

The BC Connection: Thomas Merton and the Boston College Jesuits

By **John P. Collins**

In his 1986 article “The Merton Collection at Boston College,” Basil Pennington described the history and salient features of this collection of Mertoniana, which he considered one of the three most significant, along with the Bellarmine Merton Center and the material housed at Columbia University.¹ The Boston College collection developed due to the relationships between Thomas Merton and three prominent BC Jesuits: Francis W. Sweeney, SJ, a writing and literature professor who developed Boston College’s Humanities Lecture Series; Terence L. Connolly, SJ, college librarian from 1944 to 1959; and his successor, Brendan C. Connolly, SJ, library director from 1959 until his death in 1974. Consideration of these three men and their connections with Thomas Merton provides both a helpful background for understanding how Boston College acquired such a valuable archive of Merton materials and sheds light on one small but important part of Merton’s network of friends and correspondents.

Francis W. Sweeney, SJ

Francis Sweeney was born in Milford, Massachusetts, in 1916; after graduating from St. Mary’s High School he received an undergraduate degree from the College of the Holy Cross in 1939 and entered the Society of Jesus after graduating. While in college Sweeney was diagnosed with a serious heart ailment, which significantly limited his physical activities; he was therefore allowed to engage in less strenuous activities as a Jesuit novice. After earning an M.A. degree in English and Philosophy at Boston College in 1944 he taught Latin and English at Cranwell Preparatory School in Lenox, Massachusetts in 1944-1945. Sweeney was ordained a priest in 1948 and had a “risky heart procedure” in 1950, which he survived with special prayers from many people, including Thomas Merton, who wrote: “I have been praying hard for the success of your dangerous operation if that be God’s will. But above all I ask Him to give you what is best – for you and for the Church. May He bless you and suffer in you, and I hope, be the cause of your recovery in body and your ever greater growth of soul in Spiritu Sancto.”² Sweeney not only survived the operation but was destined to live a long and productive life at Boston College, where he began teaching in 1951 after finishing his tertianship training at St. Robert’s Hall Seminary in Pomfret, Connecticut. An essayist and poet, Fr. Sweeney taught writing and literature courses at Boston College and served as faculty advisor for the *Stylus*, the oldest student literary magazine in the nation.³ Under his tutelage, authors including novelists George

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V. Higgins, Frank Bergon and David Plante and poet John Wieners learned the craft of writing (Copenhagen 103).

One of Sweeney's most lasting contributions to the university was founding the Boston College Humanities Series in 1958 (renamed the Lowell Lectures Series after the Lowell Foundation provided financial support in 1987). Such literary figures as Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, Maya Angelou, W. H. Auden, Evelyn Waugh, Daniel Berrigan, Seamus Heaney, Denise Levertov, Richard Murphy, Czeslaw Milosz, Sean O'Faolain, Adrienne Rich, Susan Sontag, Stephen Spender and Robert Penn Warren participated in the series over the years, as well as speakers from other fields such as journalist James Reston, economist John Kenneth Galbraith and historian Christopher Dawson.⁴ Through the series students at Boston College were "exposed to an amazing range of talent, including twenty-two of the Library of Congress's Poet Laureate Consultants and four Nobel Prize winners in literature" (Copenhagen 104). In conjunction with the Humanities Series, Sweeney also sponsored other programs that developed the creative talents of the students. Professional writers discussed their craft through panel discussions in the Careers in Writing Conference, a one-day event held annually from 1961 through 1967; this program was superseded by the Campus Film-Makers Festival, which ran for nine years (1969-1978); Sweeney also sponsored the Younger Poets Series which began in 1960 and lasted until the early 1970s (Copenhagen 104-105). Francis Sweeney retired in April 1998 after 40 years of service and died April 25, 2002 at the age of 86. Ironically, he retired and died in the month of April, the title of one of his best poems, praised by Thomas Merton.

Sweeney published poems and essays in *Commonweal*, *America*, *The Boston Globe*, *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Spirit*, *Thought*, *Today* and the *Washington Post*. His published books include two volumes of verse, *Baroque Moment* and *Morning Window, Evening Window*;⁵ other books Sweeney wrote or edited include *It Will Take a Lifetime*, *The Knowledge Explosion*, *Every Man My Brother* and *Vatican Impressions*.⁶ In 1987, Francis Sweeney was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters by Boston College.⁷

The extant correspondence between Sweeney and Merton⁸ began with a letter from Merton dated December 3, 1946, acknowledging that he had received a sheaf of poems that Sweeney apparently had previously sent him for comment before submitting them to an editor for publication. Merton states:

Thanks for the pleasure of reading your poems which I really enjoyed. I don't know how much of a statement you wanted, but here goes: "This is a book that has real poems in it. The poet has a penetrating and wise eye, an eloquent and tender and flexible idiom, and a heart full of sympathies which flow along a whole level of American experience – experience which he puts on paper as well as it has ever been done. What that experience is can be summed up in two terms: New England – the Society of Jesus. The combination is an interesting one and the poet gives promise of exploiting it to the full." . . . I liked best poems like the "Last Anointing," "Newark in the Spring," "Convent School," "April."⁹



Francis W. Sweeney, SJ

The first and third stanzas of this last poem give some sense of its tone and provide context for the comments Merton makes in his letter:

The fragile affirmations of the springtime
 Glitter in the leaden darts of rain.
 Shall I cut my coat this April to my cloth?
 Bind the selvage with the cord of fear and antique grief? . . .

Your specious syllogisms tumble in my conscious throat,
 Oh April, dear false Portia of my cause,
 And though the notaries eat cakes upon my oaths,
 And the priests have blessed to weariness my posture of contrition,
 Speak, April, loveliest of liars,
 And though I run and stop my ears I listen and *credo* I believe.
 (Sweeney, *Baroque* 46)

Merton remarks: “the line ‘Oh April, dear false Portia of my cause,’ is your best kind of inspiration, it seems to me. All in all that April is a good poem” [12/3/1946].

