



International Thomas Merton Society • BC Chapter

Quarterly News

April 2001 Vol. 1, No.1

One of the compelling attractions for those who read Thomas Merton is his relentless pursuit of the question “What is it to be human?” This is a question that presents itself to all who struggle to find meaning and significance in their existence. Merton’s approach to this quest unfolds as one engages with his writings, whether they be his poetry, the journals, his lively correspondences, or his many books on spirituality.

Merton’s place as a marginal person also provides an appeal to the many readers who wish to find relief from the technological displacement of humanness that we are increasingly experiencing in our current culture. To read Merton is to gain an understanding of our longing for space and time to reflect on and to imagine other ways of being. His seeming transparency and his willingness to create such possibilities becomes a sacred path to self-knowledge. Merton encourages his readers to stand back, take a deep breath, and think things over.

Ultimately, Merton’s life and writings explore the many discoveries that he made in his attempts to create a balance between solitude and community, between knowledge and experience. His journey lends its light to discoveries that ennoble and enchant us without removing us from life’s realities. He teaches us that being human means encountering ourselves in order to move into an inner world of solitude and freedom that provides the center of an existence worthy of meaning and love. For Merton, one’s spiritual journey is the foundation for such a commitment regardless of one’s religious persuasions or social context. He says it best himself: “Either you look at the universe as a very poor creation out of which no one can make anything, or you look at your own life and your own part in the universe as infinitely rich, full of inexhaustible interest, opening out into infinite further possibilities for study and contemplation and interest and praise. Beyond all and in all is God.”

— Lynn Szabo

Public Lectures 2001

“Thomas Merton’s Vision of the Kingdom”

Tues. May 15, 7:00 pm, St. Andrew’s-Wesley Church (cost by donation)

This presentation will survey Merton’s use of the scriptural image of the Kingdom of God. For Merton, the Kingdom is a multidimensional yet unifying symbol, ineffably mysterious in its divine depths and starkly practical in its concrete demands. It summons us to contemplation and to action.

Patrick F. O’Connell, a founding member and past president of the International Thomas Merton Society, is editor of *The Merton Seasonal: A Quarterly Review*, and has published some two dozen articles on Merton and his work. He is Associate Professor in the Departments of English and Theology at Gannon University, Erie, Pennsylvania. Patrick holds doctorates in English literature from Yale University and the History of Christianity from Fordham University.

7th General Meeting of the ITMS, June 7-10 in Louisville, Kentucky

The theme of this biannual conference, “Shining Like the Sun: Thomas Merton’s Transforming Vision” is taken from the famous “Fourth and Walnut” passage of *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*.

The meeting will include a trip to the Abbey of Gethsemani, with Mass at Merton’s hermitage. Major speakers include Myriam Dardenne, OCSO, who will deliver the keynote, scholars Robert Barron, Lawrence S. Cunningham and poet Wendell Berry. The program will also feature a banquet address by ITMS president Christine Bochen, as well as a roundtable on Merton and artist Victor Hammer, a multimedia presentation by Kevin Burns, twenty concurrent sessions and workshops, meditation and worship sessions, and entertainment.

The Thomas Merton Center, the official archive of Merton’s

manuscripts and other materials, housed in Bellarmine’s Brown Library and dedicated in 1997, will be staffed and open for visits throughout the conference, with many rare items on display.

Registration: Jonathan Montaldo at jmondaldo@bellarmine.edu Information on inexpensive airfare to Louisville: Gail Nygren, The Travel Group at gailnygren@home.com

“Merton and Blake: The Heretic Within and the Heretic Without”

Tues. June 19, 7:00 pm, St. Andrew’s-Wesley Church (cost by donation)

Merton’s early attraction to the poet and mystic William Blake developed into a lifelong love affair. Susan McCaslin will explore the question of why the Trappist monk who fled the world to find a home within a monastic institution remained fascinated by the poet and mystic William Blake, who in his lifetime could not abide institutional religion. Susan’s talk examines Merton’s famous “Fourth and Walnut” experience recorded in the journals and later appearing as a deeply layered text in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, considering it as a Blakean moment in and out of time. Merton’s message to the 21st century via Blake is that the cultivation of the mystical and contemplative life is the prerogative and, indeed, responsibility of everyone. Susan McCaslin is a professor of English at Douglas College in Coquitlam, British Columbia. She is the author of eight volumes of poetry and the editor of the anthology *A Matter of Spirit: Recovery of the Sacred in Contemporary Canadian Poetry*. Her most recent collections of poetry include: *The Altering Eye*, *Flying Wounded* and *Common Longing*. Susan has been reading Merton since the late 1960s and studying him intensely for the past three years as a way of recovering the sacred in the experience of her own everyday life.

