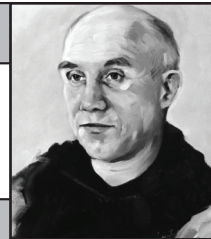


INTERNATIONAL THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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ITMS General Meeting Program Set

The Nineteenth General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society will take place at Regis University, Denver, Colorado from June 19-22, 2025. The conference theme is “‘The Calligraphy of Snow and Rock and Sky’ – Thomas Merton and the Spirit of Place.” Details of the program have been finalized by the Program Committee and announced by committee chair and site coordinator Christopher Pramuk. The plenary speakers will include Kevin Burke, SJ, Stephanie Paulsell, Julia Prinz, VDMF and Estevan Rael-Gálvez; in addition ITMS President Judith Valente will address the group, and a panel discussion on Merton and the West will feature contributions from Fred Bahnson, David Odorisio, Jeremy Seifert and Kathleen Tarr. The conference will include thirteen concurrent sessions as well as seventeen workshops, guided prayer and special presentations, along with six opening sessions. The exhibition “A Hidden Wholeness: The Zen Photography of Thomas Merton” will be on display at the O’Sullivan Fine Arts Center throughout the conference.

Kevin Burke, SJ currently serves as Vice President of Mission at Regis University, Denver, CO. A theologian with an abiding interest in liberation and political theologies, he has published seven books and is currently finishing a book on theology in the poetry of Denise Levertov.

Stephanie Paulsell, a member of the Harvard Divinity School faculty since 2001, is the author of *Religion around Virginia Woolf*, co-editor (with David Carrasco and Mara Willard) of *Goodness and the Literary Imagination*, and has served as a regular columnist for *The Christian Century* since 2007. Her work focuses on religion and literature, Christian spirituality, and the spiritually formative dimensions of the practices of reading and writing.

Julia D. E. Prinz, VDMF, a missionary sister originally from Germany, completed her Ph.D. in Biblical Hermeneutics and Spirituality at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA, where she has taught for twenty years, including courses on the spirituality and photography of Thomas Merton. She also serves as a spiritual director and retreat facilitator, and she heads the Ignatian Spiritual Life Center in San Francisco.

Estevan Rael-Gálvez is the director of Native Bound-Unbound, a Mellon Foundation-sponsored digital humanities project focused on the millions of indigenous people whose lives have been shaped by enslavement. An anthropologist, historian and indigenous slavery scholar, Dr. Rael-Gálvez has served as the state historian of New Mexico, executive director of the National Hispanic Cultural Center and senior vice president of historic sites at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Judith Valente, current president of the International Thomas Merton Society, is a retired journalist and poet from New Jersey who currently lives in central Illinois. She is the author of the spiritual memoir *Atchison Blue* as well as two books of poetry; her most recent book is *How to Be: A Monk and a Journalist Reflect on Living & Dying, Purpose & Prayer, Forgiveness & Friendship*, coauthored with Br. Paul Quenon. She covered stories for *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, *The PBS News Hour* and the Chicago NPR affiliate; her work in print journalism includes reporting for *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *America Magazine*.

Fred Bahnson is the author of *Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith*, as well as of articles in *Harper’s*, *Oxford American*, *Orion*, *Notre Dame Magazine*, *Emergence*, *Image*, *The Sun* and the *Best American Spiritual Writing* series. His essay “On the Road with Thomas Merton” won a 2020 Wilbur Award for Best Magazine Article from the Religion

Communicators Council and was included in the volume *Best American Travel Writing*.

David M. Odoriso, Co-Chair and Associate Core Faculty at Pacifica Graduate Institute, Santa Barbara, CA, received his MA in the History of Christian Spirituality from Saint John's University School of Theology in Collegeville, MN and his Ph.D. in East-West Psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. He has edited *Thomas Merton in California: The Redwoods Conferences and Letters* (Liturgical Press, 2024) and *Merton & Hinduism: The Yoga of the Heart* (Fons Vitae, 2021).

Jeremy Siefert, is an award-winning film director, cinematographer and editor whose documentaries have premiered at Sundance, Berlinale, Tribeca and other film festivals. His short film "On the Road with Thomas Merton," a collaboration with Fred Bahnson and the communities of Our Lady of the Redwoods Abbey (CA) and the Monastery of Christ in the Desert (NM), will be featured during this panel.

Kathleen Tarr is the founder of the Alaska Chapter of the ITMS and author of *We Are All Poets Here: Thomas Merton's Journey to Alaska – A Shared Story about Spiritual Seeking* (2018). Her essays have appeared in *We Are Already One: Thomas Merton's Message of Hope* (2015) and *Merton & Indigenous Wisdom* (2019). She is a member of the ITMS board of directors, PEN America and the Alaska Historical Society.

Concurrent session presentations include:

- Natana DeLong-Bas & David Odoriso: "Merton's Dialogue with Islam";
- Charles Gillespie & Michael Higgins: "Thomas Merton and John Moriarty";
- John Gillespie & Patrick O'Connell: "Communication and the Journey to Unity";
- Aaron Godlaski & Daniel London: "Merton's Mystical Ecology";
- David Golemboski & Gordon Oyer: "Merton and Finding Our Place in the World";
- Daniel Horan & Aaron Kerr: "Merton and Place 2";
- Tiffany Hunsinger & Joseph Raab: "Merton and Ecology";
- Eric Martin & Anne Pearson: "Merton and Social Commitment";
- Michael McGregor & Paul Quenon: "Merton and Place 1";
- Mark Meade: "Merton and the Place of Home";
- Jim Robinson & Andy Stanton-Henry: "Merton and the Web of Life";
- Ethan Strouse & Jason Taylor: "Merton and the City." Workshops, Prayer Sessions and Special Presentations include:
 - Robin Adair & John Seryak: "Two Friends on the Roads of Gethsemani and the Spirit of Place";
 - Elizabeth Burkemper: "Attending to Multispecies Worlds with Thomas Merton";
 - Michael Centore: "The Radial Imagination";
 - Steven Denny: "The Merton Prayer";
 - Abbi Fraser: "This Day Will not Come Again";
 - Ed Murphy, Sophia Park & Megan Way: "New Monasticism as Calligraphy in the 21st-Century World";
 - Cassidy Hall: "Queering Place, Poetry and Friendship: Exploring the Correspondence of Thomas Merton and Poet Margaret Randall";
 - Douglas Hertler: "Merton & New York City: Echoes of the Jungle";
 - Marianne Hieb: "Thomas Merton and Parable Calligraphies: Selected Readings for Creative Journaling Prayer";
 - Colette Lafia: "Exploring Deep Memory and the Spirit of Place in Journal Writing";
 - Carol Lenox & Judith Valente: "Searching for Home: Thomas Merton and Thomas Berry in Conversation";
 - Liam Myers: "Taizé Prayer with Thomas Merton and Indigenous Wisdom";
 - Paul Pearson: "Gazing with a Paradise Eye – Merton's Zen Seeing: A Guided Meditation";
 - Paul Pynkoski: "Thomas Merton and Indigenous Wisdom";
 - Marcela Raggio: "A Space of Desire and Imagination: Thomas Merton's Latin America";
 - Regina Sara Ryan: "The Promptings of Space: Discerning Nature's Calligraphies – A Writing Workshop with Thomas Merton";
 - Melanie-Prejean Sullivan: "Writing the True Self: A Calligraphic Experience";
 - Caleb Vanderleek: "'When the World Looks Back . . . When the Face Looks after That': A Musical Presentation of Sufjan Stevens' *Seven Swans* through the Lens of Merton."

