

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Finding Hope in a Time of Despair

Douglas Roche was elected to Parliament four times, serving from 1972 to 1984 and specializing in the subjects of development and disarmament. He holds six honorary doctorates. Canada's Ambassador for Disarmament from 1984 to 1989, he was elected Chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Committee, the main UN body dealing with political and security issues, at the 43rd General Assembly in 1988.

He was appointed to the Senate of Canada in 1998. He is an Officer of the Order of Canada, former Chairman of Canadian Pugwash and Chairman of the Middle Powers Initiative, a network of eight international non-governmental organizations specializing in nuclear disarmament. In 1995, he received the United Nations Association's Medal of Honour and the Papal Medal for his service on disarmament and security matters. In 2000, he received the Pomerance Award for work at the United Nations on nuclear disarmament.

Douglas Roche is the author of seventeen books, including *The Human Right to Peace* (Novalis, 2003). He is a long-time reader of Thomas Merton.

PLENARY SESSIONS

Hope in a Time of Despair: Seeking, Finding, Sharing

Thomas Merton was a prophet for his own time and remains a prophet for our historical moment as well. He was also a man of faith, hope, and love—an imperfect human being, without doubt, but one who continually worked at the integration of his spirituality and his politics. He speaks strongly over the decades since his death, and calls his readers and hearers in our time to the same ancient verities: faith, love, and in particular, at this time, to a robust and lively hope in what for many is only a time of despair.

Donald Grayston is an Anglican priest, a spiritual director, and co-director of the Pacific Jubilee Program in Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Direction. In 2004 he retired from undergraduate teaching and as Director of the Institute for the Humanities at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, BC. He is past president of the Thomas Merton Society of Canada.

Thomas Merton & George Grant: Radical Conservatives

When most of us think “conservative,” we think of advocates of war. Conservatives are often seen as hawks, liberals as doves. But is there a form of conservatism, grounded in the fullness of the Western and Christian tradition that cannot be equated with a hawkish interpretation? Indeed, Thomas Merton and George Grant (Canada's greatest political philosopher) embody such a radical and refined definition of conservatism. This presentation will discuss how Merton's and Grant's deeper conservatism offers us substantive reflection on the meaning of and path to peace.

Ron Dart teaches political science, philosophy and religious studies at University College of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, BC. He is political science advisor to the Stephen Leacock Home/Museum, on the board of the Thomas Merton Society of Canada, and author of more than twenty books that deal with the interface between literature, spirituality and politics.

CONCURRENT SESSIONS

1. Bystanders and the Morally Disengaged: A Conversation with Social Psychology and Thomas Merton

Using a selection of theories and research from social psychology and writings of Thomas Merton, this session will explore how we as individuals and as a society continue to tolerate preventable disasters, like homelessness and chronic poverty, in spite of our avowed support for ethical and moral codes such as the United Nations *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. The session will also explore some promising avenues for personal and social change.

Ann Gelsheimer, M.Ed., DTS, B.Sc. is a counselor, professor, and program coordinator at Seneca College in Toronto, and teaches visualization and healing techniques for cancer patients and their caregivers at Wellspring/Sunnybrook Hospital. Ann is a senior student of the Venerable Zasep Tulku Rinpoche and teaches at Gaden Choling Mahayana Buddhist Meditation Centre in Toronto.

2. Establishing Mertonian Ethics for the Media

Using examples from *Faith and Violence*, *Passion for Peace*, and *Raids on the Unspeakable*, this presentation will explore Merton's commitment to truth and how his theories about justice and writing can be applied to the values of journalism. If our conduct and decisions matter, so too do ideas and the ways we communicate them. Merton's commitment to truth offers rich reflection for developing a code of ethics for the media.

Joe Marren, assistant professor of communication at Buffalo State College, teaches new media writing, print editing, media ethics, media history and media literacy. He was a reporter/editor at various newspapers in Western New York for 18 years, and became acquainted with Merton's writing during his Master's degree program at St. Bonaventure University.

3. Activism Without Delusion: Thomas Merton with Ernest Becker

This workshop will investigate human illusion, the challenge to be free through our identity formation, and how the truthful community overcomes despair with peacemaking. Grounded in Merton's notion of illusion that has brought Western civilization to the brink of environmental destruction and Ernest Becker's analysis of human violence and death, we will look at the challenge of social activism and our obligation, as Merton phrases it, “to work for the total abolition of war.”

Bernie Meyer, a peace activist for more than 40 years, was a member of the Cleveland Catholic Peace Movement and arrested as one of the DC Nine. Co-founder of the Thomas Merton Community, he has been integrating peacemaking with the study of non-violence for the last 16 years.

4. Emblems for a Season of Fury: The Abstract Art of Thomas Merton

Expressing himself in prose poetry, drawings and photographs, Thomas Merton's early monastic creative work was conservative. However, just as his prose response to the cold war and upheaval of the sixties evolved into a critique of this tumultuous culture, so did his artwork. This visual presentation will describe Merton's evolution of ideas and concerns in his art as his self-confidence in his vocation changed and as he discovered a deeper and broader understanding of God.

