

# Editorial

In just a matter of months, the global order appears to have been upended. To many, there is a sense that the very foundations of western democracy are being assaulted. Against this background, John Gillespie's *A Way with Words* is timely reading. Essentially an examination of how language can be a mechanism of control and coercion for political ends, Gillespie draws upon George Orwell's *Politics and the English Language* and Thomas Merton's understanding of how the misuse, manipulation and distortion of language can be harnessed for destructive ends. At one point, Merton inveighed against the 'illness of political language [which was] a symptom of a plague of power [deriving from] a basic contempt for man.'

An unexpected phone call to Merton's abbey by Rabbi Abraham Heschel serves as the backdrop to JS Porter's ironically entitled article, *Opening Merton's Bible*. Subsequent correspondence between Merton and Heschel would culminate in the former's reluctant acceptance of a commission by *Time-Life* magazine to write a book on the Bible which was to be entitled *Opening the Bible*. Merton's approach was unabashedly singular and included reference to Pasolini's masterful *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Eric Fromm's *You Shall Be As Gods*.

Elsewhere in this edition of the *Journal*, Anthony Purvis reviews the documentary, *No Other Country*. A Palestinian-Israeli collaboration between filmmaker Basiel Adra and investigative journalist Yuval Abraham, the film has received considerable attention, attracting both accolades and approbation. For Purvis, the film is a 'must-see' for contemporary Merton readers due in large part to its ability to 'reach beyond the superficial, heavily censored news feeds and media reports that [dominate] our screens' and most pressingly because, despite all, it is a film that works to 'augment hope, not diminish it'.

It seems apt that, as the son of an accomplished artist, it would be art that led to Merton's conversion and eventual path to life as a contemplative Cistercian monk. In *A Vista Opening Far and Wide: the*

*Mosaic that Struck Merton*, Richard Conrad OP provides a beautifully illuminating and informed meditation on the mosaic in the apse of SS Cosmas and Damian which occasioned Merton's epiphany while visiting Rome on his own the summer before he went up to Cambridge.

Intriguingly, Gordon Oyer's writes of the history and lived experience of the Amish Mennonites in parallel with the Cistercians. In *Wandering the Mönchsweg* [literally, the 'monk's path']: *Personal Reflections on Merton, Mennonites, and the Margins*, Oyer drew from his own experience of a marginality shot through with monastic resonances.

'Did Thomas Merton act as a catalyst for your friendship?' This was a question I put to Rowan Williams and Bonnie Thurston last July in the days following the General Election. The resultant conversation - with an ever-present Merton at its centre - was wonderfully wide-ranging and thought-provoking. Lasting just under two hours and transcribed by Stephen Dunhill, it defied my attempts to shape it into a formal article. I finally concluded that to do so would have deprived it of the natural rhythm - literally, the 'to-ing and fro-ing' - which constitute the life-blood of the most memorable conversations.

Further highlights of this issue include a book review by Fr Charlie Annis of *A Matter of the Heart: a Monk's Journal* by Brother Paul Quenon OCSO as well as a discrete selection of finely distilled poetry by Bonnie Thurston and Andy Humphreys.

While these are serious times calling for serious contemplation, they are not immune to the hope that Eastertide heralds. In his journal entry for Easter on the 28h March 1948, Merton wrote,

[...] in my heart the deepest peace, Christ's clarity, lucid and quiet and ever-present as eternity. On these big feasts you come out on top of a plateau in the spiritual life to get a new view of everything. Especially Easter. Easter is like what it will be entering eternity when you suddenly, peacefully, clearly recognise all your mistakes as well as all you did well: everything falls into place.

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A blessed Easter!

Susanne Jennings