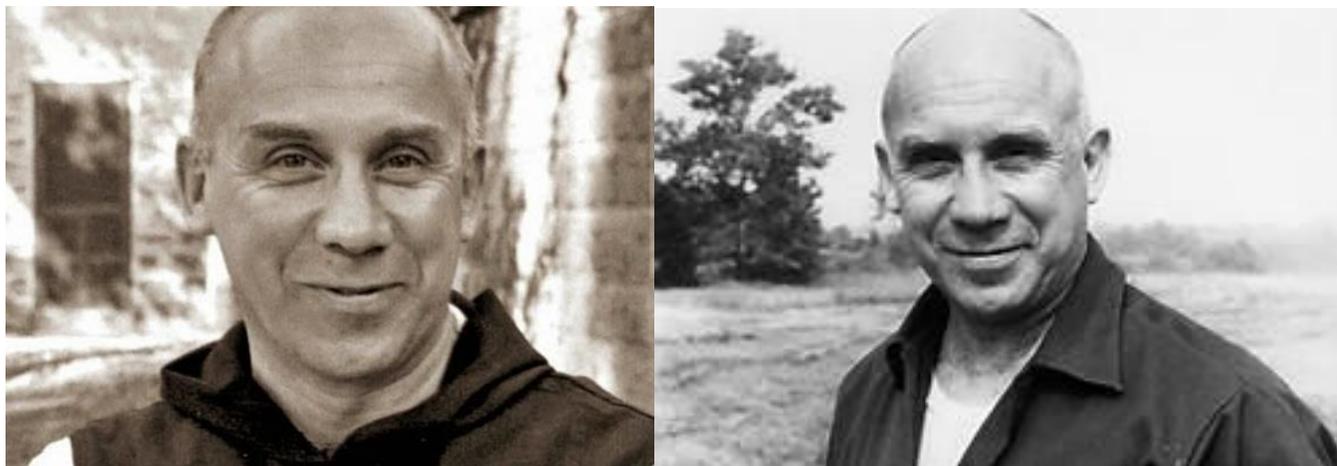


Making the Insights of Thomas Merton Accessible – Contemplation and the True Self



Agenda

7:00	Opening Silence and Prayer, Introductions and Objectives
7:15	Conference 1: Who Was Thomas Merton – His Life and His Spirituality
7:45	Conference 2a: Contemplation and the True Self – Overview, Contemplative Theology and the false self
8:00	Break / Questions
8:10	Conference 2b: Contemplation and the True Self – Contemplation as the path to the True Self, Characteristics
8:25	Conference 3: Contemplation in Life and Action
8:50	Summary, What Challenged You? and Closing Prayer

Opening Prayer:

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.” Amen! – Thoughts in Solitude

Through the insistence and encouragement of his Abbots, he eventually made writing an integral part of his monastic vocation which, in 1949, he describes in the Sign of Jonas:

To be as good a monk as I can be, and to remain myself, and to write about it: to put myself down on paper, in such a situation, **with the most complete simplicity and integrity, masking nothing, confusing no issue: this is very hard because I am all mixed up in illusions and attachments. These, too, will have to be put down.** But without exaggeration, repetition, useless emphasis. **To be frank without being boring: it is a kind of crucifixion. Not a very dramatic or painful one. But it requires much honesty that is beyond my nature. It must come somehow from the Holy Spirit.**

A complete and holy transparency; living, praying, and writing in the light of the Holy Spirit, losing myself entirely by becoming public property just as Jesus is public property in the Mass. Perhaps this is an important aspect of my priesthood—my living of my Mass: to become as plain as a Host in the hands of everybody. Perhaps it is this, after all, that is to be my way to solitude. One of the strangest ways so far devised, but it is the way of the Word of God. – The Sign of Jonas

This talk should challenge you in one or more of the following ways:

- I don't understand it.
- I understand it but I don't buy it
- I buy it but I don't see how I can do it.
- I'm doing it but it's hard.

