

Thomas Merton Society of Canada Partners with the Institute

—Donald Grayston

The Institute was pleased in March of 2002 to co-sponsor a weekend conference at the Canadian Memorial Centre for Peace, 16th and Burrard, entitled “Thomas Merton and Interfaith Dialogue: Transcending Religious Barriers.” Conceived as a response to the events of September 11, the conference brought together Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Buddhist resource people. Total attendance was around 85, of which, gratifyingly, 24 were young people present on youth scholarships, in part supported by the Institute. The weekend concluded with a Festival of the Arts, in which sacred art, music, dance, poetry and storytelling provided a right-brain celebration of the possibilities of interfaith dialogue.

More recently, the Institute has made a grant to the recently-renamed Thomas Merton Society of Canada (formerly a chapter of the US Society, it is now autonomous), in support of the biennial international Merton conference, to be held at UBC June 5–7, 2003. More than forty scholars and artists will make presentations, and once again the interfaith dimension will be highlighted.

Just before the conference, “Thomas Merton’s New York”—an offering of the Pilgrimage Program and the Society (May 15–22, 2003)—will give participants an opportunity to explore Merton’s time there (1934–40). Highlights of this study tour (through which academic credit is available to SFU students via the directed-studies option) will include visits to The Cloisters, Columbia University, Greenwich Village, Corpus Christi RC Church and Merton’s grandparents’ Episcopal parish on Long Island, as well as a possible book launch at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and a public address by Daniel Berrigan, SJ, longtime peace activist and friend of Merton’s.

If you are unfamiliar with Merton and his writings, good introductions may

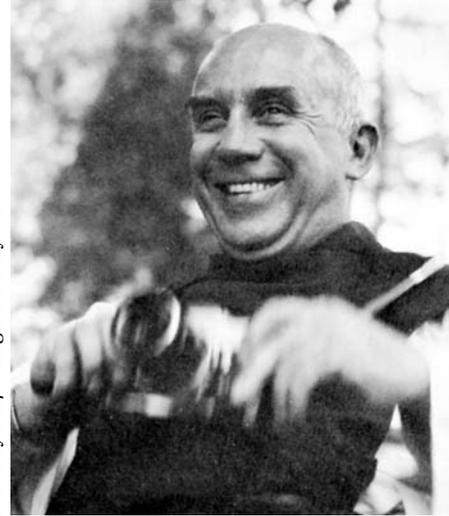


Photo by Ralph Eugene Meatyard

be found in Lawrence Cunningham’s *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master*, and William Shannon’s *Silent Lamp*. Merton (1915–68) was an American Trappist monk and writer, a poet and social critic, who engaged with the concerns of all four of the rubrics in the Institute’s mandate. I am happy to say that very recently, he, Hannah Arendt, Mohandas Gandhi (well known as the “Mahatma”) and Aurelius Augustinus (better known as St. Augustine), have all agreed to be associates of the Institute, a celestial sub-group.

Full details of these and other Merton events may be found on the Society’s website at www.merton.ca or by contacting the coordinator of the Society, Judith Hardcastle, at 604-669-2546.