

# Editorial

The poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti died in February this year at the age of 101. Poet, writer, publisher and social activist, he was considered by many to be the spiritual godfather of the Beat movement, inspiring and nurturing generations of San Francisco's artists and writers from his famous bookstore City Lights. In his manifesto, *Poetry as Insurgent Art* (1957), he wrote: 'If you would be a poet, create works capable of answering the challenge of apocalyptic times, even if this means sounding apocalyptic.' With such a view, one can easily see how some of Merton's more provocative poetry would appeal to him. For the first edition of his literary magazine, *Journal for the Protection of All Beings* (1961), Ferlinghetti sought to be one of the first to publish Merton's poem, 'Chant to Be Used in Procession Around a Site with Furnaces'. However the response to the challenge of apocalyptic times cannot be to offer a merely iconoclastic vision, but must offer a way forward, a glimpse of a better world. For Merton the poet, as he wrote in his essay, 'Louis Zukovsky - The Paradise Ear', 'All really valid poetry ... is a kind of recovery of paradise. Not that the poet comes up with a report that he, an unusual man, has found his own way back to Eden: but ... that he who reads and understands recognizes that here is a new start, a new creation. Here the world gets another chance.'

In the midst of the Covid pandemic it is hard to glimpse that 'new start', with a death toll in the United Kingdom currently standing at over 126,000, and with countless lives and livelihoods completely overturned. And all this is cast against a global backdrop of war, displacement, famine, and growing evidence of disastrous climate change. So lines from Ferlinghetti's mordant poem, 'The world is a beautiful place', seem most apt:

The world is a beautiful place  
to be born into  
If you don't mind some people dying  
all the time  
or maybe only starving  
some of the time  
which isn't half so bad  
if it isn't you

Many people have found solace in nature during this past year of isolation, a theme explored in Jim Walker's article, 'Thomas Merton and nature'. Drawing on his experiences when living in Asmara in Eritrea, the author links his experiences to Merton's observations of the world around his hermitage. In his article, 'Through a glass clearly', Tom Finnegan recounts how as a schoolboy he came across *Seeds of Contemplation*, an encounter that has led to lifetime of reading Merton. In 'Living in the "unliveable" world', Fiona Gardner explores Ernesto Cardenal's experiences after leaving Gethsemani, when he found that his 'experience of the world is that it is unliveable.' Seeing this phrase as a contemporary koan, the author explores how both Merton and Cardenal, in their own ways, came to resolve this paradox.

In his article on the future of the Catholic Church, Derek Reeve, drawing on nearly forty years experience as a parish priest, reflects on the future of the Church. Sam McNally-Cross writes about his commitment to join The House of Initia Nova, a dispersed Benedictine Community. In 'Kindred minds: Pasternak, *Zhivago* and Merton', Ron Dart examines the deep friendship and understanding that developed between the two writers, and Merton's probing set of essays, *The Pasternak Affair*. There are book reviews by Allan Hargreaves and Willy Slavin, and an examination of Rowan Williams's *The Way of St. Benedict* by James Cronin.

Sr Hazel Smith's meditation on the words of the risen Lord, 'Don't touch me', highlights how apt these words are in these times of social distancing. The cover image by Sr Rachel Denton is based on the penultimate Station of the Resurrection, 'Mary and the disciples wait in prayer'. Even in this image the disciples seem to be distancing themselves from one another. But on the day of Pentecost they will be drawn together in the unity of the Spirit, and in the bonds of peace.

Merton wrote in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, drawing on his journal entry for May 20, 1961, 'A prayer to God my Father on the Vigil of Pentecost':

Father, I beg you to keep me in this silence so that I may learn from it the word of your peace and the word of your mercy and the word of your gentleness to the world: and that through me perhaps the word of peace may make itself heard where it has not been possible for anyone to hear it for a long time.

May the joy and peace of the risen Lord fill your hearts this Eastertide.

Stephen Dunhill