

Bellarmine College Dedicates New Merton Center

The new Thomas Merton Center, located on the second floor of the recently completed W.L. Lyons Brown Library at Bellarmine College, Louisville, Kentucky, was dedicated on October 10, 1997. The Center, formerly located in Bonaventure Hall, is home to the largest Merton collection in the world.

Ceremonies began with a noon celebration of the Eucharist at Bellarmine's Wyatt Hall Chapel. Rev. Eugene L. Zoeller presided, and Dr. Theresa Sandok, OSM, director of the Merton Center and executive director of the Merton Center Foundation, served as lector. Music was provided by Bellarmine's Chapel Musicians, Choral Touring Ensemble, and Handbell Ensemble, all directed by Dr. Alexander T. Simpson, Jr. Jane Marie Richardson, SL, Merton friend and former ITMS board member, presented as the communion meditation "A Song of Mercy," adapted from the conclusion of *The Sign of Jonas*.

After tours of the new Center throughout the afternoon, the official dedication took place at 4:30 p.m., with Archbishop Thomas C. Kelly, OP, of Louisville officiating. Following readings by Mary Becker, chair of the Merton Center Foundation, from the Book of Wisdom, and by Thomas Del Prete, president of the ITMS, from Merton's own 1963 statement "Concerning the Collection in the Bellarmine Library," there were brief presentations by Dom Timothy Kelly, OCSO, Abbot of Gethsemani, Robert Giroux, Merton's publisher and Merton Legacy Trustee, and Dr. Joseph J. McGowan, Jr., President of Bellarmine College. (Their remarks are reprinted below.) Then Archbishop Kelly, accompanied by representatives of the College, the Abbey, the Merton Legacy Trust, the Merton Center Foundation, and the ITMS, formally blessed the new Center.

Concluding remarks by Mrs. Tommie O'Callaghan, Merton Legacy Trustee and Vice Chair of the Merton Center Foundation, included the announcement that the reading room in the new Center has been named in honor of Dr. Robert E. Daggy, longtime director of the Center and resident secretary of the ITMS. Dr. Daggy (who died in December) was present for the dedication.

After a reception and dinner, the day's events concluded with a 7:30 lecture in Wyatt Hall's Cralle Theatre by Canon A. M. Allchin, introduced by Bellarmine theology professor and ITMS board member Fr. George Kilcourse. Formerly attached to Canterbury Cathedral and to Oxford University and now living and working in Bangor, Wales, Canon Allchin is a renowned author and ecumenist who became a close friend of Thomas Merton, visiting him at Gethsemani three times in the 1960s. His lecture, "Our Lives, a Powerful Pentecost: Merton's Meeting with Russian Christianity," focused on Merton's deep

Prayer of Blessing for the New Merton Center

Gracious God, we ask you to bless the Thomas Merton Center. May those who come here to study find your truth. May those who come here to meet experience your love. And may those who come here to pray discover the beauty of your countenance. We thank you for the gifts you continue to bestow upon your people through the life and works of our brother, Thomas. May we, like him, seek you ardently all of our days with all of our being. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

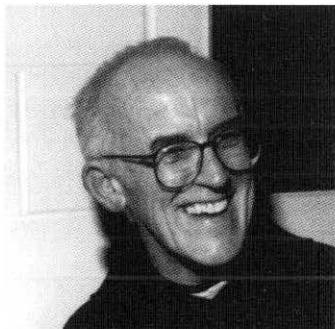
interest in and appreciation of modern Russian Orthodox writers and theologians. (Allchin's lecture will be published in *The Merton Annual*.)

Thomas Merton began contributing items to the Merton collection at Bellarmine in 1963, when, with the approval of Abbot James Fox and Bellarmine president Msgr. Alfred F. Horrigan, a Merton Room was established in the college library. In 1967, just one brief year before his death, Merton set up a legacy trust in which he named Bellarmine the official repository of his manuscripts, letters, journals, tapes, drawings, photographs, and memorabilia. In August 1976, the Merton Center moved to Bonaventure Hall, where the collection was housed until its most recent move to the new Merton Center in March 1997. Over the years, the collection has grown to more than 40,000 items, incorporating works translated into 28 languages, over 100 masters and doctoral theses, audiovisual materials, and a growing collection of paintings, drawings, sculptures, and fabric art depicting Merton.

