

Monastery Life Grows In Nation

By GEORGE W. CORNELL
AP Religion Writer

Alone, shut off from the world in silence and solitude, they commune with the infinite. "Oh merciful creator . . . to us in pity bow thine ear."

They are the cloistered monks of the Roman Catholic Church who devote their lives to seclusion, prayer and meditation — a form of consecration which is growing today in this country.

"It's an amazing paradox," said the Rev. Augustine Modotti, of the ancient Order of the Camaldolese.

"The general impression is that in America everything is money, business, materialism and pleasure. Yet we see this powerful wave of spirituality, this great undercurrent of belief in God and search for truth."

Since World War II, the contemplative life has had its greatest American expansion. In that period, the number of Trappist communities, this country's main rigidly monastic order, has quadrupled.

Sign of God.

"It's a wonder, a sign of God," said Father Modotti, a tall, gray-bearded man with flashing eyes. "The Holy Ghost is working on this land."

So now, with such indications, plus letters of request, Father Modotti has come here from Italy to start an American branch of the Camaldolese, who adhere to an even more solitary existence — the true life of a hermit.

Until now, the most secluded U.S. groups have been the Trappists and Carthusians, who take meals together and share community dwellings.

But the Camaldolese hermit lives alone, eats alone, and works alone in his own cell — with his own vegetable patch surrounded by walls too high to see over.

"It's the type of life that is condemned by the world," Father Modotti said, "the kind of life the world calls madness, the foolishness of the cross."

Yet, he said, intensive prayer is the basis of everything for the church.

Prayer Necessary

"More than action, prayer is necessary," he said. "Christ insisted on that in the gospel."

Father Modotti and the Rev. Aliprindo Catani, first assistant to the order's father-general, are now interviewing prospective candidates for membership — about 20 already have applied and seeking a suitable U.S. site.

The two emissaries, staying temporarily at St. Thomas rectory, Archbald, Pa., said Americans have a determined, rugged vigor, which shows up in material pursuits, and this is the quality needed for hard spiritual roles. "This character makes us think Americans are prepared for a life like ours, hard and difficult though it be," Father Catani, 42, said.

Father Modotti, 61, for 35 years a missionary before becoming a hermit monk 10 years ago, said he "considers the contemplative life much greater" — that it does more for God and men.

Under the rule of the Camaldolese, the church's most rigidly isolated life, the individual cells or hermitages are built in groups, but each separated from the other by walls, with meals supplied through a small cubbyhole.

Up at 1:30 a.m.

The hermit rises each day at 1:30 a.m. for their first devotions of matins and lauds. After a rest from prayers, he goes to the community church for prime, but no man speaks to another, only to God. They return to their cells to celebrate mass alone. After a small breakfast, alone, come more prayers.

They spend six to 10 hours a day in prayer. Father Modotti said, at least an hour's work in their gardens, and also do other work of their choosing, as carpenters, cobblers, painters, writers.

After lunch, they may take walks in the woods. Brief conversation with others is permitted twice a week.

Father Modotti said about half the hermit novices drop out, unable to stand the isolation, but those who stick to it find a greater happiness, and don't want to return to the world.

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NEW DELHI (AP)—India's moonshiners and bathtub gin makers are doing a flourishing business. Police admit a lot reaches the customers, but they have seized about 175,000 pounds of illegal hooch in the New Delhi area alone since public drinking was outlawed and liquor imports were restricted two years ago.