Conference 1: Who Was Thomas Merton – His Life and His Spirituality

Who was Thomas Merton – Outline of a life's journey

Key Time Periods in Merton's life:

1. Descent to Hell, through Purgatory and into Heaven (1915 – 1949) -- 34 years
2. From Darkness to Light (1949 – 1958) – 9 years
3. Reengaging the World (1958 – 1968) – 10 years
4. We are all One – Interreligious Dialogue and Writings (1959 – 1968) – 9 years

Highlights:

- Born in France during World War 1 on January 31 1915, parents were Artists (mother Ruth Jenkins was an American Quaker and father Owen Merton was an Anglican from New Zealand.)
- Loses his family throughout his early years
 - Mother dies from cancer when he was 6 (1921)
 - Father dies from brain tumor when he was 16 (1931)
 - Maternal Grandfather dies in 1936 and Maternal Grandmother dies in 1937
 - Only Brother dies in World War II in 1943
 - His Friends, Trappist Community, Catholic Faith and the World become his family.
- Lived in various places; little real stability
- Higher Education (enters college in 1933)
- Finds Catholicism (starting in 1937)
 - He started attending Church and then formally asked to become a Catholic at Corpus Christi church where he was baptized on November 16, 1938.
 - Felt a strong attraction to the Priesthood; applied but failed to be accepted by the Franciscans in 1940.

- In September 1940, Merton began to teach English at St. Bonaventure College in Olean NY and lead a personally devout life.
- In April 1941 went to Our Lady of Gethsemani Monastery for a Holy Week Retreat. In the summer of 1941, spent 2 weeks volunteering at Catherine de Hueck's Friendship House in Harlem which had a profound impact on him. Difficult deciding among the two, but 'got a sign' to return to Gethsemani.
- He returned on December 10, 1941 and waited to be accepted into the Trappists Seven Storey Mountain (December 10, 1941) pg 410:
So Brother Matthew locked the gate behind me and I was enclosed in the four walls of my new freedom...
- Path to Priesthood (a pinnacle experience)
 - Obtains the habit of a choir-monk novice and given name of Mary Louis – February 21, 1941
 - Takes Simple vows – March 19, 1944
 - Pronounces Solemn vows – March 19, 1947
 - Ordained a priest on May 26, 1949 – a pinnacle experience
 Ordination Sign of Jonas – part 4 To the Altar of God pg 181:
My priestly ordination was, I felt, the one great secret for which I had been born.
- Spiritual Struggles lead to developing a Mature, Individualized and Personal Catholic Spirituality.
 - Develops Faith through trials of uncertainty and questions
 Sign of Jonas – part 5 (pg 230):
Ordination is only the beginning of a journey, not its end. The beginning was easy and pleasant. But when summer was over the serious business of being a priest began... I found myself face to face with a mystery that was beginning to manifest itself in the depths of my soul and to move me with terror...
- Applied for U.S Citizenship (1/5/1949)
 - Became U.S. Citizen in 1951
- Assigned responsibility for others – initially make his struggles deeper
 - Master of Scholastics (Students for the Priesthood): 1951 - 1955
 - Master of Novices: 1955 – 1965
 Sign of Jonas – Epilogue Fire Watch July 4, 1952 pg 354
On all sides I am confronted by questions that I cannot answer, because the time for answering them has not yet come. Between the silence of God and the silence of my own soul, stand the silence of the souls entrusted to me. Immersed in these three silences, I realize that the questions I ask myself about them are perhaps no more than a surmise. And perhaps the most urgent and practical renunciation is the renunciation of all questions.
- Eventually this resolves into a deeper, personal Spirituality:
 No Man is an Island – Author's Note and Prologue. (1955)
The meditations in this book are intended to be at the same time traditional and modern and my own. I do not intend to divorce myself at any point from Catholic tradition. But neither do I intend to accept points of that tradition blindly and without understanding, and without making them really

my own. For it seems to me that the first responsibility of a man of faith is to make his faith really part of his own life, not by rationalizing it but by living it...

- Turns from a World denying mystic to one that deeply embraces the world.
 - Experiences mystical “epiphany” at the corner of 4th and Walnut. (1958)
Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander - Fourth and Walnut experience: pp 153 – 154
In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness...

 - Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God’s eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed...I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other. But this cannot be seen, only believed and “understood” by a peculiar gift.**

 - Focused on Non-violence methods
 - Letters to and visits from countless activists
 - Writing about Social Justice, Racism, Civil Rights, Peace, War, Violence, and Nuclear Weapons
 - Some identified Merton as a radical, reckless and might be misleading some poor souls. Some of his public wanted him to “remain the writer of the Seven Storey Mountain.”