Merton goes on to provide brief commentary on a number of other poems Sweeney had sent. Concerning one not mentioned by title but probably “Cranwell Sunset,” Merton writes, “I don’t feel the way you do about all those prep schools and there is no reason why I should” [12/3/1946]. He may have been referring to the last two lines of the poem: “And yet I know and the heart of me rejoices, / From Cranwell to heaven the sunset road goes home” (Sweeney, *Baroque* 14). This idyllic description of Cranwell, the Jesuit boarding school in Lenox, Massachusetts where Sweeney taught as a scholastic in 1944-45,¹⁰ is a distant cry from Merton’s own experience at the Lycée Ingres in Montauban, France, where he spent two rather miserable years.¹¹

The next poem that Merton mentions is “Carillon Voluntary” and he comments that it “*should* bridge the gap between us. It doesn’t though” [12/3/1946] – the “gap” in question being their different perceptions of prep schools. In “Carillon Voluntary,” Sweeney muses about many prep schools across the country:

Tree-hushed, lawn-lapt, spire-crowned kingdoms,
 Hosts of lads in their great halls quaffed:
 Grace and wisdom and laughter at Campion,
 Courage at Exeter, honor at Taft. (Sweeney, *Baroque* 13)

Merton might have identified with the “Hosts of lads in their great halls quaffed” from his own experiences at Oakham, but he was probably irritated by the litany of high-end prep schools that were included in Sweeney’s final stanza:

Lovely the names fall, tones of a carillon,
 Bludgeoned by battle they hear them still:
 Loomis, Lawrenceville, Portsmouth Priory,
 Berkshire, Canterbury, Holderness, Hill. (Sweeney, *Baroque* 13)

Hence the gap between them is not bridged in the end.

Sweeney’s poem entitled “Spring in Newark” is evidently high on Merton’s list of the

Jesuit's poems as he declares, "it is a good poem and does make me interested in Newark as you see it, although I had never even thought of looking before" [12/3/1946]. Sweeney's short poem follows:

Are the tulips out in the Museum garden?
 Do the double-decked buses run out to Weequahic?
 And what of the old fellow who sold jonquils at the Tube
 station – is he on the job this year?
 I should like to walk up High Street once more,
 To hear the children singing in Greek through the open doors
 of the Orthodox Church,
 And to walk into the dark Abbey and on my knees
 Tell God I love Him better in Newark, in the spring. (Sweeney, *Baroque* 57)¹²

About the next poem, Merton comments, "Same way with 'Men of the Ateneo'" – implying that it too is "a good poem" – adding, however, "I don't even know what that is" [12/3/1946]. The poem is a memorial to the brave young cadets from Ateneo De Manila University, a Jesuit school in the Philippines that Sweeney may have visited, who fought bravely against the Japanese during late 1941 and early 1942 at Bataan and Corregidor. The following are the first several lines of the second stanza:

They were the men, two thousand of them, remember,
 Who marched when the peril came,
 (Two hundred of them under age, who should
 have stayed with their mothers),
 The small men with the faces of children
 And hearts of leopards under their shirts. (Sweeney, *Baroque* 53)

Merton is less positive about "Letter to my Brother Interned in Norway,"¹³ commenting: "The last line of the one for your brother in Norway seems to me much too weak – mostly because *verily* is just as unsubstantial as a word could possibly be" [12/3/1946]. The reference is to the final stanza of this brief poem:

Vocal, feathered-white and torrent-going
 Valley streams run silver through the fall
 Vistas, – Oh my brother, dear my brother,
 Verily no news, no news at all. (Sweeney, *Baroque* 11)

It is evident that the poem was inspired by the time Sweeney was teaching at Cranwell, as in the first stanza the streams are set in the landscape of the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts.

In his next letter, dated "Vigil of Pentecost, 1947," Merton writes: "I had not seen the poem because we do not get any magazines: so thank you for sending it and above all thank you for your dedication of it." Merton is referring to a recent issue of *The Commonweal* (as it was then called) in which Sweeney published a poem titled "Letter to Lancelot (For Thomas Merton)."¹⁴ Merton added: "I like the new idiom and some of the lines are especially successful: – rolling diocese, and lamb

world etc. Those two last lines before the finale are the best.” The first phrase mentioned appears in the second stanza:

Majestic the guileless morning, as brightly habited as a bankrupt
Beyond the fall of dice and the doom of lottery,
Visits his rolling diocese. The great ring unwinking,
Careless of our woe, of the ache in the gullet,
Unembarrassed by the paper prayers burned in the
astrologer’s joss-house.

The final five lines of the poem contain the other phrase and the lines considered “the best” by Merton:

The bitten, the notched, the counterfeit sixpence I wager
For chance of a golden guinea.
Oh lamb-world blind in the thickets,
Dear as my blood and the red heart’s leather!
The morning, yes.

In a postscript of the letter Merton mentions that he will send to Sweeney a copy of his translation of *The Soul of the Apostolate*, by the French Trappist abbot Jean-Baptiste Chautard,¹⁵ and comments: “It has helped me a little to keep from getting too involved in the business of writing as business.”

