

Introduction – The *Seasonal* at Fifty

The present issue of *The Merton Seasonal* marks the completion of fifty years of publication of this journal, which was begun in early 1976 at the suggestion of Brother Patrick Hart, Thomas Merton's final secretary and already serving as the semi-official public representative of the Abbey of Gethsemani for Merton matters. According to Fr. Clyde Crews, at the time the Director of what was originally called the Thomas Merton Studies Center, at Bellarmine College in Louisville, then as now the principal repository of Merton materials, in his brief article "Early Days at the Merton Center and the Founding of *The Merton Seasonal*," appearing in the Fall 2000 issue (25.3) to commemorate the *Seasonal*'s first quarter-century, "the ever kindly and ever resourceful Brother Patrick . . . mentioned that a real need he was starting to sense was a newsletter for people around the country interested in studies of Merton and those concerns of Merton that we had identified" (11). The first issue, simply a two-sided sheet of paper with a masthead of sorts, reading "THE MERTON SEASONAL / of Bellarmine College / Winter 1976," identified itself, quite accurately, as "the most modest of all possible beginnings" and indicated its purpose "to inform the friends and followers of Thomas Merton's thought and concerns of the activities and researches carried out in his name"; it focused first of all on "news of upcoming programs of the Bellarmine Merton Center and an update on research going on in our own Merton Collection," with the additional intention, "as word of the Season [*sic*] gets around . . . to become more and more a clearing center for word of Merton activities throughout the country," a goal that quickly became operational. Fr. Crews took credit "with humble pride" only for providing the new journal's title, suggesting that it may have had connotations "both cosmic and kindly – the times of our lives that both recur and remain," but that it had a more pragmatic implication as well: "by calling it *Seasonal*, I wrongly thought, we wouldn't be held to a strict production schedule; in the seasons that I could get it out, it would appear!" In any case, at the end of the Fall 1976 semester he left the Center to become the chair of the Bellarmine Theology Department, and editorial duties of the *Seasonal* fell into the very capable hands of Dr. Robert Daggy, at the time the Center's archivist and associate director, becoming the director from 1980 until shortly before his death in 1997.

While labeled "this news quarterly" in the initial issue's second sentence, in fact the first nine volumes consisted of at most three issues (just two for volume 4). Appearing at the outset of the spring 1976 semester, this first issue was paradoxically labeled "Winter 1976." When the publication schedule went to a full four issues with volume 10 (with only volume 18 reverting to three), the first issue of each volume followed the lead of 1.1 and was designated "Winter," an anomaly that would continue all the way until the first issue of volume 21, when, once again at Brother Patrick's suggestion, that year's volume began with "Spring 1996" – aligning the sequence of the *Seasonal* more naturally with the sequence of the seasons, as it has remained ever since.

With the second issue of volume one the familiar layout of the magazine began – its pages 8.5" x 7" – four pages of a single folded sheet, its bright yellow color the first of a variety of hues that would predominate through the first twelve volumes. The stated intention to broaden the focus beyond campus and local events is evident in the brief notes on "Research in Progress – World Wide" and "Merton Events – Other Places," and the running bibliography of "Recent Publications By and About Thomas Merton" made its first appearance, a listing that would be an important component of almost every issue since. The final 1976 issue features the first illustrated cover – a

Merton photograph of a tree – and the first piece of Merton writing – an excerpt on “Fall” from Merton’s *Secular Journal*. The number of pages doubled to eight in 1.3, expanding to 16 by 4.2, to 20 in volume 9 and to 24 in the four issues of volume 10. Fr. Crews’ short commentary on the work of Merton scholar Sr. Elena Malits in 2.2 served as the *Seasonal*’s first actual “article,” while the initial reviews (of the *Collected Poems* and George Woodcock’s critical work on Merton) appear in 3.1 and 3.2, respectively, and on the cover of the latter is found the first of dozens of depictions of Merton, a photo of a bronze sculpture of Merton’s head. Volume 4 features the first piece of Merton’s own writing not previously available (in English), on clerical celibacy, along with the transcript of a talk given by Merton’s former student and final abbot, Flavian Burns. The first of Robert Daggy’s informal “Editorials,” introductory remarks on contents of the current issue and related items of Mertoniana, which would continue throughout his tenure as editor, is found in 5.1, along with James Baker’s poem “Thomas,” the first of hundreds of pieces of verse related directly or indirectly to Merton that would be published in the *Seasonal*. Another recurring feature that soon began to appear commemorated significant figures in Merton’s life who had recently died – Daniel Walsh in 5.2 (Late Summer 1980) and Sr. Thérèse Lentfoehr in 6.3 (Autumn 1981), along with brief notices of John Howard Griffin and John Jacob Niles in 6.1 (Winter-Spring 1981). Over the course of this initial decade, the key components of the journal had become established, designed to appeal to a broad spectrum of readers interested in Merton for a wide variety of reasons.

