

INTERNATIONAL THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER

Volume 12, Number 1

Spring 2005



Art: Jim Cantrell

## Merton and the Catechism Campaign

More than eleven hundred fifty people from across America and around the world have signed on to a letter drafted and sponsored by the International Thomas Merton Society, requesting that a brief biographical portrait of Thomas Merton be restored to the new American Catholic Catechism, to be published by the United States bishops in 2006. The letter is addressed to Bp. Donald Wuerl, chair of the group that composed the catechism, and has been sent as well to other members of the catechism committee and to U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops president Bp. William Skylstad.

The letter was prompted by a November 2004 interview with Bp. Wuerl in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (see [www.post-gazette.com/pg/04324/414174.stm](http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/04324/414174.stm)) reporting that Merton, who had originally been profiled in the opening chapter of the catechism, had been removed in the final draft, reportedly because "the generation we were speaking to had no idea who he was," according to Bp. Wuerl. "Only secondarily did we take into consideration that we don't know all the details of the searching at the end of his life." The article reported that Merton "is rejected by conservative Catholics who believe his later interest in Buddhist forms of prayer compromised his faith." The letter responded "that Merton remains a figure of great fascination and attraction, and will continue to serve as an outstanding model of faith, wisdom and compassion for many years to come" and that "no reputable Merton scholars or . . . careful readers of Merton think that his interest in Eastern religions toward the end of his life, which led to his Asian journey and his untimely death, in any way compromised his commitment to Catholic

Christianity." The letter concludes, "We respectfully request that the committee reverse its decision and restore the material on Merton to its original place in the volume. We believe that doing so will make the catechism a better book and will assist its readers in becoming wiser, more mature, more committed Catholic Christians."

The campaign has received national attention. An article in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* that was distributed nationally by Religion News Service added significant new information (see [www.courier-journal.com/localnews/2005/01/01ky/A1-merton0101-7306.html](http://www.courier-journal.com/localnews/2005/01/01ky/A1-merton0101-7306.html)). It was followed by a Catholic News Service piece that ran in many diocesan papers (see [www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0500126.htm](http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0500126.htm)). More recently the story has prompted an editorial in *Commonweal* magazine criticizing the decision to remove Merton ([www.commonwealmagazine.org/article.php?id\\_article=1141](http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/article.php?id_article=1141)) and a front-page story in the *National Catholic Reporter* ([http://ncronline.org/NCR\\_Online/archives2/2005a/031105/031105a.php](http://ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2005a/031105/031105a.php)). The original critique of the catechism and Merton's place in it (among other things), by Msgr. Michael Wrenn and Kenneth Whitehead, which apparently prompted the bishops' decision to some degree, can be found at [www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=20616](http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=20616).

Included in the mailing to the bishops are dozens of selected testimonies from signers about Merton's influence in their lives: bringing some into the Church, keeping others from leaving, inspiring vocations, consoling, challenging, leading to contemplation and to action for peace, justice and interreligious understanding.

While organizers of the letter campaign are not optimistic about the likelihood that Merton's profile

will be restored to the catechism, which is presently awaiting approval from the Vatican, they believe that the process of raising awareness of Merton among both the bishops and the general public has been a positive experience. ITMS President Erlinda Paguio told Catholic News Service that she was disappointed that Merton was omitted from the final draft, but she was also optimistic that his rejection might lead more people to learn about him. "I hope more people will read his writings if even just to find out why he was not included," she said, and added that if Merton were alive today he would most likely laugh about the whole situation. "He encountered a lot of contradictions in his life," she said. "This is probably just one of those contradictions." The full text of the letter can be found at <http://www.merton.org/ITMS/index.asp>.