A little over a year later Merton writes Sweeney about being both a priest and a poet. Sweeney was on the eve of his ordination on June 19, 1948 and Merton writes:

For neither of us is it important that we also have a tendency to be poets. What could that possibly mean alongside of being Christ’s? Still if He wants our priesthood to express itself accidentally in poetry, so much the better. . . . If the church has many priests and many poets, she still needs good priests and good poets because of these she has all too few. [6/17/1948]

The correspondence continued over the years up through February of 1968. It was evident that Merton and Sweeney were comfortable with each other from their informal salutations: Dear Tom or Thomas and Dear Francis or Frank. The topics covered in the letters included a Japanese translation of the *The Seven Storey Mountain* [6/17/1949], *Jubilee* magazine [10/28/1953], items sent to the BC Merton Collection [10/28/1953; 5/4/1961], Father Hans Küng and his upcoming tour of the United States planned by Francis Sweeney [10/13/1962], a visit to Chartres¹⁶ by Francis Sweeney [10/13/1962], a possible visit to Gethsemani by Küng [10/17/1962],¹⁷ Father Alfred Delp’s letters and other materials sent by Merton to Sweeney [11/15/1962], Mark Van Doren’s lecture at BC titled, “The Stature of Robert Frost” [2/14/1963], discussion of an upcoming conference at BC regarding peacemaking efforts of Vatican diplomats¹⁸ [8/9/1967], Merton’s recommendation of W. H. Ferry as a speaker for the conference [8/13/1967], Sweeney’s invitation to Ferry [8/16/1967], Merton’s declining an invitation to write a paper for the conference [2/10/1968].¹⁹ The final letter of the Merton-Sweeney correspondence was Sweeney’s overview of the upcoming conference: in addition to the major addresses there would be panels including Eugene Rostow, Monsignor George

Higgins, James O’Gara, John Sheerin and Norman Cousins. Sweeney was hopeful that Ambassador Arthur Goldberg and Alan Westin would join the panel. Arnold Toynbee would be sending a paper expressing an historian’s overview of Vatican diplomacy. In a final paragraph Francis Sweeney writes: “Thanks for your leadership in the peace and war dilemmas. I would love to see you and talk to you, and perhaps after twenty-five years I shall one day get to Gethsemani” [2/8/1968].²⁰ Soon, however, Thomas Merton was to start his journey to the East, where he died on December 10, 1968, and the long-awaited visit by Francis Sweeney to Gethsemani never materialized.

Probably the most significant exchange between the two men was Merton’s gift to Sweeney of a carbon copy of the typescript of *The Seven Storey Mountain* for a 1949 exhibition of his work.²¹ This typescript became the foundation of the university’s Merton archives, assembled largely by the second of Merton’s Jesuit correspondents, Terence Connolly.

Terence L. Connolly, SJ

Terence L. Connolly, SJ, was born in North Attleboro, Massachusetts in 1888 and died in 1961. He became a member of the Society of Jesus in 1908 and received his B.A. and M.A. degrees at Woodstock College and his Ph.D. from Fordham University. Connolly served as professor of English at Fordham University, Dean of English at Georgetown University and Head of the English Graduate Program at Boston College from 1926 to 1945. He was curator of the distinguished Francis Thompson Collection at Boston College and published a number of volumes by and about Thompson and other English Catholic writers of the late nineteenth century such as Coventry Patmore; he was also the translator of St. Bernard’s treatise *On the Love of God* and editor of numerous other volumes of English literature.²²

The correspondence between Terence Connolly and Thomas Merton²³ centered primarily on the Thomas Merton Exhibition organized by Connolly at Boston College, which was held March 24-April 10, 1949. Connolly’s letters to Merton were respectful and deferential, addressed to “Fratr Louis” or “Father Louis” throughout the entirety of the correspondence; it is evident that *The Seven Storey Mountain* had had a significant impact on his spiritual life. Connolly was very willing to assist Merton with any book request from the library and through the inter-library loan services as well as through friends in other religious houses. The tone of Merton’s letters to Terence Connolly was likewise always formal, addressing him as “Father Connolly” and on one occasion with a handwritten note as “Father.” Both priests commented throughout the correspondence that they were keeping each other in their prayers or remembrances at Mass. Merton’s letters reflect a willingness to assist Connolly with the exhibition in any way possible, although he was a little uneasy about being the center of attention and later even felt the exhibition might be termed a “nuisance.” At times in the letters one can sense the time pressures that Merton felt due to his voluminous correspondence and writing.

The first letter from Terence Connolly to Merton expressed his gratitude for the gift of the carbon copy of the *Seven Storey Mountain* typescript, given through Francis Sweeney, which he planned to use as the centerpiece of the exhibition of Merton’s works. He states, “I understand that there are variations in the MS, and, of course, I shall take particular pains that these variations or parts not used in the printed volume be not exhibited – as a precaution against any one using them.” For exhibition purposes, Connolly requests that Merton autograph other books that he has written

and for his convenience he has sent the books already, but adds that if for some reason Merton does not wish to do so, he only has to return the package without opening it. In conclusion Connolly assures Merton that the “SSM is doing much good for the sowing of the seed of Faith that has shown such fruit in your life” [1/18/1949].

In his response Merton expresses a positive feeling for the exhibition and assures Terence Connolly that he is going to open the package of books and autograph them as requested. In regards to the unpublished variants in the typescript he states: “If anyone wants to publish any of the unpublished parts it would probably be o.k. as the whole thing has been passed by our censors, but there are one or two parts I’d like to keep unpublished so if the question comes up, please let me know.” Merton mentions that he read Connolly’s “excellent translation of St. Bernard” and since the Jesuit is such a good friend of the Cistercians he is sending him a couple Cistercian pamphlets. In this letter Merton also makes a request for the loan of books from the library and through the inter-library loan system. Merton states, “I am looking for Gardeil, ‘The Structure de l’ame et l’experience mystique” and also requests a book by Joret on the Dominican Spirit. Merton’s final paragraph in this letter refers to a recent journal article.²⁴ He writes, “If you glance into the January ‘Thomist’ you will find me taken down four or five pegs for my errors in theology – they very kindly sent Sister Madeleva to pick me up and dust me off at the other end of the issue, after the beating that begins on page 1. So you see I need the Holy Ghost to keep me straight” [1/27/1949].²⁵

The next two exchanges between Merton and Terence Connolly primarily concern the loan of books from Merton for the exhibition. Connolly requests Merton’s copy of Blake’s *Poems* and his copy of *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* by Etienne Gilson [1/29/1949]. Merton promptly replies that it would take too much time to track down the books and that the Gilson book has now “vanished” from the abbot’s room and probably had been sent to one of the “foundations.” However, he is sending Gilson’s *Mystical Theology of St. Bernard* and it has underscoring which might be helpful.