The 8th General Meeting of the ITMS is scheduled to take place in Vancouver, June 5-8, 2003 at UBC, and will be hosted by the ITMS, BC Chapter.

Merton study, this summer and beyond...

“Thomas Merton and the East: Passing Over and Coming Back”

July 9-13, 8:30-10:30 am, 1:30-3:30 pm.

\$352/\$317 team/\$176 retired.

Facilitator: Don Grayston

The course will focus on Merton's exploration of Asian traditions, especially during his pilgrimage to Asia in the last months of his life. Don teaches Religious Studies at Simon Fraser University and directs the Pacific Jubilee Program in spiritual formation and direction. Sponsored by The Chalmers Institute at Vancouver School of Theology
Registration: 822-9816; fax: 822-9517.

“Studies on Thomas Merton”

Aug. 13-17, 9:00 am-4:00 pm

Facilitator: Lynn Szabo

Participants will meet at Hill Haven Retreat Centre in the Fraser Valley for an intensive study of Thomas Merton's literary writings, including poetry, essays, and drama, as well as teaching about the monastic life. Lynn teaches English Literature and Creative Writing at Trinity Western University. Sponsored by Trinity Western University
Registration: full.

One-Day Merton Retreat

Sat. Sept. 8, 10:00 am-4:00 pm (limited to 20 participants) \$75.00

Facilitator: Jonathan Montaldo

Jonathan Montaldo is serving as the Director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine

University in Louisville, Kentucky. He edited volume 2 of Merton's private journals published as *Entering the Silence* (1996) and co-edited *The Intimate Merton* (1999) with Brother Patrick

Hart. His new book, *Dialogues with Silence: A Collection of Thomas Merton's Prayers & Drawings* will be published by HarperSanFrancisco in September, 2001. Based on his prayers and drawings, this one-day retreat/workshop will help us meditate upon and discuss together the meaning of these artifacts of Merton's contemplation for our own lives. The following is the final paragraph of Montaldo's introduction to this new book:

“May these prayers and drawings, Thomas Merton's dialogues with silence, be of benefit to all those wise enough to know they no longer know where they are going. May those who cannot pray and those who still pray but without hope find courage in these pages. May those forced to travel by night take comfort here. May those who yearn for God learn through these pages that God is passionately yearning for them. As we all stumble falteringly forward together through the darkness, may the God who is hurrying toward us, rushing like a mother runs at the sound of cries, find us all quickly.”

“Thomas Merton in France”

May 13-23, 2002, Prades, France

An offering of the Pilgrimage Program, in cooperation with the Humanities Department at Simon Fraser University, International & Exchange Student Services, and the ITMS, BC Chapter. Brochures available June 1.

Song for Nobody - Thomas Merton

*A yellow flower
(Light and spirit)
Sings by itself
For nobody.*

*A golden spirit
(Light and emptiness)
Sings without a word
By itself.*

*Let no one touch this
gentle sun
In whose dark eye
Someone is awake.*

*(No light, no gold, no
name, no color
And no thought:
O, wide awake!)*

*A golden heaven
Sings by itself
A song to nobody.*

Fall Lecture Series

“Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander”

Mon. Sept. 17, 7:00 pm (cost by donation)

Speaker: Paul Pearson (Louisville, Kentucky)

“Beyond More: Merton's Nature Mysticism”

Mon. Oct. 15, 7:00 pm (cost by donation)

Speaker: Christopher Page (Victoria, BC)

“Thomas Merton's Journal Jottings: Looking, Musing, and Responding to Nature”

Mon. Nov. 19, 7:00 pm (cost by donation)

Speaker: Monica Weis (Rochester, NY)

Beginning this September, the Merton lectures will be held at Canadian Memorial Church & Centre for Peace, 1825 W. 16th Avenue at Burrard. Our new venue offers an intimate space, ample free parking, and a location that is easily accessible by bus. Canadian Memorial supports the work of the ITMS, BC Chapter, and will include Merton events as part of their “Spiritual Pathways” program.

Membership Reminder

The purpose of the ITMS, BC Chapter is to promote a greater knowledge of the life and writings of Thomas Merton through public lectures, workshops, seminars, retreats and other special events that provide insight into Merton's spiritual journey and, more importantly, our own.

You can support the work of the ITMS, BC Chapter by becoming a member. Benefits of membership include a quarterly newsletter, access to a lending library of Merton's lectures to the novices at the Abbey of Gethsemani as well as other audio and videotapes about Merton, and information on a continuing basis about events connected with Thomas Merton at international, national, regional, and local levels. Annual membership dues are \$20.00. If you would like to become a member, please forward your cheque (payable to the ITMS, BC Chapter) to: ITMS, BC Chapter, 705 - 700 Chilco Street, Vancouver, BC V6G 2R1.

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