The new Merton Center is open to visitors from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. For information contact the Merton Center at (502) 452-8187.

DEDICATION REMARKS

On the Edge of a Great Realization



TIMOTHY KELLY, OCSO
Abbot of Gethsemani

On page 297 in the just published volume 6 of *The Journals of Thomas Merton*, there is an entry concerning the Merton room. (I suspect that many readers of volume 6 will be using the index for leads other than the "Merton Room.") The entry reads as follows:

"The Merton room is a kind of escape from Gethsemani, a protest against their messing up, destroying, losing, frittering away, dispersing, rotting, canning, feeding to the mice everything I have put my heart into."

He knew us pretty well! After all, we were his brothers. And it is true, who among us ever gives his brothers or sisters sufficient recognition for their talents? We know them in that more primary relation: that of brother or sister. Who is going to save every scrap

of paper from one's sibling, expecting it to be of value for posterity? Or, on the rare occasion that it does happen, the one preserving so individualizes the collection that the person represented becomes questionable. It was a wise thing that Merton did with the blessing of his Abbot, James Fox.

So the Abbey of Gethsemani owes a real debt of gratitude to Bellarmine, Monsignor Horrigan, Father John T. Loftus, OFMConv, and many others from 1963 who understood the value of the Merton corpus and wanted it preserved for the future. Not only did they understand the importance of the work, but they also established a place to gather and care for the material, a place to keep from "feeding the mice"—a home for the memories of Merton's heart.

Being a brother of Father Louis, Thomas Merton, I think I have some sense of what he hoped for from the Merton collection. Once thing he did not want was a monument. He might just be a little embarrassed with what we are doing today. What he did want and what hopefully is being provided

by this ample and well-appointed facility is that others would have access to his work—primarily as an encouragement to enter their personal journey, seeking the truth, seeking God. He wanted the many revelations of the circuitous route that he took known so that none of us would be discouraged by all that overwhelms us. He wants us to know and find hope in that “mercy within mercy, within mercy” (*Sign of Jonas* 362).

The Thomas Merton Center located on a college campus is in an excellent position to fulfill the desire of Father Louis. Here the young seekers after truth and meaning can be encouraged by one who spent his whole life seeking to fill that desire. In this place these seekers can have the experience that Merton records in the *Asian Journal* when he spoke for over two hours with a Tibetan hermit. “The unspoken or half-spoken message of the talk was our complete understanding of each other as people who were somehow *on the edge* of great realization and knew it and were trying, somehow or other, to go out and get lost in it” (*Asian Journal* 143 pbk).

Thomas Merton has given his heart to you, Bellarmine. He did not give it to be preserved. By the simple fact of giving he was teaching all of us the central truth of his message. We only can be who we are by giving ourselves away, spending ourselves for the sake of others, because the human person is called to live the life of God.

My prayer and the prayer of all Father Louis’ brother monks at Gethsemani is that many persons will come to this Center not just to analyze the writings but to hear in them the call to that absolute personal honesty that will bring each of us “to the edge of the great realization.”

Seven Storey Mountain Still Going Strong After Fifty Years

Yesterday [9 October 1997], when I arrived at the monastery, Brother Patrick Hart showed me a Merton document which played a crucial role in my life as an editor and book publisher. It was the original contract for *The Seven Storey Mountain*, which Merton signed in 1947. It was countersigned by my boss at Harcourt, Brace, and Company, Mr. Donald Brace, since I did not then have the power to sign book contracts. I alone had read the manuscript which Tom asked Naomi Burton to send to me, so I went to Mr. Brace’s office and invited him to read it. Instead of agreeing to do this, he said, “What’s it about, Bob?” I told him the author was a classmate of mine at Columbia (which was also Mr. Brace’s college, class of 1902), and that it was an autobiography which explained how, at age twenty-six, Tom had become a Trappist monk.

“Do you think it will lose money?” he said.

“Well, it’s so well written, and the story is so unusual, I believe it should find enough of an audience to justify publication.”

“Do you think it will be a best-seller?” he asked.

“Oh no!” I quickly replied. “It’s much too special for that—but won’t you take a look at it yourself?”



