Rev. Philip A. Carey, S.J., director of the Xavier Labor School in Manhattan. He suggested that they unionize the clerical workers, independently if they wanted it that way, but better still with the support of the already existing Transport Workers Union. He invited them to attend his school.
"Xavier Labor School is but one of a system of schools across the country," Mr. Weinberg explained. "They have been established in every industrial city in the nation: 100 permanent schools, 24 directed by Jesuits, 32 by diocesan authorities, and the rest sponsored by Catholic fraternal organizations, colleges, and the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists."
"MOST OF THESE schools came into existence between 1936 and 1944, the era of the Wagner Act and industrial organization by the CIO," he continued. "And each year 7,500 men and women, like Brooks and Westcott, are graduated into the ranks of labor."

Quill's parting with the communist line.
Then, the Harper's writer related, Quill had to break with the American Labor Party, leaving behind him the party line, which was now announced through that political organization. And once he was out, he went whole hog. He resigned from the Greater New York (CIO) Council. And... in March, 1948, he stood up before the membership of the TWU and damned the comrades to hell."
The training of the Xavier "amateurs," Mr. Weinberg indicated, had paid off.
battles. Their instructor in trade union methods was John Holly, original organizer of the building trades unions in New York, who bore scars of struggle against racketeer Scallie and had been a strike leader and organizer in the textile workers' unions. Under the guidance of these men there was none of the debating society technique which has been a hindrance to many extension-school projects."
Making use of the lessons they learned at Xavier, the two men won a skirmish with the communists at a Transport Workers convention over the election of a new board member. They noted who their friends were among the delegates, and at the same time organized a group of about 125 TWU rank-and-file men into a "tight, tough, trained unit," in Mr. Weinberg's words. "A stream of these men attended Xavier Labor School," he wrote.
WHEN THE important matter of the raise in the New York nickel subway fare came before the union, Westcott and Brooks and the rank-and-file were ready. Though Quill and the leaders tried to hold out for the nickel ride and thus support the communist line position, the challengers rallied the weight of the membership behind a fare increase. It was the beginning of



MICHAEL (Red Mike) QUILL, not so Red CIO leader since Catholic trained unionists moved into an active role in Quill's Transport Workers Union.

berg wrote, "The ranks of the labor priests, as they were called by the newspapers, included Cardinals Mooney, Stetch and Mundelein; Bishops Shell and Haas; Monsignors John A. Ryan and Ligutti; Fathers Boland, Monaghan, Masse, Corridan, Clancy, Higgins, Shortell, Smith and Hammond."

"WESTCOTT AND Brooks, along with ten other men from the New York Omnibus Company entered Xavier in a class of 350 men and women, representing every kind of background and experience," he stated. "Longshoremen, teachers, and waitresses; ex-battle lawyers, artists, and postal clerks. But more than 80 per cent of these students earned less than \$2,000 a year."

"A complete course at Xavier offered Brooks and Westcott training in labor law, trade union methods (organizing techniques, contract negotiations, and handling of grievances), parliamentary procedure, economics, public speaking, labor history, and labor ethics. The insistence of practicality was almost fanatical; each year, at Xavier, a group of alumni, called the Seniors, meets to discuss the curriculum and keep it fresh, up to date and utilitarian."

"THEIR TEACHER of parliamentary procedure was Peter Belmonte, for 13 years an official of the Paper Cutters Union. A. F. L. a veteran of many convention and union meeting

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