

Editorial

In the final chapter, 'The Christian Choice', of *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, Thomas Merton, writing with a sense of urgency, stated:

We have to recognise the implications of voting for extremist politicians who promote policies of hate. ... It is no longer reasonable or right to leave off decisions to a largely anonymous power elite that is driving us all, in our passivity, towards ruin. We have to make ourselves heard. ... We still have time to do something about it, but the time is rapidly running out.

Though Merton was writing at another time of heightened geo-political tension, his sounding of the alarm is even more applicable to the present day given technology's runaway advancement. As I write, major wars are raging across the Middle East and Ukraine with bombs raining down and, with them, the destruction of whole communities and vital infrastructure. The most recent of these was intended to rout out the leaders and terrorist cells of Hamas and Hezbollah and liberate an Iranian population at the mercy of the ruling Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Within days, a new threat to increase pressure to reopen the Strait of Hormuz was issued through the ratcheting up of invective which warned of an unparalleled and targeted bombing campaign. If implemented, defiance of International Law and threatened genocide would have decimated the very people the war was purported to save.

Alongside these developments, Christianity itself has been reconfigured by a self-styled 'Secretary of War' as a neo-Crusader movement which promises to show no mercy to oppressors. This is an example of 'strongmen' politics for which power and refusal to see what the French term *les petites histoires* have no time for considering what individual men, women, children and their animals suffer through the terror of continuous bombardment and physical displacement. Such brash misunderstanding of the essence of Christ's example as a radical Jewish rabbi who preached the futility of violence and the espousal of a radical 'way' in which to make peace is an inversion of all that underlies the events of Easter.

Not only was Merton horrified by the violence of war and racism, but he became increasingly aware of, and alarmed by, the violence inflicted on the natural world. In this issue Clare Bryden, an environmentalist and poet who has strong links with the religious community at Tymawr, examines Rachel Carson's effect on Thomas Merton through Carson's ground-breaking book *Silent Spring*. The destruction of whole swathes of the bird population because of the irresponsible use of pesticides shocked Merton.

Also in these pages of the Journal, Paul Quenon OCSO, a monk of Gethsemani dating back to Merton's time, provides us with a rare and wonderfully told account of Holy Week and Easter at the abbey both before and after Vatican II.

Elsewhere, Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* – a work that (sadly) doesn't date – is referenced in a thought-provoking paper given that was given by Paul Pearson at last year's meeting of the TMSGBI at The Community of the Resurrection, an Anglican religious community based at Mirfield in North Yorkshire. The work is also present in Bonnie Thurston's article which makes a persuasive case for valuing the voices of those who choose to live on the edges of society as hermits. She does so quite presciently by citing Merton's example and by speaking out of her own lived experience.

Gemma Simmonds CJ, an intelligent and original voice familiar to many, brings fresh insight to Holy Saturday – a day in the Triduum which is all too often overlooked as the flurry of preparations for Easter Sunday gather pace – by injecting an Ignatian perspective to Merton's working out of the true versus the false self.

In 'Encounters with Tea', Peter Cavaciuti situates Merton's meeting with DT Suzuki and his secretary in 1960s New York within a detailed and fascinating exploration of the history, methodology and significance of the Zen Buddhist tea ceremony itself (called the 'Way of Tea' or *Koshosai Chado*) which makes for fascinating reading.

J S Porter takes an incisive look at 'three things' pertaining to Merton among which are theologies of dependence and encounter. As a stark warning to remember that our interdependence is as vital as breathing, he quotes from WH Auden's poem, 'September 1, 1939': 'We must love one another or die.'

As a counter note to the pervasive angst and unrest that can obscure the meaning and hope that lie at the heart of the promise of Easter, Merton's entry in his journal on 18th April 1965 may bear revisiting:

Peace and beauty of Easter morning: sunrise, deep green grass, soft winds, the woods turning green on the hills across the valley ... I got up and said the old office of Lauds, and there was a wood thrush singing four-tone mysteries in the deep ringing pine wood (the 'unconscious wood') behind the hermitage. The 'unconscious wood' has a long moment of perfect clarity at dawn, and from being dark and confused, lit from the east, it is all clarity, all distinct, seen to be a place of silence and peace with its own order within the disorder.

May it be so for each and every one of us.

Blessed Eastertide!

Susanne Jennings