An event that would have a major impact on the *Seasonal* occurred early in the journal’s second decade. This was of course the founding of the International Thomas Merton Society in May 1987, announced in the Autumn 1987 issue (12.4). The Spring 1988 *Seasonal* included a letter to “Fellow-Subscribers of *The Merton Seasonal*” from the first president of the ITMS, Msgr. William Shannon, recognizing of “the need for a vehicle of communication with the members of the Society.” He continued, “We did not have to look far for an answer to that need. *The Merton Seasonal* of Bellarmine College has, since its beginning in 1976, performed the service of communicating information about Thomas Merton to those interested in Merton studies. . . . Because it fit so well the needs of the Society, we came to the conclusion that *The Seasonal* should, without ceasing to be a publication of Bellarmine College, become the official organ of the ITMS. Bellarmine College has most graciously agreed to this arrangement.” From that time onward, the annual dues for ITMS membership would include a subscription to the *Seasonal* (though it would still be available also to anyone who did not wish to join the Society, which in addition to institutional subscriptions presumably included very few if any individuals). In one sense the new arrangement had relatively little effect on the contents of the *Seasonal*. The well-established mix of popular and more academic articles, poetry, reviews and news of events in the Merton world continued as usual, with this last category of course now including various activities directly or indirectly associated with the ITMS. One tradition that began with the Summer 1989 issue (14.3) was the publication of “The Farmer from Nelson County,” William Shannon’s presidential address from the first ITMS General Meeting, held at Bellarmine in May 1989, a regular feature that has continued every two years right up to the present, with president Judith Valente’s address, “Keeping Merton Human,” at the Nineteenth General Meeting in June 2025, published in the Fall 2025 issue of the *Seasonal* (50.3). Various other materials drawn from general meetings and ITMS events more generally also began to appear in the *Seasonal* – homilies from the conferences, versions of presentations made, personal reflections of attendees – all of which fit very smoothly into the well-established pattern of contents that already characterized the *Seasonal*.

A further innovation that occurred just before the *Seasonal* began its third decade was the inauguration of the *ITMS Newsletter*. After an initial issue printed and sent to members separately in Fall 1994, the *Newsletter* became a twice-yearly supplemental insert in the first and third issues of the *Seasonal*, containing all Society news as well as news of the Merton Center, other recent or upcoming Merton-related events, obituaries of members of the Merton community, calls for papers for conferences, notice of books by and awards to ITMS authors, along with ITMS chapter and affiliate news, ranging from 4 up to 16 pages per issue, now in its own thirty-second volume. This has had the effect of providing additional space in the pages of the *Seasonal* itself for its articles, poetry, reviews and the running bibliography, while continuing to make news of the Merton world available, in a more organized and comprehensive way.

Shortly after the *Seasonal* entered this third decade of publication, Robert Daggy, Director of the Thomas Merton Center, ITMS Resident Secretary and longtime *Seasonal* editor, became ill, afflicted with a rare blood disease. After Dr. Daggy had to withdraw from active involvement at the Center and with the *Seasonal* following the 1996 volume, the ever-faithful Brother Patrick Hart oversaw volume 22 of 1997, which included in its winter issue Dr. Daggy's obituary, following his death on December 15 of that year, with his burial at the Abbey of Gethsemani two days later, twenty-nine years to the day, as Abbot Timothy Kelly noted, after the burial of Thomas Merton. No single person could or would ever be able to play the central role, or rather roles, in Merton studies that Robert Daggy had during his 23 years at the Merton Center. With regard to the *Seasonal*, it so happened that in 1997 the outgoing ITMS president was someone who in graduate school had for three years been an editorial assistant at a publishing project of another famous TM – The Complete Works of Saint Thomas More – and that very year saw the publication of a volume he had edited of the journal of another of his heroes, Henry David Thoreau. Given this training and extensive editing experience, with the unofficial blessing of Brother Patrick and the official appointment of the incoming ITMS president, Thomas Del Prete, he became the new editor of the *Seasonal* at the beginning of 1998, a position in which he is now completing his twenty-eighth year, an endeavor which has been quite satisfying personally and evidently quite satisfactory institutionally, for the ITMS at large, working closely with Merton Center Directors Theresa Sandok, Jonathan Montaldo and, for the past 25 years, Paul M. Pearson.

