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After Easter 1974, when I had finished my thesis at Emory, “Toward the Only Real City in America: Paradise and Utopia in the Autobiography of Thomas Merton,” I went to meet Patrick Hart for the first time, like a cat bringing a mouse so he would notice me. On Holy Saturday my partner Robert Moore and I had dyed waxed eggs together. I brought one for Patrick as a first gift. I thought he would take it to his cell and treasure it. He held it for a moment but then put it in a chink of Gethsemani’s brick walls. “It’s going to get ruined out here,” I thought. Was he telling me my gift was not for him? As he did so many others, Patrick went on to mentor me. He helped me reach out for whatever it was I was stretching for. We loved one another. If he had been a randy twenty-year-old, he could have been my dad. Every Christmas, I would write him to say that he was the father of the best years of my life. He stood on the sidelines, cheering me on. He gave me a life’s mission. He sent

me on my way. At his funeral, I noticed that whoever embalmed him did a great job. His face never looked more beautiful. He was radiant, at last handsome. I thought he would be pleased were he looking down at himself, and touching his chest as I did with my right hand to say thanks and good-bye. As the crowd dispersed I stayed at the foot of his grave and threw in some dirt. I waited while the assigned novice started to close up the grave just as it began to rain. I noticed he began filling in along the edges of Pat's body. He hesitated to hit his head that I stared down at through the thin cloth covering it. I was not fearful of the dirt, but I admired this novice's discretion. In 2016 we had had a final meeting in his infirmary room. We knew this visit was it. Hugs and tears. He pulled one of my letters from the pocket of the plaid shirt he was wearing. He told me he kept it there right next to his heart. I was not fooled. I knew he had file drawers full of notes and cards from everyone everywhere. Depending on his visitor, he would retrieve one of their notes, place it in this pocket and offer it to them as Exhibit A: "See how much I loved only you." Ha! But I was not jealous. He was 93, rich with experience, loved by the chorus of those he saved with kindness. I am one of these who will sing his praises until I too am dead. The father of our best years, he rests awhile in our hearts, always only passing through, leaving behind his gifts of joy and peace, urging us on to do more and better work.



Coeditors Hart and Montaldo



Jonathan Montaldo

Jonathan Montaldo is former director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University and editor of numerous books, including *The Intimate Merton*, coedited with Patrick Hart.