

Editor's Note

In his review some years ago of a (quite horrendous) sci-fi novel featuring Thomas Merton as a central character, Jonathan Montaldo scoffed at the narrator's notion that some dark, baleful secret had been concealed for decades at the Abbey of Gethsemani, parenthetically commenting: "lol – if I wanted a secret to circulate on all the earth's continents by nightfall, I would make a morning call to a monk at Gethsemani." Extravagant exaggeration as it may be, it drew from me a spontaneous chuckle of recognition at what was surely a sly allusion to Patrick Hart. Soul of discretion and epitome of charity that he was, Brother Patrick was also a fount of information from the trivial to the profound to his wide network of contacts. As general editor of the Cistercian Publications series that included the Merton conference volumes I was editing, Brother Patrick would call periodically from his office as the abbot's secretary to check on the status of the latest work-in-progress and to catch me up on relevant news – always announcing himself as "the other Patrick" – I knew it was very much the other way around but he was quite content with this identification. Whenever my phone rang in the early morning before the start of classes, I could be pretty sure the call was coming from Gethsemani and would anticipate a lengthy and delightful chat – he repeatedly said Larry Cunningham and myself were the two people he could count on reaching in the early hours – which of course were far from being early in his daily monastic schedule. After whatever business needed to be taken care of there were sure to be astute comments on the latest enormities perpetrated by civil and/or ecclesial authorities, along with wise and appreciative insights on whatever signs of God's grace were at work in Church and world. After a serious fall and his move from the secretary's office to the infirmary, the calls stopped, except for one recorded message, after a gap of at least a year, probably longer, letting me know a monk from the abbey would be giving the invocation at the inauguration of a new president at Bellarmine – perhaps an item for the *ITMS Newsletter*. I've always regretted I wasn't there for that one last conversation – maybe I wasn't in the office early enough that day.

But even better than the phone calls were the visits. I first met Brother Patrick the weekend the Merton Society was founded in the spring of 1987. Because of scheduling conflicts I missed the first day of the meeting, when Brother Patrick was there, but through the



good offices of Bob Daggy and Victor and Dewey Kramer I was able to get down to the abbey the following day, to find Brother Patrick waiting for me on the steps in front of the church, as he had for dozens, perhaps hundreds, of other visitors before and since, each to be shown around as though we were particularly special guests, each treated, as the Rule of Benedict specified, as Christ Himself. Numerous visits followed in the decades ahead, usually connected with some sort of research facilitated by Brother Patrick, sometimes entailing following him around from his office to the scriptorium, or the old novitiate classroom, or through the cloisters to some other out-of-the-way nook, in quest of some obscure document or other, but sometimes simply sharing a meal in the “non-silent” room in the guesthouse dining area. But the best visit was perhaps the last – my wife Sue had come with me to Kentucky for the first time, and we toured the usual sites, not only Fourth and Walnut and the Merton Center but Lincoln’s birthplace as well. But the highlight of the trip was Gethsemani, and the highlight of Gethsemani was Brother Patrick, whom I actually saw relatively little of that day. I had various references to track down, so for an hour or so as I was paging through some old tome or other in one room of the guesthouse, next door Brother Patrick was entertaining and utterly charming Sue, as he had so many others, at one point of course taking her out to make a visit to Merton’s grave. Every Christmas after that Sue would send a card with a newsy note to Brother Pat, and a card with his exquisitely beautiful handwriting would come in return, reassuring us of his good spirits and relatively good health even after he had moved to the infirmary. When no card arrived this past Christmas we realized he must be approaching the end of his pilgrim’s progress, so were saddened but not surprised by news of his departure less than two months later.

The first volume of the novitiate conference series was dedicated to Brother Patrick, who was celebrating his golden jubilee around that time. The note reads: “For / Patrick Hart, ocsso / *Abba* and *Senior* / to the Worldwide Community / of Merton Scholars and Readers / with Respect, Gratitude and Love / on the Occasion / of his Golden Jubilee / of Monastic Profession / (1954-2004).” News of his death arrived at just the same time as the proofs for the ninth and final volume of the series, making possible a final word of appreciation: “In grateful Memory / of / Patrick Hart, OCSO / (1925-2019) / final secretary of Thomas Merton / founding editor of the Monastic Wisdom Series / master, guide and friend / to Merton scholars and readers / throughout the world / for the past half-century.”

This same spirit of gratitude, respect and affection shapes and fills this memorial issue of *The Merton Seasonal*. Beginning with a biographical summary of highlights of Brother Patrick’s long and fruitful life, it then provides the text of the beautiful funeral homily of Dom Timothy Kelly, OCSO, who during his more than a quarter-century as Abbot of Gethsemani (1973-2000) worked so closely with Brother Patrick as his secretary. Reprinting Brother Patrick’s own early articles on Irish monasticism provides evidence of another, little-known dimension of his Cistercian life and work, while moving tributes from a representative group of Patrick’s colleagues and friends in the Merton community witness to the impact he had on these and so many other lives over the past five decades. Finally, a full bibliography testifies especially to Patrick’s invaluable contributions to preserving and expanding the literary and spiritual legacy of his friend and fellow monk Thomas Merton, with whom he is now united in the presence of the Lord they both so faithfully served.

Pat O’Connell