

Protestants to reform their church by reconnecting themselves not merely to the old monasticism but to the ever-renewing monastic tradition. He writes that monastic tradition, “which is always old, is at the same time ever new because it is always reviving – born again in each new generation, to be lived and applied in a new and particular way.”<sup>2</sup> In addition, I have contended in an unpublished paper that Merton read the *Rule of Saint Benedict* from the perspective of discipleship, and his understanding of the monastic life as a life of discipleship has valuable implications for a Korean Protestant Church in which discipleship is strongly recommended to her members as one of core ideals of the Christian life.

Although few Korean Protestants wish to live in a monastic community, nowadays an increasing number of them are attracted to the spiritual life or the contemplative life which is well-developed and passed down through the monastic tradition. However, it is true that they have a few resources from which they can learn about the contemplative life. Thomas Merton, who can serve as an experienced guide in such a pursuit, is well-known among Korean Catholics, but when it comes to Korean Protestants, he is far less known. Only one primary work and three secondary works have been published by Protestant publishers until now. Therefore, my wish for his one hundredth birthday is that more Korean Protestants find Thomas Merton as their spiritual friend and reliable guide in reconnecting themselves to the ever-renewing monastic tradition.

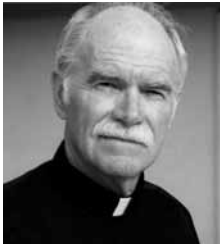
1. Thomas Merton, *The Silent Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957) 61.
2. Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955) 151.

## Merton as Mirror

By **J. T. Ledbetter**

I’m not going to quote meaningful or playful or insightful passages in this essay: just Merton as Mirror. I’ve taught classes in and about Thomas Merton for thirty years and I used to ask the students what appealed to them about Merton. I don’t ask anymore. I know their answers. Here they are:

This guy is me all over. I’ve struggled to find myself as part of something bigger and never made it. Now I see Merton struggling with his life and his identity within the church and he still laughs! Angst and laughter! I see myself laughing and crying; he’s my mirror; now maybe I can be a mirror for other students.



**J. T. Ledbetter**

A Monk? I don’t think so!

No sex? No beer? No Dodger games? Why would I want to give

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up all that, and more I won't talk about, to live in a big old prison-like place in Kentucky where mosquitoes bite and it's cold in the winter? Why would I want to do that? Do you think I would? Sometimes I wonder . . .

This man was all man and all human. I've been a Catholic forever (19 years) and always thought of priests as living on another planet where they eat, sleep and pray in church. Never appealed to me. Merton looks out at me with such a puzzling and searching look that I see myself in his sandals or boots or whatever and I wander through his woods on his "knobs," listening to the rain on his hermitage, and I think this is peace – he found it even though he continued to suffer and want and need – just like I do even in the quiet of the sanctuary where I go to find it. He found it within his suffering and searching. That's something I want.

"I've come to say good-by." Those words were spoken by a student of mine who appeared at my office door, suitcase in hand. It seems she decided to follow her heart that heard the call Merton heard when he raced down to Corpus Christi Church in Manhattan. She was going to an order in St. Louis to serve the poor and pray. Her family was stunned! The family had gathered for a big dinner to try to talk her out of throwing her life away. "Why?" was their question as she kissed them all, hugged the little ones and the dog and walked to the door. As she turned the knob, her mother reached her arms out to her and said, "What are you going to do?" My student turned and said, "I'm not going to the convent to do; I'm going there to be." As she walked down the hall I looked out my window at Kingsman Park and thought of praying for her, but all I could do was watch the students crossing the park, stopping at the little bridge over the stream, disappearing into the autumn leaves to dorms or class. Her life is certainly going to be different now, I thought. But she will *be* in the truest and fullest sense. Merton's decision was her decision. Not a perfect mirror-match, but what is?

There's something in his eyes that calls to me. It's kind of like what you said about Meister Whatshisname saying, "the eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me." Something like that. I see me in Merton's eyes, clearer, closer. It's me all right. Now I have to see me in other eyes. Something he said about the "other." I forgot how he said it but I think I get it.

So he had beer and hamburgers in little Kentucky joints. Right on, Tom! I can see me there just fine.

There's so much in his eyes, all that he gave up, or found again, like Margie or whatever her name was . . . too much to give up . . . if I had the strength to do it I might, but . . . still, those eyes. There's some of me in there, far back, intense yet happy, kind of the happy you feel after running or working out or, I was going to say making love but I won't say that . . .

I'm up to my gunnels in Merton and all those books. Good grief, how did he do so much and still write so much and pray and all that. He must have been several people with several life-times. I only have one. Schweitzer had one, Mother Teresa had only one. Gandalf tells Frodo that too, doesn't he? What to do with the one we have is the question. Funny, I can see myself in Merton doing the things he did. Why is that? I'm looking into those deep-well eyes of his and I see myself opening and opening and opening.

Too late. I'm Lutheran. He bashed us Lutherans pretty good. Why is that? But I didn't mind it. Why is THAT?

The semester is over and I'm not selling or returning any of my Merton books. The picture you gave me of him is on my wall and I'm taking it with me when I graduate next week, plus the prayer card and all the good talk we had about him. I can't take it all in yet, but he's the only philosopher or theologian I can read and stay awake, because I'm reading about me. I'll bet he didn't know what a mirror he was going to be and how many people look into him and find something and someone for the very first time. And like what they see. Thanks for showing him to me.

If God gives me direction and strength to travel the road, maybe someday somebody will see a picture of me and think, "I can see a little of myself in those eyes." Who knows? Maybe.

## Slow, Deepen, Shine: Why Merton Still Matters

By Susan McCaslin

Recently, while reading up on the overwhelming scientific evidence for global warming and corporate capitalism's vested interest in denying or ignoring it, I considered how the life and writings of Thomas Merton address what I see as one of the central issues of our times. Merton's insistence on contemplation as the ground of effective action suggests that contemplative deepening, if pursued not only individually, but collectively, holds an essential antidote to our current environmental crises. What in earlier ages was an individual call to the contemplative life, an optional deepening for a few, has now become a collective and global imperative. The most singular and consistent



Susan McCaslin

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**Susan McCaslin** is the author of thirteen volumes of poetry, including *The Disarmed Heart* (The St. Thomas Poetry Series, 2014), a volume of peace poems. Her previous volume, *Demeter Goes Skydiving*, was short-listed for the BC Book Prize and was the first-place winner of the Alberta Book Publishing Award in 2012. She is a longtime Thomas Merton scholar who has written on Merton and sophianic traditions as well as Merton as mystical poet. She resides in Fort Langley, British Columbia.