

## Editor's Note

*When one of the contributors to this special anniversary issue of The Merton Seasonal sent along his reflection, he remarked: "I chose a topic that I thought others might not pick up on" and added facetiously: "You don't need 25 articles on the 'true self'!" He needn't have worried – the true self certainly makes its appearance in the 43 articles that follow, as well it should, but as only one of a rich variety of topics explaining why Thomas Merton still matters to so many of us personally and to our church and world one hundred years after "the last day of January 1915," when "under the sign of the Water Bearer, in a year of a great war, and down in the shadow of some French mountains on the borders of Spain," he "came into the world." Merton appears as sage, prophet, contemplative, poet, friend, thinker, writer, humanist, an attractive, fallible, imperfect, intriguing human being, a lover of God, nature, humanity, but also as mirror, kaleidoscope, iconic metaphor, foxy hedgehog and vice versa. His true catholicity – universality – is borne out by the scope, the breadth and depth, of these insightful commentaries on one or another facet of Merton's life and work. Coincidentally no less than 43 different Merton works are cited in these 43 brief essays, spanning the Merton canon from The Seven Storey Mountain to The Asian Journal. Perhaps most heartening are the pieces providing evidence of Merton's continued fascination for those coming to maturity in this anniversary year, as well as the numerous connections made with Pope Francis, clearly a kindred spirit and a leader after Merton's own heart. Perhaps Gosia Poks sums up best what all the essays are saying in one way or another: "Ultimately, Merton matters because he shows that the Sermon on the Mount still matters."*

*Particular thanks are due to Brother Patrick Hart, Merton's last secretary, a guide and friend to Merton readers and scholars for more than four decades, for providing the semi-official Merton biography that serves as a prefatory note to this issue; to the members of the Merton Legacy Trust, Anne McCormick, Peggy Fox and Mary Somerville, and to Paul M. Pearson, Director of the Thomas Merton Center of Bellarmine University, for making available the Merton photos and drawings included in this issue; to Donna Kristoff, OSU, for the lovely collage that graces its cover; and to the contributors who have shared their own insights on and appreciation of Thomas Merton with the readers of this commemorative issue of The Merton Seasonal. Happy birthday!*

**Pat O'Connell**

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*Thomas Merton, known in the monastery as Fr. Louis, was born on 31 January 1915 in Prades, southern France. The young Merton attended schools in France, England and the United States.*



**Patrick Hart and Thomas Merton**

*At Columbia University in New York City, he came under the influence of some remarkable teachers of literature, including Mark Van Doren, Daniel C. Walsh and Joseph Wood Krutch. Merton entered the Catholic Church in 1938 in the wake of a rather dramatic conversion experience. Shortly afterward, he completed his master's thesis, "On Nature and Art in William Blake." Following some teaching at Columbia University Extension and at St. Bonaventure's College, Olean, New York, Merton entered the monastic community of the Abbey of Gethsemani at Trappist, Kentucky, on 10 December 1941. He was received by Abbot Frederic Dunne who encouraged the young Frater Louis to translate works from the Cistercian tradition and to write historical biographies to make the*