### Thomas Merton and Pope John Paul II

In his reminiscence of meeting Pope John Paul II, published in the April 22 issue of *Commonweal* magazine, peace activist and Merton biographer Jim Forest includes details on his conversation with the pope about Thomas Merton. In December 1980, Forest accompanied Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Argentinean social justice activist, political prisoner and that year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, on a visit to the Vatican, where Perez Esquivel met with the pope to apprise him of conditions in Latin America. Toward the end of the audience, the pope presented rosaries to his visitors, and in return the Nobel Laureate, who had been deeply influenced by Merton, gave the pope a copy of Forest's recently published book, *Thomas Merton: A Pictorial Biography* (later published in an expanded edition as *Living with Wisdom*). Forest continues, "This was the one moment in the audience when I had a brief exchange with John Paul. Switching from Spanish to English, the pope asked if I had known Merton. Yes, I responded, he had been my spiritual father the last seven years of his life. John Paul said he too was a great admirer of Merton's writings. A close friend, the publisher of his own writings in Poland, was also the publisher of many of Merton's books in Polish. He had read them all, he said, and still had them in his library." This is the second instance of a modern

pope giving evidence of being a Merton reader. In an earlier *Commonweal* article (December 2, 1988), ITMS founding president William Shannon quotes Msgr. Capovilla, Pope John XXIII's secretary, who spoke of how when he came down to the Pope's apartment he saw Merton's books "L'une après l'autre" ("one after the other").

### Tommie O'Callaghan Honored

On August 12, 2004, Thomasine (Tommie) O'Callaghan was honored at a dinner sponsored by the Thomas Merton Foundation to celebrate her decades of work dedicated to preserving the legacy of Thomas Merton. Through their mutual friend Daniel Walsh, Merton became a close friend of Tommie, her husband Frank and their seven children during the 1960s, and Tommie was asked by Merton to become one of the original three members of the Merton Legacy Trust, a position she continues to hold. She has been instrumental in the development of the Merton collection at the Bellarmine University Merton Center, and has hosted and befriended dozens of Merton readers and scholars who have visited Louisville. She was a founder of the Thomas Merton Foundation and has served on its board since its inception in 1995.

### Conference on the Art of Merton

A one-day conference focusing on Thomas Merton's drawings and photographs entitled "A Hidden Wholeness: The Art of Thomas Merton," sponsored by the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, was held on Saturday, December 11, 2004. Speakers included: Anthony Bannon: "Thomas Merton's Art of Contemplative Photography"; Dorothy Keller: "The Desert as Metaphor: Experiencing the Spiritual Dimensions of the Desert in the Visual Art of Thomas Merton"; Roger Lipsey: "Amid Sanctus Sounds: Thomas Merton's Calligraphy and Photography"; Therese Mulligan: "Poetics and the Photograph: The Photography of Thomas Merton and Ralph Eugene Meatyard"; Marilyn Sunderman, RSM: "Seeing/Being Awake: Zen and the Photography of Thomas Merton." Peter Morrin, director of the Speed Museum in Louisville, chaired a panel

discussion by the participants. Many examples of Merton's drawings and photographs from the Merton Center collection were also on display.

### **TMS Call for Papers**

The Sixth General Meeting of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland will be held from March 31 through April 2, 2006 at Oakham School, Rutland, UK. The conference theme is "Beyond the Shadow and Disguise: Exploring Thomas Merton's Spiritual Experience and Religious Insight." Papers relating to this theme, including Merton and Buddhism, Merton and Islam, inter-faith dialogue and ecumenism, are particularly sought for presentation at the conference. Ideas for participative workshops and non-academic presentations are also invited. Academic papers would be allotted 30 minutes (10-12 double spaced pages, maximum) and the proposal should be no more than 500 words. Workshops would run for 90 minutes, and dramatic, poetic, artistic and musical presentations for 45-90 minutes. Proposals for papers, workshops and presentations should be sent by email or by post before July 8, 2005 to Fiona Gardner, Brick Cottage, Pitcot Lane, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Somerset, BA3 4SX, England; email: fgardner@fish.co.uk.

### **Merton and Buddhism Conference**

A conference on "Thomas Merton and Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness and Everyday Mind" was held February 18-20, 2005 at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY. The conference, sponsored by the Thomas Merton Foundation, included presentations by Reuben Habito: "Thomas Merton's Zen Experience – Hear the Cries of the World"; John Keenan: "Spiritual Teaching & Interfaith Dialogue: The Limits of Thomas Merton's Understanding of Buddhism"; Judith Simmer-Brown: "Liberty that Nobody Can Touch: The Meeting of Thomas Merton & Tibetan Buddhism"; Robert Thurman: "Merton, Shantideva and the Dalai Lama"; Bonnie Thurston: "The Unfolding of a New World: Thomas Merton & Buddhism"; and

James Wiseman, OSB: "Thomas Merton & Theravada Buddhism." The conference also featured an opening evening lecture by Dr. Thurman: "How to Live Forever Right Now."

