

Two poems by Michael Woodward

Thomas Merton

At Fourth and Walnut today, it's just
Any old crowd milling: I guess it always was.
But you're there too among them, helping us remember.
And from these books you get under my skin,
Firing the ache for something whole and simple: the truth.

It's funny how the cheese and the conflicts
Don't matter now. There's so much cheese
We have to deal with. But you needed that, too:
It had its place in the mountain climb, one of many paths
Leading to the crossed roads of your heart.

I want to thank you for staying with them all; not going
Anywhere much: letting those roads worry you awake.
Smile on us then, reclining as you must now, at home
Among buddhas, saints and outcasts; their familiar.
And pray for blessing on our small wits,
And on our turbulent, distracted hearts.

Stag at Bay

(For Fr Tissa Balasuriya OMI)

The efficient
And respectable hounds
Wearing their impeccable Roman collars
Have erupted;
Brought you to bay at last.

We will know in the end
Whether they were really angry
At the hue of your coat;
Whether what drove them on
Was projection of their own
Chaos on to you.

For now
There is only passion:
The mad barking
And the spittled maws.

I know the dignity of your kind.
Penned against a rock,
You will greet them with compassion,
Knowing how hard it is for anyone to see
The truth when it comes
Wearing words we do not recognise.

You will not deny them
Your body to tear.

(A comment by Michael Woodward: This poem came to me more unbidden and complete than almost anything I have written as I, a Catholic, tried to meditate in an Anglican church in the Welsh town which will be home to the dissenters' bishop, surrounded by ladies doing church cleaning, the week after the historic ordinations of women (including our baby-minder's mother-in-law).