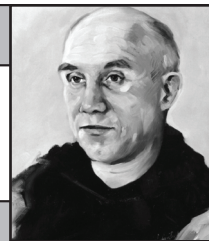


INTERNATIONAL THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

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## Nineteenth General Meeting Held

“The Calligraphy of Snow and Rock and Sky: Thomas Merton and the Spirit of Place” was the theme of the Nineteenth General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society, held June 19-22, 2025 at Regis University, Denver, Colorado. A total of 205 participants from 31 states and six countries attended.

General session addresses included: Kevin Burke, SJ and Julia Prinz, DVMF: “Praying the Hours amidst a Landscape of Cries: An Aesthetics of Resistance”; Susan Reynolds: “Terrain of Memory: Mertonian Reflections on Spirit, Place and Violence in the Shadow of the Front Range”; J. Matthew Ashley: “Thomas Merton, David Tracy and the Uncanny: Signs . . . Still . . . of Our Times”; Estevan Rael-Gálvez with Nicki Gonzales: “Native Bound Unbound: A Pilgrimage through Silence”; a “Merton and the American West” session featuring David Odorisio, Kathleen Tarr, and the film *On the Road with Thomas Merton*, by Jeremy Siefert in collaboration with Fred Bahnson, author of the award-winning essay of the same name. ITMS President Judith Valente delivered the presidential address entitled “Keeping Merton Human.”

The program included 36 presentations over the course of its three days: 23 concurrent session papers and thirteen workshops, guided prayer and special presentations, as well as a First-Timers’ Orientation and five opening sessions: a Chapters Workshop; an International Perspectives on Merton panel; a Merton Research and Researching Merton discussion; and two Emerging Scholars sessions, each featuring two presenters. Also on the schedule were morning and evening prayer; the ITMS Town Hall business meeting (at which a proposed by-laws change to increase the size of the board by adding a

pair of reserved seats for international members was not approved by the membership in attendance); an indigenous prayer ceremony with Andy Cozad; and a closing reception and buffet with final reflections. The exhibit “A Hidden Wholeness: The Zen Photography of Thomas Merton,” curated by Paul M. Pearson, was open throughout the conference in the O’Sullivan Fine Arts Center on campus. Participants were also invited to join the Regis worshipping community for Sunday Eucharist celebrated by Kevin Burke, SJ.

The Program Committee was chaired by immediate ITMS past president Christopher Pramuk, who also served as site coordinator, and included Ben Burkemper, Elizabeth Burkemper, Roger Butts, ITMS Treasurer Emma McDonald Kennedy, Paul M. Pearson, Paul Pynkoski, Kathleen Witkowska Tarr and ITMS President Judith Valente.

It was announced that the ITMS Twentieth General Meeting will take place June 17-20, 2027 at Iona University, New Rochelle, NY. Immediate past president Judith Valente will serve as Program Committee chair, with Vaughn Fayle, OFM as site coordinator.

## New Officers and Board

The Officers and Board of Directors of the International Thomas Merton Society for 2025-2027 were announced by outgoing president Judith Valente during the ITMS Nineteenth General Meeting on June 20, 2025. In accordance with the ITMS by-laws, the officers were chosen by the Board and members of the Board by the membership at large, from a slate prepared by the ITMS nominating committee: Michael Moore, chair; Deborah Kehoe and Emma McDonald Kennedy. A total of 181 ITMS members, 18% of the membership, participated in the election, 172 through on-line voting and 9 by mail.

Officers are Paul Pynkoski, president; Joseph Q. Raab, vice president; Michael Moore, secretary; Megan Way, treasurer; immediate past president Judith Valente will continue to serve on the board as past president. Newly elected members of the board are Abbi Fraser, David Odorisio and Anne Pearson; Rose Marie Berger, Elizabeth Burkemper and Kathleen Witkowska Tarr were re-elected to the board.

**Paul Pynkoski** is an active member of the Church of the Redeemer, Toronto, ON, where he coordinates literature discussions at the Common Table, a drop-in for those who are vulnerable or homeless. He is a founding member of Voices for Peace, an ecumenical conference on peacemaking and has contributed to *The Merton Seasonal*, *The Merton Annual*, *Orthodoxy in Dialogue* and *The Anglican*. He has presented at conferences of the International Thomas Merton Society and the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, exploring through contemporary music and Merton's writing the intersection of spirituality, politics and the arts. He has served most recently as vice president of the International Thomas Merton Society.

**Joseph Q. Raab**, STL, PhD is a professor at Madonna University in Livonia, MI, where he teaches courses in the Religious Studies and Philosophy Department and in the Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry program, as well as teaching Theology courses for the Saint Meinrad School of Theology, and Philosophy for a Siena Heights University program which serves incarcerated students. He has served as co-editor of *The Merton Annual* and presented his first paper at the 2003 ITMS General Meeting. He is the author of *Opening New Horizons: Seeds of a Theology of Religious Pluralism in Thomas Merton's Dialogue with D. T. Suzuki* (2021).