- Requests for a more solitary life were granted:
 - Given use of wooden toolshed, which he named St. Anne’s, as a place of solitude – 1953
 - Moved into Hermitage – August 1965

- Brief but intense romantic interlude with Marjorie, a 19-year old nurse in Louisville (1966)

- Active Correspondence, Outreach and Writing on Non-Christian faiths – in conjunction with Vatican Council II
 - Began his reading these in the late 1950’s
 - Judaism, Islam (Sufism), Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism
 - Incorporated his growing knowledge in lessons with Novices
 - Deep interest in monastic renewal which spurred his interest in Buddhism

- Visits with Famous Buddhists
 - Visit D.T. Suzuki – Zen Scholar at Columbia (1964)
 - Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn visits monastery and makes enormous impression on Merton (1966)
Faith and Violence Pg 106 – **Nhat Hanh is My Brother... He is more my brother than many who are nearer to me by race and nationality, because he and I see things exactly the same way.**

...I have far more in common with Naht Hahn than I have with many Americans, and I do not hesitate to say it. It is vitally important that such bonds be admitted. They are the bonds of a new solidarity and a new brotherhood

- Final Pilgrimage to the Far East to attend first Asian East-West Intermonastic Conference in Bangkok
 - Leaves Abbey on 9/10/1968
 - Visits India, Sri-Lanka (Ceylon) and Thailand
 - Visits Dalai Lama

Dalai Lama writes of Merton: I could see he was a truly humble and deeply spiritual man. This was the first time that I had been struck by such a feeling of spirituality in anyone who professed Christianity... It was Merton who introduced me to the real meaning of the word "Christian."

- Addresses Calcutta Spiritual Summit Conference on 10/23/1968
- Mystical Experience at Polonnaruwa – December 4, 1968

Asian Journal - pg 233:

Looking at these figures I was suddenly, almost forcibly, jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things, and an inner clearness, clarity, as if exploding from the rocks themselves, became evident and obvious...

The thing about all this is that there is no puzzle, no problem, and really no "mystery." All problems are resolved and everything is clear, simply because what matters is clear. The rock, all matter, all life, is charged with dharmakaya ... everything is emptiness and everything is compassion. I don't know when in my life I have ever had such a sense of beauty and spiritual validity running together in one aesthetic illumination... I mean, I know and have seen what I was obscurely looking for. I don't know what else remains but I have now seen and have pierced through the surface and have got beyond the shadow and the disguise.

- Addresses Intermonastic Conference and dies in Bangkok on 12/10/1968

Asian Journal, November Circular Letter to Friends – November 9, 1968 pg 324

In summary, I can say so far my contacts with Asian monks have been very fruitful and rewarding. We seem to understand one another very well indeed.... They are all specialists in meditation and contemplation. This is what appeals to me most. It is invaluable to have direct contact with people who have really put in a lifetime of hard work in training their minds and liberating themselves from passion and illusion... they are men of unusual quality and depth, very warm and wonderful people. Talking with them is a real pleasure... I hope you will pray from me and for all those I will be meeting. I am sure the blessing of God will be upon these meetings, and I hope I can bring back to my monastery something of the Asian wisdom with which I am fortunate to be in contact – but it is something very hard to put into words. I wish you all the peace and joy in the Lord and an increase of faith: for in my contacts with these new friends I also feel consolation in my own faith in Christ and His indwelling presence. I hope and believe He may be present in the hearts of all of us. With my very best regards always, cordially yours in the Lord Jesus and in His Spirit.

[Thomas Merton's Spirituality](#)

The foundations of Thomas Merton's Spirituality:

Whatever I may have written, I think all can be reduced in the end to this one truth, that God calls human persons to union with Himself and with one another in Christ... – “Concerning the Collection in the Bellarmine College Library – A statement, November 10, 1963.”

The elements of Merton’s Spirituality:

- 1. Trappist Foundations – Vows and constant rhythm of Prayer during each day**
- 2. Personal, Living, Questioning Faith that is Progressively aligned with the Catholic Tradition**
- 3. Incarnational at its core – fully human!**

(I) Context: Foundations of the Trappist Life

Sign of Jonas – Prologue– **The Cistercian Vows** pg 9:

