

THE THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

The Twelfth General Meeting and Conference
6-8 April 2018 at Oakham, Rutland, UK.

The theme of the conference is:

Facing the Life-and-Death Issues.

During 1961 Merton faced increasing opposition from the Trappist censors to his outspoken writings on the Cold War. It brought into sharp focus Merton's inner conflict between his monastic vow of obedience and his own conscience. In a letter to Dorothy Day of August 1961 he wrote that:

I don't feel that I can in conscience, at a time like this, go on writing about things like meditation, though that has its point. I cannot just bury my head in a lot of rather tiny and secondary monastic studies either. I think I have to face the big issues, the life-and-death issues.

And face them he did throughout the 1960s, most importantly the issues of war and of race, until his death in Bangkok.

Indeed, on the day he died, 10th December 1968, in his final lecture 'Marxism and Monastic Perspectives', he saw the monk as not only one seeking transformation of consciousness, but also, leading on from such a liberation, as 'essentially someone who takes up a critical attitude towards the world and its structures'. As he saw it, one could no longer rely on structures as they may be destroyed at any moment by a political power or force. For us, fifty years later, Merton's concerns seem ever more prescient.

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Stephen Dunhill – Chairman TMSGBI