Introductory presentations will include a First Timers' Orientation; a Chapters Workshop with Michael Brennan; "Merton Research and Researching Merton" with Alda Balthrop-Lewis, David Golemboski and Mark Meade; "International Perspectives on Merton"; and two emerging scholars sessions, one with Matthew Riddle, Ethan Vander Leek and Guadalupe Zorrilla; the other with Ryan Bell, Harley Dean Matthews and Rosys.

Registration for the conference, including all meals, is \$280 for ITMS members, \$330 for non-members; cost of accommodation for three nights (June 19-21) is \$250 for a single room, \$210 per person for a shared room; additional lodging is also available for the night preceding the conference (June 18). Registration is open as of December 1. Further information, including transportation options, is available at <http://merton.org/2025>. Questions may be addressed to Christopher Pramuk, site coordinator, at: cpramuk@regis.edu.

The Program Committee includes Christopher Pramuk, Denver, CO (Chair and Site Coordinator); Ben Burkemper, Troy, MO; Elizabeth Burkemper, Troy, MO; Roger Butts, Fort Collins, CO; Emma McDonald Kennedy, New Canaan, CT (*ex officio*); Paul M. Pearson, Louisville, KY; Paul Pynkoski, Toronto, ON; Kathleen Witkowska Tarr, Anchorage, AK and Judith Valente, Normal, IL (*ex officio*).

Shannon Fellowships Awarded

At its June 2024 meeting, the ITMS Board of Directors awarded 2024-2025 Shannon Fellowships to six scholars, Swasti Bhattacharyya, Nicholas Dolan, Cassidy Hall, Bernadette McNary-Zak, Vladimir Alexander Smith-Mesa and Glenn Young. The Shannon Fellowship program was established in 1997 in honor of the late Msgr. William H. Shannon, the founding president of the ITMS, to promote scholarship on Merton and his work. Up to five annual awards, of a maximum of \$750 each, are granted to scholars for research on primary-source Merton materials at the Merton Center at Bellarmine University or other archival collections. This year's selection committee includes Paul M. Pearson (chair), Fiona Gardner and Joseph Raab.

Swasti Bhattacharyya and **Bernadette McNary-Zak** will engage in a collaborative project to

explore the influence on Thomas Merton of Vinoba Bhave (disciple, confidant and spiritual successor to Mahatma Gandhi) and his *Talks on the Gita*, as contained in unpublished works, recordings, letters, etc. in the Merton Center archives, to supplement material already examined in published works.

Nicholas Dolan will consider unpublished material of Thomas Merton and Ernesto Cardenal in the Thomas Merton Center archives, including Merton's correspondence with close associates of Cardenal and figures important to Cardenal's literary career; correspondence between Merton and Latin American clergy, male and female monastics and church officials generally; an inventory and reading of Merton's correspondence with Latin Americans in general, especially pertaining to literary matters, such as his mostly unpublished correspondence with publisher Victoria Ocampo.

Cassidy Hall will work on a project entitled "Open and Closed: Thomas Merton's Correspondence with and about the LGBTQIA+ Community, with a Focus on LGBTQIA+ Writers," with the aim of piecing together various identified material including unpublished and marginalia, to see what new information about Merton's openness and closedness to the LGBTQIA+ community might emerge, with the goal of eventual publication of the findings.

Vladimir Alexander Smith-Mesa will work on assembly of a bilingual Spanish-English metadata project/e-book, entitled "The Virtual Cuba of Father Louis (Thomas Merton's Cuban Interlude)," intended to transform the way of understanding Merton's Cuba by bringing his relevant works together in one single place, providing digital images and thorough descriptions of all the available primary sources of Merton's Cuban materials – whether sketches, drawings, notebooks, complete manuscripts, especially his handwritten documents and unpublished letters with Cubans.

Glenn Young will prepare a chapter entitled "At the Edges of the Page: Thomas Merton's Marginalia as Hermeneutic Mysticism," for the projected volume *Mysticism and the Margins* (Palgrave Macmillan). The research will consider Thomas Merton's mysticism by looking at annotations and marked passages found in books he read, thus

providing readers with a sense of the elements of mysticism that held interest for Merton.

The deadline for applications for Shannon Fellowships for 2025-2026 is March 15, 2025. Awards must be used between July 1, 2025 and July 31, 2026. Awards will be based on the quality of the proposal submitted and on the need for consulting archival materials at the site proposed. Applicants must be members of the ITMS; they may join the Society at the time of application by including a check for \$25 (or \$40 to include *The Merton Annual*), made out to “ITMS”, along with their proposals. Current officers and Board members of the ITMS, as well as grant committee members, are not eligible for fellowships during their term of office. Fellowships may be granted a maximum of two times to any applicant.

Application for Shannon Fellowships must include the following:

- a detailed proposal of 500-750 words explaining the subject and goals of the applicant’s research and the rationale for consulting primary sources at the Merton collection selected by the applicant; applicants are strongly encouraged to demonstrate in their application that they have consulted online finding aids for the Merton Center (<http://www.merton.org/Research>) or for other archival collections of Merton’s work (a list of subjects of previous awardees can be found under “Previous Research Topics” on the web site);
- a letter of recommendation from a scholar familiar with the applicant’s qualifications and research interests;
- a proposed expense budget: grants will cover costs of travel to and from collections; expenses for accommodations and food during time of research at archives; costs of photocopying;
- disclosure of any other sources of funding awarded or applied for, with amounts received or requested.

Applications are encouraged from established scholars, from researchers without academic affiliation, and from students and younger scholars, including those engaged in research for theses and dissertations.

Completed applications for fellowships should be sent to **Dr. Paul M. Pearson, Director, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, 2001 Newburg Road, Louisville, KY 40205; email: pmpearson@bellarmine.edu.**

The committee’s recommendations will be presented at the June 2025 meeting of the ITMS Board of Directors, who will make the final decisions on awards, and results will be communicated to applicants shortly thereafter.

Full details are available on the ITMS web site at: <http://merton.org/ITMS/fellows.aspx>.

Daggy Scholarships Available

The International Thomas Merton Society will once again sponsor the Daggy Youth/Student Scholarship Program to make it possible for young people to participate in the ITMS General Meeting. The program is named in honor of the late Dr. Robert Daggy, founding member and second president of the ITMS and longtime director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University. Up to fifteen scholarships will be awarded, covering all costs (except transportation) of attendance at the Nineteenth General Meeting of the ITMS, to be held June 19-22, 2025 at Regis University, Denver, CO. The awards will also include one year’s free membership in the ITMS. Young people between the ages of fourteen and twenty-nine, and full-time undergraduate students up to the age of forty, are invited to apply. (Those under eighteen at the time of the conference must be accompanied by a parent or adult chaperone, whose registration will not be covered by the scholarship.)

An application form and further information can be found at: <http://www.merton.org/ITMS/scholarships.aspx>. Required details include the age of the applicant, proof of educational status (if applicable), telephone number and email address (if available) as well as a return address, along with a statement explaining why the applicant is interested in learning more about Thomas Merton and would benefit from attending the ITMS General Meeting. Applicants will also provide contact information for a youth minister, campus minister, pastor, teacher or other qualified adult who has agreed to provide

a recommendation explaining in what capacity he/she knows the applicant and why the applicant should be considered as a qualified candidate for an ITMS scholarship. Completed applications must be submitted by May 1, 2025.

