

Thomas Merton Symposium in Rome, 12-15 June, 2018

Report by Peter Ellis

The symposium was sponsored by St Anselm's Monastery, a flourishing Benedictine college, university and monastic community, set on the Aventine Hill from where you can look across the Tiber to St Peter's. We were warmly welcomed and hosted with lunches, drinks breaks in the courtyard, and invitations to participate in monastic worship. Around thirty papers were presented, some in Italian but most in English, based around the theme of 'Thomas Merton: Prophecy and Renewal'. The speakers over the two full and two half-days were from six European countries, North and South America, and South Africa, with the theme being widely interpreted, as one would expect at a Merton conference, and with interesting questions and discussions.

At random, and to give a flavour, one could note papers on John Cassian, Thich Nhat Hanh, addiction, Edith Stein, Merton's 'Eight freedom songs', and, in a multimedia presentation, an imaginary dialogue between Merton and the body artist/dancer Gabrielle Roth. The symposium was bookended with keynote addresses by Paul Pearson and Michael Casey OCSO.

On the last afternoon many of us were grittily led in the afternoon heat by Willie Eurlings, chairman of the Flemish-Dutch Merton Society, on a tour of Rome focusing on the churches that Merton visited as a teenager, one of which, the astounding St Sabina, is only three minutes away from St Anselm. The monastery will publish the papers in due course.

Peter Ellis, a Merton enthusiast and a professional archaeologist, now retired, lives in Bath.

Before the start of the symposium the following message was received from The Vatican:

His Holiness Pope Francis sends greetings and prayerful good wishes to all assembled for the International Symposium 'Thomas Merton: Prophecy and Renewal', to be held at the Pontifical Athenaeum Sant'Anselmo from 12-15 June 2018. His Holiness trusts that these days of study and reflection will lead to a deeper appreciation of Merton's role as a master of prayer whose writings continue to 'open new horizons for souls and for the Church' (cf. Address to the United States Congress, Washington, 24 September 2015) and help shed the light of Christ on the pressing spiritual and cultural challenges of our time. To all present the Holy Father cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of wisdom, joy and peace in the Lord.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin - Secretary of State