### **Italian Merton Conference**

The first conference in Italy devoted to the work of Thomas Merton took place October 9-10, 2004 at the Monastery of Bose, an ecumenical community in Magnano, near Turin. The conference theme was "Solitude and Community" and the focus was on the final phase of Merton's life (1960-1968). Presenters included: Enzo Bianchi, prior of Bose, who gave the opening address; Canon A. M. Allchin: "The Evolution of Merton's View of the Inner Life"; Lawrence Cunningham, "Thomas Merton and the Vocation of Monastic Life in the World"; Jim Forest, "Merton's Engagement on Social Issues"; Paul Pearson: "Redeeming the Rhinoceros: The Guilty Bystander in the Twenty-First Century"; Bonnie Thurston: "From Monk and Writer to Guilty Bystander: The Spiritual Journey of Thomas Merton"; Archbishop Rowan Williams: "The Courage Not to Abstain from Speaking: Monasticism, Culture and the Modern World in the Public Interventions of a Disturbing Monk." A panel discussion among the presenters concluded the conference. The conference attracted 160 participants from Italy and elsewhere in Europe, in addition to the 70 members of the community itself. At the conclusion of the conference Paul Pearson spoke about the work of the Thomas Merton Center and the International Thomas Merton Society and suggested the organization of an Italian Thomas Merton Society. The suggestion was taken up and a small group agreed to become the initial organizing committee. ..

### **Film Biography on DVD**

*Merton: A Film Biography*, the one-hour film by Paul Wilkes and Audrey Glynn, is now available in DVD format. Bonus features include extensive excerpts from filmed reminiscences of Merton at programs sponsored by the Thomas Merton Foundation. The film is available from First Run Features, 153 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014; phone: 800-229-8575; website: [www.firstrunfeatures.com](http://www.firstrunfeatures.com).

### Merton Awards at CPA

Two Merton-related works received awards at the 2005 Catholic Press Association meeting, held in Orlando in May. Receiving first place for best feature article in prayer & spirituality magazines was "Merton and the Millennials" by Suzanne Mayer, IHM, published in the Winter 2004 issue of *Spiritual Life*. Thomas Merton's *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, edited by Patricia Burton and published in 2004 by Orbis Books, received the third place award for best book in the Spirituality category. The citation for *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* reads: To call this remarkable book prophetic is an understatement. Written in 1962 in the context of the Cold War, the manuscript was suppressed at the time by the Abbot General of Merton's order but circulated in mimeographed form for 42 years. The relevance of Merton's thought on war, peace, and nuclear proliferation in this age of preemptive strikes is breathtaking. As one reviewer put it, "Substitute 'war on terrorism' for 'war on communism' and his insights continue to challenge our culture of war and ourselves."

### Guy Davenport (1927-2005)

Guy Davenport, prolific author, longtime professor at the University of Kentucky and friend of Thomas Merton, died January 4, 2005 in Lexington, KY. Author of almost fifty works in various genres, Davenport was a translator, a poet, a literary critic and a celebrated short story writer who was awarded a so-called genius grant from the MacArthur Foundation in 1990. Soon after joining the University of Kentucky faculty in 1963 he visited Thomas Merton at Gethsemani with his friends the photographer Ralph Eugene Meatyard and poet, novelist and essayist Wendell Berry. Merton refers to the trio in his journal as "the three kings from Lexington." His essay "The Anthropology of Table Manners," included in his collection *The Geography of the Imagination* (1981), has been described by Merton biographer Jim Forest as "possibly the funniest memoirs of Merton" yet written.