For the exhibition, Terence Connolly was desirous of having Merton’s writings in the Columbia University journals, *Jester*, *Columbia Review* and *The Spectator*. Connolly contacted the Columbia Records Department and received on loan the relevant copies of *Jester* and *Columbia Review*.²⁶ Although Connolly is happy to have on loan Merton’s copy of Gilson’s *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*, he expresses his disappointment about not having the copy of *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*. From a Dominican convent Connolly was able to obtain copies of *Dominican Life* by Joret, one copy in English and another in French [2/3/1949]. A mention is made in Connolly’s next letter of a forthcoming exhibit of Wilfred Meynell’s works and letters [2/4/1949]. Meynell was the founder of the magazine *Merry England* in which he featured and sponsored the work of Francis Thompson. In a return letter, Merton acknowledges he is the author of *The Spirit of Simplicity* and some other Cistercian pamphlets that he sent to Connolly. He adds that the copies of the book by Joret were helpful in finding the answer to the question raised in *The Thomist* article [2/18/1949]. Terence Connolly writes: “Dr. Daniel Walsh has agreed to come to speak on the occasion of the opening of the Exhibition.”²⁷ After complimenting him on his new book *Seeds of Contemplation*, Terence Connolly states that he is sending the book to Merton for an autograph. “If this is asking too much, I



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shall easily understand” [3/7/1949].

The Exhibit Program read as follows: “A Lecture and Exhibition. A Lecture by Daniel Walsh, Ph.D., ‘The Impact of Catholic Thought on Modern Life and Letters’ and The Opening of an Exhibition of the Work of Thomas Merton Including the Original Manuscript of *The Seven Storey Mountain*.” The brochure includes a page listing the many sponsors including Richard J. Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, and John J. Wright, Auxiliary Bishop of Boston. There is a page listing separately a Women’s Committee, a Men’s Committee and Ushers. The Merton materials are organized according to the following categories: Books, Book Jackets, Photographs, Journals and Merton’s Master of Arts Thesis, “Nature and Art in William Blake.” The centerpiece of the exhibition, of course, was the “Original MS of *The Seven Storey Mountain*” although according to the official “List of Items Used in the Merton Exhibition” only certain sections of it were on display. A sampling of the pages listed are as follows: “Discussion of Capitalism and Encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII” (pp. 264-278); “Modern Materialistic Society” (pp. 59-62); “A page of corrections of the MS in Merton’s handwriting.” Two of Merton’s poems that appeared in *The New Yorker* were also exhibited: “Aubade: Lake Erie” (August 1, 1942) and “Carol” (December 23, 1944). Journal articles include “Huxley’s Pantheon” (*Catholic World*, November 1940) and “Contemplation in a Rocking Chair” (*Integrity*, August 1948).

The next several exchanges between Terence Connolly and Merton include Connolly’s praise for the speech by Dan Walsh at the Exhibition [3/30/1949]; appreciation by Merton for a donation to the Abbey from the exhibition²⁸ [4/2/1949]; comments by Connolly “about Merton’s forthcoming ordination to the priesthood” [4/12/1949; 4/27/1949]; and appreciation for Merton’s donation of his copy of Blake’s *Poems* to the Boston College Library [4/27/1949]. *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard* was discussed by Merton and Connolly in the next several letters. Connolly notes that he has not yet sent back the borrowed copy of the Gilson work and asks Merton’s permission to transfer the underscoring and marginal notes into his copy to satisfy interested students²⁹ [5/2/1949]. Connolly noted his desire to be present at Merton’s ordination on May 25, 1949, and in a letter penned to Dom James Fox, Abbot of the Abbey of Gethsemani, he expresses his regrets as he “tried desperately to arrange to be present.”³⁰

In his next letter Merton states that he needs the Gilson book “badly” as he will be soon teaching a course in “Spiritual Theology.” He declares again in the letter: “[I] really do need the book now, and if you still have it there, I would be very happy to see it again” [10/12/1949].³¹ A contrite Connolly writes: “It is difficult for me to express my embarrassment at the realization that I had not returned your copy of Gilson’s *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*. It goes to you in the mail today” [10/17/1949]. Over the next six years there are three letters from Terrence Connolly to Merton, acknowledging and expressing appreciation for materials sent to the library: galley proofs of *The Seven Storey Mountain* and *The Waters of Siloe* [1/13/1950]; “Monastic Orientation”, Series V [2/8/1955];³² *Jonastegnet* (the Danish translation of *The Sign of Jonas*) [8/14/1955]. The only extant correspondence from Thomas Merton to Terence Connolly after October 12, 1949 is a Christmas card with the request “Pray for us!” [12/17/1952].

Brendan C. Connolly, SJ

Brendan Connolly, Terence Connolly’s successor as Boston College Librarian – but not his

brother, as is sometimes assumed – was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1913, entered the Society of Jesus in 1931 and was ordained as a priest in 1943. He was a graduate of Boston College, received his master’s degree in library science from Catholic University and was the first Jesuit priest to hold a doctorate in library science, which he received from the University of Chicago. Before taking the helm as Director of the Boston College Library, he was an instructor of English at the same institution and was a librarian and assistant professor of theology at Weston College, the Jesuit scholasticate, where he later became Professor Extraordinarius of Philosophy and Theology. Brendan Connolly was in demand as a consultant for library planning by many universities, communities and foreign countries including Iraq, Venezuela and the Philippines. Known also as a leading authority on early Boston history, Connolly assembled journals, letters and diaries which enriched the city’s social history. He served on the Centennial Committee of the Boston Public Library, was a member of the executive board and archivist of the Massachusetts Library Association, was instrumental in forming a consortium of academic and reference librarians in the greater Boston area and was the Boston College representative to the New England Deposit Library. He championed human rights causes and his dedication to social justice involved him in the early formation of the NAACP. The survival of the urban university and issues of academic freedom were high on the list of Connolly’s interests and priorities. At the time of his death in 1974, Boston College President J. Donald Monan, SJ, eulogized his fellow Jesuit: “Fr. Brendan Connolly was a University Librarian of broadest vision and discriminating judgment. He was a student’s librarian who opened the full range of library treasures to the student body. He was a librarian’s librarian in foreseeing unerringly the directions that the science would assume.”³³