Paul M. Pearson is Director and Archivist of The Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY. He is resident secretary of the International Thomas Merton Society and current president. Founding member and first secretary of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Paul is the editorial advisor to *The Merton Journal*, editor of *Thomas Merton: Poet, Monk, Prophet* (Three Peaks Press, 1998), *Thomas Merton: A Mind Awake in the Dark* (Three Peaks Press, 2002), and a compiler of *About Merton's Secondary Sources 1945-2000: A Bibliographic Workbook*. His most recent book, *Seeking Paradise: Thomas Merton and the Shakers* (Orbis 2003) will soon have a companion volume, *A Meeting of Angels: The Correspondence of Thomas Merton with Edward Deming and Faith Andrews* (Broadstone Books, late 2007).

5. The Power of Images to Harm and Heal

Following a talk on Thomas Merton's belief in our need for better images, participants will meditate on a life-sized collage depicting the perpetrators of genocide begging forgiveness, and share in an image-based ritual called Sacred Dialoguing.

Clyo Beck, artist and writer, is the author of *Prayerforce* and the creator of “Pleas for Forgiveness.” She maintains a prayer website dedicated to achieving peace. Clyo presented *The Power of Images to Harm and Heal* in January at a conference in Winnipeg, which was co-sponsored by the Thomas Merton Society of Canada and the Faculty of Theology at The University of Winnipeg.

6. Wisdom and Prophecy: The Two Poles of Merton's Mature Spirituality

This presentation will focus on the creative tension between Merton's “sapiential” or “sophianic” consciousness, which responds to the world with an intuitive, participatory awareness of the “hidden wholeness” of all reality, and his prophetic attentiveness to the alienation and isolation caused by the rejection of wisdom and the violation of the divine image through violence, prejudice, and exploitation. By articulating a dynamic balance between these two consciousnesses, Merton is able to do justice simultaneously to an appreciation of the primordial unity of creation, and to our obligation to make that unity visible and tangible in a world rent with fragmentation and alienation, thereby offering us hope in a time of potential despair.

Patrick F. O'Connell, a founding member and former president of the International Thomas Merton Society, teaches in the Departments of English and Theology at Gannon University, Erie, PA, and edits *The Merton Seasonal*, the ITMS quarterly publication. He is co-author of *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (2002), and editor of *The Vision of Thomas Merton* (2003) and of the first two volumes of Merton's novitiate conferences, *Cassian and the Fathers* (2005) and *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism* (2006).

7. Thomas Merton and the Theology of Encounter

When Merton needs to know something, he turns to persons who know and practice what he seeks to know. For example, he learns about Buddhism from his friendship with D.T. Suzuki, the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. Such bonds of friendship and love—the “theology of encounter”—make intellectual differences less significant, enabling both parties to draw nourishment and hope from many streams. This chat-and-discussion session will explore the last chapter of Porter's forthcoming book, *Thomas Merton: Hermit at the Heart of Things* (Novalis, 2008).

John S. Porter is the author of *The Thomas Merton Poems* and *Spirit Book Word: An Inquiry into Literature and Spirituality*. Born in Belfast and educated in Canada, he is a passionate and omnivorous reader. An accomplished poet, critic and teacher, he writes for the *Literary Review of Canada* and *The Globe and Mail*.

8. Finding Hope in the Ordinary: Merton and the Generative Power of Nature

This talk will explore how the ordinary, generative power of nature and Merton's persistent fascination with dawn enable him to discover that *le point vierge* in nature and *le point vierge* in each of us are related. Merton's deep realization of this theological insight—that *le point vierge* is both an event and an indwelling, a point in time and a point of being—is the result of his habit of awareness, a habit we too can cultivate to discover that “the gate of heaven is everywhere.”

Monica Weis SSJ, Professor of English and Director of the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies Program at Nazareth College, Rochester, NY, is past vice-president of the International Thomas Merton Society, and a frequent contributor to *The Merton Seasonal* and various Merton conferences. Her most recent publication is *Thomas Merton's Gethsemani: Landscapes of Paradise* (University Press of KY, 2005).

9. Letters in Times of Crises: Reading Merton's *Cold War Letters*, Then and Now

This interactive session will focus on the recently published *Cold War Letters*, viewed as a dimension of Merton's networking for peace. Placing the letters in the context of Merton's time and story, we will read and discuss selections from the letters, and consider the significance of Merton's message today.

Christine M. Bochen is Professor of Religious Studies at Nazareth College, Rochester, NY, where she holds the William H. Shannon Chair in Catholic Studies. Christine is co-author of *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* and editor of *Courage for Truth, Learning to Love*, and *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings*. Together with William H. Shannon, she edited Merton's *Cold War Letters*, published last fall by Orbis Books.

Conference Schedule

Friday, April 27

7:30pm Keynote Speaker—Douglas Roche

Saturday, April 28

- 8:30 - 9:00am Registration
- 9:00 - 10:15am Plenary Session—Donald Grayston
Refreshment Break
- 10:45 - noon Concurrent Sessions 1 - 4
Lunch
- 1:00 - 2:15pm Plenary Session—Ron Dart
Refreshment Break
- 2:45 - 4:00pm Concurrent Sessions 5 - 9
- 4:15 - 5:00pm Contemplative Interfaith Gathering

Accommodation:

Seneca College Residence & Conference Centre
1760 Finch Ave. E., Toronto, Ontario
416-491-8811

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Registration: \$60 (Fri. & Sat., including lunch)
\$30 (Sat. morning or afternoon)
\$15 (Fri. evening only)

Finding Hope in a Time of Despair



April 27 - 28, 2007

Seneca College Conference Centre
1760 Finch Avenue East, Toronto, Ontario

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