The Cistercian monks made five vows, at the time of their profession: poverty, chastity, obedience, stability, and conversion of manners. The whole meaning of the monastic vocation is summed up in these vows, which are given to the monk as a means of consecrating his life to God. They deliver him from the uncertainties and cares and illusions that beset the man of the world. They imply struggle and difficulty. They demand complete self-renunciation. They lead to a life perfectly hidden in Christ. They embrace the whole life of man and all his desires with a singular completeness. One of the most significant of these vows is the vow of stability which binds a monk to one monastic community. Unless the Superiors decide to send him to a foundation, the monk lives and dies in the monastery of this profession. It takes a special dispensation from Rome for a monk to move to another monastery... By making a vow of stability the monk renounces the vain hope of wandering off to find a “perfect monastery.” This implies a deep act of faith... Stability becomes difficult for a man whose monastic ideal contains some note, some element of the extraordinary. **All monasteries are more or less ordinary. The monastic life is by its very nature “ordinary.”... It sets us free to pray all day, and to live alone with God.** But for me, the vow of stability has been the belly of the whale. I have always felt a great attraction to the life of perfect solitude. It is an attraction I shall probably never entirely lose....

The Rhythm of Merton’s Day – his original Hermitage schedule:

- 2:15 am rise, Lauds followed by Meditation
- 5:00 am breakfast followed by Lectio Divina
- 7:30 am Prime and Rosary
- 8:00 am Manual work, chores, etc
- 9:30 am Terce, Sext, None then to monastery for private Mass followed by Thanksgiving and part of the Psalter, Dinner at infirmary refectory then return to Hermitage; siesta or light reading.
- 1:00 pm Vespers
- 2:15 pm writing, work or walk
- 4:15 pm Vigils
- 5:00 pm Supper followed by Compline
- 6:00 pm New Testament, meditation, Examen
- 7:00 pm Retire

Contemplative Prayer

Contemplative Prayer – pp 29 – 30:

Monastic Prayer, especially meditation and contemplative prayer, is not so much a way to find God as a way of resting in him whom we have found, who loves us, who is near to us, who comes to us to draw us to himself... is a prayer of silence, simplicity, contemplative and meditative unity, a deep personal integration in an attentive, watchful listening of “the heart.” The response such prayer calls forth is not usually one of jubilation or audible witness: it is a wordless and total surrender of the heart in silence.... **(prayer) involves the whole man and proceed from the “center” of man’s being, his “heart” renewed in the Holy Spirit, totally submissive to the grace of Christ. Monastic prayer begins... with a “return to the heart,” finding ones deepest center, awakening the profound depths of our being in the presence of God who is the source of being and our life.**

(II) A Personal, Living, Questioning and Progressive Faith aligned with Tradition (Spirituality)

We are always Seekers! Our questions, more than our answers, define us and our journey: “What a man truly is can be discovered only through his self-awareness in a living and actual world... I do not have clear answers to current questions. I do have questions, and, as a matter of fact, **I think a man is known better by his questions than by his answers. To make know one’s questions is, no doubt, to come out in the open oneself.**” - Preface to Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, 1966

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, pg 316:

For my own part I consider myself neither conservative nor an extreme progressive. I would like to think I am what Pope John (XXIII) was – a progressive with deep respect and love for tradition – in other words a progressive who wants to preserve a very clear and marked *continuity* with the past and not make silly and idealistic compromises with the present – yet to be completely open to the modern world while retaining the clearly defined, traditionally Catholic position. The extreme progressives seem to me... to be hasty, irresponsible, in many ways, quite frivolous in their exaggerated and confused enthusiasms. They also seem to me at times to be fanatically incoherent, but I do not sense in them the chilling malice and meanness which comes through in some of the utterances of extreme conservatives... The extreme conservatives seem to me to be people who feel themselves so menaced that they will go to any length in order to defend their own fanatical concept of the Church. This concept seems to me to be not only static and inert, but in complete continuity with what is most questionable and indeed scandalous in the history of the Church: Inquisition, persecution, intolerance, Papal power, clerical influence, alliance with worldly power, love of wealth and pomp, etc.