In one of the earliest letters from Brendan Connolly to Thomas Merton the Jesuit expresses his appreciation for a recent piece on the Chinese missions that discusses Fr. Matteo Ricci, SJ.³⁴ He mentions that he gave the essay to Father Richard Lawlor “who was a missiologist by trade and who did his doctorate on Father Ricci.” Later in the letter Connolly mentions that Fr. Lawlor was very happy reading Merton’s article – “or is it a book?” – titled *Meditation and Spiritual Devotion*³⁵ [7/26/1962].

Much of the correspondence³⁶ focused on Merton’s gifts of books and other items to the Boston College library and Connolly’s efforts to obtain books for Merton through the library or the inter-library loan system (see *SC* 156-57 [11/26/1962]; 290-91 [9/7/1965]; 294-95 [10/21/1965]). In some cases Merton corresponded directly with Paul Moynihan, the reference librarian, who sent him bibliographies to help the monk track down books from other sources. Although many of the books requested by Merton were about Celtic and Medieval Studies, there were other requests, for example, related to the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida [4/25/1965] and to novelist William Faulkner [1/20/1967; 2/26/1967; 9/7/1967]. At one point Merton notes that he is attempting to learn Gaelic, but in the end, the language proved too difficult, especially given his time constraints [1/1/1966; 3/17/1966].

The salutations by both Merton and Brendan Connolly began with formal greetings: “Dear Father Louis” and “Dear Father Brendan.” However, after about three years of correspondence Brendan Connolly began to address



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Merton as “Dear Tom” [3/27/1965] and Merton responded in kind with his next letter to the Jesuit: “Dear Brendan” [4/3/1965]. Like the other two Jesuits, Connolly continued with a cordial correspondence and, indeed, it was a friendly exchange between the two religious.

Perhaps the centerpiece of the correspondence is the discussion between Merton and Brendan Connolly on the issue of Jesuit spirituality, which was prompted by the exchange of letters between the monk and Fr. Ronald Roloff, OSB.³⁷ Connolly writes to Merton:

[I] found myself too intrigued by the exchange of letters between you and Fr. Ronald to resist recording my reaction. If you were rightfully diffident about entering into a domestic dispute in another part of the house of monasticism I suppose I must risk seeming temerarious. I don't feel so. A phrase (which needless to say, I did not find offensive) in Fr. Ronald's last letter seemed to me to be particularly provocative. “We monks are not just like secular priests or Jesuits.” Where is the most basic font of identity between men who are priests and religious? It seems to me to lie in the fact of having chosen a community as a way of life. [1/16/1964]

Connolly goes on to explain briefly the differences between Jesuit priests and brothers. Seldom do the brothers become ordained, with perhaps a handful of exceptions, most notably Fr. McElroy, the founder of Boston College, who was ordained after serving ten years as a brother and an 18-month theology course “laid on a high school background!” The Jesuit goes on to explain his motives for entering “an institute of religious priests.” Having only a dim notion of what it meant to be a priest, Connolly was overwhelmed with the prospect of spending 12-13 years before ordination. With his colleagues, Connolly adopted the notion of Jesuit community as a “home” within the security of a shared rule, which helped him survive the experience. The idea of community was an effective way for Connolly to introduce the concept of religious families apropos to all religious orders with the understanding that adult religious do, indeed, have to reconcile their individual “adult freedom and responsibility” within this family [1/16/1964]. In a return letter Merton assures Brendan Connolly that there is a commonality among different religious orders and that because the Cistercians have been “assimilated canonically to other Orders” there has been a tendency for “monks” to stand back and identify themselves as apart from “Jesuits.” Merton continues:

At the moment there are hopes that we can get a status of our own as *monachi* once again in the eyes of canons. This will enable us to make sense out of such things as our *ratio studiorum*, and will simplify our problems about the status of brothers [W]hen Fr. Ronald [Roloff] was saying “not Jesuit,” it was just a kind of automatic reflex, and did not imply much about Jesuits one way or the other. I agree that it is neither fair nor accurate to keep describing monks as non-Jesuits. . . . Still, I do think that there are really quite profound differences in the spirituality of monastic Orders and the modern Orders, especially yours, which are dedicated to the apostolate so systematically and entirely. (SC 204 [2/23/1964])³⁸

However, the differences among the orders should not be “exaggerated” according to Merton, and there should be no distortion of religious life within the Church. Merton declares that “sweeping generalizations” about the Society should not be made as “Jesuit life and spirituality is a very complex

phenomenon and much deeper than most people take it to be.” Merton ends his correspondence by asking Connolly to give him “something of an idea of Jesuit spirituality and the Jesuit ideal as you see it” (SC 205 [2/23/1964]). Connolly responds several months later with this statement: “I have been chewing on your Jesuit spirituality request . . . [and] I am now afraid that the final issue will be a ridiculous mouse” [6/10/1964]. Less than a month later, Connolly writes: “I am afraid that I am now somewhat compulsive on the subject” [7/7/1964]. But it wasn’t until many months later that Brendan Connolly proffered his definition of Jesuit spirituality. Dispelling the idea that there were some deep motivations within the prospective candidate in selecting the Jesuit order, Connolly offered Thomas Merton the following commentary:

