

Early Days at the Merton Center and the Founding of *The Merton Seasonal*

By Clyde F. Crews

In the spring of 1975, at the tender age of thirty, I was finishing a one-year interim term as academic dean at Bellarmine College. President Dr. Eugene Petrik, perhaps fearful that sloth would overtake me, asked that I take on the new responsibility for the Merton Center along with my teaching responsibilities.

The able work of administrating and archiving the Merton holdings was already being handled by Dr. Robert Daggy. The predecessor in my new job of Center director, as I recall it, was Dr. Raymond Bailey, Baptist minister and academic; my successor as of the spring semester of 1977 (when I became chair of the Department of Theology) was to be Franciscan Father Gervase Beyer.

My new task was to be largely one that arranged programs and lectures, not so much on Merton himself as on themes close to Merton's heart and mind. These we delineated at the time as: 1) spirituality: old and new; 2) ethics and social justice; 3) ecumenism: east and west; and 4) religion and the arts. Among the programs sponsored by the Merton Center during this period of 1975-1976 were these:

- A lecture by Dr. Rollo May at Bellarmine attended by 800 – November 15, 1976.
- A Symposium for Catholic educators on Catholic-Jewish relations – October 1976.
- Non-credit courses offered at the college titled: An Architecture of Faith; Catholic Charismatic Renewal; Biblical Spirituality; Coping with Unbelief; The Search for God; The Second Vatican Council; A Bicentennial Look at National Priorities.
- A bicentennial lecture series that looked on religion as a loyal critic in American life from four perspectives: Baptist, Catholic, Jewish and Presbyterian.
- A student reading-theater program called "Vital Voices" that allowed Bellarmine students to study and then present the thought of Teilhard de Chardin, Dag Hammarskjöld and Merton himself.
- A Candlelight Concert at the Cathedral of the Assumption – December 12, 1976.

Another task at the Center in that American bicentennial year was the gathering together for the first time

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**Fr. Clyde F. Crews (l.) with
Fr. Karl Rahner, SJ**

of a listing of speakers at Bellarmine sponsored by the Merton Center since 1970.

Perhaps the most lasting of the activities of those years was the one that began most modestly: the publication of *The Merton Seasonal*. One day, probably early in 1976, I was talking by phone with the ever kindly and ever resourceful Brother Patrick Hart from Gethsemani. He mentioned that a real need he was starting to sense was a newsletter for people around the country interested in studies of Merton and those concerns of Merton that we had identified.

Thus we produced from the college print shop a single sheet labeled with the modest masthead: “*The Merton Seasonal of Bellarmine College – Winter 1976.*” Within a year, the mailing list for this effort numbered about five hundred, mostly persons in the Louisville area. While the idea for this newsletter began with Brother Patrick, I may with humble pride claim only that I provided the title *Merton Seasonal*. I would like to think that it was because it suggested something both cosmic and kindly to me – the times of our lives that both recur and remain. And there was surely a trace of that. But I’m afraid there was a good deal of the administrator’s hedge in that title as well: by calling it *Seasonal*, I wrongly thought, we wouldn’t be held to a strict production schedule; in the seasons that I *could* get it out, it would appear!

Gratefully, it would soon fall into more professional hands that have made of it over the years an increasingly comprehensive piece of work that not only announces programs and bibliographies, but that evokes original research and writing as well. Nearly a quarter-century after the birth, and especially since it has become so handsome a scion in these later years, it has been pleasant to look back on the *Seasonal*’s simple beginning. I am grateful for the invitation to have done so.