ROBERT GIROUX
Merton’s Publisher

“No,” he said, “I’m really too busy right now, but since you like it and you know the author, let’s sign it up.”

Before the book came out in October 1948, I was worried that the first printing of 7,500 copies might fail to sell. Within seven months it had sold so fast that the following May I brought a special copy, with a printed insert announcing it was Copy No. 200,000, to the monastery for Tom’s ordination. (Brother Pat yesterday also showed me this copy.) And that was just the beginning. It became the biggest best-seller of my career. After almost fifty years, it is still going strong, with multi-millions of copies in all editions and all translations. (Book publishers know that best-sellers are mysterious. A great book, *Moby Dick*, was a flop in the 1850s, with 650 copies. It was ahead of its time, though it is now required reading.)

Why do I tell you this story? Because it is the reason we are here today. I have known many gifted writers, but none who developed and grew as fast and as deeply as Merton did. He soon left *The Seven Storey Mountain* far behind and occasionally even said that he regretted having written it. But it was the essential first step. It made him famous and at the same time humbled him, and without *The Seven Storey Mountain* his story would have been quite different. He improved so greatly and became so prolific that I tried to discover the reasons. When I first visited Gethsemani in 1949, he led me to the vault, with its iron doors, that had become his writer’s workshop. (It no longer exists.) His busy day as a monk obviously left him little time for writing, and I asked him how he did it. “I have about two hours every day for writing, and I really use them,” he replied. “I’m also keeping journals, there’s lots of correspondence, and I manage to write every single day.” Few writers exist who are able to follow such a disciplined daily practice. Some would say he wrote too much, and I was surprised at the hate mail we received at Harcourt, Brace saying, “Why don’t you make this talking Trappist shut up!” For such silly people, I had a card printed which said, “Writing is a form of contemplation.”

In recent years two major publishing ventures have brought Thomas Merton to an ever wider public—the five volumes of *Letters*, under the general editorship of Father William Shannon, and the seven volumes of the *Journals* so ably overseen and contributed to by Brother Patrick Hart. (Incidentally, with volume six now off the press, Brother Patrick tells me that final journal seven is now at the printer and will be published in 1998. Its title is *The Other Side of the Mountain*.)

I want to congratulate Dr. Joseph McGowan and Bellarmine College on the opening and dedication of the new Thomas Merton Center in such handsome surroundings. Thomas Merton chose Bellarmine as the repository for his papers, when he established the Merton Legacy Trust, naming Thomasine O’Callaghan, James Laughlin, and Naomi Burton as trustees and executive secretary Anne McCormick as administrator. When Naomi retired, I succeeded her as a trustee.

Merton’s teacher and my teacher at Columbia was poet Mark Van Doren, and he had an interesting definition of a classic. “Classic books,” he said, “are those that never go out of print, like the Bible and Shakespeare.” It is a fact that Merton has become a classic writer. May God bless the new Merton Center and may it endure and grow in all the years to come.

Thank You, Father Louis

Greetings, and congratulations to all who have worked to make possible not just today's wonderful activities but the Merton Center itself. Most of all I want to congratulate and thank Fr. Louis, Thomas Merton, whose great mind, heart, soul, imagination, passion, courage, creativity, and faith made possible the magnificent content and character of the Center we have named in his honor.

It is my hope that this new home of the internationally renowned and valued Merton collection will facilitate the rich research and scholarship it deserves; that it will serve as the home and true center of enhanced and expanded international and interfaith conversations about the values, ideas, and issues that engaged Merton, and about the values, ideas, and issues we might readily imagine would engage him today. Finally, it is my hope that the development and now the dedication of this spectacular space for this spectacular collection will inspire Bellarmine College itself to integrate more fully the values, ideas, and spirit of Thomas Merton into the intellectual, cultural, and institutional life of the College, a college named for another great Catholic thinker, Roberto Bellarmino. We are so blessed and privileged to have the opportunity of providing a worthy home for the enormous and important life work of Thomas Merton.

The motto of Bellarmine College is "In Veritatis Amore." As his collection makes clear, Thomas Merton was very much in love with truth. May the new Merton Center in the new W.L. Lyons Brown Library at the new Bellarmine deepen our love of truth by deepening our understanding of Thomas Merton and his work.



JOSEPH J. MCGOWAN, JR.
President, Bellarmine College