1. I think that the “processing” of the young Jesuit, his reading of his own traditions, his anticipated ministry, and the nature of his prayer all lead to an extraordinarily Christo-centric spirituality. . . . 2. it is also an “ambitious” Christocentrism, an “achieving” one. And yet it is always muted in achievement by reason of the extent to which his ministry is indirect. In my own case I am building a university library for the centuries which may, at any time, be “weeded” by the bomb. This is a far cry from my chaplain experience at the Boston Public Hospital where, day after day, one would anoint, absolve, communicate (not in such order!) and watch the man die. Result: a certain disinterestedness (“Indifference in the Ignatian sense?”) and a reinforcement of the importance of effort as opposed to result, of the necessity for purity of intention and conformity to the will of God. 3. The prayer life of a Jesuit is at least in practice very differently structured during one’s adult as opposed to one’s scholastic life. The life of the novice and student are, as far as stipulated prayer is concerned, very ordered. Such order is generally morally and often physically impossible for many “working stiffs.” One result can, of course, be a drying up. I even think that many believe this to be true of themselves when, in fact, it is not. What takes place, rather, in my opinion, is a greater frequency and much greater awareness of the divine, an irregular pulse of conscious commitment and Love (to paraphrase a paper I recently read), a translation of experience often uncomfortable or boring or painful into a meaningful, but unarticulated prayer. [3/27/1965]

Within a few days Merton responds, thanking Connolly for his notes on the “Jesuit Spirit” and for the most part agrees with him. He comments on Connolly’s expression “achieving” Christocentrism and makes the following remarks:

[W]hat you list as an “achieving” Christocentrism I would . . . add a special modality which I have always associated with the S.J.: not expendability, exactly, but a special vocation to be “at the disposal” of the Order, the Church, and to achieve as part of a concerted work in which one’s personal achievement may mean vanishing completely into the background and giving up results in order that someone else may come out with *his* results. In other words, supernatural teamwork yet ability to free-lance as a commando, etc. This may just be my romantic notion of the Jesuits. But it is tied up with what I think was Ignatius’ sense of his men as

chosen instruments of the divine will. To be a flexible instrument in the hand of God is a great and sometimes terrible vocation. I think you people have that sense much more than anyone else in the Church. It is certainly not the Benedictine concept of obedience, but it can obviously manifest itself anywhere that there are men and Christians. We are all in some way instruments. And we all have to be virtuosos at taking a back seat when necessary, way back. The prayer life of a flexible instrument cannot be well ordered. It has to be terribly free. And utterly responsive to a darkly, dimly understood command. So I think that really rejoins what you say about “indifference.” (SC 271 [4/3/1965])

With this letter Merton and Brendan Connolly end their dialogue and one is impressed with Merton’s ability to prompt a highly educated Jesuit to probe his inner self for so many months to at last reveal an understanding of his own Jesuit spirituality.

This was not, however, the end of their correspondence, as it continued for over three more years, with a last letter penned by Brendan Connolly less than four months prior to Merton’s untimely death on December 10, 1968. In a concluding letter to Connolly, Merton comments briefly on the subject of vocational breakdown and concludes: “what do those good fathers think marriage is, anyway? I fear some of them are going to find it much less beautiful than they had anticipated” [7/31/1968]. In his final letter to Merton, Brendan Connolly supports Merton’s “moderate middle of the road position” in regards to the current crises of religious vocations and declares: “I still strongly believe that there is a good deal of durable wisdom in the old cliché, *in medio stat virtus*. This may be merely a rationalization of my own position which is similarly smitten, hip and thigh, by contradictorily placed groups which seem to be endowed with a great many more certainties than I am” [8/19/1968].

The correspondence between Thomas Merton and the three talented Jesuit priests at Boston College spanned some 22 years, beginning with a letter to Francis Sweeney in early December, 1946 and ending with a letter from Brendan Connolly in the middle of August, 1968. It is evident that Merton felt a closeness to the three Jesuits, as he comments to Brendan Connolly, “Your letter [7/26/1962] was pleasant and gratifying and I feel a closer bond with the Fathers at BC” [8/7/1962]. Perhaps the best way to express the great admiration for Thomas Merton by the three Jesuits is a letter penned by Francis Sweeney, SJ, to a woman on Long Island wrought over the death of Thomas Merton. He writes: “Thomas Merton’s death saddened all his friends, and I can well understand your feeling of bewilderment, that his living presence, which was in all he wrote, is no longer with us. We do have his books and can always find him there. More than that we can be sure because of the Communion of Saints that our prayers can help him now, and that he is praying for us.”³⁹

1. M. Basil Pennington, OCSO, “The Merton Collection at Boston College,” *The Merton Seasonal* 11.1 (Winter 1986) 8-10; subsequent references will be cited as “Pennington” parenthetically in the text.
2. Letter dated October 9, 1950. Unpublished letters from Thomas Merton to Francis W. Sweeney, SJ, Terence L. Connolly, SJ, and Brendan C. Connolly, SJ, part of the collection at the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY, are quoted by permission of the Merton Legacy Trust; letters will be cited in the text by date.
3. See Edward Copenhagen, “Restoring Sweeney: The Acquisition and Processing of the Francis W. Sweeney Manuscript Collection,” *Catholic Library World* 75.2 (2004) 102, n. 1; subsequent references will be cited as “Copenhagen” parenthetically in the text. Copenhagen was the Assistant Archivist at Boston College, 1999-2006.

