

# Editorial

Ever since the pandemic, the making of plans has held an element of risk and this year's Merton Society's celebration was no exception. Two years in the making and after having cancelled the conferences of 2020 and 2024 due to Covid, its fate hung in the balance owing to the latest national rail strike. Though some of us (myself included) were prevented from going, there were still enough delegates able to attend and to make it worthwhile to go ahead. The conference setting - Rydal Hall in Cumbria with its Wordsworthian associations – proved to be the perfect place for what in Paul Pearson's excellent and comprehensive overview was a special gathering of friends old and new.

One of the contributors to the conference, Dan Horan, OFM shares his paper, 'The Humble God of Thomas Merton: Christ, Kenosis and Salvation in the General Dance'. Towards the end, he sets us a question: 'What could change about how we imagine ourselves as church and members of the Body of Christ when we de-centre sin and humanity and re -centre love and God?'

Merton's Master's thesis, 'William Blake and the Nature of God', which was undertaken at Columbia University is the focus for a fascinating and detailed analysis by Rebecca Gould, 'Art and Selfhood: Thomas Merton and William Blake'. Gould delineates how Blake was a pivotal figure in Merton's life, having first come to know of him through his father, the artist Owen Merton. Not uncritical of the thesis's lack of academic rigour, she discerns the Blake he depicts as having been credited with having had a prophetic role in his [Merton's] own journey towards Catholicism and the life of a vowed Trappist monk.

In 'Merton, the Political Priest', Gerry McFlynn, a priest of the Connor and Down Diocese, examines Merton's transformation from a young, idealistic priest to someone whose mature thought ranged far beyond the cloister. He traces this extraordinary evolutionary process to several seminal texts from the Merton corpus and speculates that had he lived, he may have become a radical political priest. But he does not do so without

making reference to the presence of the spiritual contemplation upon which Merton's thought was grounded. McFlynn also highlights how in 1964, Merton 'held a 4-day long retreat at Gethsemani on the spiritual roots of protest to which he invited 14 leading peace activists representing the Catholic, Protestant, historical Peace Church and the Unitarian traditions.' By the end of the retreat, an outline had been drawn up of a 'spirituality that transformed prayer into protest and contemplation into resistance to the powers and principalities of a murderous world.'

Mary Frances Coady writes about the German Jesuit priest, Fr Alfred Delp whose horror at the godlessness of the Nazi regime would eventually lead to his arrest, show trial and execution by hanging. While awaiting his fate, Delp wrote what became known as 'The Prison Meditations'. In 1963, Thomas Merton was sought out to write the introduction to their first publication in English, a process which Coady compellingly describes.

Elsewhere in this edition of the Journal, there are some excellent and thought-provoking book reviews by Brother Malcolm SSF, Anthony Purvis, Stephen Dunhill and Mara MacSeoinin, and selections of poems by Bonnie Thurston and Kevin Scully, each singular and bearing a re-read.

In England, after the shrill north-easterly winds of April, May has arrived with warmer, gentler climes and a profusion of blossom - always an enchanting sight. For Merton, in rural Kentucky, as he recorded in his journal 75 years ago on May 25<sup>th</sup> 1949, the Vigil of the Ascension, 'the liturgy of the Vigil is matched by the brilliant weather of the day. Not a shred of cloud anywhere in the deep blue sky.' The following day he was ordained, fulfilling at last the vow he had made nine years earlier in Cuba at the Basilica of Our Lady of Cobre.

In closing, I just want to say how honoured I am to be following in the footsteps of Stephen Dunhill, a brilliant and consummate editor of this journal for a good many years.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Susanne Jennings