

Editorial

Fifty years ago, on August 30, 1967, Ad Reinhardt, the artist and friend of Merton from their days at Columbia University, died. Merton records this event in his journal 11 days later on September 10. The whole entry is full of despondency, not only about Reinhardt's death, but also for Ed Rice and the collapse of the magazine *Jubilee*, the problems of the monastery and its future, 'if any', deep unease about the great violence in the country, and all his own misguided questions. For Merton, all the patterns were full of 'clash and shock'. The only consolation he seems to derive is from reading the Bible, in particular the book of Isaiah.

Within a few weeks Merton seems to have reached some form of partial resolution, seeing his task as simply to live in the silence of the woods and meditate. He came to see that all his unease and powerlessness with the authorities, whether monastic or national, could never be resolved. As he would write in his circular letter of Midsummer 1968, 'And I realize more and more that in my own vocation what matters is not comment, not statements of opinion, not judgments, but prayer.'

For most of the decade he had rolled up his sleeves and engaged with these wider problems using all the means at his disposal: prayer, dialogue, and using the power of the written word to explain, to expose and make his readers reflect on their own actions.

In his essay Patrick O'Connell shows how Merton, with crystal-clear language in his poems 'A Picture of Yee Ling' and 'Paper Cranes', uses the power of irony to show us how the language used by the media can lull us into assuaging our guilt as 'bystanders' to momentous events seemingly beyond our control; and how Merton can guide us today into our response to media manipulation. James Cronin examines how Merton responded to the 1961 Shelter Scare, his nuanced words at odds with the official Catholic line. Merton's arguments are just as pertinent today as, with the menacing spectres of North Korea, Russia and Iran looming large, the US government is starting to dust down its nuclear shelters, and wealthy individuals are again building their own bunkers.

For Merton, hearts would never be changed by grand speeches or statements, but through patient dialogue, such as that detailed by Bonnie

Thurston in her article about Merton's correspondence with the English academic Etta Gullick. And in a wider sense, Gary Hall in his article, 'All Bystanders Now?', examines through the work of the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman how Merton engages us in a continuing conversation, helping to form with us an ongoing 'community of committed speech'. The brief article by Iris White, 'Seeking a Closer Walk with God', testifies to just how one individual was drawn into this community. And inspired by Merton, Derek Reeve joins in this conversation with 'A Few Thoughts for Advent'.

Continuing this dialogue through the printed word, we carry reviews of four books. Monica Weis, in her book 'Thomas Merton and the Celts', shows how the life, writings and witness of the Celtic monks reached out across the centuries to inspire Merton; In 'Much Ado about Something', Larry Culliford reflects on 'Merton's philosophy of human flourishing for the common good', giving us a vision of spiritual maturity; Mario Aguilar, in 'The Way of the Hermit', explores our developing idea of the hermit, these witnesses to God's presence, calling on the example of hermits, including Merton, from several faith traditions; and George and Elizabeth Ryan offer us a delightful illustrated book for children, 'The ABCs of Thomas Merton', reviewed here by the Journal's youngest ever contributor, 10-year old Luciana Welsh. Also included are 3 poems by Bonnie Thurston, and a poem by Denise Levertov, as we remember this friend of Merton 20 years after her death.

Perhaps, despite his despondency, Merton was hearing Isaiah's call, 'Wait on the Lord'; a call he also heard increasingly in his study of Eastern societies and religions. As he said in his talk in Calcutta: 'I am convinced that what one might call typically "Asian" conditions of nonhurry and of patient waiting must prevail over the Western passion for immediate visible results.' And words from Merton's prayer for peace, read in the American Congress in 1962, speak to us so clearly today: 'Teach us to be long-suffering in anguish and insecurity. Teach us to wait and trust. Grant light, grant strength and patience to all who work for peace, to this Congress, our President, our military forces, and our adversaries.'

We, too, this Christmastide will hear again the words of Isaiah – may they become the prayer of our heart.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Stephen Dunhill