

# CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS

International Thomas Merton Society  
Seventeenth General Meeting—June 24-27, 2021  
Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana

## “Thou inward Stranger”

“Thou inward Stranger / Whom I have never seen,” from “Stranger,” *The Strange Islands*, 1957

In the 1940's, Thomas Merton began the interior journey in search of God through the contemplative monastic life. In response to a question from a student at St. Mary's College in 1948, Merton wrote *What Is Contemplation?* that was first published by Saint Mary's College president Sr. Madeleva Wolff, a pioneer in women's graduate theological education. In monastic life, Merton became a self-designated “stranger” to the values of contemporary society. He later discovered through his revelation in downtown Louisville that, though he should be alienated from oppressive systems, “[t]here are no strangers!” on the human level. Merton the mystic transcends the seeming contradiction of retreat from the world and love of humanity. Just as in Louisville he found he could “not be alien” to all the people “shining like the sun,” he wrote that in his hermitage and among the trees, “here I am not alien.” In Merton's concern for human rights and a monk devoted to the charism of hospitality, how did this person of privilege demonstrate how to be an ally, through self-identification with the outsider, to those externally labeled “the alien” and “the stranger”?

We invite proposals for presentations related to the conference theme on topics such as (but not limited to): contemplation, monastic hospitality, Merton and women/feminine wisdom, the importance of Merton's thoughts and rhetoric in addressing themes of what it means to be a “stranger” and/or “alien,” Merton and his relationship to Saint Mary's College, unity amid difference, Merton's writings on identifying as “stranger” and its relationship to the natural world, themes of estrangement and alienation in Merton's work, reflections on Merton's idea of the true-self as it pertains to understanding our or his inward stranger, and the monk as stranger.

### Session formats include:

1. **Scholarly Papers** designed for presentation in twenty minutes for an audience of academics and non-academics (8-10 double-spaced pages, maximum).
2. **Workshops** designed for presentation in ninety minutes to involve interactive participation incorporating adult learning strategies and/or small group discussion.
3. **Creative/Dramatic Presentations** designed for presentation in ninety minutes using music, poetry, dance or other media to provide insight into aspects of Merton's life or work.
4. **Guided Meditation/Prayer Sessions** designed for presentation in ninety minutes, particularly those using Merton's writings as a framework for prayer and meditation.

Website: [merton.org/2021](http://merton.org/2021). Proposals of no more than 250 words and a short biographical statement (1-2 sentences) should be submitted by May 15, 2020 by email attachment to [itmsmeeting@googlegroups.com](mailto:itmsmeeting@googlegroups.com).