### Rev. John Amuji (1951-2004)

Fr. John Amuji, a 2001 ITMS Shannon Fellowship winner, died July 24, 2004 of a brain tumor in his native Nigeria. Fr. Amuji, from the Catholic diocese of Enugu, Nigeria, spent a year in Louisville doing dissertation research at the Bellarmine University Thomas Merton Center on "Seeds for a Contemporary Spirituality of Interreligious Dialogue in the Writings of Thomas Merton," as part of his doctoral studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He participated in the ITMS Seventh General Meeting and in several meetings of the ITMS Louisville Chapter and assisted the pastoral staff at St. James Church, where he resided as a guest. ITMS President Erlinda Paguio said of Fr. Amuji, "He made many friends in Louisville during his brief stay in town. He is well remembered for his deep spirituality and great openness to share his knowledge and pastoral skills." A memorial Mass for Fr. Amuji was celebrated on August 20, 2004 at St. Brigid Church in Louisville.

### Premiere of Merton Play

On Sunday, May 8, the Still Point Theatre Collective of Chicago held the world premiere of a one-person play about Thomas Merton entitled *The Hermit in New York*, written by Teresa Weed and Chicago theater veteran Beau O'Reilly, who also took the role of Merton. The play focuses on the tensions and the balance between the private and the public Merton, the contemplative and the social critic. The play follows earlier productions by the group, including *Haunted by God: The Life of Dorothy Day*, and *Points of Arrival: A Jean Donovan Journey*, that reflect its mission to portray modern spiritual heroes for contemporary audiences. For further information, contact Still Point Theatre Collective at 1337 West Ohio, Chicago, IL, 60622; phone: 312-226-0352; email: stillpointc@aol.com.

### New Zealand Merton Program

Dr. Paul M. Pearson, director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville,



KY and Resident Secretary of the ITMS, spent a week in June, 2004 speaking on Merton in New Zealand, at the invitation of Rev. Raymond Schmack, coordinator of the New Zealand Chapter of the ITMS. He met with chapter members, delivered a lecture at Christ's College, Christchurch on "Thomas Merton: A Monk with the Vision of an Artist," to coincide with the opening of the major retrospective exhibit of Owen Merton's paintings, presented a two-day seminar on "Thomas Merton: Poet, Monk, Prophet," gave a variety of media interviews, and visited the Merton Collection at the Christchurch Central Library, founded with donations made by Merton's aunts, Agnes and Beatrice Merton.

### ITMS Authors

Msgr. William H. Shannon, founding president of the International Thomas Merton Society, has recently published a new book entitled *Here on the Way to There: A Catholic Perspective on Dying and What Follows* (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005) [\$12.95 pb]. "This is written for those who are 'here, but almost there,' which really means all of us mortals," the author writes in the introduction. "I hope to discuss: How does 'life here' relate to 'life there'? How does 'life here' prepare us for 'life there'? and how can we help those who are imminently close to 'there' ready themselves for the big transition? How do we ready ourselves for that same experience? And finally there is the really big question: What can we say about 'life there'? What is it like?"

Robert Inchausti has recently published *Subversive Orthodoxy: Outlaws, Revolutionaries, and Other Christians in Disguise* (Brazos Press, 2005) [\$19.99 pb], which includes a section on Thomas Merton along with G. K. Chesterton, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King and numerous others. Lawrence S. Cunningham says of the book, "Inchausti writes with a sharp eye and considerable wit to argue that Christians, often from the margins, are among the most acute critics of modernity. His book is trenchant and informative enough to claim a wide audience. . . . A finely written volume packed with learning worn lightly."

### Interreligious Dialogue

Two recent books carry on the tradition of interreligious dialogue pioneered by Thomas Merton. *Transforming Suffering: Reflections on Finding Peace in Troubled Times*, edited by Donald W. Mitchell and James Wiseman, OSB (New York: Doubleday, 2003) [\$14.00 pb], is the transcription of the second Gethsemani Encounter between Christian and Buddhist monastics, held at the Abbey of Gethsemani in April 2002, which focused on the theme of suffering in the two traditions. It includes contributions by almost four dozen participants, as well as messages from Pope John Paul II and the Dalai Lama. *Between Two Souls: Conversations with Ryokan*, by Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) [\$20.00 hbd], is a poetic dialogue between a nineteenth-century Zen monk and a contemporary Benedictine woman, the former national coordinator of Pax Christi USA. Msgr. William Shannon, founding president of the ITMS, writes that "this remarkable book" enables the reader "to discover the deep roots of a shared wisdom common to East and West. . . . It offers a paradigm for a nonviolent approach to life so desperately needed in our terror-stricken world."