Any ITMS member who knows an eligible young person / student that would benefit from attending the 2025 General Meeting should encourage him or her to apply for a scholarship.

Russo Chapter Grants

Four applications for the initial funding cycle of ITMS Russo Chapter Grants were approved by the Board of Directors of the International Thomas Merton Society at its June 2024 meeting. These grants honor the memory of Anthony (Tony) Russo (1941-2022), founder of the Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky ITMS Chapter, longtime ITMS Chapters Coordinator, facilitator of more than a dozen annual retreats on Merton at the Abbey of Gethsemani and frequent conductor of Chapters Workshops at ITMS General Meetings. Grants to ITMS chapters and affiliates provide financial support, up to a maximum of \$500 each, for chapter/affiliate events, including but not limited to inviting visiting speakers. They are funded through the generosity of his wife Josie.

Grants were awarded to the ITMS chapter at Benet House Retreat Center, Rock Island, IL to assist with its annual 24-hour Merton retreat, helping to cover the costs of two speakers; the Chicago ITMS Chapter, to assist with the costs of room rental, speakers' travel and honorarium etc. for a day-long workshop in spring 2025 at Dominican University with Richard Putz and Vaughn Fayle, OFM; the Indianapolis ITMS Chapter, to assist with the cost of room rental, screen rights and speaker honorarium for a showing of Cassidy Hall's film *Day of a Stranger* in September 2024; Sylvia Grevel, to assist with funding for a Zoom subscription and related costs, to be used to establish an ITMS chapter in Perth, Australia and to develop an country-wide Australian ITMS affiliate network.

The deadline for the next round of Russo Grant applications is June 1, 2025. Applications must include a detailed proposal of the project for which

the grant will be used, a statement of how the project will contribute to the work of the chapter, and a proposed expense budget, including disclosure of any other sources of funding awarded or applied for, with amounts received or requested. Applications will be reviewed by an appointed committee and approved by the ITMS Board. Awards must be used between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026. Following the event, award recipients are required to submit by July 31, 2026 an accurate expense account and a report on the implementation of the project. Completed applications for grants, or requests for further information, should be sent for forwarding to the committee chair to ITMS Resident Secretary Dr. Paul M. Pearson, International Thomas Merton Society, Bellarmine University, 2001 Newburg Road, Louisville KY 40205; e-mail: merton@bellarmine.edu.

Rosemary Haughton (1927-2024)

Rosemary Luling Haughton, British Catholic lay theologian, social activist and communitarian who paid a famous visit to Thomas Merton during the year before his death, died May 9, 2024 at the age of 97. Born in London on April 13, 1927, the eldest of three daughters of artist Peter Luling and novelist Sylvia Thompson Luling, she attended the Farnham Girls' Grammar School, Queen's College, London and the Slade School of Art. As a teenager, she became attracted to Roman Catholicism, and converted at the age of 16 under the instruction of a Benedictine nun, Mother Raphael. In 1948, she married Algernon Haughton, also a Catholic convert. The couple had twelve children, including two foster children. She began her writing career to supplement her husband's salary as a teacher at Ampleforth College, a Catholic boys' boarding school in North Yorkshire, eventually writing some three dozen books on topics relating to religious and spiritual concerns, Catholic culture, feminist spirituality, marriage and sexuality that reached a wide audience in America as well as Britain, including such titles as *On Trying to Be Human*, *The Passionate God*, *The Catholic Thing*, *The Transformation of Man*, *The Drama of Salvation*, *Images for Change*, *Tales from Eternity*, *The Re-*

Creation of Eve and *The Theology of Experience*. In the 1970s she and her husband founded the Lothlorien Community in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland. After moving to the United States, where she lived for about thirty years, she was also a founder member in 1981 of Wellspring House, a center for hospitality in Gloucester, Massachusetts. In 2011, having moved back to Yorkshire, she formalized her civil partnership with Wellspring House co-founder Nancy Schwoyer in a ceremony held at the town hall in Halifax.

She began to read Thomas Merton as a teenager, describing herself as becoming “somewhat intoxicated with him, and then, as it were, ‘grew up’ with him, as he struggled, explored, and changed.” In the year after his death, Haughton would describe Merton as a “sign and guarantee of the still, vivid, and incorruptible heart in a religion that had all too many obviously deathly and trivial aspects.” Merton in turn read with admiration Haughton’s 1967 volume *Transformation of Man*, writing to her American publisher that he found it “a fundamental statement and witness to the salvation event in daily life and in areas where, to an exclusively clerical theology, it was not previously visible.” This contact led to Haughton’s visit to Gethsemani in October 1967, of which Merton writes in his journal that it was “curious to meet a theologian who is six months pregnant,” and describes her as “quiet, intelligent, not the obstreperous kind of activist progressive, concerned about a real contemplative life continuing, etc.” Haughton recalls being touched by Merton’s “complete humanness” as they shared their thoughts, concerns and hopes over a picnic lunch and Merton took a picture of Haughton in “a long black cloak with hair blowing in the wind” that would later be used as the author photograph for one of Haughton’s books, *The Theology of Experience* (1972).

Rosemary Haughton died peacefully at her home in Heptonstall, Yorkshire on May 9, 2024. She was preceded in death by her parents, her husband Algernon, who died in 2008, and her two sisters, Dr. Virginia Luling, who died in 2013, and Elizabeth Luling Dooley, who died in 1962. She is survived by her partner Nancy

and her twelve children and 62 grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Her funeral took place at St. Thomas Church, Heptonstall on June 8.

Anthony T. Padovano (1934-2024)

Anthony Padovano, a founding member of the International Thomas Merton Society and author of one of the earliest interdisciplinary critical studies of Merton’s work, died June 14, 2024 at the age of 89. Born on September 18, 1934 in Harrison, NJ, son of Thomas and Mary Rose (Cierzo) Padovano, he entered the seminary as a high school student and was ordained a priest for the Patterson, NJ diocese in 1959, after graduating from Seton Hall University in 1956 and receiving a bachelor’s degree in Theology from the Gregorian University in Rome in 1958. He subsequently received a licentiate in 1960 and a doctorate in Theology in 1962 from the same institution, along with a 1962 licentiate in philosophy from Rome’s St. Thomas Pontifical University. From 1962 through 1974 he taught at the Newark archdiocesan seminary in Darlington, NJ, and served as a parish assistant at St. Catharine’s Parish in Glen Rock. He began his prolific writing career during this period with such popular works as *The Estranged God: Modern Man’s Search for Belief* (1966), *Who Is Christ?* (1967) and *American Culture and the Quest for Christ* (1970). In the summer of 1973, during a summer course he was teaching in Texas, he met Theresa Lackamp, a sister from Montana who was one of his students; they subsequently fell in love and after receiving laicization he married her on September 1, 1974, the beginning of a 49-year union in which they raised four children. He became a leading voice for church reform, particularly the readmission of resigned priests to active ministry, through the organization CORPUS which he helped found. He pursued graduate studies in literature and received a doctorate in English from Fordham University in 1980; he taught literature at Ramapo College in New Jersey for 45 years until his retirement in 2016, continuing to write on theological and spiritual topics during these decades, eventually publishing 29 books and over 150 articles on various topics. He continued to serve in pastoral capacities with an ecumenical worshipping community

throughout his life. His contributions to the fields of theology, religion and church reform are collected in the Padovano Papers housed in the archives of the University of Notre Dame.

