

New Plans and Perspectives for the Italian Thomas Merton Society

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(translated by Mario Zaninelli)

My desire to make Thomas Merton better known in Italy began over ten years ago. I had read many of Merton's books and had shared my passion for reading other books about the monastic and religious life with my good friend, Franco Giabbeucucci. In our many conversations we often reminded one another of our interest in Merton's autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Our enthusiasm for Merton's work led to my wanting to know much more about him than I

did, so I wrote to the ITMS in the hope of gaining means to continue my education in Thomas Merton's writings and ideas.

Through the ITMS, I learned about a conference on Merton that was to take place in 2004 at Bose, a monastic community near Turin, and I decided to attend. It was a great experience. I met Merton scholars such as Donald Allchin, Jim Forest and Paul Pearson. Eventually, I decided to involve other people, like Sherri McFerran, an Ameri-

can from Louisville, Kentucky, living in Italy, in a group involved in reading Merton together and making selections from his writings to translate into Italian.

Then I met Brother Cesare Bovinelli, a member of the Camaldolese community at Fonte Avelana, and Father Mario Zaninelli, a priest of the diocese of Milan. In December 2008, Father Mario and I organised an international conference on Thomas Merton at the Italian Abbey of Fiastra in the Marche region of central Italy. After this conference, all of us (Mario, Franco, Cesare, Sherri and I) decided to take our aims a step further and in July 2010, we formally established the Italian Thomas Merton Society, and I became its first President. Cesare served as Vice-President, Father Mario became our technical coordinator, and Sherri and Franco supported our different activities as a formal society. The Italian Thomas Merton Society has now grown to twenty-five members.

Having formally organised ourselves, we produced a seminar related to Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation* at Fonte Avellana. Most recently, in 2012, the Society held a well-attended conference in Rome on Merton and inter-religious dialogue. The invited speaker was Brother Matteo Nicolini-Zani of the Bose Community. Father Mario Zaninelli continues to present talks about Merton and his spirituality at various Italian venues. Only a few weeks ago, I presented a talk on

Merton in my hometown, Foligno, near Assisi.

We have established important connections with an Italian publisher and plans are in place to publish new editions of Merton's books in Italian. The Italian translations of Merton's work date back to decades ago and many are out of print.

We continue to form relationships with other Thomas Merton societies around the world, and we hope to deepen these relationships. To this end, Father Mario and I were delighted to participate in the meeting of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland at Oakham in 2012. We also participated in the pilgrimage-retreat held by the Thomas Merton Society of Canada in the summer of 2012, in Rome.

We are currently in the process of reorganising the Society's website, www.thomasmerton.eu, and we hope to present a conference on Merton's relationship to the Second Vatican Council, as well as on Merton's ideas as they resonated with Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its publication.

We are hoping to support a significant event to mark the centennial of Merton's birth in 2015, in which Merton societies around the world would be invited to participate. We trust that all the Merton societies in Europe will join in participating in this event.

Please keep in touch with us!