**Michael Moore** is a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), ordained in 1987. A former military chaplain, he is a member of Veterans for Peace and a member of the Wisdom Council for Abbey of the Arts, a virtual monastery and global online community. Since retiring from the Air Force in 2011, he has served churches in Minnesota, Florida,

Colorado, Georgia and Alabama. He received a Certificate in Christian Spiritual Formation from Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia and is a retreat/course leader for Columbia's Center for Lifelong Learning. He has served as the ITMS Board Secretary since 2023.

**Megan Way** is an Associate Professor of Economics at Babson College in Wellesley, MA. She teaches economics as well as integrated courses in socio-ecological systems. Her research spans several areas, including family economics, the economics of higher education, and spiritual leaders' critiques of modern economic systems. Her article, "Applying Thomas Merton's Wisdom to the Economics Classroom," was published in volume 37 of *The Merton Annual* (2024). She has also written for *The Merton Seasonal* and presented at the 2023 ITMS General Meeting. She completed the Living School program at the Center for Action and Contemplation in 2021.

**Judith Valente**, a retired journalist and poet from New Jersey who currently lives in central Illinois, has served as a member of the ITMS Board and as Society vice president and president. She is the author of the spiritual memoir *Atchison Blue* as well as two books of poetry, along with *How to Be: A Monk and a Journalist Reflect on Living & Dying, Purpose & Prayer, Forgiveness & Friendship*, coauthored with Br. Paul Quenon (2021). Her most recent book is *The Italian Soul: How to Savor the Full Joys of Life* (2025). 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*. She is married to retired Illinois Circuit Court Judge Charles Reynard.

**Rose Marie Berger** is a Catholic poet, writer and peace activist, a senior editor for *Sojourners* magazine, for which she writes a regular column, and author of the poetry collection *Bending the Arch* (2019). She has traveled to Ukraine, Colombia, Bosnia and elsewhere to support faith-rooted peacemaking. She is active in the global Catholic Nonviolence Initiative. She presented the keynote address, "Direct Transmission of Faith," at the ITMS Sixteenth General Meeting in 2019. She is

co-editor of *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and World* (2020). She lives in Oak View, CA. She is a current member of the ITMS Board of Directors.

**Elizabeth Burkemper**, born and raised in Troy, Missouri, is a graduate of Yale Divinity School, where she received a Master of Arts in Religion and Ecology and where she now works with the Life Worth Living Program. She earned her undergraduate degree in Peace Studies and Sustainability at the George Washington University. A 2017 Daggy Scholar, she presented on “Countering ‘Strangeness’ in Late Capitalism” at the 2021 ITMS General Meeting and most recently led a workshop on “Attending to Multispecies Worlds with Thomas Merton” at the 2025 ITMS conference. A member of the St. Louis Area Chapter of ITMS, she is a current member of the ITMS Board and serves as host to the Tuesdays with Merton webinar series.

**Kathleen Witkowska Tarr** is founder of the Alaska Chapter of the ITMS and author of *We Are All Poets Here: Thomas Merton's Journey to Alaska*, a spiritual memoir which relates details about Merton's 1968 Alaska sojourn. Her essays have appeared in *We Are Already One: Thomas Merton's Message of Hope* (2015) and *Merton & Indigenous Wisdom* (2019) and in *The Merton Seasonal*. She has presented at the Eighteenth General Meeting of the ITMS (2021) and on the Tuesdays with Merton podcast. She is an affiliated scholar at USC's Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies and holds an MFA in literary nonfiction from the University of Pittsburgh. She was a participant in the “Merton and the American West” General Session at the 2025 ITMS General Meeting. She is a current member of the ITMS board.

**Abbi Fraser** graduated from UCLA in 2022 with a B.A. in Public Affairs, after which she quickly dove into the world of the Catholic Worker, spending her days making soup, folding clothes, accompanying folks and contemplating God on the subway, thanks to the likes of Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Gustavo Gutierrez and her friends. A former Daggy Scholar, she currently works for TENx10, an ecumenical movement focused on

radical discipleship to make faith matter more for young people.

**David M. Odorisio** is Associate Professor at Pacifica Graduate Institute, Santa Barbara, CA, where he serves as Chair of the Psychology, Religion, and Consciousness MA/PhD program. He has edited four volumes, including: *Thomas Merton in California: The Redwoods Conferences and Letters* (2024) and *Merton & Hinduism: The Yoga of the Heart* (2021). David is a current Shannon Fellow, as well as a former Daggy Scholar and Youth Advisor to the ITMS Board. He has published in both *The Merton Seasonal* and *The Merton Annual* and serves as Co-Chair of the Mysticism Unit for the American Academy of Religion.

**Anne Pearson**, a former Daggy Scholar, wrote her Honors thesis on Thomas Merton's writings on racism and their continued relevancy in our current political and social environment. She has presented this research in Argentina and Great Britain, and as a TEDx talk. She also serves as the co-chair of the Daggy Scholars Committee. Following graduation she lived and worked in Washington, DC, where she created programming for graduate nursing students at the American Association of Colleges of Nursing that addressed the impact of neurodiversity on education inequity. She gave a presentation entitled “Thomas Merton and Non-violence: Developing an Ideology of Resistance” at the 2025 ITMS General Meeting. She is currently a graduate student in the master's program at the London School of Economics.

