

# Editorial

According to recently published data, more than 1,700 people each year have been killed and more than 22,000 seriously injured by road traffic. Other data records that in the year to September 2015 there were 574 homicides in England and Wales.

Numbers affected escalate when we take account of the impact on each other person related to the victim or witnessing these events. Each life matters in a way that statistics can never reveal; few of these events, however, generate political waves.

I am writing this on the day after two people were killed intentionally by a car, one by a knife attack, and another (the attacker) by gunshot, in Westminster, London. Thirty-one other people have so far been treated in hospital. It is reported that the attacker 'is thought to have acted alone but was "inspired by international terrorism"'.<sup>1</sup>

Members of Parliament felt threatened, though none was harmed yesterday. The last time an MP was violently harmed was nine months ago when, on 16 June, Jo Cox was killed whilst serving her constituents in a West Yorkshire village. The attacker, acting alone, shouted 'Britain First!' as he shot and stabbed Jo Cox. He is said to have been inspired by Nazism, and by Jo's passion for membership of the European Union. A week after her murder, just over half of the voters in a UK referendum declared their preference for leaving the European Union. The heady atmosphere of public debate was saturated with talk of self-determination, mistrust, money, migration.

In other news, the Syrian Network for Human Rights reports that in the six years to March 2017, 24,000 children have been killed. Another feed reports today that a 'combination of drought and conflict has left the lives of more than 20 million people in east Africa in the balance.'<sup>2</sup> Each life matters in a way that statistics can never reveal.

From fragments of information and emotion we construct stories and a sense of the world. Our responses depend on circumstances and histories; our recollections and reactions are events in themselves, influencing others.

I could have written instead about the glorious springtime quietly bursting into colour outside this office. It may matter more than anything. Subjective reflections on selective news, lives resonating with one another, narratives and springtime, dying and rising are ways of introducing this journal's range of contributions.

Some respond with poetry, and we are delighted to share three poems from each of Vickie Cimprich and Philip Seal. More than fifty years ago, Merton mentioned in passing another poet, the holocaust survivor Paul Celan. Detlev Cuntz gives us a sense of why Celan caught the attention of the monk who was also attempting to write of the atrocities coming more fully into view during the 1960s. Like Celan, Merton also understood that 'dialogue can be a message in a bottle, sent out in the... belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps.'<sup>3</sup> Sonia Petisco takes us back to the heartland of a more familiar encounter of that same year, and the poetry inspired by a nurse who awakened Merton to a late springtime. In a personal testimony representing many others, Jill Robson describes how Merton's messages reached her, prompting dialogue and a postcard – which may just be visible in our cover photo. Brief encounters continue to resonate.

Sonia describes the 'spiritual darkness and physical helplessness' out of which Merton was awakened by Sophia and Eros. Fiona Gardner similarly highlights episodes of 'mental and emotional struggle' which characterised a 'painful process of rebirth' in Merton's earlier life. Like Detlev with Celan, Fiona brings Merton into dialogue with a writer who does not turn away from pain, who recognizes that 'without pain there can be no birth; without death no resurrection.'<sup>4</sup> Harry Williams - who also writes deliciously of the *Joy of God*<sup>5</sup> - knew, like Merton, that 'emotional breakdown may be a vulnerable opening-up that can lead to insights and breakthrough'.<sup>6</sup> Readers may recall another dimension of this theme explored by Mark Meade in our previous journal, and may also want to explore Donald Grayston's outstanding *Thomas Merton and the Noonday Demon*.<sup>7</sup> Themes of mental health, spiritual insight and political life are interwoven throughout this edition.

Fiona's essay closes with a 1965 letter from Merton, and our final prose piece was also written by Merton in 1965. With a commentary by Stephen Dunhill, and with gratitude to the Merton Legacy Trust, we include here Merton's reflections on *The Poorer Means*. Beyond formal meetings, negotiation, discussion and diplomacy, our unity is fostered and sustained by the 'poorer means' of 'sacrifice, suffering, expiation, prayer' which 'seldom or never have any clearly visible result'.<sup>8</sup> Our differences and disagreements will remain; but just as 'ecumenism in its

deepest and most living form has been born in the trenches and barracks of wars and concentration camps', so our hope of resurrection is heightened not obscured by proper attention to personal and public pain. And, as Maureen Pickering reminds us, the risen Christ may then come to us in the shocking ordinariness and companionship of an impromptu Easter breakfast.

We are grateful as ever to our reviewers, who in this edition introduce us to recent books by David Hodges, Christine Painter and Michael McGregor. And we wish all our readers, contributors and companions a hope-filled Easter.

Gary Hall

1. *The Guardian*, 23 March 2017
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/audio/2017/mar/23/why-is-east-africa-facing-a-hunger-crisis-and-what-can-be-done-podcast>
3. See 'Paul Celan's Poetry after Auschwitz', pp. 50-60. Quote on p. 59.
4. See 'Thomas Merton & Harry Williams', pp. 37-46. Quote on p. 38.
5. H. A. Williams, *The Joy of God: Variations on a Theme* London: Mitchell Beazley, 1979.
6. 'Thomas Merton & Harry Williams', p. 40.
7. Donald Grayston, *Thomas Merton and the Noonday Demon: The Camaldoli Correspondence*, Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2015.
8. See 'The Poorer Means', pp. 4-9. Quotes on p. 5.

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### Kathleen Archer 1936 - 2017



Sadly Kathleen passed away on the 20<sup>th</sup> January. She had been a long-time member and supporter of the Society, never missing a meeting and attending all our conferences. Indeed she attended the first inaugural Merton meeting in Winchester in 1993. She contributed several articles to *The Merton Journal*, including one reflecting on the ITMS conference at Rochester in 2009. She wrote:

I meditated in the train to Niagara Falls that this had been a memorable conference, not only for the depth of spiritual perception in all the speakers, but for the necessity for depth in personal friendships leading to a real appreciation of the many ways in which God is known and loved in so many wonderful faiths he has given to the human race.

*May she rest in peace and rise in glory.*