

12. 10. 78
3. 11. 80
6. 10. 83 (918)

The Light of X^t (First
I Will Arise (Celebrate
1')

Thirty years and more ago, a cistercian monk living in a remote monastery in Kentucky in the United States was enjoying an extraordinary vogue with his writings — on spiritual life; and his autobiography, which became a best-seller, 'The Seven Storey Mountain' or 'Elective Silence' as it was known outside the United States. The story of his own pilgrimage of life and his finding his place in the monastic life of prayer, work and contemplation, inspired many people in those years, some of whom followed in his footsteps into monastic life. Thomas Merton continued to write, many books which were translated and reprinted many times. Later, he became a somewhat controversial figure for some of the causes he espoused: he became a travelling spiritual director, giving retreats and courses on prayer. And he died about ^{10 or 12} 10 years ago, in an accident while travelling through Bangkok. For a while (as so often seems to happen with writers who've been in vogue at some stage), he faded from the bookshelves. But more recently there's been a revival of interest in Thomas Merton and his writings, and new editions of his books being issued, new collections of unpublished pieces. It's his more purely 'spiritual' books that are being re-read now, in keeping maybe with the developed interest in, and practice of prayer and contemplation that's been notably growing these recent years — and this not only within church communities. Not quite true to say that Thomas Merton is being re-discovered: he has yet to be fully evaluated, and meanwhile continues to be helpful to many people in their trying to live Christian lives, with a deeper prayerfulness. [What I've

Today, I'd like to share with you

been saying is by way of introduction to a piece I wanted to share with you today,] a passage from Merton's "New Seeds of Contemplation". It's one approach to the perennial question of 'how can I to know the will of God?' 'Thy will be done', we pray so often, maybe thinking of it in rather general terms rather than in the context of our own daily lives. Of course it's clear enough whenever there is an explicit claim on our obedience, such as a legitimate command. But the very nature of each situation (Merton wrote) usually bears witness into itself some indication of God's will. For whatever is demanded by truth, by justice, by mercy, or by love must surely be taken to be willed by God. To consent to His will, then, is to consent to be true, or to speak truth, or at least to seek it. To obey Him is to respond to his will expressed in the need of another person, or at least to respect the rights of others. For the right of another person is the expression of God's love and God's will. In demanding that I respect the rights of another, God is not merely asking me to conform to some abstract, arbitrary law: he is enabling me to share, as his child, in His own care for my brother or sister. No one who ignores the rights and needs of others can hope to walk in the light of contemplation, because his way has turned aside from truth, from compassion, and therefore from God. So, Thomas Merton. A song of prayer now, "I heard the voice of Jesus say" ^{M. J. Kelly Lord}

Wood Hall Hope
Songs from
First Sounds
12

MUSIC - PRAYERS

The requirements of a work to be done can be understood as the will of God. If I am supposed to hoe a garden or make a table, then I will be

obeying God if I am true to the task I am performing. To do the work carefully and well, with love and respect for the nature of my task, and with due attention to its purpose, is to unite myself to God's will in my work. In this way I become his instrument. He works through me. When I act as his instrument, my labour cannot become an obstacle to contemplation, even though it may temporarily so occupy my mind that I cannot engage in it while I am actually doing my job. Yet my work itself will purify and pacify my mind and dispose me for contemplation. Unnatural, frantic, anxious work, work done under pressure of greed or fear or any other inordinate passion, cannot properly speaking be dedicated to God, because God never wills such work directly. He may permit that through no fault of our own we may have to work readily and distractedly, due to our sins, and to the sins of the society in which we live. In that case we must tolerate it and make the best of what we cannot avoid. But let us not be blind to the distinction between sound, healthy work and unnatural toil. In any case, we should always seek to conform to the inner logic or truth of the duty before us, the work to be done, or our own God-given nature.

Contemplative obedience and abandonment to the will of God can never mean a cultivated indifference to the natural values implanted by Him in human life and work. Insensitivity must not be confused with detachment. A contemplative must, certainly, be detached, but can never allow himself to become insensible to true human values, whether in society, in other people, or in himself.