### Louies Awarded

The 2025 Thomas Merton Awards, informally known as “Louies,” were presented by outgoing ITMS president Judith Valente on June 21, 2025 during the concluding buffet-reception of the ITMS Nineteenth General Meeting. The award is a bronze bust of Thomas Merton created by sculptor David Kocka. The recipient of the “International” award, given to an individual who has made a significant contribution on an international level to the promotion of Merton's writings (in English or in translation) and to the presentation of his ideas, is Gary P. Hall. The recipient of the “Thomas Merton”

award, given to an individual whose recent work has made a significant contribution to Merton studies, is David M. Odorisio. The recipient of the “Society” award, given to a member of the ITMS whose distinguished service has contributed to the aims of the Society and the furthering of its goals, is Lynn Szabo.

**Gary P. Hall**, a charter member of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, is a Methodist minister who worked with marginal urban communities in Leeds and Leicester before becoming a theological educator at the ecumenical Queen’s Foundation in Birmingham, training future clergy from the UK and abroad. He is currently superintendent minister of the newly formed Hidden River Methodist circuit in the West Midlands. He wrote his master’s thesis on Thomas Merton at the University of Birmingham in 1994 and received his doctoral degree from the same university in 2019 for a dissertation on Merton. He served as assistant editor for the TMS *Merton Journal* from 2002 through 2004 and again in 2013, as editor in 2005-2007 and as co-editor from 2015 through 2019. He has been a frequent speaker at Merton conferences in the UK and abroad, including his keynote address at the 2014 TMS conference at Oakham School and presentations at the ITMS General Meetings in 1995, 2015 and 2021. His articles and reviews have appeared in *The Merton Annual*, *The Merton Journal*, *The Merton Seasonal* and elsewhere. He was also the co-editor with Detlev Cuntz of the volume *Guard the Human Image for It Is the Image of God: Essays on Thomas Merton* (2019). He served as an ITMS International Advisor in 2005-2007, 2015-2017 and from 2023 onwards.

**David M. Odorisio** is the editor of *Thomas Merton in California: The Redwoods Conferences and Letters* (Liturgical Press, 2024), an annotated volume of previously untranscribed conferences given by Merton in May and October 1968, along with correspondence and other related materials. He is Associate Professor at Pacifica Graduate Institute, Santa Barbara, CA, where he serves as Chair of the Psychology, Religion, and Consciousness MA/PhD program. He has edited three other volumes,

including *Merton & Hinduism: The Yoga of the Heart* (2021). He is a current Shannon Fellow, as well as a former Daggy Scholar and Youth Advisor to the ITMS Board. He has published in both *The Merton Seasonal* and *The Merton Annual* and serves as Co-Chair of the Mysticism Unit for the American Academy of Religion.

**Lynn R. Szabo** is professor emerita of American Literature at Trinity Western University, Vancouver, BC, Canada, where she served as English Department Chair and on the faculty of graduate studies, coordinating the English stream for the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies and Humanities. She regularly taught courses on Thomas Merton, training a number of Merton scholars of the next generation as she herself was mentored by Dr. Ross Labrie. She has served as a board member both of the Thomas Merton Society of Canada and of the ITMS, where she was a member of the board from 2003 through 2009 and served as society vice president in 2009-2011. She was also a longtime member of the editorial committee of *The Merton Annual*. An authority on Merton’s poetry, she has written numerous articles on his verse in *The Merton Annual*, *The Merton Seasonal* and elsewhere, and is the editor of Thomas Merton, *In the Dark before Dawn: New Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 2005), a major collection of Merton’s writings in this field. She is also co-editor of the volume *Through a Glass Darkly: Suffering, The Sacred and The Sublime in Literature and Theory* (2010).

#### Shannon Fellowship Awarded

At its June 2025 meeting, the ITMS Board of Directors awarded a 2025-2026 Shannon Fellowship to David M. Odorisio for a project entitled: “Thomas Merton’s Working Notebooks on Sufism, Cistercian Anthropology and Comparative Mysticism.” 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



Bellarmino University or other archival collections. This year's selection committee includes Paul M. Pearson (chair), Fiona Gardner and Joseph Raab.

**The deadline for applications for Shannon Fellowships for 2026-2027 is March 15, 2026.** Awards must be used between June 1, 2026 and July 31, 2027. 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. Successful applicants are required to submit an accurate expense account and a report summarizing the results of their research at the conclusion of the grant period.

Applications 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 biographical statement of 100-150 words providing pertinent educational, scholarly and/or professional information about the applicant;
- 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](mailto:pmpearson@bellarmine.edu).** The committee's recommendations will be presented at the June 2026 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>.

#### **Russo Grants Awarded**

At its June 2025 meeting, the ITMS Board of Directors awarded 2025-2026 Russo Grants to the ITMS Chicago Chapter for a conference in spring 2026 on "Contemplative Practices: Exploring World Religions with Thomas Merton," and to the Indianapolis Chapter for a "Merton Pilgrimage" enabling the group to visit the Thomas Merton Center in Louisville and the Abbey of Gethsemani.

The International Thomas Merton Society invites applications for grants from ITMS chapters and affiliates to provide financial support, up to a maximum of \$500 each, for chapter/affiliate events, including but not limited to inviting visiting speakers. 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. They are funded through the generosity of his wife Josie.