### Merton on the Web

Canadian Merton collector Albert Romkema has set up a web site listing the more than 400 items in his Merton library, including numerous rare holdings. The site is organized according to title, author, publisher, unique items and new additions. It can be accessed at [www.merton-artifacts.com](http://www.merton-artifacts.com). He also has begun a weblog site called "No Man Is an Island" that can be accessed at <http://no-man-is-an-island.blogspot.com>.

### Book Requests

Next September a Thomas Merton Reading Room will open at the Vancouver School of Theology at the University of British Columbia. Some hardback books by and about Merton as well as other items have already been donated to the collection. The books and audio-visual materials

will be non-circulating so that scholars and readers generally will have access at any one time to the full Merton corpus – or as full as it can be made. All who might like to donate books or other Merton-related items to the collection may contact Ross Labrie at labrie@interchange.ubc.ca, or send items to Professor Labrie at Arts One, University of British Columbia, 6358 University Blvd., Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4.

\*\*\*\*\*

A Merton reader from the former Soviet Union is interested in receiving any extra Merton books that ITMS members may be willing to part with. They may be sent to: Rostyslav Panichev, 03148 Kyiv Hnata Yury 16-49, Ukraine.

### Merton Happenings

At the Midwest Regional Meeting of the Conference on Christianity & Literature, held in September 2004 at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN, Pat O'Connell gave a presentation entitled "The Building of Thomas Merton's *Tower of Babel*."

\*\*\*\*\*

Merton Center Director Paul M. Pearson gave a presentation entitled "Emblems for a Season of Fury: The Art of Thomas Merton" at "Epiphanies of Beauty: The Arts in a Post-Christian Culture," a conference held November 18-20 at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN.

\*\*\*\*\*

On December 10, 2005, the annual memorial mass commemorating the death of Thomas Merton was celebrated at the Cathedral of the Assumption, Louisville, KY. The homilist was Deacon William Grimes, a former novice under Thomas Merton.

\*\*\*\*\*

On December 12, 2004, Rev. Michael Baxter, professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame and director of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, and Rev. George Kilcourse, professor of theology at Bellarmine University, gave a joint presentation entitled "The Roots of Peace: A Contemplative Dialogue" at the Clifton Center in Louisville, KY, sponsored by the Thomas Merton Foundation.

\*\*\*\*\*

On January 31, 2005, the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland celebrated the ninetieth anniversary of the birth of Thomas Merton by opening a collection of Merton books and tapes at the University of Bristol Chaplaincy. Canon A. M. Allchin, president of the TMS, was the featured speaker.

\*\*\*\*\*

At the Southeast Regional Meeting of the Conference on Christianity & Literature, held in April 2005 at Campbellsville University, Campbellsville, KY, Pat O'Connell gave a presentation entitled "Existing under Trees: God, Nature and Humanity in Thomas Merton's Work." The meeting concluded with a trip to the Abbey of Gethsemani, a visit to Merton's grave, and attendance at vespers in the abbey church.

\*\*\*\*\*

A mini-course entitled "No Man Is an Island: Reading Thomas Merton" was held on Saturday mornings at 11 a.m. from April 16 through May 14 at Blessed Sacrament Church, 152 West 71<sup>st</sup> Street, New York City. The moderator was Brenda Fitch Fairaday. For further information contact the parish at 212-877-3111.

\*\*\*\*\*

On April 22-24, Dominic Milroy OSB led a retreat at Ampleforth Abbey, Yorkshire, sponsored by the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland. The focus was on contemplation and the recovery of wonder; the paradox of Thomas Merton; faith in a post-Christian world; and the mystery of Christ as Word of God.