His book *The Human Journey: Thomas Merton, Symbol of a Century*, a reworking of his 1980 Fordham doctoral dissertation on Merton, which combined theological and literary analysis of Merton's life and work, was published in 1982; it was reissued as *The Spiritual Genius of Thomas Merton*, with a new Foreword by Jonathan Montaldo, in 2014. He was also the author of the booklet *Contemplation and Compassion: Thomas Merton's Vision* (1984), *A Retreat with Thomas Merton: Becoming Who We Are* (2014) and *Conscience & Conflict: A Trilogy of One-Actor Plays*, on Merton, John XXIII and Martin Luther (1988); a video of the Merton play, entitled *Winter Rain* and featuring Michael Moriarty as Merton, was recorded in 1985. He also recorded a series of 24 audio lectures on Merton entitled *Thomas Merton: A Life for Our Times*, issued in 1988. In 1987, he was one of the fourteen Merton scholars who met at Bellarmine College in Louisville, KY to found the International Thomas Merton Society, and he was a plenary speaker at the ITMS Fifth General Meeting in June 1997 at Spring Hill College, Mobile, AL. His keynote address at the conference commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of Merton's baptism, held at Corpus Christi Church in Manhattan on November 14, 1998, was published as "The Eight Conversions of Thomas Merton" in *The Merton Seasonal* 25.2 (Summer 2000). Jonathan Montaldo's interview with him, entitled "Spirituality, Scholarship and Biography," was published in volume 10 of *The Merton Annual* (1997).

He is survived by his wife Theresa, his four children Mark, Andrew, Paul and Rosemarie, as well as his five grandchildren Mia, Luke, Lilyana, Diana and Anthony. A memorial service was held July 20, 2024 at the Holy Family Chapel of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth at Convent Station, NJ.

William D. Apel (1947-2024)

William D. Apel, longtime member of the International Thomas Merton Society and noted

scholar of Merton's interfaith relationships, died September 18, 2024 at the age of 77, after living and working for many years with multiple sclerosis. Born on February 9, 1947 in Braddock, PA, son of Roger and Leanore Apel, he graduated from Muskingum College, Muskingum, OH, and went on to earn his M.Div at Garrett Theological Seminary in Chicago and a Ph.D. at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. He was ordained by the United Methodist Church with his ministry recognized as well by American Baptist Churches, USA. Beginning in 1975 he served for twenty years as the first full-time chaplain at Linfield College (now University) in Linfield, OR, where he was professor of religious studies for 36 years, retiring in 2011. His close association with Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey, Lafayette, OR included co-teaching such classes as "Monks and Mystics" at the monastery with Br. Mark Filut, OCSO. He led student trips abroad to Ireland and Italy and traveled and spoke internationally, including visits to Canada, Germany, Russia, Israel, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Japan. He was a member of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, the International Bonhoeffer Society, the Howard Thurman Educational Trust as well as the ITMS, for which he was a frequent conference presenter, an active leader of the local ITMS chapter, the recipient of a 2007 ITMS Shannon Fellowship, member of the Editorial Committee of *The Merton Annual*, and author of numerous articles in *The Merton Annual*, *The Merton Seasonal* and *The Merton Journal* (UK). His work also appeared in *American Baptist Quarterly* and *Bonhoeffer for a New Day* and elsewhere. He was author of the groundbreaking work *Signs of Peace: The Interfaith Letters of Thomas Merton* (2006), as well as *Witnesses before Dawn: Exploring the Meaning of Christian Life* (1984) and *Silent Conversations: Reading the Bible in Good Company* (2000). At the time of his death he was completing a long-term writing project entitled *The Gospel according to Thomas Merton*, to be published posthumously. His friend and fellow author Geoff Colvin recalls: "Everyone recognized Bill as a great scholar, teacher, presenter and author,

yet in no way did he intimidate people. He always fully acknowledged and respected what others had to say or write. He was very much a humble man and gifted teacher who was able to communicate his depth of knowledge in a way that gently drew you to what he had to say. He always showed great pleasure in seeing his friends and associates. He had a particularly strong welcoming style when receiving people. Who could forget his beaming smile when he'd greet you? We were always amazed and inspired by his strength and willingness during the long suffering and limitations imposed by the affliction of multiple sclerosis and related ailments to keep doing what he has done best – reading, writing and communicating. We will miss him greatly.” He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Jane Apel, and his children Emily and W. Paul Apel, as well as his brother Terry. A memorial service will be held October 19 at 11 a.m. the First Baptist Church in McMinnville.

John H. Moses (1938-2024)

Rev. John H. Moses, retired dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London and Thomas Merton scholar, died July 14, 2024 at the age of 86. Born in Marylebone, London on January 12, 1938, he was educated at Ealing County Grammar School for Boys in West London, the University of Nottingham and Trinity Hall, Cambridge. He then studied for the Anglican priesthood at Lincoln Theological College. After his ordination in 1964, he became an assistant curate at St. Andrew's Parish, Bedford, then rector of the Coventry East Team Ministry and rural dean of Coventry East. In 1977 he was appointed the Archdeacon of Southend, serving also as the Bishop of Chelmsford's officer for industry and commerce, chairman of the diocesan retreat house and chairman of the diocesan advisory committee. In 1982 he became Provost of the Chelmsford Diocese, and in 1992, he was appointed the first rector of Anglia Ruskin University; in 1997 he was made an Honorary Doctor of the University. In 1996 he became Dean of St Paul's, serving until his retirement in August 2006. In that year he was created Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order (KCVO). In 2013, he

was appointed the John Macquarrie Professor of Anglican Theology at the Graduate Theological Foundation in Mishawaka, Indiana. He was the author of a number of books, including *The Sacrifice of God: A Holistic Theory of Atonement* (1994), *A Broad and Living Way: Church and State -- A Continuing Establishment* (1995), *The Desert: An Anthology for Lent* (1997), *One Equal Light: An Anthology of the Writings of John Donne* (2003) (his predecessor as Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral) and *The Language of Love: Exploring Prayer: An Anthology* (2013). His longtime interest in Thomas Merton's life and work led to his two final books. In 2014, he published *Divine Discontent: The Prophetic Voice of Thomas Merton*, which Archbishop Rowan Williams called in his Foreword, “A coherent and comprehensive reminder of why Merton has mattered and still matters so much to so many diverse readers.” In 2018 he edited *The Art of Thomas Merton: A Divine Passion in Word and Vision*, which brought together Merton's writings and drawings, about which Merton scholar Fiona Gardner wrote: “This anthology of Thomas Merton's words and calligraphies is an inviting gateway into an experience of enrichment and deep wisdom. Thanks to John Moses, we can enjoyably explore this life-awakening selection.” His funeral took place on August 22 at Southwell Minster, the cathedral church of the Anglican Diocese of Southwell, Nottinghamshire, where he had moved following his retirement from St. Paul's. He is survived by his wife Susan, their three children and seven grandchildren.

John H. Staggs (1953-2024)

Rev. John H. Staggs, founder and longtime director of the Mississippi Chapter of the International Thomas Merton Society, died January 19, 2024 at the age of 70. He was born on March 8, 1953 in New Albany, Mississippi, son of Wallace Howard and Virginia (Pennebaker) Staggs. He graduated from W. P. Daniel High School, New Albany in 1971, and the University of Mississippi in 1975 with a B.S. in Education. He married Lou Ann Bailey in 1973, and after graduation continued his studies at Asbury Seminary in Lexington, KY, where he received

a Master of Arts in Religion; subsequently he received a Master of Divinity degree from Memphis Theological Seminary, attended Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, NJ, and completed a D.Min. at Asbury and a Ph.D. at the Graduate Theological Foundation in Donaldson, IN with a dissertation on St. Francis of Assisi, following a summer of study at Rome and Assisi. For 32 years he served United Methodist Churches in Mississippi and New Jersey, mentoring many students in ministry and serving on various committees for United Methodist districts and conferences.

