



**2 September 2020**  
**Midweek Encouragement**

Recently, I have been gaining much insight from the writings of the Trappist Monk, Thomas Merton, who wrote about the concept of true selves and false selves. I personally found this insight helpful and would like to share it with you as an encouragement for your week.

In his book, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton wrote, "Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self." He identifies the false self as the person that we wish to display to the world, and the person we want the whole world to revolve around. He expounds further, saying:

*"Thus I use up my life in the desire for pleasures and the thirst for experiences, for power, honour, knowledge and love, to clothe this false self and construct its nothingness into something objectively real. And I wind experiences around myself and cover myself with pleasures and glory like bandages in order to make myself perceptible to myself and to the world, as if I were an invisible body that could only become visible when something visible covered its surface."*

I find that what Thomas Merton shared about us being clothed with bandages of the false-self arresting and it struck a deep chord within me. He says that we all have a false self that we long to present to the world around us. For some, it is the person interested in climbing the corporate ladder, or in always being hip and clever, or to be seen as successful, or in always being in a word "cool". However, that person is nothing more than a mask we wear and often, it is something we wear subconsciously. It is not really who we truly are; it is a self we try to project in order to gain love and acceptance in some way.

This disguise we wear is not what God desires for us. It is made explicit through the words of the Apostle Paul, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your **old self**, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the **new self**, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:22-24)

When we reflect on this passage together with Merton's idea of the true and false selves, we can see that the old self is the false self, and the new self is the true self. It then becomes clear that the Christian journey is about deconstructing the false self and discovering the true self. Merton describes this journey as "discovering myself in discovering God. If I find Him I will find myself, and if I find my true self I will find Him."

In other words, God desires for us to be the persons we were created to be, to be simply and purely ourselves, and in this state to love God and to let ourselves be loved by God. It can be described a double journey: finding God means allowing ourselves to be found by God. And finding our true selves means allowing God to find and reveal our true selves to us.

Some of you might be thinking this sounds rather abstract, what does this mean on a practical level? How are we to put this into action? Simply put, as we attempt to move away from those parts of ourselves that prevent us from being closer to God: selfishness, pride, fear, and so on. And as we try as best we can to move toward those part of ourselves that draw us nearer to God, we will gradually find ourselves growing more loving and more generous. In that process, our true selves will be gradually revealed: the self that is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

My encouragement to you this week is to start the process of moving away from the things that draw you away from God and to move toward those parts that draw you nearer. Spend some time reflecting on the things you struggle with and make a commitment to more away from those things. As we move closer to becoming our true selves, the selves we are meant to be, the selves that God created, the more loving parts of us will be naturally magnified, and the more sinful parts will be naturally diminished and eventually, be put off.

Let us seek to be truer than who we were yesterday, and to let God reveal our true selves for His glory!

**Rev Timothy Yong**