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. The deadline for applications is June 1, 2026. Applications will be reviewed by an appointed committee and approved by the ITMS Board, and applicants will be notified about awards by July 1, 2026. Awards must be used between July 1, 2026 and June 30, 2027. Following the event, award recipients are required to submit by July 31, 2027 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.

#### **Daggy Scholarships Awarded**

Twenty-nine young people were able to attend the ITMS Nineteenth General Meeting at Regis University, Denver, CO as recipients of Daggy Youth Scholarships. These awards, named in honor of the late Robert E. Daggy, long-time director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University and resident secretary and second president of the ITMS, cover all registration, room and board expenses for attendance at ITMS General Meetings and include a year's free ITMS membership. The selection committee for this year's scholars included Anne Pearson and Jim Robinson, co-chairs, Elizabeth Burkemper, Emma McDonald Kennedy and Michael Moore.

This year's recipients of Daggy Scholarships included: **Carter Brannon** – Boston College; **Teodor Brkovic Gajin** – Loyola Marymount University; **Nikita Budnik** – McGill University; **Julie Ciecior** – Pacifica Graduate Institute; **Bennet Cullison** – University of Chicago; **Justin Duenne** – Quaker Seminary, Indiana; **Diana Hadjiyane** – Loyola Marymount University; **Tiffany Hunsinger** – University of Dayton; **Yoshi Kuramoto** – San Pedro Methodist Church; **Jack Leopold** – Denver/Boulder, CO; **Brendan McAleer, CSC** – Loyola Marymount University; **Jane Miller** – Loyola

University Chicago; **Leah Miller** – Naropa University; **Julia Morrow** – Franciscan School of Theology & San José State University; **Liam Myers** – Iona University & Maryhouse Catholic Worker, NYC; **Amanda Pierce Schar** – Boston College; **Matthew Riddle** – Villanova University; **Amy Rini** – Boston College; **Ian Smith** – Iona University; **Jessica Sun** – Pax Christ USA; **Rowan Torres** – Iona University; **Caleb Vanderleek** – St. Stephen's University; **Ethan Vander Leek** – Marquette University; **John Waldrop** – Lexington, KY; **Matthew Wolfe** – Providence Housing; **Yidi Wu** – Boston University; **Michael Zelaya** – Avila Institute & Bellarmine University; **Adam Zook** – Siena Heights University; **María Guadalupe Zorrilla** – Cuyo National University, Mendoza, Argentina.

#### **James Conner, OCSO (1932-2025)**

Fr. James Conner, student, colleague and friend of Thomas Merton at the Abbey of Gethsemani and fourth president of the International Thomas Merton Society, died on July 25, 2025 at the age of 92. Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma on December 3, 1932, he entered the abbey on August 13, 1949, at age 16, and was given the name Tarcisius, reverting to his baptismal name in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. He made his first vows on October 7, 1951 and professed his final vows on December 8, 1954. He was ordained a priest on June 15, 1957 and spent time studying in Rome in the period 1962-1964. In 1972, he volunteered to assist at the Abbey of Christ in the Desert in New Mexico, which was struggling at the time, and eventually became superior there. After spending some time in San Francisco, he became chaplain for a group of Benedictine nuns interested in integrating Eastern meditative practices into their monastic spirituality, helping them to found Osage Forest Monastery in Oklahoma, reflecting his own interest in other religious traditions and his longtime involvement in the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue movement. He returned to Gethsemani in 1990 but was subsequently elected superior of Assumption Abbey, Ava, Missouri and in 1995 became abbot of that community. He returned permanently to Gethsemani in 1999.

Fr. James studied under Fr. Louis, Thomas Merton, as a scholastic, also choosing him as his confessor. He later worked closely with Merton, serving as undermaster of novices in the years 1958-1961, during Merton's tenure as novice master. Among his other roles at Gethsemani were retreat master, interior cellarer, overseer of the fudge operation and guest house chaplain, continuing to work in the bakery and mail-order business up until his final illness. He was also a much appreciated confessor for many of the monks. The longest serving monk in the community, he died on the feast of St. James the Apostle as Mass was being celebrated. His funeral was celebrated on July 29.

After serving two terms as a member of the ITMS Board of Directors (1989-1993), Fr. James became the fourth ITMS president (1993-1995), with primary responsibility for the thorough revision of the early ITMS by-laws that took place during his term of office. He was a general session speaker at early ITMS conferences, including the first (1989) and third (1993) as well as his presidential address in 1995, and gave the keynote address at the eleventh General Meeting in 2009, as well as participating in the panel of Merton friends at the second General Meeting in 1991 and preaching the closing homilies at the tenth (2007) and twelfth (2011) ITMS conferences. Most of these presentations were subsequently published in *The Merton Annual* or *The Merton Seasonal*. His articles and reviews on Merton also appeared in *Catholic World*, *Cistercian Studies*, *Monastic Exchange*, *Monos*, and the volumes *Thomas Merton/Monk* (1974, 1983), the British Merton Society volume *Voice of the Stranger* (2008), the bilingual collection *Seeds of Hope* (2008) and the centennial volume *We Are Already One: Thomas Merton's Message of Hope* (2014). Paul M. Pearson's interview with him, entitled "A Dedication to Prayer and a Dedication to Humanity," appears in *The Merton Annual* 23 (2010).

