



THE INTERNATIONAL THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY

Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University
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www.merton.org

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Dr. Tej Bunnag,
Secretary, Thai Red Cross
Thailand

June 27th, 2022

Dear Dr. Bunnag,

As Director of the Thomas Merton Center, the official repository of Merton's literary estate, and as Resident Secretary of the International Thomas Merton Society, I am writing in support for a memorial at Samut Prakarn to commemorate Thomas Merton's death there in December 1968.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) is arguably the most influential American Catholic author of the twentieth century. His autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, has sold millions of copies and been translated into over fifteen languages. He wrote numerous other books & hundreds of poems & articles on topics ranging from monastic spirituality to civil rights, nonviolence, & nuclear war.

Thomas Merton was born in Prades, France on January 31st, 1915. After a rambunctious youth Merton converted to Roman Catholicism whilst at Columbia University and in December 1941 entered the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky.

The years he spent at Gethsemani brought about profound changes in his thought, propelling him into the political arena, where he became the conscience of the peace movement of the 1960's. Referring to race and peace as the two most urgent issues of our time, Merton was a strong supporter of the nonviolent civil rights movement.

During his last years, he became deeply interested in Asian religions, particularly Zen Buddhism, & in promoting East-West dialogue. After several meetings with Merton in 1968, the Dalai Lama praised him as having a more profound understanding of Buddhism than any other Christian he had known. It was during this trip to a conference on East-West monastic dialogue that Merton died, near Bangkok on December 10, 1968.

There is a plaque in Prades, France where he was born; a historical marker here in Louisville; &, of course, his grave site at the Abbey & so to have a plaque at the place where he died would complete the circle, so to speak.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything else I can do to help.

Dr. Paul M. Pearson
ITMS Resident Secretary & Director, the Thomas Merton Center