\*\*\*\*\*

On April 28, the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University cosponsored a visit to Louisville by Tadatoshi Akiba, Mayor of Hiroshima. The evening reception began with Center Director Paul Pearson recalling the visit of Hibakusha to Gethsemani in May 1964 and a reading of Merton's poem "Paper Cranes." The Mayor was presented with two books for the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum – a Japanese edition of Merton's essays, *Passion for Peace*, which includes the poem *Original Child Bomb*, and a copy of *In The Dark Before Dawn: New Selected Poems* which includes both *Original Child Bomb* and "Paper Cranes."

\*\*\*\*\*

On May 6, Jonathan Montaldo spoke on "Thomas Merton: Monk, Poet and Prophet" at the Centro Pro Unione (Piazza Navona), in Rome, sponsored by the Italian chapter of the ITMS.

\*\*\*\*\*

On the four Thursday evenings in May, Fr. Bob Pawell, OFM led a book study on Lawrence Cunningham's *Thomas Merton & The Monastic Vision* at St. Peter's in the Loop Church in Chicago.

### Upcoming Events

Terrence Taylor, former assistant director of the Thomas Merton Foundation, will lead a weeklong retreat called "Doing Thomas Merton: A Search for Spiritual Integration" at Ghost Ranch Conference Center in Abiquiu, New Mexico May 20-27, 2005. Registration cost is \$215 plus room and board. For further information contact Ghost Ranch – phone: 1-877-804-4678, ext. 152; email: dianeh@ghostranch.org; website: www.ghostranch.org.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dr. Lawrence Cunningham will be giving a course on Thomas Merton at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN, from June 20 through July 8. For further information contact the Notre Dame Department of Theology: phone: 574-631-4254; website: www.nd.edu/~theo.

\*\*\*\*\*

July 1-8, Jonathan Montaldo will lead a retreat entitled "The Intimate Merton" at Kordes Retreat Center, Ferdinand, IN. The cost is \$400; a \$50 non-refundable deposit is required. For further information contact the center at 812-367-2777 or 800-880-2777; email: kordes@thedome.org.

\*\*\*\*\*

ITMS Vice President Donald Grayston will be giving a one-credit course entitled "Thomas Merton: Catholic Monk, Interfaith Pioneer" July 11-14 at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. For further information contact the Department of Theological Studies: phone: 310-338-7670; email: tshenk@lmu.edu; website: http://www.lmu.edu/pages/12489.asp.

\*\*\*\*\*

An exhibition of photographs by Harry L. Hinkle entitled "Thomas Merton's Gethsemani: Land-

scapes of Paradise" will be held from July 29 through September 5, 2005 at the McGrath Art Gallery on the campus of Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. The show is based on Hinkle's new book of the same name, with text by Monica Weis, SSJ, published in May 2005 by University Press of Kentucky. On August 5, there will be a reception and book signing with the author and photographer from 5 to 7 p.m.

\*\*\*\*\*

August 12-15, 2005, Ron Dart and Judith Hardcastle will lead a four-day pilgrimage retreat entitled "Thomas Merton and the Beats" in the North Cascade mountains, with hikes to Desolation Peak and Sourdough Mountain, where the early Beats – Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and Jack Kerouac – worked as lookout rangers in the 1950s. For further information contact Judith Hardcastle at: judithhardcastle@telus.net.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Fall 2005 "Week with Thomas Merton" Elderhostel at Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, led by Thomas Merton Center director Paul M. Pearson, will be held Oct. 30-Nov. 4, 2005. The Spring 2006 Merton Elderhostel will be held March 12-17, 2006. For further details contact Linda Bailey: 502-452-816; e-mail: lbailey@bellarmine.edu.

### Chapter News

The Thomas Merton Society of the Capital Region (Albany, NY) hosted a Thomas Merton 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration on January 30 at the Orchard Tavern in Albany. The program featured a talk entitled "Are Solitaries Really Made by Severe Mothers?" by Sheila Mary Milton, editor of the forthcoming *Tom's Book*, the journal kept by Merton's mother, Ruth Jenkins Merton, during his early years. For further information contact Walt Chura: 518-456-3201; wwchura@localnet.com.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Thomas Merton Society of Canada is sponsor of the following events. On March 30, Fenton Johnson spoke on "Faith, Skepticism and Storytelling as a Means to Truth." On April 22, Jeff Imbach, president of the Henri Nouwen Society, spoke on "Solitude in Engagement and Loneliness: A Comparative Look at Thomas Merton's and Henri

