In this centenary year of the birth of Thomas Merton (1915-1968) this course will provide participants with a broad general overview of Merton’s life and thought. The number of new publications, special features on Merton, news items etc. is just snowballing and, as Merton comes to the attention of many either for the first time, or renewing the interest of others, this course will provide an overview of Merton’s life and thought exploring the key themes in his writing and teasing out the reasons Merton became such an important spiritual writer in the 20th century and asking key questions about his continued relevance in the 21st century. Through PowerPoint, recordings etc., incorporating a lot of images and other materials from the archives the life and thought of Merton will be brought to life for participants.

Objectives:

1. To give participants a broad overview of Thomas Merton’s life and thought.

2. To help participants understand the monastic life that became central to Merton’s life and thought.

3. Through a broad selection of the writings of Thomas Merton to explore the reasons why Merton became one of the major spiritual writers of the 20th Century and his relevance for us now.

Thursday 11th July:

2.00 – 3.30 – introductory session for course participants.
6.00 pm – Merton Reception
7.00 – 9.00 pm – Merton Public Lecture:
"I love beer, and, by that very fact, the world." -- the humor and humanity of Thomas Merton.

This presentation will explore Merton sense of humor over the years from his pre-monastic cartoons published in the Columbia Jester, through his correspondence, journal entries and recordings, to the stories told by his friends and brothers. It is often said that a sense of humor is essential to the religious life and this often overlooked facet of Thomas Merton is an important part of his humanity which makes him so attractive and accessible to his readers as we walk, with him, the Road to Joy.
This course will focus on Merton’s thought and spirituality, in particular four major areas of his writings.

**Friday 12th July:**

9 am – noon. Entry into monastic life and monastic spirituality. *Seven Storey Mountain* and other related text – the spirituality of Merton.

1 pm – 4 pm. His rootedness in monastic life. His growing sense of compassion and awareness of the world. *The Sign of Jonas* – the poet and writer.

**Saturday 13th July:**

9 am – noon. Embracing the world. Writings on social issues. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* – the artist and “activist.”


**Required Reading:**

*Thomas Merton Essential Writings* edited by Christine M. Bochen. (Orbis, 2000)

Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (Harcourt Brace, 1953)

Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Doubleday, 1966)

**Recommended:**


Jim Forest, *Living with Wisdom* (Orbis, 2008)


Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (Harcourt Brace, 1948)


Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Houghton Mifflin, 1984)

Paul M. Pearson is Director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky and Chief of Research for the Merton Legacy Trust. He is Resident Secretary of the International Thomas Merton Society, served as President for the 10th administration, program chair for the 11th ITMS conference held in Rochester in June 2009, treasurer for the Society (2007-2013) and is site coordinator for the 2015 conference celebrating the centenary of Merton’s birth. He completed his Ph.D. at Heythrop College, London and his masters in Library and Information Science at University College, London.