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, pg 323 – 324:

I think that, like most other converts, I faced the problem of the “religiousness” and came to terms with it. **God was not for me a working hypothesis, to fill in gaps left open by a scientific world view. Nor was He a God enthroned somewhere in outer space. Nor did I ever feel any particular “need” for superficial religious routines merely to keep myself happy. I would even say that, like most modern men, I have not been much moved by the concept of “getting into heaven” after muddling through this present life. On the contrary, my conversion to Catholicism began with the realization of the presence of God in this present life, in the world and in myself, and that my task as a Christian is to live in full and vital awareness of this ground of my being and of the world’s being.** Acts and forms of worship help one to do this, and the Church, with her liturgy and sacraments, gives us the essential means of grace. Yet God can work without these means if He so wills. **When I entered the Church I came seeking God, the living God, and not just “the consolations of religion.”**

Faith and Violence, Apologies to an Unbeliever (pp 205 – 214):

My own peculiar task in my Church and in my world has been that of the solitary explorer who, instead of jumping on all the latest bandwagons at once, is bound **to search the existential depths of faith in its silences, its ambiguities, and in those certainties, which lie deeper than the bottom of anxiety. In these depths there are no easy answers, no pat solutions to anything. It is a kind of submarine life in which faith sometimes mysteriously takes on the aspect of doubt when, in fact, one has to doubt and reject conventional and superstitious surrogates that have taken the place of faith. On this level, the division between Believer and Unbeliever ceases to be so crystal clear. It is not that some are all right and others are all wrong: all are bound to seek in honest perplexity. Everybody is an Unbeliever more or less! Only when this fact is fully experienced, accepted and lived with, does one become fit to hear the simple message of the Gospel – or of any other religious teaching.** The religious problem of the twentieth century is not understandable if we regard it only as a problem of Unbelievers and of atheists. It is also and perhaps chiefly a problem of Believers. The faith that has grown cold is not only the faith that the Unbeliever has lost but the faith that the Believer has kept. This faith has too often become rigid, or complex, sentimental, foolish, or impertinent. It has lost itself in imaginings and unrealities, dispersed itself in pontifical and organizational routines, or evaporated in activism and loose talk. The most hopeful sign of religious renewal is that authentic sincerity and openness with which some Believers are beginning to recognize this. At the very moment when it would seem that they had to gather for a fanatical last-ditch stand, these Believers are dropping their defensiveness, their defiance and their mistrust. **They are realizing that a faith that is afraid of other people is not faith at all. A faith that supports itself by condemning others is itself condemned by the Gospel.**

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, pp 122 – 124:

“The time is fully come, and the Reign of God is at hand: repent and believe in the good news.” – Mark 1:15
The greatest temptation that assails Christians is that in effect, for most of us, the Gospel has ceased to be news. And if it is not news it is not Gospel: for the Gospel is the proclamation of something absolutely new, everlastingly new, not a message that was once new but is now two thousand years old. And yet for many of us the Gospel is precisely the announcement of something that is not new: The truths of the Gospel are old, deep-rooted, firmly established, unchanging and in some sense a refuge against all that is disturbing because it is new... The message of the Gospel when it was first preached was profoundly disturbing to those who wanted to cling to well-established religious patterns, the ancient and accepted ways, the ways that were not dangerous and which contain no surprises. Repentance is at the same time a complete renewal, a discovery, a new life, and a return to the old, to that which is before everything else that is old. But the old and the new meet in the metanoia, the inner change, that is accomplished by the hearing of God’s word and the keeping of it. That which is oldest is also newest because it is the beginning. “I am the Beginning, and I speak to you.” “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” The Jews were scandalized at Christ who spoke as if He were already know to Abraham. “Thou art not yet forty years old.” Christ replied: “Before Abraham was made, I am.” The new is within the old because it is the perennial beginning of everything, and emerges from the old, transcending it, having no part in it, eternally renewing its own life. **The Gospel is handed down from generation to generation, but it must reach each one of us brand new, or not at all. If it is merely “tradition” and not news, it has not been preached or not heard – it is not Gospel. Any word that comes from God is news! ... If there is not risk in revelation, if there is no fear in it, if there is no challenge in it, if it is not a word which creates whole new worlds, and new beings, if it does not call into**

existence a new creature, or new self, then religion is dead and God is dead. Those for whom the Gospel is old, and old only, have killed it for the rest of men. The life of this Gospel is its newness... What makes the Gospel news? The faith, which is created in us by God and which we hear it as news. The acceptance of faith, this new birth in the Spirit, opens up a new dimension in which all things are made new: eternity, time, our own self, the world around us... **The Gospel is the news that, if I will, I can respond now in perfect freedom to the redemptive love of God for man in Christ, that I can now rise above the forces of necessity and evil in order to say “yes” to the mysterious action of Spirit that is transforming the world even in the midst of the violence and confusion and destruction that seem to proclaim His absence and His “death.”**

