

International Thomas Merton Society

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 4, No. 1

Spring 1997



Art: Jlm Cantrell

ITMS Tenth Anniversary

On May, 30, 1997, the International Thomas Merton Society celebrates the tenth anniversary of its founding. During the weekend of May 29-31, 1987, a group of fourteen scholars, convened by Msgr. William H. Shannon, met at the Thomas Merton Studies Center in Louisville, Kentucky to form the ITMS. The gathering was an outgrowth of contacts made almost a decade earlier at various symposia held in 1978 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Merton's death, and developed from Msgr. Shannon's experience coordinating the Thomas Merton Society of Rochester, NY.

In addition to Msgr. Shannon and Dr. Robert Daggy, who hosted the group as director of the Merton Center, participants in this founding meeting included Christine Bochen, David Cooper, Lawrence Cunningham, Br. Patrick Hart, E. Glenn Hinson, Victor Kramer, Dewey Weiss Kramer, Patrick O'Connell, Anthony Padovano, Ron Seitz, Bonnie Thurston and Sr. Mary Luke Tobin.

At the meeting, goals and preliminary by-laws for the society were drawn up and officers chosen: William H. Shannon as president, Robert Daggy as vice president, Christine Bochen as secretary and Bonnie Thurston as treasurer. It was decided that *The Merton Seasonal*, which had been published by the Merton Center at Bellarmine since 1976 under Dr. Daggy's editorship, would become the official organ of the ITMS, and subscribers were informed of the founding of the Society and invited to

become members in the Autumn 1987 issue.

To recognize the twentieth anniversary of Merton's death and to increase awareness of the ITMS, a "Celebrate Merton '88 Year" was proposed, to be marked by regional meetings and symposia. Plans were also made to hold the First General Meeting of the Society May 25-28, 1989 at Bellarmine College.

Since that time, membership in the ITMS grew from the initial fourteen to more than 1600. In addition to the General Meetings, held at Bellarmine (1989), Nazareth College, Rochester, NY (1991), Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO (1993), and St. Bonaventure University, Olean, NY (1995), highlights of the first decade of the ITMS include: the biennial awarding of "Louies," Merton statuettes to honor outstanding contributions to international appreciation of Merton, to Merton scholarship, and to the ITMS itself; the establishment and growth of local chapters, under the guidance of the first chapters coordinator, the late Arline Newton, and her successor, Ed Farley, with the leadership of many local ITMS members; the establishment of the *ITMS Newsletter* in 1994, first edited by Frank Tuoti and now by Greg Ryan; the first series of ITMS summer retreats in 1996, coordinated by Harriet Hope and Robert Hale, OSB Cam.; as well as the continued publication of *The Merton Seasonal* and the closer coordination between the ITMS and *The Merton Annual*, published since 1988.

Msgr. Shannon has written a brief history of the first decade of the ITMS, which will appear in the program of the ITMS Fifth

General Meeting, to be held June 12-15 at Spring Hill College, Mobile, AL. A ceremony honoring the "Founding Fourteen" will be part of the ITMS "Town Meeting" on Saturday afternoon at the Mobile meeting. To mark the tenth anniversary, ITMS President Pat O'Connell will also announce at the "Town Meeting" the winners of the first "Shannon Fellowships" for research at Merton archival collections, to be awarded annually by the ITMS.

Merton Center in New Quarters

The Thomas Merton Center, located for the past twenty years on the ground floor of Bonaventure Hall at Bellarmine College, Louisville, KY, was moved to its present location on the second floor of the new W. B. Lyons Brown Library on March 17 and April 4, 1997. (Particular credit and appreciation are due to Merton Center administrative assistant Michael Drury, Merton trustee Tommie O'Callahan and ITMS Treasurer Erlinda Paguio for their hard work in getting the Merton collection transferred from old quarters to new.) The new Merton Center is elegantly designed with two large reading rooms, administrative offices, and more space to exhibit books and art works by Merton or those related to him, as well as to store the extensive collection of primary and secondary source materials of Mertoniana. Two cubicles in one of the reading rooms provide privacy for listening to Merton's taped conferences or viewing videocassettes about him. All are welcome to visit the Center.

