

Bonnie Thurston

To R. S. Thomas' God

Eternal silence to which
I address my plea
and beg to see
in your mirror darkly,
my own deepest desire:

Do not take form
in human language,
the slipperiness
we use to hide
from ourselves,
the building material
for the edifice we erect
to keep you at bay,
tame your wildness,
explain you away.

On infrequent,
unexpected occasions
pierce us with
the unsettling comfort
of your perceived,
pervasive presence,
enough to feed
but not to satiate
your greatest gift,
the hunger for you

Hidden mercy,
the heart center
of all our longing,
remain the mystery
out beyond the stars in
a cornerless universe,

otherwise we shall
remake you in our
own, narrow image
and be lost.

Alternatives

Without Cerberus
or the river Styx,
monastic communities are,
worlds within a world,
between the worlds,
kingdoms surrounded
by moats of old orchards,
or modern, crumbling cities.
Their essential core is
an untenanted cloister,
the central mystery
pulsing living water,
the hidden depths
radiating ethereal light.
Enclosure keeps
knowledge of other,
ancient, orderly ways.
Passed from quavering voice
to listening soul, they
are the old, rusty key
that opens the heart's
barred portcullis.

A Garden in the Place

*"Now there was a garden in the place
where he was crucified..." John 19: 41*

In point of fact
it was not "a green
hill far away," but
a rocky outcropping
outside the city walls,
a place from which
its terrible trees
could be easily seen.
Nobody sows seed
in such a place.
Nobody but God.
One doesn't always
fall to earth and die.
God, the gardener
can make the cross
a trellis which bears
the sweetest fruit.

Bonnie Thurston resigned a Chair and Professorship to live quietly in her home state of West Virginia, USA. She is author or editor of 24 theological and 8 books of poetry, most recently *Not Sonnets: Observations from an Ordinary Life* (Cinnamon Press, 2022) and *From Darkness to Eastering* (Wild Goose, 2017). She is particularly interested in Merton's poetry and his inter-religious thought. She was a founding member of the ITMS, and served as its third president. She has written many articles on Merton and given retreats and lectured on Merton widely in the U.S., Canada, the UK and Europe. She has edited several books of Merton's writings, and has written *Shaped by the End You Live For: Thomas Merton's Monastic Spirituality* (2020). Her work on Merton has been translated into Dutch, German, Italian, and Spanish.