He first became interested in Thomas Merton's life and work while a student at Asbury, making his first visit to Gethsemani with a group led by his professor, Reginald Johnson. He subsequently began taking retreatants himself annually to Gethsemani, continuing to do so for more than three decades, eventually as part of his leadership of the Mississippi ITMS chapter. In his article "Reinventing the Wheel: Thomas Merton and the Christ of the Cross," published in the Spring 2002 issue of *The Merton Seasonal* (27.1), he writes of the importance of Merton's theology of the cross for himself both professionally and personally, particularly during a crisis period of his 11-year-old daughter's cancer diagnosis. The article also tells the story of the Mississippi chapter's work in replacing the wagon wheel at the foot of the cross at Merton's hermitage in 2001, one month after he had officiated at the wedding of his daughter, now cancer-free.

His visitation and funeral were held on January 24 at the New Albany First Methodist Church, followed by burial at the New Albany City Cemetery. He is survived by his wife Lou Ann, his children Christy Hill and Nathan Staggs, their spouses James and Amanda, and his grandchildren Matt and Mallory Hill.

Arthur Wehr, SJ (1955-2024)

Arthur Wehr, SJ, an ITMS member since 2002 who was a noted local leader and teacher in the Sacramento, CA Merton community, died tragically by his own hand on July 4, 2024 at the age of 68, following a long struggle with depression.

He was born in San Francisco October 5, 1955, son of Arthur J. Wehr, Jr. and Margaret Ann (Peaslee) Wehr. A member of a military family, he and his six siblings moved frequently. He attended schools in Okinawa, North Carolina, Kansas, Texas and Germany, as well as California. He graduated from the University of San Francisco in 1977 and in 1979 entered the novitiate of the California Province of the Society of Jesus in Santa Barbara. He continued his studies at Fordham University in New York, the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, and the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley and in 1990 was ordained a priest in San Francisco. Before ordination, he taught English and religion and served as the director of the Christian Service program at Bellarmine Prep, San Jose, CA. Subsequently he taught religion at Brophy College Prep in Phoenix, before beginning work in Jesuit parishes, including St. Francis Xavier in Phoenix (1993-2000), Our Lady of Sorrows in Santa Barbara (2001-2004), and as associate pastor at St. Ignatius Loyola in Sacramento since 2004. He was known as an extremely dedicated and hard worker whose gentleness and calm demeanor made him an effective minister, a popular and respected spiritual director and confessor with a deep love of Scripture. According to Fr. Thomas Lucas, SJ, St. Ignatius pastor, Fr. Wehr "demonstrated a gift for parish ministry and gentle care for his parishioners," but his "physical stamina and mental health had suffered setbacks in recent years, especially since the time of the pandemic." He was "about to take a leave from his duties at the parish so that he could focus on his mental and physical health" but while options were being arranged "he broke before we could get him to the help he needed."

After moving to Sacramento Fr. Wehr began attending the Merton chapter meetings at St. Francis Church. Chapter leader Tim McHargue notes that initially the group had no idea who this quiet but erudite and insightful new figure was; only after a couple more meetings did they learn he was a newly arrived Jesuit from a neighboring parish. He soon began a discussion group of his own at St. Ignatius which continued for eighteen years, explaining

Merton's teachings with clarity and encouraging a *lectio divina* approach of prayerful meditation on Merton's writing. "He explained the literal meaning of Merton's writing," one member stated. "He helped us understand why Merton wrote what he did." His fellow Jesuits called Fr. Art "the Monk" as a term of deference and endearment. Members of the St. Ignatius group recall him as "very humble," "intelligent," "quiet," "private," "understanding," "kind," "gentle," "selfless," "never harsh or judgmental." He also organized and led trips for parish members to destinations such as Rome, the Holy Land, Fatima, Guadalupe, and during the pandemic, the Benedictine Monastery of Christ in the Desert in New Mexico that Merton visited.

He is survived by his mother, Margaret Wehr, of Folsom, CA, and siblings Kate Wehr, Sue Buscher, Lisa Plumb, and Stephen, Michael and David Wehr. His funeral Mass was held on July 27, 2024 at St. Ignatius Loyola Church, Sacramento, with burial at Santa Clara Mission Cemetery, Santa Clara, CA.

Tim McHargue recalls that when fellow chapter leader John Berger and Fr. Wehr would meet, they would recall the story Merton told in his final talk about Chogyam Trungpa's escape from Tibet, when he was told to "leave the yaks behind." John commented that he and Fr. Art often greeted each other by asking about their yaks: "Are your yaks slowing you down?" they would inquire of each other. "Hopefully, in Heaven," their friend reflects, "Fr. Art's yaks are keeping up with his huge heart and soul!"

Colleen O'Sullivan, RSJ (1943-2023)

Colleen O'Sullivan, RSJ, Australian scholar and spiritual director who wrote her doctoral dissertation on Thomas Merton, died April 11, 2024 at the age of 81. Born January 3, 1943, daughter of James and Ena Johnson O'Sullivan, she was a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart, and spoke and wrote extensively on the order's Australian founder, Mary McKillop. She completed spiritual direction training at Loyola House, Guelph, Ontario, and was also trained as a supervisor of spiritual directors. Her ministries included assignments as a teacher, pastoral worker

and art therapist along with spiritual direction and retreat facilitation throughout Australia, including the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. She also served as chair of her community's ecospirituality resource team. In 2006, she received her doctorate from the Catholic University in Sydney for a dissertation entitled "Thomas Merton and the Towers of Babel," a copy of which is archived at the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. Her study of Merton's spirituality gave her a particular interest in contemplation and contemplative practices across denominations. Her review of volume 20 of *The Merton Annual* appeared in the Winter 2008 issue of *The Merton Seasonal* (33.4). A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on April 23 at the community's St. Joseph's Chapel in Norwest.

Michael Blastic, OFM (1949-2023)

Fr. Michael Blastic, OFM, Franciscan scholar and longtime member of the International Thomas Merton Society, died on December 21, 2023 at the age of 74. Born in East Chicago, Indiana, he joined the Conventual Franciscan Friars in 1968 following his graduation from Bishop Noll High School in East Chicago, and graduated from Loyola University in Chicago. He was ordained a priest on April 5, 1975. He received an STL in Spirituality from the Gregorian University, Rome, and a doctoral degree in Historical Theology from Saint Louis University. He taught at St. Bonaventure University, where he began the process of transferring to the Order of Friars Minor while teaching at the Franciscan Institute there, and professed solemn vows in this branch of the Franciscans on November 2, 2009; he also taught at Siena College, Washington Theological Union and finally at the Franciscan School of Theology, at the University of San Diego from 2021 until his death. He also spent a considerable amount of time in formation work and was Vicar Provincial for Saint Bonaventure Province of the Conventual Franciscans and spent ten years in novitiate formation for the six American OFM provinces. His scholarship and service as a Franciscan were dedicated to the study and teaching the early Franciscan tradition. He conducted workshops and retreats for Franciscan groups

and communities in India, Africa, Australia, the Philippines and across North America. His funeral Mass was celebrated at Immaculate Conception Church in San Diego, CA with burial at Old Mission San Luis Rey Cemetery in Oceanside, CA. He is survived by his sister, Mary Beth Gardner and her husband William, his brother Bill and his wife Barbara, along with two nieces, a nephew, three great-nieces, four great-nephews, as well as many cousins. Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of San Diego said that “Father Blastic had a wonderful Franciscan spirit and was a splendid teacher and guide for our seminarians at the Franciscan School.”