Nouwen's Experience of Solitude." On Saturday, May 28, a one-day retreat entitled "Forgotten Voices: Women in the Church" will be held at All Saints Monastery in Dewdney, BC. On June 2, at 7:30 p.m., Lynn Szabo will speak on *In the Dark Before Dawn*, her new edition of Thomas Merton's selected poetry. On June 15, the annual "Decadent Dessert Party" with member recognition for the past year's work will take place at 7:30 p.m. at the Canadian Memorial Church & Centre for Peace in Vancouver. From July 30 through August 6, the society is sponsoring a "Thomas Merton in Alaska" cruise, led by ITMS vice president Donald Grayston. On September 30, the official opening of the Thomas Merton Room at the Vancouver School of Theology at the University of British Columbia will feature a talk by Paul M. Pearson, Director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University.

\*\*\*\*\*

At the October 2004 meeting of the Chicago ITMS Chapter, Pam and Don Martinez spoke of their experiences at the Parliament of the Worlds Religions in Barcelona during summer 2004. At the November meeting, the video *Summer Rain: Six Images of Thomas Merton* by Anthony Padovano was shown and discussed. A Merton Society Mexican Night was held on February 5, 2005 in connection with the University of Chicago Folk Festival. At the April meeting the video "Thomas Merton: Man, Monk and Myth" with Fr. Patrick Collins was shown, and a discussion about the future direction of the chapter was held.

\*\*\*\*\*

The January meeting of the ITMS Cincinnati Chapter focused on Merton's ideas concerning Promethean-type spirituality in *Raids on the Unspeakable* and *The New Man*, led by Dave Thaeler. The March meeting was led by Barbara Stratman and Don Sheehan. The April Meeting featured a meditative reading of the "Prometheus" chapter from Merton's *The New Man*. The chapter will sponsor a retreat Sept. 23-26 at the Abbey of Gethsemani. For further information contact Tony Russo: 513-941-5219; trusso@fuse.net.

\*\*\*\*\*

On Saturday, February 26, the Corpus Christi (Manhattan, NYC) ITMS chapter sponsored a talk by Fred Herron, author of *No Abiding Place*:

*Thomas Merton and the Search for God*, entitled "A Boat That Has Slipped Its Moorings." On Saturday, May 21, from 2:00-4:00 p.m., Paul Spaeth, Curator of the Merton collection at St. Bonaventure University, Olean, NY, will speak to the chapter. For further information visit the Corpus Christi web site at: <http://www.corpus-christi-nyc.org/MertonSociety.htm>.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Mississippi Chapter of the ITMS is sponsoring a retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani, led by chapter coordinator Dr. John H. Staggs, June 20-24, 2005. For further information contact Dr. Staggs at 511 Columbus St., Aberdeen, MS 39730; phone: 662-369-2519; email: [merton@netdoor.com](mailto:merton@netdoor.com).

\*\*\*\*\*

The Sacramento ITMS chapter concluded its discussion of Merton's *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* at its January meeting. Its current book for discussion is *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, to be followed by William Shannon's *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey*. The chapter sponsored a day of reflection at the Cistercian abbey in Vina, CA March 19. For further information contact John Berger at 3736 Laguna Way, Sacramento, CA 95864; phone 916-482-6976.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Washington DC chapter of the ITMS sponsored a presentation entitled "Thomas Merton: A Spirituality of Peacemakers" by Rev. George Kilcourse at St. Anselm's Abbey on December 4, 2004. On April 2, 2005, Fr. James Wiseman, OSB of Catholic University spoke to the group on "Thomas Merton and Theravada Buddhism." The monthly discussion group, which meets at the Abbey on the second Saturday of each month, continues to read and discuss Merton's *The Inner Experience*. For further information, contact Mary K. Stanford at 301-320-4478.

**Send all Merton-related news to:**

**Pat O'Connell**

**Box 3219**

**Gannon University**

**Erie, PA 16541**

**[occonnell001@gannon.edu](mailto:occonnell001@gannon.edu)**