#### **Timothy E. McHargue (1951-2025)**

Longtime Merton Society member and ITMS Chapter leader Timothy E. (Tim) McHargue died from cancer on June 16, 2025 at the age of 73. Born

on July 20, 1951, son of Jefferson Davis McHargue, Jr. and Jeanne Ely McHargue, he was educated at Jesuit High School in Sacramento, where his family had moved from southern California when he was twelve years old. He later spent almost four years working at an international school in Jakarta, Indonesia, where he met his wife Lynnette, went on to earn a doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology from University of the Pacific in Sacramento, and directed a program for students with disabilities at Folsom Lake College for 16 years. He began reading Thomas Merton in high school and continued to do so throughout the rest of his life. With his friend and former teacher John Berger, he founded the Northern California Chapter of the International Thomas Merton Society in 1990. He was a participant in ITMS General Meetings, co-leading a workshop with John Berger at the 2005 conference in San Diego on "Merton's Message of Peace, Social Justice and Nonviolence in his 'Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants,'" a topic revisited in their recently coauthored article "Understanding Our Exact Position: Contemplating Merton's 'Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants'" (*Merton Seasonal* 48.4 [Winter 2023] 8-18). He had earlier written two articles for the *Seasonal* on experiences dating from his time in the Far East: "A Pilgrimage in Bangkok" (21.4 [Winter 1996] 3-6), on his visit to the Red Cross center where Merton died, and "Beyond Bangkok: A Pilgrimage to Rawasengeng" (23.4 [Winter 1998] 13-19), a trip to the Indonesian Cistercian monastery where Merton had intended to spend Christmas 1968. His poem "Sacred Stones: Ruminations on Rubble" appeared in the Spring 2021 issue of the *Seasonal* (46.1: 16-17). He is survived by his wife Lynnette Diem, his sister Marianne and brothers Dan, Tom, Jerry and Jim, four nieces, three nephews and numerous great nephews and great nieces. His funeral Mass was celebrated at Holy Spirit Church in Sacramento. Donations in his memory may be made to the Cistercian Abbey of New Clairvaux, Vina, CA.

#### **Jack Kelly (1934-2025)**

Jack Kelly, longtime ITMS member and

husband of Marcia Marcus Kelly, the niece of Thomas Merton's friend Robert Lax, died May 2 in Manhattan, at the age of ninety. Born in Olean, NY on December 22, 1934, he attended St. Mary's Academy and graduated from Olean High School in 1952. He went on to Villanova University where he majored in English and was in the Navy ROTC program, and as a senior midshipman participated in a memorable cruise to pre-Castro Cuba that included an impromptu visit with Ernest Hemingway, a favorite author. During his two years of active duty in the Navy he toured the Pacific, with stops in Tokyo, Nagasaki, Okinawa, Hong Kong, Manila, Singapore and Honolulu. He later worked as a live-aboard captain on a Hudson River barge, subsequently becoming an editor at a major New York publisher, while pursuing an avocation for photography, and later for drawing and painting, taking classes at the Art Students' League and the Grand Central Art Academy in New York, as well as in Olean and in Santa Barbara, CA.

An unplanned visit with his wife to Thomas Merton's monastery, the Abbey of Gethsemani, led to a series of popular travel guidebooks featuring monasteries and retreat centers of a wide range of religious and spiritual traditions: *Sanctuaries: A Guide to Lodgings in Monasteries, Abbeys and Retreats – The Northeast* was published in 1991 (reviewed by Arthur Biddle, the editor of the Lax-Merton correspondence, in *The Merton Seasonal* 16.3 [Summer 1991] 22-23); *Sanctuaries: The West Coast and Southwest* appeared two years later, and *Sanctuaries: The Complete United States*, which included about 300 locations they had personally visited, in 1996. The couple also edited *One Hundred Graces*, an interreligious collection of traditional and contemporary mealtime blessings, published in 1992.

Their interview with Marcia's uncle, "Conversation with Robert Lax," was published in the Summer 1991 issue of *The Merton Seasonal* (16.3: 4-9). Jack Kelly's article "Robert Lax – Coming Home," the introductory essay of the memorial issue for Merton's friend (26.1 [Spring 2001] 3-6), provided a detailed narrative of the final journey of Lax from

his longtime home in the Greek isles back to Olean, where he died a short time later. In his review of *Run to the Mountain*, the first volume of Merton's complete journals, which appeared in *The Merton Seasonal* 20.4 (Fall 1995) 11-12, Kelly related his own appreciation of Merton as "the measured clear thinker I admire as much as anyone . . . the clarity of [whose] thinking sets me free."

#### ITMS Authors

Matthew Boedy is the author of *The Seven Mountains Mandate: Exposing the Dangerous Plan to Christianize America and Destroy Democracy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2025) [\$25 paper], an exposé of the ideology of Christian nationalism and its decades-long plan to radically transform America. The author reveals how prosperity preachers and political operatives are presently destroying democracy under the second administration of Donald Trump, with particular attention to the secretive Turning Point USA organization and its founder Charlie Kirk, a major figure in Christian nationalist efforts to control the "seven mountains" of education, government, religion, family, business, media and entertainment. The new book is described in *Publishers Weekly* as "A sobering assessment of the evolution of Christian nationalism."