The dedication of the library on April 9 was the high point of a week-long celebration at Bellarmine, which included a reading of Merton's poems by Br. Paul Quenon, OCSO. The official dedication of the Merton Center itself is scheduled for October 10, 1997. The Rev. Dr. A. M. Allchin, a friend of Merton and author of *The World Is a Wedding: Explorations in Christian Spirituality* and many other publications,

will be the featured speaker. For more information about the Dedication Program, call the Merton Center at (502) 452-8187.

A Taste of Gethsemani

The Thomas Merton Center Foundation sponsored a panel discussion on December 10, 1996 at Bellarmine College in Louisville, KY, featuring five Cistercian monks who were former students of Merton at the Abbey of Gethsemani. The program, which commemorated the twenty-eighth anniversary of Merton's death, was preceded by a vespers service led by a schola of monks. In addition to this food for the soul, a taste of Trappist cheese and fruitcake was served before and after the program.

The panel, moderated by author and Bellarmine professor emeritus Wade Hall, included Fr. Matthew Kelty, Brother Paul Quenon, and three abbots, Frs. Timothy Kelly of the Abbey of Gethsemani, Fr. James Conner of Assumption Abbey, Ava, MO, and Fr. John Eudes Bamberger of the Abbey of the Genesee, Piffard, NY.

One of the memories each shared with the 340 people who attended the program was their first meetings with Merton, recalling how much they were caught unawares that the novice master they were talking to was the famous writer himself. Fr. Timothy recalled telling the monk that he thought Merton's writings were "rather romantic," while Br. Paul commented that he thought the autobiography was "a little bit long in the middle." Fr. James said he was looking for someone who looked pious and inspirational, but discovered that Merton "looked much more like the community buffoon than the community intellect." Fr. John Eudes noted that Merton looked like "a guard for Notre Dame," and it was only when he spoke that his depth and fluidity became apparent. Fr. Matthew recalled that Merton asked him to be his confessor because Merton knew it would mean much to him.

The audience was much delighted and inspired by the spontaneity and the substance of the discussion. The videotape of this program is available from the Thomas Merton Center Foundation, Bellarmine College, 2001 Newburg Road, Louisville, KY 40205, for \$21.95 & \$2.50 per tape for postage and handling.

Summer Merton Events

June 9-13: ITMS member Fr. Patrick Collins will be presenting a course on "The Spirituality of Thomas Merton." For information contact: Eleanor Holland, IBVM, Catholic Theological Union, 5401 S. Cornell, Chicago, IL 60615; phone: (773) 753-7474; e-mail: HollandE@aol.com.

• • • • •

June 21-July 31: Fr. Francis Kelly Nemeck, OMI and Sr. Marie Theresa Coombs will direct a forty-day "desert experience" retreat following the principles of St. John of the Cross and Thomas Merton. Contact: Lebh Shomea House of Prayer, Box 9, Sarita, TX 78385; phone: (512) 294-5369.

• • • • •

June 30-July 11: ITMS member Douglas Burton-Christie will be presenting a course on "The Christian Spiritual Journey: Antony of Egypt, Hildegard of Bingen, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Thomas Merton." Contact: Department of Theological Studies, Loyola Marymount University, 7900 Loyola Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90045-8400; phone: (310) 338-7670.

• • • • •

July 14-18: Graduate course on Thomas Merton. Contact: Department of Religious Studies, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH 45469-1530; phone: (937) 229-4321; e-mail: relstudy@checkov.hm.udayton.edu.

• • • • •

July 16-25: ITMS member Donald Grayston will lead a pilgrimage to Merton's birthplace, Prades, France, including visits to St-Antonin and Montauban, as well as lectures, discussions and meetings with local

ITMS members. Contact: Donald Grayston, Humanities Program, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6, Canada; phone: (604) 291-5516.

• • • • •

July 21-27: Fr. Joe Watt, formerly a Trappist with Thomas Merton, will present a retreat: "Contemplative Ways of Being: The Way of Thomas Merton." Contact: Santa Sabina Center, 25 Magnolia Ave., San Rafael, CA 94901; phone: (415) 457-7727; e-mail: Sntasabina@aol.com.

Chapter News

The Santa Sabina Center has continued to host its monthly "Thomas Merton Reflection Evenings" for quiet and shared reflection on Merton's life and writings, Tuesdays, 7-9 p.m. The last meeting of the spring took place on May 13 and the reflection evenings will begin again on September 9. The Center also hosted a conversation with Merton biographer Jim Forest on November 11, a weekend retreat November 14-16 on "Thomas Merton, Spiritual Master" with Lawrence Cunningham, and an Advent Poustinia Retreat December 19-21 led by Flavian Burns, OCSO, former abbot of Gethsemani and student of Thomas Merton. For information contact: **Harriet Hope**, Santa Sabina Center, 25 Magnolia, San Rafael, CA 94901.

