

DEATH OF THOMAS MERTON

Father Thomas Merton, Trappist philosopher and writer, died, accidentally electrocuted, in Bangkok on December 10, aged 53.

Father Merton was a monk of Gethsemane Abbey, Kentucky, U.S.A., he had gone to Bangkok to take part in an international conference on monasticism and had lectured to the conference the day before his death.

Father Merton was born in France in 1915 the son of a New Zealand Anglican father and an American mother. His own introduction to Catholicism came through his literary studies. He was received into the Church in 1938 and became a Trappist in 1941. His many books—especially *Elected Silence* and *The Seven Storey Mountain*, won international fame.

DEATH OF KARL BARTH

Karl Barth, 82, a pre-eminent Protestant theologian, died on December 10 at his home in Basel, Switzerland.

He was born on May 10, 1886, the son of Swiss Reformed minister in 1908. As pastor of a parish, he became known as the "Red Pastor" because of his support of factory workers seeking higher wages and better working conditions.

His first book, *The Epistle to the Romans*, appeared in 1919.

Professorships at the German universities of Gottingen, Muenster and Bonn followed.

As professor at Bonn, Barth was a civil servant. He refused to take the oath of allegiance that Hitler required of state employees. In 1934, he was the chief author of the Barmen Confession, which asserted the freedom of the Church from temporal powers. It was signed by about 2000 leaders of German Protestantism.

Condemned by a Nazi court in 1935 for "seducing the minds" of students, Barth was dismissed from his post at Bonn and expelled from Germany.

He became professor of theology at the University of Basel and continued in that position until his retirement six years ago.

The most extensive exposition of his thought is his uncompleted 17-volume *Church Dogmatics*. His system of theology states that Christianity rests upon faith in a God who is supreme and transcendent, who approaches men but cannot be approached by them except on His terms.

He is survived by his wife, a daughter and two sons, both theologians.

In an interview with KNA, the German Catholic news agency, Father Hanes Kueng, praised Karl Barth as having contributed more than any other Protestant theologian to an understanding between Protestant and Catholic theology.

Barth's object, he said, was not the conversion of Catholics to Protestantism or vice versa, but the conversion of Catholics and Protestants to the Gospel of Christ. The fundamental concerns of his theology are now "the common property of both Churches", Father Kueng said.

BRAZILIAN BISHOPS WARN AGAINST INDISCRIMINATE BIRTH CONTROL

Developing countries cannot afford indiscriminate birth control policies, the bishops of Brazil said in a joint statement released at Rio de Janeiro, after their national meeting.

Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, the bishops said, is a defence of the dignity of man "and a condemnation of the civilization of profit and pleasure to which Western nations, once considered Christian, are now turning."

A set of instructions on the conduct to be followed by priests and married couples regarding the encyclical is preceded in the joint document by a statement that *Humanae Vitae* "is part of the teaching authority of the Church," and, as such must be binding for Catholics.

PAPAL PEACE PROGRAMME

A global programme directed towards the promotion of justice as the means of countering the "permanent threat of war" and achievement of peace by peace by channeling military spending into aid for developing nations has been issued by the Vatican to mark Pope Paul VI's second World Day of Peace on January 1, 1969.

The document provides a suggested plan for persons responsible for the organization of the World Day of Peace on national levels in all countries. It calls for action by individuals, groups and governments and expressed the hope