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Kathleen Deignan, CND has recently edited *Thomas Berry: A Book of Hours* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2025) [\$25 paper]. Following the format of her previous volumes featuring the words of Thomas Merton and Teilhard de Chardin, she provides here a unique encounter with the spirituality of Thomas Berry, Passionist priest, ecological prophet, and self-described "geologian," who recounted the "universe story" and described the "great work" of contemporary humanity as developing an Ecozoic consciousness capable of sustaining life on this planet. The material is arranged according to themes divided into eight days, each of which includes prayers, hymns and readings for the four parts of the day: Dawn, Day, Dusk and Dark. Berry biographer Mary Evelyn Tucker writes: "Thomas Berry's wisdom deserves to be widely known and



appreciated. Kathleen Deignan’s careful selections from his writings provide a luminous context for this to happen. This Book of Hours is a singular feast for meditation and enrichment that is nothing short of transformative.”

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Michael Owen has recently published two books on Ira Gershwin (1896-1983), the first lyricist to win a Pulitzer Prize. His biography *Ira Gershwin: A Life in Words* (New York: Liveright, 2024) [\$37.99 cloth] is the first full-length life story of the songwriter best known for his collaborations with his brother George on a series of hit Broadway shows, who spent much of his time and energy after the latter’s tragically early death in 1937 in managing his estate and supporting his legacy, but also collaborated with such distinguished composers as Kurt Weill and Harold Arlen. Scholar and musician Michael Feinstein writes, “This book is a marvel and model of how to write resonantly and engagingly about a charming subject who was unintentionally elusive. Having personally known and adored Ira for years, I am overwhelmed by the information and detail Owen captures.” The second book, *The Gershwins Abroad* (Schott Music, 2024) [€32.00], is an annotated scholarly edition of Ira Gershwin’s 1928 travel notebook, written during the brothers’ trip to Europe when George was working on his celebrated tone poem *An American in Paris*. It is a volume in the Gershwin Critical Edition series that will provide the first scholarly collection of the music and lyrics of the Gershwin brothers.

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Bonnie Thurston’s latest book is *John the Baptizer: Reformer and Hinge of Scripture* (New York: Paulist Press, 2025) [\$19.95 paper], a volume in the Catholic Biblical Association series of Biblical Studies, particularly appropriate for adult scripture study in a group or personally and for undergraduate courses in scripture. This “narrative biography” of John the Baptist, drawn primarily from New Testament texts, introduces the reader to the life of John the Baptist in the Gospels and Christian spirituality. With more verses devoted to him than anyone except Jesus, John the Baptist appears some ninety times in the

New Testament. Relying primarily on the canonical New Testament texts (with reference to modern scholarship), the book introduces the general reader, undergraduate or seminary student to John’s life, especially its importance in the ministry of Jesus, the development of the early church, and his enduring spiritual significance.

#### Award for ITMS Author

*Thomas Merton in California: The Redwoods Conferences and Letters*, edited by David M. Odorisio (Liturgical Press, 2004), tied for first place in the Spirituality category of this year’s Association of Catholic Publishers 2025 Excellence in Publishing Awards.

#### Fourth Argentine Merton Conference

The Fourth Argentine Thomas Merton Conference took place August 28-29, 2025 at the Cuyo National University in Mendoza, Argentina, organized and sponsored by the university’s Instituto de Investigación en Lenguas y Culturas Extranjeras, the Maestría en Literaturas Contemporáneas en Lengua Inglesa, the Cátedra de Literatura Norteamericana and the Argentine Westlands Merton Chapter. The bilingual Conference was held online to foster international participation. The organizing committee included Marcela Raggio, Guillermina Perera de Saravia, Eduardo Salinas, Carlos Villegas and Verónica Mastrodonato. Following an introductory welcome by ITMS President Paul Pynkoski, presentations included: Cristóbal Serrán Pagán: “Prophetic Voices against the Madness of War, Greed and Power: Merton and Cardenal Address the State of the World in the 1960s”; Dominiek Lootens: “To Silence the Truth is to Bury Gold: Thomas Merton’s Interaction with the Maxims of Evagrius Ponticus in J.-P. Migne”; Leonardo Martínez: “Thomas Merton, en la frontera del catolicismo social” (“Thomas Merton, at the Frontier of Social Catholicism”); Paul Pynkoski: “Imagination and Resistance in *Hagia Sophia*”; Federico Astorga: “Merton y el existencialismo: Entre Heidegger y Sartre” (“Merton and Existentialism: Between Heidegger and Sartre”); Hugh Turley: “What Thomas Merton’s Authorized Biographer Revealed and What He Concealed”;

William Horan: “Thomas Merton and Arun Gandhi on Nonviolence”; Lilian Nasserian: “The Evolving Mission of Education: Preparing Minds for a World in Flux”; Juan Carlos Ramos Héndez: “Poéticas del fin: Una escatología atómica en Nikolaus Geyrhalter y Thomas Merton – Filme-ensayo y ensayo literario” (“Poetics of the End: An Atomic Eschatology in Nikolaus Geyrhalter and Thomas Merton” – Film-essay and literary essay); Liana Gehl: “More on the Frogs of the Same Pond”; Emilia Kark: “Art and Epiphany: Thomas Merton’s Encounter with the Divine through the Icon”; Alicia Bugallo: “Vínculos Merton-Cardenal: impresiones en dos cartas inéditas (1968, 1969) de revista *Mutantia*” (“Merton-Cardenal Links: Two Unpublished Letters from 1968 and 1969, in *Mutantia*”); Verónica Mastrodonato: “Thomas Merton’s First Letter to Victoria Ocampo: Analysis and Translation”; Juan Pablo Duboué, Guadalupe Zorrilla, Andrea Cruz: Lectura de poemas /A poetry reading, inspired on Thomas Merton.