Rev. James M. Laurenzo (1941-2023)

Fr. James M. Laurenzo, a priest of the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa and a life-member of the International Thomas Merton Society, died December 9, 2023 at the age of 82. He was born on July 1, 1941 in Des Moines, Iowa, son of Vincent and Billie Jean Laurenzo, and raised in Perry, one of four brothers. He was educated at St. Joseph College in Collegetown, Indiana, and Immaculate Conception in Conception, Missouri. He also attended Mt. St. Bernard and Aquinas School of Theology, both in Dubuque. He was ordained a priest for the diocese of Des Moines in 1969 by Bishop Maurice Dingman and until his retirement ministered in the diocese for forty years, at the parishes of St. Pius X in Urbandale, along with St. Ambrose Cathedral, St. Peter, Holy Trinity, and St. Catherine of Siena in Des Moines, and St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Carlisle. He was also a hospital chaplain, serving at Mercy One Des Moines Medical Center from 1980 to 1985. During a year’s sabbatical he earned a master’s degree at the University of Notre Dame, with particular study of the Old Testament and the Hebrew language, and led formation efforts in the Des Moines metro area through the St. Joseph Educational Center in West Des Moines, coordinating adult education from 1994 to 1997 and serving as director from 1997-2001. He also taught theology for a number of years at Drake University. He is remembered for his preaching: “I think he was the best preacher in the Diocese,” said Father Timothy Fitzgerald. “He was very concise and would reach very deeply for his words.” While

pastor at St. Catherine, Father Laurenzo led ten groups of Drake University college students on trips to El Salvador, where the parish supported the construction of a church and the building of a school, furnishing it with computers, desks and teachers. Father Laurenzo also traveled to Italy, to the Holy Land, to the Galapagos Islands, and to Cuba, with two particularly meaningful trips to Africa and Ethiopia during times of famine. According to a friend, “He was a priest who studied the documents of Vatican II, Scripture and Tradition. He remained faithful and committed to his understanding and his education and formation in what a Vatican II renewal would look like.” In retirement, he continued his wide-ranging reading and study and engaged in informal ministry including regular visits to a local prison. His Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on December 16 at Holy Trinity Church in Des Moines.

Merton Scholars Retreat

On June 21-23, 2024, thirty presenters at the ITMS Eighteenth General Meeting, family members and Daggy Scholars, along with musician Carrie Newcomer, attended the biennial Merton Scholars Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani. The opening session on Friday evening began with an opening prayer by ITMS secretary Michael Moore followed by introductions of all the participants, and featured music by Newcomer and a meditation entitled “Mountains of Contemplation,” led by board member Kathleen Tarr. Saturday morning’s session took place at Merton’s hermitage, and included a reflection by Br. Paul Quenon and sharing by participants of current projects, while at the afternoon session Carrie Newcomer performed songs inspired by Merton interspersed with poetry readings by various participants. A social hour on Saturday evening provided further opportunity for discussion and community interaction. Retreatants also participated in the monastic prayer periods, including the liturgy of the hours and Sunday morning Eucharist.

ITMS Authors

To commemorate the retirement of Canadian Merton scholar Ron Dart, a two-volume collection

entitled *The Scholar-Gipsy* (borrowed from a poem by Matthew Arnold) (St. Macrina Press, 2024) (503 & 298 pp.) has been published, with reflections by colleagues and friends on art, poetry, politics, Christianity, justice, peace, mountaineering, the environment and other themes that have marked Dart's teaching, writing and speaking. The volumes are available for \$9.99 each on Kindle (free on Kindle Unlimited) and for \$18.39 and \$14.62 in paperback from Amazon.

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Cassidy Hall has recently published *Queering Contemplation: Finding Queerness in the Roots and Future of Contemplative Spirituality* (Broadleaf Books, 2024) (170 pp.; \$25.99 cloth), looking at the world of contemplative Christianity from the perspective of queerness, reflecting both her own experience and that of figures whose voices have been largely marginalized and neglected. Rev. Dr. Barbara A. Holmes comments: "*Queering Contemplation* opens a treasure chest of wisdom and perspective. This book is such an incredible contribution to increasingly diverse and inclusive contemplative resources." Carl McColman writes: "Cassidy Hall's *Queering Contemplation* is a beautiful and eloquent book, showcasing her articulate and deeply honest voice and vital message. . . . It's a book I'll return to again and again, and will enthusiastically recommend to others."

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Michael Higgins' new book is *The Jesuit Disruptor: A Personal Portrait of Pope Francis* (House of Ananzi, 2024) (344 pp.; \$21.99 paper), a fresh look at a complex pope with a simple agenda: radically reforming the Catholic Church. James Martin, SJ writes: "Michael W. Higgins, a brilliant writer, scholar, and reporter, gives us a tantalizing read of Pope Francis's revolutionary papacy in *The Jesuit Disruptor*. Quirky, quizzical and even occasionally quixotic, his approach is accessible and the style entertaining." Robert Ellsberg adds: "An essential guide to one of the most consequential figures in the history of the church. What makes this pope such a surprising 'disruptor' is shown not just in the consistency of his pastoral vision, but in his unusual

capacity to listen, learn, and evolve in response to events and encounters."

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Daniel P. Horan, OFM's most recent book is *Fear and Faith: Hope and Wholeness in a Fractured World* (Paulist, 2024) (112 pp.; \$16.95 paper), an extended reflection on Christ's repeated command to his followers, "Do not be afraid!" Sophronia Scott writes: "*Fear and Faith* is a small book with a big message: Fear is a tool of control, and Christ teaches us to resist it. Daniel P. Horan guides us to lean on this aspect of our faith so that we can live the abundant existence we are meant to live. Important words for our times." Ilia Delio, OSF adds: "Dan Horan brings to light one of the most paralyzing conditions for human growth and offers a comprehensive discussion that brings fear into an explicitly Christian focus. Fear can conquer the will, divide the heart, and stifle the mind. Where the spirit is, however, there is love; fear is driven out by perfect love."

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Christopher Pramuk and William Hart McNichols have collaborated on the new volume *All My Eyes See: The Artistic Vocation of Father William Hart McNichols* (Orbis, 2024) (112 pp.; \$28 paper). Through interviews with Pramuk, iconographer McNichols reveals his twin vocations as priest and artist, with particular focus on the beauty of the world, the vulnerability of children and God's compassionate solidarity with those who suffer. James Martin, SJ writes: "William Hart McNichols is one of the great Christian artists of our time – of any time. This new book, beautifully illustrated and written in collaboration with Christopher Pramuk, is a glorious introduction to his life and his art." Jeannine Gramick, SL notes: "Christopher Pramuk's probing conversations with William Hart McNichols illuminate a faithful priest – one who comforts the least in the world's eyes, who respects confidences in the face of misunderstanding, who listens for the Word of God in beauty, pain, and the natural world. Fr. Bill's words and art enabled me also to say: 'all my eyes see.' As you read this book, your eyes too will be opened to the experiences of a meaningful life."