4. The Humanities Series and the Lowell Lectures featured poets, novelists, dramatists, theologians, historians, classicists and actors; more recently, The Lowell Humanities Series, as it is now called, has diversified even more by presenting speakers such as sociologist Eric Klinenberg, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, journalists Dexter Filkins and Elif Batuman and non-fiction writer Jane Brox (see *The Heights* [Boston College student newspaper] 10/28/2010).
5. Francis Sweeney, *Baroque Moment* (New York: McMullen Books, 1951); Francis Sweeney, *Morning Window, Evening Window: Selected Poems* (London: Haggerston Press, 1999).
6. Francis Sweeney, *It Will Take a Lifetime* (Boston: Charles River Books, 1980); Francis Sweeney, ed., *The Knowledge Explosion: Liberation and Limitation* (Boston College Centennial Colloquium – 1963) (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966); Francis Sweeney, *Every Man My Brother* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1976); Francis Sweeney, SJ, ed., *Vatican Impressions* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1962).
7. See Francis Sweeney Exhibit Highlights, Burns Library, Boston College, Spring 1999.
8. Fourteen letters from Merton to Sweeney and eight letters from Sweeney to Merton are extant, and it is evident that there was other correspondence that has not survived.
9. The descriptive statement by Merton appeared as a blurb on the back cover of *Baroque Moment*; subsequent references will be cited as “Sweeney, *Baroque*” parenthetically in the text. Merton’s statement is also used as the central paragraph of the Preface in the later *Morning Window, Evening Window*; subsequent references will be cited as “Sweeney, *Morning*” parenthetically in the text.
10. Cranwell Preparatory School opened in 1939 and was closed in 1975; many New England Jesuit Scholastics were assigned a teaching tour there before ordination to the priesthood.
11. See Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948) 48-53; Merton’s later boarding school experiences in England, at Ripley Court and Oakham, were more positive: see *Seven Storey Mountain* 62-103. Apparently Merton was thinking broadly about boarding schools in general and preparatory high schools were part of that perception.
12. The Newark Museum, New Jersey’s largest, was founded in 1909; Weequahic is the name of a Newark park designed by the Olmstead Brothers; St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, also known as the “Mother Church of New Jersey,” was incorporated in 1906 and located on High Street (now Martin Luther King Boulevard) since 1924; the reference to “the Abbey” is evidently to the Benedictine monastery founded in Newark in 1857 and still in existence. Sweeney may have become acquainted with Newark from a visit to Saint Peter’s College, a Jesuit institution located in nearby Jersey City.
13. After reviewing available documents in the Milford, MA archives and speaking with Paul Curran, the Town of Milford historian, I have no reliable information about a brother of Francis Sweeney. It may be noted, however, that another poem by Sweeney uses the word “brother” to describe not a sibling but a close friend: the first line of the poem entitled “Elegy for a Bombardier” is: “Brother, the years have served us ill.” This poem is dedicated to his school friend, Wendell T. Phillips, Jr., a bombardier who was killed in World War II (*Milford Daily News*, 11/20/1948).
14. Francis Sweeney, “Letter to Lancelot (For Thomas Merton),” *The Commonweal* (May 9, 1947) 92; the poem was reprinted in *A Merton Concelebration*, ed. Deba Patnaik (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1981) 25-26.
15. Jean-Baptiste Chautard, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, trans. A Monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani (Trappist, KY: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1946); the book was reissued with a revised preface by Doubleday Image Books in September 1961. For further information see Patrick F. O’Connell, “*Soul of the Apostolate*,” in William H. Shannon, Christine M. Bochen and Patrick F. O’Connell, *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002) 445-46.
16. Evidently the visit to Chartres was the inspiration for the title Sweeney’s second book of verse. In the first paragraph of the Preface, he writes: “When one visits the Cathedral of Chartres at any one time of day, one may be advised to view its glorious windows in the morning and again in the evening to note the changing color in the glass. The experience suggested the title of this collection of poems: ones written in the early years and those which express a later pilgrimage” (Sweeney, *Morning* 5).
17. On February 14, 1963, Sweeney wrote to Merton: “After much of schedules [*sic*], it now seems that Father Kung will not be able to visit Gethsemani during Easter Week. There are a number of places he wants to see in the southwest.”
18. Sweeney wanted to invite Merton to the conference but he knew that the monk could not leave the monastery [8/9/1967]. Merton confirmed Sweeney’s assumption about not leaving the monastery: “if I asked permission I’d be shot down for the ninety-ninth time this summer. I have given up even trying to talk about such things” [8/13/1967].
19. Merton wrote: “I don’t think I am qualified to speak of peace from the viewpoint of Vatican diplomacy when I really have not studied Vatican diplomacy at all.”