### **Tuesdays with Merton Series**

Upcoming presentations in the Tuesdays with Merton webinar series, sponsored by the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University and co-sponsored by the Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union, include Vincent Pizzuto: “Delicious Tranquility: Near-Death Experiences and the *Quietud Sabrosa*” on October 14; Harley Matthews: “Merton and the Protestant Tradition” on November 11; and Judith Valente: “In Their Own Words: The Monks Who Knew Merton” on December 9. To register for the webinars go to: <http://merton.org/TWM/> and follow the highlighted “Register Here” link. Previous Tuesdays with Merton presentations are available on the ITMS YouTube channel and as audio podcasts.

### **TMS Conference Scheduled**

The next biennial conference of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland will be held April 10-12, 2026 at Sarum College, Salisbury, UK with the theme “Embracing the Present Moment – Possibilities and Challenges,” taken from a passage in Merton’s *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*: “In a time of drastic change . . . [w]hat really matters

is openness, readiness, attention, courage to face risk. You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith, and hope. In such an event, courage is the authentic form taken by love.” Confirmed speakers include: Malcolm Cash on lessons from Merton and Malcolm X for current racial challenges and possibilities; Vaughn J. Fayle, OFM on Merton and the forgotten Africa; Gary Hall on the bystander as a teacher of attention; Michael Higgins on Merton and John Moriarity; Daniel Horan on insights from Merton’s *The New Man* for the present moment; Paul Pynkoski on creation, incarnation and resistance in “The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air”; Sophronia Scott on Merton’s model of self-care through communication; Paul M. Pearson on living with Merton in the present moment. The cost of the conference is £255.30 and should be booked directly through the college by contacting [hospitality@sarum.ac.uk](mailto:hospitality@sarum.ac.uk).

### **Merton Varia**

An updated catalogue of the Albert Romkema collection of Thomas Merton’s published and unpublished writings and related materials, considered to be the most comprehensive in private hands including more 2600 items, has recently been assembled. Information on the collection and the collector can be found on Romkema’s website at <https://merton-artifacts.com>. Romkema has been pastor at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Petawa, Ontario since 2017.

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Award-winning filmmaker and writer Gerald Thomas Straub, founder of the Santa Chiara Children’s Center and Academy in Haiti and author of *Reading Thomas Merton and Longing for God in Haiti* as well as *A Journey to Meekness: Prayer Poems and Reflections*, veteran retreat director and presenter of over 260 multi-media sessions at high schools, universities and churches in the US and Europe, is available for speaking engagements on the topic “Choosing to Love: A Multimedia Reflection on Poverty and Prayer,” based on his own extensive

experience working and living with the poor and marginalized (90-120 minutes). Arrangements for the presentation can be made for both in-person and remote (via Zoom) options, suited for retreat settings, school classes, ministerial groups, small Christian communities, formation programs and similar venues. Costs would include reimbursement for travel expenses, with any further stipend to be contributed on a free-will offering basis. All stipend funds would go directly to the Santa Chiara Center ([santachiaracc.org](http://santachiaracc.org)). Bishop David Fellhauer of the Diocese of Victoria, Texas writes of the presentation: "I attended Gerry Straub's keynote presentation at our annual diocesan Catechetics and Ministry Conference and was most impressed. The presentation was powerful and conscience-stirring. It seemed that everyone present was deeply moved." Further information can be found at [gerardstraub.com](http://gerardstraub.com).

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Steven Denny, author of *The Merton Prayer: An Exercise in Authenticity* (ACTA, 2022), has a website that includes a blog, information on the book, its author and the prayer's composer, reviews and various media presentations and interviews. It can be accessed at: <https://themertonprayer.com>.

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On the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Ernesto Cardenal, an online resource of downloadable recordings, one of which contains the reading (not in his own voice) of Cardenal's 1957 account of Merton's spiritual direction, a yet unpublished text by Cardenal. Introduced by Cardenal scholar Luce-López Baralt, the compilation can be accessed at: <https://www.fundacionbancosantander.com/es/cultura/literatura/prosas-dispersas>.

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Charles Brandt (1923-2020), Catholic convert, priest and longtime hermit who met and was strongly influenced by Thomas Merton, lived in a hermitage he called Merton House along the Oyster River in British Columbia from 1965 until the time of his death. (For details of his life, see the interview by Donald Grayston and David Chang: "A Single Sacred Community: An Interview with

Charles Brandt – Hermit, Bookbinder, Ecologist" in *The Merton Annual* 29 [2016]). Under the auspices of the Brandt Oyster River Hermitage Society, a program for Brant Contemplative Residence Grants, offering opportunities for short-term stays at Fr. Brandt's hermitage, have begun in 2024. For more information see <https://charlesbrandt.ca/a-call-for-contemplatives>.

