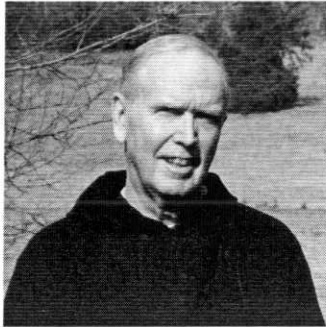


## Obituaries

*The past year or so has seen the deaths of two figures well known in the Thomas Merton story – Abbot Flavian Burns and Sister Mary Luke Tobin. By Paul Pearson.*



Bernie Luecht

**Thomas Burns** was born in 1931 and entered the Abbey of Gethsemani after reading *The Seven Storey Mountain* in 1951, taking the religious name of Flavian. After his novitiate he was a scholastic under Thomas Merton until Merton became novice master in 1955. Flavian Burns was ordained to the priesthood in 1959 and in 1966 followed Merton's example in becoming a hermit in the Abbey grounds. When Abbot James Fox resigned as Abbot after twenty years in that position Flavian Burns, at the time just thirty-six years old, was elected as his replacement in January 1968. It was Abbot Flavian who gave his permission for Merton to attend the conference in Bangkok at which he was accidentally electrocuted.

Flavian remained Abbot at Gethsemani for just five years and resigned in 1973 to return to the hermit life. He was called from his hermitage again in 1980 to become the superior of the Trappist community at Holy Cross Abbey, Berryville in Virginia, then at Ava, Missouri, returning to Berryville in 1990 as Abbot. In 1996 he resigned as Abbot and was appointed chaplain to a Trappistine community in Virginia. He died on October 12<sup>th</sup> 2005 after a long battle with cancer and was buried at Holy Cross Abbey on October 17<sup>th</sup>.



**Mary Luke Tobin** was born in 1908 and entered the Sisters of Loretto at the age of nineteen. She was elected President of the Sisters of Loretto in 1958 and served in that position for twelve years. The Motherhouse of the Sisters of Loretto is situated at Loretto, Kentucky just a few miles from the Abbey of Gethsemani. Beginning in 1959 Thomas Merton gave occasional lectures to the novices at Loretto. In 1964 Sr. Mary Luke was elected president of the Conference of Major Superiors of Women and, in that capacity became one of only 15 women to be an auditor at the Second Vatican Council. She kept Merton, and the monks at Gethsemani, in touch about the events unfolding in Rome.

Inspired by her "prophetic friendship" with Thomas Merton she became involved in many social issues, actively protesting against war and becoming a strong advocate for justice, peace and human rights. She traveled the world on missions for peace including visits to Saigon and Paris during the Vietnam War, and to El Salvador and Northern Ireland during the conflicts in those countries. In 1979 she began the Thomas Merton Center for Creative Exchange in Denver, and was a founding member of the International Thomas Merton Society. In 1999 she retired back to Loretto where she died on August 24<sup>th</sup> leaving her body to medical research.

Closer to home **Mrs. Patricia Trunfull**, a longtime member of the TMS of GB&I, and an avid Merton reader died, on September 8<sup>th</sup> at Cherry Blossom Residential Home in Cowes, Isle of Wight. Pat Trunfull attended many of the early meetings of the Society and generously donated many of the books that formed the Thomas Merton Collection now housed at the Catholic Library at St Michael's Abbey, Farnborough.