

# Editorial

In December 1993, the inaugural Thomas Merton conference gathered in Winchester, where David Scott was priest and poet. The former director of the Merton Center, Robert Daggy, accompanied by Paul Pearson, the current director, was with us, tracing echoes of St. Augustine's Confessions in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and speaking of Owen Merton's work and family. Monica Furlong was there too, considering the impact on the student Merton of the alienation of black people in nearby Harlem, as he made his way towards solitude, sustaining attention to a deep human loneliness. Esther de Waal spoke of reading lovingly, with a tenderness which does not invade the spiritual secrecy of an author, and Jim Forest told of the unhurried and silently evangelical activity of the iconographer. There were others. Pdraig Daly and Selima Hill brought us poetry of the heart; and on 10<sup>th</sup> December, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Merton's death, Ken Leech was warning against a sanitisation of Merton, reminding us of his undergirding theology of resistance and of the sustained monastic protest against dehumanising cultures and an assimilated church.

Ken Leech, priest and theologian, died in September 2015 at the age of 76. We pay tribute in what follows to a priest whose ministry with vulnerable people in London was an urban translation of Merton's prophetic counter-narrative. Included here is a personal reflection on his life and ministry by his lifelong friend and co-worker Terry Drummond, and a version of an essay by Ken published as a pamphlet shortly before he addressed the Merton conference in Winchester. We have also included three short reflections on Silence by Ken, originally given at a Quiet Day in 1986. We have paired each one with a poem by Tony McClelland. Also included is an extract from *The Eye of the Storm*, published in 1992 in which Ken wrote more directly about how Merton

accompanied his work in Aldgate and in Soho. (It was at St. Anne's Church in Soho that Ruth Jenkins and Owen Merton, parents of Tom and John-Paul, married in 1914.)

Other connections emerge as Bonnie Thurston tells of the friendship between Merton and Etta Gullick, in an essay which complements her contribution to the Advent 2017 edition of this journal. Like Merton, Etta Gullick was a teacher helping to prepare men for priesthood, at St. Stephen's House, Oxford, where Ken Leech trained. Bonnie highlights the discussion between Gullick and Merton about prayer and its nurture, with a focus on the attendant difficulties of distraction on the one hand, and heightened self-consciousness on the other.

Where Leech and Thurston demonstrate in different ways the resonances between Merton and his readers, Ron Dart's essay picks up affinities between Merton and someone he was reading. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1968, Merton was flying out of Anchorage, reading Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East* (1932). On 15<sup>th</sup> October he was flying towards Tokyo and reading Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922). Ron Dart identifies and explores common themes in the countercultural positions of the two authors, both of whom were renowned for their prolific correspondence, their reaching out through writing.

Writing can establish and nurture relationship, as these essays illustrate in contrasting ways. Other people's writing can also give voice to intuition or emotion, to realities we had not yet found a way to communicate. As Tony McClelland puts it in his poem, 'Discoveries', included in the following pages:

In another's words:

something we have known together,  
but could not name alone.

Perhaps we return time and again to Merton because in his words we discover what we have sensed yet struggled to name: the Ace of Freedoms, the Risen One, the Christ whom Ken Leech hails as 'challenger and disturber of human illusion'.

Let us take to heart this Eastertide the words that Merton recorded in his journal on his final Easter Day:

It is *Easter!* The Alleluias are back.

Gary Hall