(III) Merton’s Incarnational Spirituality and its implications

The Inner Experience – pg 40

For the soul and body are not divided against one another as good and evil principles; and our salvation by no means consists of a rejection of the body in order to liberate the soul from the dominance of an evil material principle. On the contrary, our body is as much ourselves as the soul, and neither one without the other can claim to exist purely in its own right, as a true personal being. It was the same also in Christ, in whom the life, being, and actions of His Body were just as much His own, and just as much divine, as the thoughts and aspiration of His soul. So when Christ walked down the roads fo Galilee, it was not an illusory man or even a real man acting as a temporary “front” for a Divine Agent: the Man Himself Who walked there was God... The fact that since the Incarnation God and Man have become inseparable in the One Person of Jesus Christ means that the “supernatural order” has not just been somehow imposed from without upon created nature, but that nature itself has, in man, become transformed and super naturalized...The man who lives and acts according to the grace of Christ dwelling in him acts in that case as another Christ, as a son of God, and thus he prolongs in his own life the effects and the miracle of the Incarnation.

New Seeds of Contemplation Chapter 21 (Extra Notes - The above especially applies to the Contemplative)

The supposed “problem” as to whether in contemplation one should abandon the humanity of Christ in order to go directly to His divinity arises from a too superficial grasp of dogma... If in our contemplation we so separate the humanity and divinity of Christ that we “pass beyond the humanity,” to “rest in the divinity” we will tend to divide Christ into “A Man” and “A Divine Person,” whereas in actuality God and man in Him are completely indivisible and inseparable in the Unity of His Person. ... He Who is, is present in the depths of our own being as our Friend, and as our other self. Such is the mystery of the Word dwelling is us by virtue of His Incarnation and our incorporation in His Mystical Body, the Church. The personal presence of Christ in the Word in our souls is... His “Mission.”

New Seeds of Contemplation pp 292 – 296:

The Lord would not only love His creation as a Father, but He would enter into His creation, emptying Himself, hiding Himself, as if He were not God but a creature. ... **For in becoming man, God became not only Jesus Christ but also potentially every man and woman that ever existed. In Christ, God became not only “this” man, but also, in a broader and more mystical sense, yet no less truly, “every man”.** The presence of God in His world as its Creator depends on no one but Him. **His presence in the world as Man depends, in some measure, upon men... we are able to decide whether we ourselves, and that portion of the world which is ours, shall become aware of His presence, consecrated by it, and transfigured in its light...** It is possible to

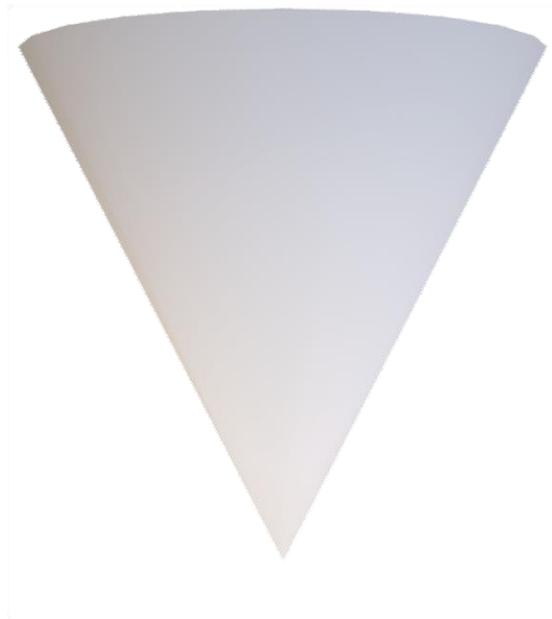
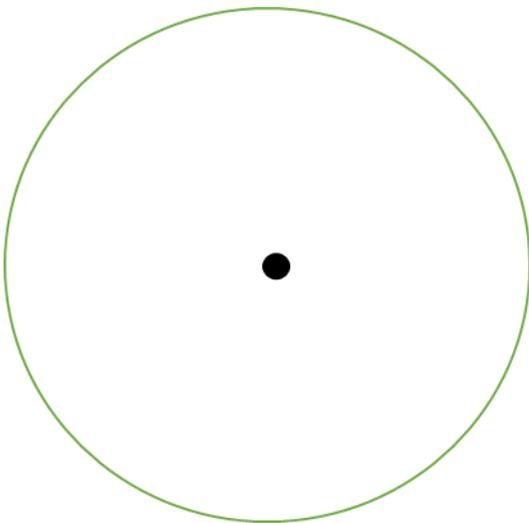
Speak of the exterior self as a mask... The mask that each man wears may well be a disguise not only for man's inner self but for God, wandering as a pilgrim and exile in His own creation. **And indeed, if Christ became Man, it is because He wanted to be any man and every man. If we believe in the Incarnation of the Son of God, there should be no one on earth in whom we are not prepared to see, in mystery, the presence of Christ.**