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Monica Weis, SSJ has recently published *The Good Rain Volume II: The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester in Brazil 2001-2024* (NFB Publishing, 2024) (127 pages), a description of the South American mission of her religious community that began in 1964; it is a sequel to the volume *The Good Rain* by Sr. Margaret Brennan, an account of the group's first forty years in Brazil. Ann Carrigan calls *The Good Rain* "a small book that's makes for a fascinating read. Inspired by the Catholic Church's Vatican II Council, her Order – the Sisters of St. Joseph in Rochester, NY – missioned some 34 sisters between 2001-2024 to Brazil to work in partnership with the rural poor. In those early years that service exploded in a range of services – civil, legal and programmatic – that were near dizzying in accomplishment. Today only 5 sisters remain and they are aging. But what struck me most powerfully was that they still look to the future and they continue to serve in ways and with programs that support people's lives."

Awards for ITMS Authors

The Liturgical Press reissue of *A Retreat with Thomas Merton: A Seven-Day Spiritual Journey* by Esther de Waal won first place in the inspirational category in the Association of Catholic Publishers (ACP) 2024 Excellence in Publishing Awards at its annual meeting in Chicago, May 28-30. William Meegan's *Remembering the Forgotten Merton*, a biography of Thomas Merton's brother John Paul, received a third place in the First Time Author: Biography category. Daniel Horan, OFM's *Engaging Thomas Merton: Spirituality, Justice, and Racism* received an honorable mention in the "Religion in the Public Square" category of the 2024 Catholic Media Association book awards at its June 18-21 annual meeting in Atlanta, GA.

Tuesdays with Merton Series

The Tuesdays with Merton webinar series, cosponsored by the International Thomas Merton Society and the Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL, takes place on the second Tuesday of each month on Zoom. On September 10, Julie Leininger Pycior gave a presentation entitled "Despite Everything and

Because Everything Is at Stake: Bearing Witness with the Help of Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day." On October 8, Gray Matthews will speak on "Contemplative Mayhem"; Steven P. Millies' topic on November 12 will be "Merton and Political Discourse"; on December 10, Fr. William Hart McNichols and Christopher Pramuk will present "Offering Christ to a Broken World: Merton's Advent Tidings of Great Joy"; on January 14, 2025, Abbi Frasier will speak on "Merton and the Catholic Worker"; on February 11, Rose Berger will speak on "Merton and Pope Francis: Peace, War and Nonviolence." All presentations take place at 7 p.m. EDT/EST. For further information and to register for these programs, see: <http://merton.org/TWM/>. To view past presentations in the series see: <http://merton.org/ITMS/TWM/TWM-Archive.aspx>.

Merton at CEA

The International Thomas Merton Society once again sponsored panels and presentations at the 2024 College English Association annual convention, held March 21-23, 2024 at the Westin Buckhead Atlanta Hotel, Atlanta, GA. The conference is a gathering of 300+ scholar-teachers committed to literature, writing, college teaching and related fields. The theme for this fifty-third annual meeting was "Transformations." A panel entitled "Thomas Merton: Transformations in Life and Text," chaired by Monica Weis, SSJ, included presentations by Paul Pearson : "From *My Argument with the Gestapo*, via *Seven Storey Mountain* to *The Geography of Lograire*: Thomas Merton's Evolving Biography"; Thomas Malewitz: "Art as the Voice of Authentic Human Resistance in an Era of Algorithms: Revisiting Thomas Merton's 'Message to Poets' and 'Answers on Art and Freedom'"; Mark Meade: "Thomas Merton's Unpublished Poem about 'Good Country People' by Flannery O'Connor"; Ben Crace: "The Book of Transformations: Merton and the *I Ching*." In addition, Christian Smith gave a presentation entitled "Thomas Merton's Transformative Rhetoric" as part of a panel on "Rhetoric and Composition – As a Whole-Person Endeavor."

The fifty-fourth annual meeting will take place March 27-29, 2025, at the Sonesta Hotel in

Philadelphia. Once again, one or more Merton panels are planned, along with possible individual presentations at other concurrent sessions. An allied organization of the CEA, the ITMS will provide limited financial support to help defray expenses for presenters. The theme of the 2025 conference is “Freedom.” Possible topics for presentations include (but are not limited to): Merton’s commitment to the freedom of the True Self; Merton’s paradox: “the four walls of my new freedom”; Merton’s poetry: “Eight Freedom Songs” (texts and music); Merton’s macaronic poems and *The Geography of Lograire*; Merton and Eckhart on human freedom.

Abstracts of 200-500 words for a 6-8 page paper (15-minute presentation time) are due by November 1, 2024, submitted to: <https://www.contfoot.pro/cea2025>. Participants must be members of the CEA (\$50/year) by January 2025. Those interested in speaking at the convention are encouraged to contact Monica Weis, SSJ, coordinator of the CEA Merton sessions, at mweis9@naz.edu for further information on submitting a proposal and on CEA membership; additional information is available in the full Call for Papers at the CEA web site: <http://cea-web.org>.

TMS Conference

The Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland held its biennial conference entitled “Thomas Merton: Back among Friends” on April 5-7, 2024 at Rydal Hall, a Christian retreat center located in Ambleside, Cumbria, in the English Lake District. The event marked the return of the TMS meetings after the cancellation of the 2020 and 2022 conferences due to the coronavirus pandemic. The program was conceived as a response to Merton’s invitation, at the end of *New Seeds of Contemplation*, to “forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance.” Presentations at the conference included: Daniel P. Horan, OFM: “The ‘Humble God’ of Thomas Merton: Christ, Kenosis and Salvation in the General Dance”; Gordon Oyer: “Wandering the Mönchweg: Personal Reflections on Merton, Mennos and Margins”; Anne Pearson: “‘Enter into a Providential Reciprocity’: Thomas

Merton’s Thoughts on Racism through a British Lens”; Paul M. Pearson: “Dancing with St. Benedict: Thomas Merton’s Embrace of the Rule.” Workshops included: Paul Pynkoski: “Invitation to the General Dance: A Call to Joy and Resistance” and Kathleen Tarr: “Merton, Mountains & the Spirit of Place.” Paul Pearson also gave an additional presentation entitled “‘A Mass of Stuff’: The Thomas Merton Center’s Resources & Treasures.” Special guest Miggy Scott, wife of the late David Scott, a principal founder of the TMS, led the group in a circle dancing session and a guided walk from Grasmere, home of poet William Wordsworth, back to Rydal. The weekend also featured prayer and meditation sessions and a poetry celebration featuring works by David Scott, Merton and others.

The next TMS conference has been scheduled for April 10-12, 2026; as further information becomes available it will be posted on the society website: <https://www.thomasmertonsociety.org.uk/events/2026-conference-thomas-merton-society-gb-i>.

Merton Happenings

On May 11, the US Catholic China Association conducted a book circle discussion on “Ecological Wisdom in Merton’s *Chuang Tzu*,” based on Donald P. St. John’s chapter in *Merton & the Tao: Dialogues with John Wu and the Ancient Sages*. On June 29, the USCCA offered a free Zoom program on Thomas Merton’s correspondence with Asian Catholic scholar John Wu, based on the chapter by Lucien Miller in *Merton & the Tao*. On September 21, the group discussed via Zoom Thomas Merton’s insights into Confucianism through the five recorded conferences that he delivered to novice monks of Gethsemani under his direction in 1965. The USCCA was founded in 1989 by concerned US bishops, the Maryknoll and Jesuit orders, and representatives of other religious communities, in order to promote mutual support and fraternal ties between the Church in China and the US Church. For information on the Association and news of future programs, see: <https://www.uscatholicchina.org>.