• • • • •

The Louisville Chapter of the ITMS hosted Merton scholar Jonathan Montaldo at its February meeting. Montaldo, editor of *Entering the Silence*, the second volume of the complete Merton journals, was in Louisville to present a course entitled "Thomas Merton: Wisdom and the Remembered Self," which examined major themes in Merton's private journals. The course, which was taught at both Bellarmine College and at the Cathedral of the Assumption in Louisville, was sponsored by The Thomas Merton

Center Foundation and the Office of Continuing Studies at Bellarmine. Recent meetings of the chapter have focused on the theme of freedom in Merton's writings. For information contact: **Erlinda Paguio**, 7317 Honiasant Ave., Louisville, KY 40214.

• • • • •

The Thomas Merton Society of Michiana sponsored a presentation on May 1 entitled "Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day on the Church in the World" by Michael Baxter, CSC, moral theologian and visiting assistant professor at the University of Notre Dame. A lecture entitled "Encounters of the Heart - A Taste of Merton Spirituality" with teacher and counselor Tom Peterson is planned for September. The group also sponsors continuing faith sharing, contemplative prayer, and book discussion groups. For information contact: **Jan Jenkins**, 3621 Sullivan Court, South Bend, IN 46614.

• • • • •

The Massachusetts Chapter of the ITMS attended talks on Merton on November 21 at Boston College by Jim Forest, who spoke on Merton and his peace writings, and on December 10 at St. Paul's Parish Hall in Cambridge by Rosemary Haughton, who gave the annual Thomas Merton Lecture on "Contemplation: A Different Way of Seeing." The group's March meeting took place at Holy Cross College in Worcester and focused on selections from Merton's *Vow of Conversation*. For information contact **Ed Farley**, 262 Wentworth Ave., Lowell, MA 01852.

• • • • •

On November 19, the Cleveland Chapter of the ITMS celebrated its first anniversary with readings from some of Merton's writings, reflections on its first year and plans for its second, and a party with cookies and a birthday cake provided by chapter president Sr. Donna Kristoff. During the fall, Donna presented a well-attended, enthusiastically received eight-week course on Merton at the "Elders' Campus" at Cuyahoga Community College in Parma OH. For information contact: **Donna Kristoff**,

OSU, 2600 Lander Road, Pepper Pike, OH 44124.

• • • • •

The Spring Retreat of the Capital University [Columbus, OH] Chapter of the ITMS was held May 29-June 1 at Bethany Spring Retreat Center, Bethany Spring, KY. The chapter's study group completed its discussion of *A Thomas Merton Reader* at its May 19 meeting, and will be holding a wrap-up/planning/picnic gathering on June 22. For information contact: **Nancy Kellogg**, 5915 Headley Road, Gahanna, OH 43230.

• • • • •

The Seattle Chapter meets monthly with a focus on listening to Merton tapes and a meditation period; in November, the group sponsored a three-week seminar at St. Benedict Parish facilitated by chapter coordinator Richard Kortser. For information contact: **Richard Kortser**, 2335 N. 133rd St., Seattle, WA 98133.

• • • • •

On May 17, the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland sponsored a one-day conference on "Merton, Eckhart and the Contemplative Tradition" in association with the St. Theosevia Centre for Christian Spirituality, at Regent's Park College, Oxford. Featured speakers were Dom Aldhelm Cameron Brown, OSB and Dr. Oliver Davies. The society now includes over three hundred members. For information contact **Paul Pearson**, The Thomas Merton Society, 18 Colby Road, Upper Norwood, London, SE19 1HA, Great Britain.

• • • • •

A new Brazilian Chapter of the ITMS is currently forming, to be called "The Society of the Brotherly Friends of Thomas Merton." The first meeting of the group took place on December 10, to commemorate the anniversary of Thomas Merton's death. For information contact **Waldecy Gonçalves**, Rua Provina Cavalcanti, 153 apto. 1102, 22610-080 Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil.

(News Ed.: Gregory Ryan: gjryan@aol.com)