The high point during these more recent decades was certainly the first issue of 2015 (40.1), the commemoration of the centennial of Merton's birth, which featured 43 reflections by members of the Merton community, at 72 pages the longest *Seasonal* issue in its history. Other noteworthy special issues were the memorials for some of the significant figures in the Merton world, including Robert Lax (26.1), Naomi Burton Stone (30.1), Abbot Flavian Burns (31.1), Sr. Mary Luke Tobin (32.2), Msgr. William Shannon (37.2), Daniel Berrigan, SJ (41.3), Brother Patrick Hart (44.2), Jim Forest (47.2), and, on the 25th anniversary of his death, Robert E. Daggy (47.4). As for the rest, the quality of so many of the submissions to the *Seasonal* has served to maintain the high standards for the journal set by Dr. Daggy from the very outset.

To mark the completion of this half-century of publication of *The Merton Seasonal*, the remainder of the current issue provides a comprehensive bibliographical listing of virtually every piece found in its 189 issues (with the exception of the "Recent Publications" feature included in nearly every issue), arranged in four groupings. First come the more than 50 primary source writings by Merton himself – articles, poems, translations, letters – most of them never previously published,

arranged according to the sequence of their appearance in the *Seasonal*, identified by volume and issue number, year and pagination. A few additional Merton pieces embedded in longer articles are also cross-referenced at the end of this list. This is followed by the most extensive section, almost 700 articles by nearly 300 different authors, arranged alphabetically, then sequentially for multiple contributions, with title, volume, issue, year and pagination. Accompanying this list is an extensive index of these articles, arranged according to three groupings of subjects: people, titles (of Merton works) and topics, thus providing a helpful tool for readers interested in locating particular materials pertinent for research and/or relevant to personal interests. A third section lists, according to the same arrangement, the more than 200 authors of poetry appearing in the *Seasonal*, many of them repeat contributors over the course of years. Finally, a Reviews section includes an alphabetical listing of the more than 250 authors who have provided evaluations of the almost 500 books and audio-visual materials by or about or associated in some significant way with Thomas Merton.

To scan these listings of various materials published over the past five decades in *The Merton Seasonal* is to realize the richness in breadth and depth of Merton's insights on so many different aspects of specifically Christian and universally human experience and the quest for meaning, articulated in so many different ways by the reflections of the hundreds of writers, including Merton himself, who have been published in the *Seasonal* from 1975 up to the present. Except for the most recent volumes, every piece in each issue of the *Seasonal* is available in full-text format on the merton.org website: arranged alphabetically by author (paired with contributions to *The Merton Annual*) in the "Research" section, and issue-by-issue chronologically in the "International Thomas Merton Society" section. May the commemoration of this anniversary serve as an invitation and an incentive to discover and/or rediscover some of the perennial wisdom the *Seasonal* has provided by and about Thomas Merton, a legacy that it will hopefully continue to celebrate and illuminate for decades to come.

Patrick F. O'Connell, Editor

By Merton

"Fall, from *The Secular Journal of Thomas Merton*." 1.3 (Fall 1976) 5.

"Evening: Zero Weather" [poem]. 2.1 (Winter 1977) 4.

"Statement on Clerical Celibacy." 4.3 (Autumn 1979) 8.

"Centered on Faith: An Excerpt from a Letter of Thomas Merton to Abdul Aziz." 10.3 (Summer 1985) 6.

"Thomas Merton & Alfred B. Hailparn: Two Recently Discovered Letters Concerning the 1937 *Columbian*." 14.4 (Autumn 1989) 4-5.

"Merton's Words in China." 15.3 (Summer 1990) 12.

"Aubade: Lake Erie" [poem]. 18.1 (Winter 1993) 4.

"My Lord God / Bwana Munga Wangu." 18.1 (Winter 1993) 6.

"In God's Desert." 18.2 (Spring 1993) 4-6.

"The Haunted Castle." 19.1 (Winter 1994) 7-10.

"Another Stop on 'The Road to Joy': A Letter." 19.1 (Winter 1994) 11.

"Reinhardt Slips into His Painting: An Excerpt from *A Catch of Anti-Letters*" (with Robert Lax). 19.4 (Autumn 1994) 7-8.