

WOMEN AND MERTON

+ *ITMS* GENERAL MEETING REFLECTIONS

by **Robert E. Daggy**

“Women and Merton” is a topic gaining momentum in the parlance of Merton studies. It is a topic though which can be approached in various ways. There were, first of all and of course, the women in Merton’s life. There were the women to whom he wrote letters. There was the woman at Cambridge, still shrouded in mystery, and there was “S.,” the student nurse who continues to intrigue Merton readers. There were the “dream figures” of Proverb and Hagia Sophia — absorption in the latter seems to have been a watershed experience for Merton. So far, Bonnie Bowman Thurston is among the few women scholars who have approached the *real* women in Merton’s life in her *ITMS* General Meeting paper, “‘I Never Had a Sister’: Merton’s Friendships with Women.” Sr. Marilyn King deals with Hagia Sophia and that dimension in Merton’s experience in her essay in *The Merton Annual II*: “‘A Soft Voice Awakens Me’: Merton’s Spirituality of Human Communication.”

Then there are the many women writers, scholars, poets, and artists who have studied, written on, and depicted Merton. Major books have been produced by women: Anne E. Carr, Monica Furlong, Therese Lentfoehr, Elena Malits, Elisabeth Ott, and the bibliographies compiled by Marquita E. Breit. Again, Bonnie Bowman Thurston has been forward in her preparation of bibliographic material about women on Merton. It has recently been announced (following the resignation of David D. Cooper) that the fourth volume of *The Merton Letters* will be edited by Christine M. Bochen.

And there is the question of updating Merton’s language to be inclusive. Several proposals have been presented to the Trustees of the Merton Legacy Trust, but, to date, only one pamphlet seems to have appeared: *Words of Peace: Thomas Merton on Nonviolence*, published and de-sexed by Pax Christi USA in Erie, Pennsylvania. A note points out: “The manuscripts in this publication have been adapted to reflect gender inclusive language.”

We feature in this issue of *The Merton Seasonal* some thoughts on women in Merton’s life as well as essays, poetry, and artwork by women. One paper from and two reminiscences about the *ITMS* General Meeting in May 1989 also appear.



HAGIA SOPHIA

Drawing by Victor Hammer