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On June 13, Rev. Steve Moore led a hybrid presentation entitled “The Spirituality of Peacemaking: Thomas Merton & Jim Forest in Dialogue” at the Spiritual Renewal Center in Syracuse, NY.

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On July 28-31, “A Retreat on the Mystics” featuring Joan M. Nuth on Julian of Norwich and Joseph Q. Raab on Thomas Merton was presented at the Weber Retreat Center on the campus of the Adrian Dominican Sisters’ Motherhouse in Adrian, MI.

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On August 12-14, Dom Cesare Bovinelli, OSBCam and Mario Zaninelli, president of the Associazione Thomas Merton Italia, led a retreat entitled “Il Mondo nei Granelli delle Sabia: Thomas Merton e i suoi ‘Mondi’” (“The World in a Grain of Sand: Thomas Merton and his ‘Worlds’”) at the monastery of Fonte Avellana, Italy.

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On September 6, John Gillespie gave a presentation entitled “Surprised by Similarity: C. S. Lewis, Thomas Merton, and the Self” as part of the Undiscovered Lewis conference at George Fox University, Newberg, OR.

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On September 19, Monica Weis, SSJ offered a power point presentation/discussion on “Thomas Merton: How Landscape Evokes Meditation” for the Sangha (meditation) group at St. John’s Meadows, Rochester NY.

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On October 2, John Gillespie made a presentation entitled “Surprised by Similarity: C. S. Lewis, Thomas Merton, and the Self” at Lone Star College, Kingwood, Texas, as part of its “Curious Minds” speaker series.

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On October 5, James Finley made an online presentation entitled “Thomas Merton: The Interspiritual Pioneer” as the first of twelve monthly sessions on twentieth-century mystics for The Mystics School.

Upcoming Events

On October 23, Sylvia Grevel will be leading

a retreat entitled “A Benedictine Spirituality of Contemplative Action – Thomas Merton & Hildegard of Bingen” at St. George’s Cathedral in Perth, Australia; for further information contact: spirituality@perthcathedral.org.

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On October 26, the Gabriel Marcel Institute of Philosophy in Sydney, Australia is holding a one-day conference on “Thomas Merton and Religion,” available both in person and on-line. Speakers include: Liam Lynch: “Thomas Merton, Oscar Wilde and the Importance of Being Contemplative”; Paul M. Pearson: “Thomas Merton and the Role of Contemplation in a World of Violence”; David Ranson: “Thomas Merton: The Political Saint – The New Paradigm of Holiness within the Catholic Tradition”; Nathan Tartak: “Merton’s Endorsement of Marcel’s Mystery of Being: An East-West Bridge”; Augustè Žičkytė: “The Latin in Thomas Merton’s *The Sign of Jonas: A Language Experience*.” For further information see: <https://www.rockhurst.edu/gabriel-marcel-society/conferences>.

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On November 15-17, Sylvia Grevel will be leading a retreat at the Abbey of Orval, Belgium, entitled “Verbeelding, Vitaliteit en Creativiteit: Zien in het Volle Licht van Thomas Merton” (“Imagination, Vitality and Creativity: Seeing in Merton’s Full Light”). This is the thirty-ninth annual Merton Weekend sponsored by the Mertonvrienden of the Low Countries. For further information, see: www.thomasmerton.nl.

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On November 22-24, the Centre for Dialogue at Campus Riedberg will sponsor a Thomas Merton retreat led by Dominiek Lootens at the Forum Vinzenz Pallotti in Vallendar, Germany.

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On December 4, Fernando Beltrán Llavador will give a presentation entitled “Thomas Merton: El Verdadero Viaje” (“Thomas Merton: The Authentic Journey”) as part of the program of the Jesuit Center for Faith and Development of Valladolid, Castile and León, Spain.

On December 7, David Odorisio will give a hybrid presentation entitled “Going ‘Beyond God’: Thomas Merton’s Universal Vision” at the Krotona Institute, Ojai, CA, in person and remotely via Zoom. For further information see: <https://www.krotonainstitute.org>.

On December 13-15, Gary Hall will lead an Advent retreat entitled “Hearing Prophets, Awaiting Wisdom, Living Advent with Thomas Merton” at Holland House, Cropthorne, Worcestershire, UK; for further information see www.hollandhouse.org.

On December 14, ITMS President Judith Valente will discuss “Thomas Merton’s Contemplative Wisdom for a Time of Crisis” with Fr. John Dear in a Zoom Presentation for the Beatitudes Center for the Nonviolent Jesus. For further information see the center website at: <https://beatitudescenter.org>.

On February 25, 2025, Bishop John Stowe, OFMConv. of Lexington, KY, will deliver the Nineteenth Annual Thomas Merton Black History Month Lecture at Bellarmine University.

On March 20, Kathleen Deignan, CND will give a presentation entitled “Prayer Matters in the Dark Night of Creation: The Ecological Wisdom of Thomas Merton” at Glastonbury Abbey, Hingham, MA; for further information see: glastonburyabbey.org.

Chapter and Affiliate News

On March 17, Joe Donnelly spoke to the Chicago ITMS chapter about Thomas Merton and Gordon Zahn. On April 21, John Ostenburg gave a presentation entitled “Thomas Merton: Precursor of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.” On May 19, Jon Sweeney talked to the group about his new memoir, *My Life in Seventeen Books*, with a particular focus on the chapter “Monica Furlong’s *Thomas Merton* and How to Ruin a Honeymoon.” After a summer break, the chapter heard a presentation on September 15 by Daniel Horan, OFM on the topic “Thomas Merton: Prophetic Faith in the Face of

Fear.” On October 29, chapter member Richard C. Pütz will lead a discussion on “Confronting Christian Nationalism: Speaking Up and Speaking Out.” For further information, contact chapter coordinator Mike Brennan at 773-447-3989; email: cc.itms@gmail.com.

On March 22, Ron Dart gave a presentation entitled “Thomas Merton, Hermann Hesse and the Israeli-Palestinian War” at the Canadian Memorial Centre for Peace in Vancouver, BC, sponsored by the Thomas Merton Society of Canada. On the following day, he led a retreat on “Thomas Merton and the Art of Spiritual Formation” at the Centre. For further information on Society activities, contact Susan Cowan at tmssc@telus.net or visit the website at: <https://merton.ca>.

On June 12, the Spring/Summer 2024 quarterly meeting of the North-Central Connecticut ITMS Chapter took place remotely over Zoom; the meeting featured a panel discussion of Merton’s *New Seeds of Contemplation*, facilitated by chapter coordinator Mike Smoolca. On September 21, the Fall meeting featured Douglas Hertler’s performance of his play *Merton and Me: A Living Trinity*, followed by dinner and discussion, at the Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center in West Hartford, CT. For further information on chapter activities, see the chapter website: <https://www.invalumen.org/northctitms.html> or contact Mike Smoolca at: msmoolca@hotmail.com.

On October 1, the Belmar, NJ ITMS chapter held an online discussion of Merton’s letters in *The Road to Joy* to Tommie O’Callaghan. For further information contact chapter coordinator Gregory Ryan at gjryan@optonline.net.

Send all Merton-related news to:

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The ITMS Newsletter is also available online at:

www.merton.org/ITMS