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Michael Owen (whose recent books on/by Ira Gershwin are included in the "ITMS Authors" section above) is interested in hearing from anyone with information on Brother Matthew McGunigle (1901-1983) (also referred to as Matt Scott in Merton's journal), who lived at the Abbey of Gethsemani from 1951 until his death, and who had been a friend of Ira Gershwin and many other Hollywood & Broadway people, and a writer for newspapers, the theater and the movies before entering the monastery. (The Ira Gershwin papers in the Library of Congress include a large folder of letters from Matthew during his years at Gethsemani, including a brief 1954 note from Merton to Ira thanking him for sending a set of records to the abbey.) He is currently doing research on a possible biography and can be reached at: [mrowen62@gmail.com](mailto:mrowen62@gmail.com).

### **Merton Happenings**

James D'Angelo presented four of his nine songs on poems of Thomas Merton as part of the Planetree Contemporary Music Festival held in London on May 25, 2025. These were: "In Silence," "Stranger," "Song for Nobody" and "Solitude," all of which can be heard on his website: <https://www.jamesdangelomusic.com/> as performed by baritone Scott Dispenza at the 2017 ITMS General Meeting. He has also completed an oratorio on Merton's unpublished manuscript libretto *The Tower of Babel*, originally intended for the composer Paul Hindemith, and is seeking a choral society and/or conductor to perform the work. He can be contacted via [jamesdangelomusic@gmail.com](mailto:jamesdangelomusic@gmail.com).

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On June 8, Douglas Hertler presented his one-person play *Merton and Me: A Living Trinity* at the Center for Creative Studies in New York City.

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On July 10, Douglas Hertler presented his one-person play *Merton and Me: A Living Trinity* for a group of high school students from across the country as part of “Philosophy in Daily Life: An Ignatian Approach to the Examined Life,” an Ignatian summer retreat program at Fordham University, Bronx, NY.

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On August 1-3, Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSBCam led a weekend retreat entitled “*Hagia Sophia: At Play in Creation with Thomas Merton*,” at the Holy Spirit Retreat Center in Encino, CA.

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On August 2, David Odorisio gave a live, interactive online presentation entitled “Going ‘Beyond God’: Thomas Merton’s Universal Vision” for the Theosophical Society of America.

#### Upcoming Events

On October 17, 2025, poet and spiritual writer Kathleen Norris will give the inaugural Martha Buser, OSU Annual Lecture at 7 p.m. at the Cralle Theater, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. The presentation is free and open to the public.

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On October 29, Abbot James Wiseman, OSB of St. Anselm’s Abbey will give a presentation on Thomas Merton at the Northeast Neighborhood Library in Washington, DC as part of their “Faith in Focus” series.

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On December 11-14, David Odorisio will lead an online and in-person retreat entitled “Pathways to the Heart: Contemplative Prayer Practices, East and West,” at the Krotona Institute, Ojai, CA. For further information contact the Institute at 805-646-2653 or [info@krotonainstitute.org](mailto:info@krotonainstitute.org); or visit their website at: <https://www.krotonainstitute.org/downloads/pathways-to-the-heart-contemplative-prayer-practices-east-and-west>.

#### Chapter and Affiliate News

On September 21, the Chicago ITMS Chapter will host a presentation by iconographer Joseph Malham entitled “Catholic Heroes of the Twentieth Century: New Icons for a New Millennium” at Euclid Avenue

United Methodist Church in Oak Park, IL. On October 19, Judith Valente will discuss her most recent book, *The Italian Soul: How to Savor the Full Joys of Life*. On November 16, chapter member Vinny Donnelly will speak on “Merton in Rome.”

For further information, contact chapter coordinator Mike Brennan at 773-447-3989; email: [cc.itms@gmail.com](mailto:cc.itms@gmail.com).

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On February 21, the Winter 2026 North Central Connecticut ITMS Chapter meeting will take place at 8:30 p.m. at Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center in West Hartford, CT, in person and via Zoom, featuring Sophronia Scott (author of *The Seeker and the Monk*, for which she received the 2021 Louie Award from ITMS), co-sponsored with the Christian Contemplative Experience at Holy Family. Before this public lecture, she will lead a daylong retreat entitled “Anam Cara: Thomas Merton, and Pursuing Relationships That Enlighten Our Lives,” also both in person and on Zoom. For further information see the chapter website: <https://www.invalumen.org/northctitms.html> or contact chapter coordinator Mike Smoolca at: [msmoolca@hotmail.com](mailto:msmoolca@hotmail.com).

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On September 27, the New York City Merton Society chapter will sponsor a session entitled “Peacemakers, Prophets and Friends: Thomas Merton and Robert Lax,” led by Marcia Kelly, Judith Emery, Anthony Bannon and others who knew them and their work, at Corpus Christi Church in Manhattan. Admission is free, but preregistration is requested; for further information contact [info@thomasmertonnyc.org](mailto:info@thomasmertonnyc.org) or 212-666-9350.

Send all Merton-related news to:

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*The ITMS Newsletter is also available online at:*

**[www.merton.org/ITMS](http://www.merton.org/ITMS)**