20. Unpublished letters from Francis W. Sweeney, SJ, Terence L. Connolly, SJ and Brendan C. Connolly, SJ to Thomas Merton, most located in the Thomas Merton Collection, 1940-1986 of the Archives and Manuscript Department of the John J. Burns Library, Boston College, are quoted with permission of the Society of Jesus of New England; letters will be cited by date in the text.
21. No letter from Sweeney referring to the typescript is extant, but in a handwritten postscript to his November 27, 1948 letter to Sweeney, Merton writes, "Sure B.C. can have those ms. – if Fr Abbot says ok"; this may refer to the *Seven Storey Mountain* typescript, as in a letter to Sweeney dated December 16, 1948, less than three weeks later, Terence Connolly thanks him for sending the typescript to the library for the archives, assuring him that the manuscript will be of interest to the general public and that suppressed passages by Merton will not be shown during the Exhibit. The first page of the typescript itself has an undated note in Merton's handwriting: "Uncut and very mixed up ms. of 7 Storey Mountain – for Boston College Library." In a February 19, 1949 letter to Sister Thérèse Lentfoehr, Merton explains that he has sent a carbon copy of *The Seven Storey Mountain* to Fr. Terence Connolly at Boston College. Another copy went to Sister Thérèse and the "top copy" went to his editor, Robert Giroux (Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy, The Letters of Thomas Merton to New and Old Friends*, ed. Robert E. Daggy [New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989] 191; subsequent references will be cited as "*RJ*" parenthetically in the text). Merton explains to Sister Thérèse that he is not sure what happened to some missing pages of the manuscript; perhaps they were used as scratch paper. He states: "Boston [College manuscript] is probably the more complete because it was not worked over at all. The one you have was in the hands of the publisher. For that reason I am happier to have excerpts printed from your copy, because I am not sure everything in the Boston [College] copy ought to be printed" (*RJ* 194 [7/15/49]). According to Pennington, the BC typescript "is largely a carbon copy but there are three sections where typed pages have been inserted. One of them is the conclusion of the volume (pages 676 to 681 in the manuscript) where we find editorial changes in Merton's own hand. These pages like the rest of the manuscript are also edited by some unidentified hand. In his letters Merton expressed concern that the unpublished sections would not be copied or displayed. Later Sister Therese made a careful study of the Boston [College] manuscript in comparison with her own copy and with Merton's permission published some of the sections left out of the published volume" (Pennington 9). See the July 4, 1950 and August 3, 1950 letters from Sister Thérèse to Terence Connolly, SJ about securing some pages of the Boston College manuscript to compare with her own copy (Thomas Merton Center Archives).
22. See John J. Delaney, *Dictionary of American Catholic Biography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984) 110, and *Catholic Authors, Contemporary Biographical Sketches, 1930-1947*, ed. Matthew Hoehn, OSB (Newark, NJ: St. Mary's Abbey, 1947) 159.
23. Nine letters (four of which were cards) from Merton to Terence Connolly and eighteen letters from Terence Connolly to Merton are extant.
24. The article is "Active and Contemplative Orders," published in *The Commonweal* 47.8 (Dec. 5, 1947) 192-96, in which he draws upon the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and discusses the argument about the relative merits of the active and contemplative lives. (The article was subsequently incorporated into the Epilogue of *Seven Storey Mountain* [414-19] at the suggestion of Fordham University professor Francis X. Connolly.) In his article "States of Life" (*The Thomist* 12.1 [Jan. 1949] 1-16), John Fearon, OP critiqued Merton's conclusion that in the end there is only one vocation.
25. In the same issue of *The Thomist* (101-106), Sr. Madeleva, long-time president of Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN and herself a poet and literary critic, reviewed (very favorably) Merton's latest book of poems, *Figures for an Apocalypse* (New York: New Directions, 1948).
26. Columbia sent some journals and the citations are included in the "List of Items in the Merton Exhibition, March 24 to April 10, 1949": "*Jester of Columbia*, Nov. 1935 (First Printing of 'Suburban Demon,' by Merton); Sept. 1935 ('Katabolism of an Englishman,' by Merton); Dec. 1935 ('The More Abundant Life,' and 'Students Awake,' by Merton). (Loaned by Col. Univ.); "*Columbia Review*, November 1935 ('At the Corner,' by Merton). (Loaned by Col. Univ.)."
27. Merton writes subsequently to Dan Walsh: "I am sorry this Boston College exhibition has grown to such proportions as to include such things as speeches, and I apologize for the fact that you have to be disturbed, on top of all the embarrassment I caused you by the book [*The Seven Storey Mountain*]. I know I must have caused you some. I did not know the thing would become the public nuisance that it has" (*RJ* 304 [2/24/1949]; emphasis added).
28. Pennington states that both Dan Walsh and Thomas Merton received a \$200 stipend and Boston College netted \$1000 for the opening night of the Exhibit (Pennington 10, n. 6).
29. "Father Connolly copied into another copy of Gilson all of Merton's underlinings and marginalia before returning the volume and this copy is in the collection at Boston College. Merton's own copy is now in the Columbia collection"

- (Pennington 10, n. 5).
30. Letter from Terence L. Connolly, SJ to Abbot James Fox, OCSO [5/25/1949].
 31. Merton's concern about the book was expressed in a letter to Sister Thérèse Lentfoehr: "Fr. Connolly has not yet sent back the Gilson. I told him to keep the Blake" (*RJ* 196 [10/3/1949]).
 32. Upon receiving the copy of "Monastic Orientations, Series V" Connolly requested from Merton the rest of these volumes of Merton's conference notes for his scholastics [2/8/1955]. The Thomas Merton Inventory and Container List at Boston College include the following: "Monastic Orientation Series II": two copies, 1951; "Monastic Orientation Series IV": 1952, September-1953, November; "Monastic Orientation Series V" 1953-1954 – signed by Merton.
 33. *Bridge* (June 1974) 14; see also the obituaries in *Boston Globe* (4/23/1974); *Boston Herald American* (4/23/1974); *The Pilot* (4/26/1974).
 34. See "The Jesuits in China," in Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967) 81-90, first published in *Jubilee* 10.5 (September 1962) 35-38; apparently Merton had sent a mimeographed copy of the article prior to its appearance in *Jubilee*.
 35. The reference is apparently to Merton's book *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1960).
 36. Twenty-six letters from Merton to Brendan Connolly and twenty from Brendan Connolly to Merton are extant. While all Merton's correspondence with Francis Sweeney and Terence Connolly is unpublished, six letters to Brendan Connolly were included in Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990): 156-57 [11/26/1962]; 204-205 [2/23/1964]; 209 [3/17/1964]; 271 [4/3/1965]; 290-91 [9/7/1965]; 294-95 [10/21/1965]; subsequent references will be cited as "SC" parenthetically in the text. (Note: Connolly's name is misspelled in *SC* as Connelly.)
 37. Ronald Roloff, OSB was a monk at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN, with whom Merton had a lively exchange of letters over the issue of contemporary monasticism and renewal; see *SC* 146-48 [9/26/1962], 149-52 [10/21/1962], 153-56 [11/13/1962], 198-203 [2/14/1964], 210 [3/21/1964], 266-67 [2/27/1965]. Much of the correspondence was collected in a 30-page mimeograph entitled "An Exchange of Letters on Monastic Questions," a copy of which Merton evidently sent to Brendan Connolly.
 38. It is interesting that in a letter to Jean Leclercq, OSB expressing his weariness with the correspondence, Merton himself comments about Roloff, "he shows himself to be in reality an activist who has no real taste for the monastic life in its renunciation of the world and in its orientation toward solitude. . . . He is in a word a parish priest or a 'Jesuit'" (*SC* 215 [Holy Saturday, 1964]).
 39. Letter to Mrs. M. H. Alexander, Long Beach, NY from Francis W. Sweeney, SJ [6/20/1969] (Thomas Merton Center Archives).