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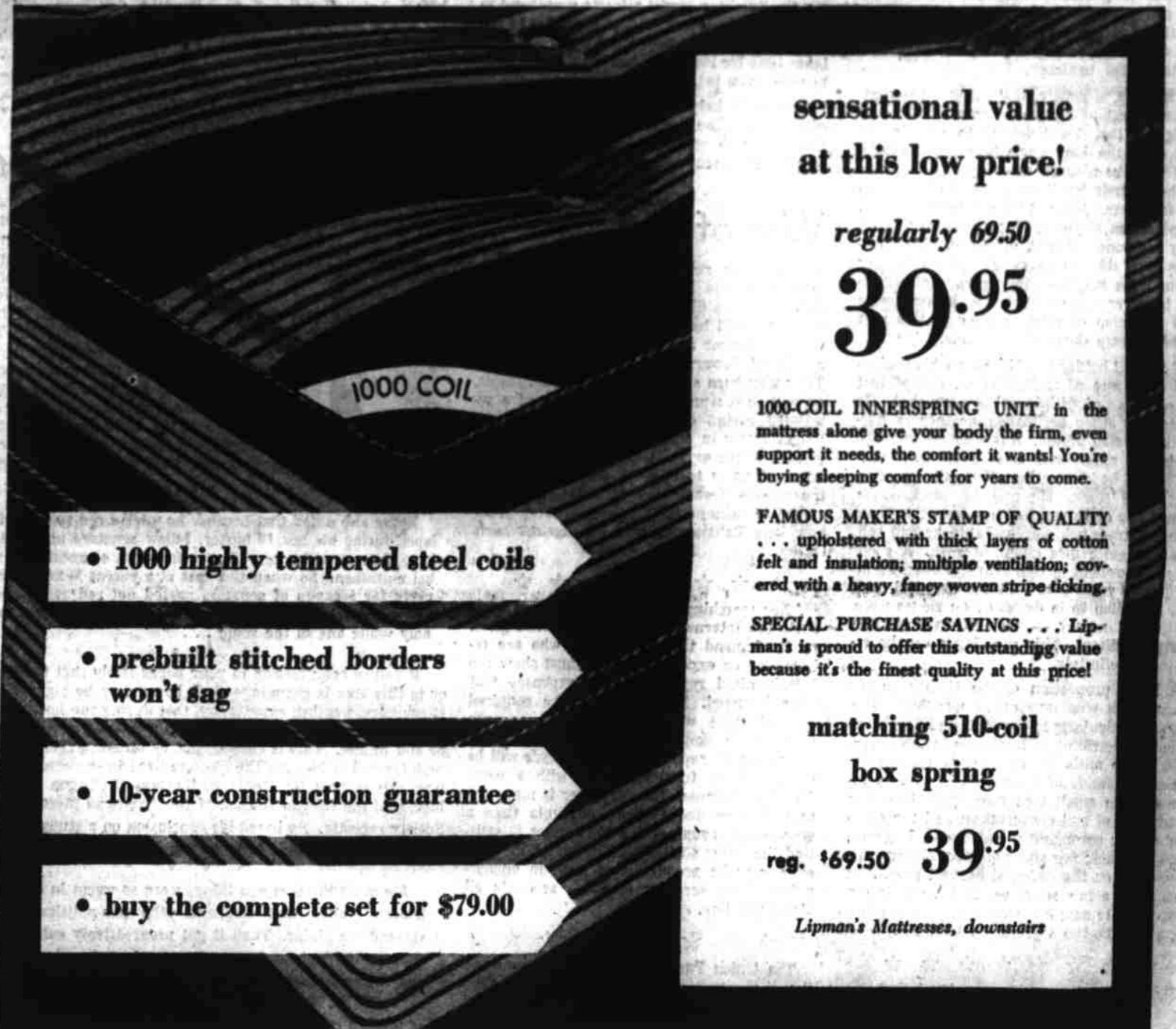
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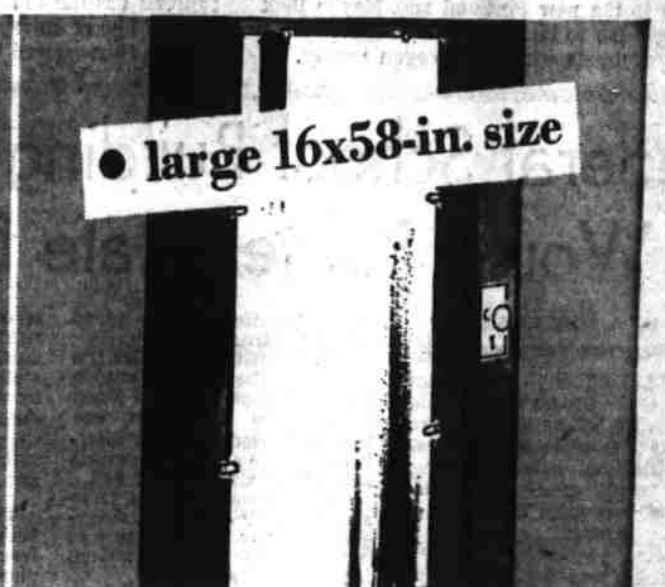


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