Thoughts in Solitude pg 37: **The spiritual life is first of all a life. It is not merely something to be known and studied, it is to be lived.** Like all life, it grows sick and dies when it is uprooted from its proper element. **Grace is engrafted on our nature and the whole man is sanctified by the presence and action of the Holy Spirit...** We live as spiritual men when we live as men seeking God. **If we are to become spiritual, we must remain men. And if there were not evidence of this everywhere in theology, the Mystery of the Incarnation itself would be ample proof of it... If we want to be spiritual, then, let us first of all live our lives.**

Conference 2a: Contemplation and the True Self – Overview and the false self.

Contemplation... is life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. – New Seeds of Contemplation.

If I find Him (God) I will find myself and if I find my True Self I will find Him. – New Seeds of Contemplation.



We'll go over 3 terms in this Conference, the True Self, the false Self and Contemplation.

True Self – inner self, hidden self, inmost self, real self

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, Fourth and Walnut experience: pg 153 – 154 (1958)

... At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes

of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak His name written in us in our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely... I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.

false self - superficial self, outward self, smoke self, contingent self, imaginary self, private self, illusory self, petty self

Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self... My false and private self is the one who wants to exist outside the reach of God's will and God's love – outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion... For most of the people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs, which cannot exist. – New Seeds of Contemplation pg 34

Contemplation – Awakening to and Living from my True Self (my center) – a new consciousness!

New Seeds of Contemplation

Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive... It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life... It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source... It knows the Source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes beyond reason and beyond simple faith. It is a more profound depth of faith, a knowledge too deep to be grasped by images, in words or even in clear concepts... we know beyond all knowing or 'unknowing'... (pp 1-2)

It is the gift of God Who, in His mercy, completes the hidden and mysterious work of creation by enlightening our minds and hearts, by awakening in us the awareness that we are words spoken in His One Word, and that Creating Spirit dwells in us and we in Him... That we are "in Christ" and that Christ lives in us... Contemplation is the awareness and realization, even in some sense experience, of what each Christian obscurely believes: "It is now no longer I that live but Christ lives in me." ... It is an awakening, enlightenment and the amazing intuitive grasp by which love gains certitude of God's creative and dynamic intervention in our daily life... It is a pure and a virginal knowledge, poor in concepts, poorer still in reasoning, but able by its very poverty and purity to follow the Word "wherever He may go." (pp 4-5)

Contemplative Theology

The Inner Experience – Christian Contemplation pp 35 – 36:

The story of Adam's fall from Paradise says, in symbolic terms, that man was created as a contemplative. The fall from Paradise was a fall from unity... Man fell from the unity of contemplative vision into the multiplicity, complication, and distraction of an active, worldly existence. Since he was now dependent entirely on exterior and contingent things, he became an exile in a world of objects, each one capable of deluding and enslaving him. Centered no longer in God and in his inmost spiritual self, man now had to see and be aware of himself as a kind of pseudo-object, from which he was estranged. And to compensate for the labors and frustrations of this estrangement, he must try to admire, assert, and gratify himself at the

expense of others like himself. Hence the complex and painful network of loves and hatreds, desires and fears, lies and excuses in which we are all held captive... he can no longer see his own inner "face" or recognize his identity in the spirit and in God, for that identity is secret, invisible and incommunicable... he is utterly exiled from God and from his true self, for neither in God nor in our inmost self can there be aggressive self-assertion: there is only the plain presence of love and of truth. So man is exiled from God and from his inner self. He is tempted to seek God, and happiness outside himself. So his quest for happiness becomes, in fact, a flight from God and from himself... But man must return to Paradise. He must recover himself... God himself must become Man, in order that, in the Man-God, man might be able to lose himself as man and find himself as God. God Himself must die on the Cross, leaving man a pattern and proof of His infinite love. And man, communing with God in the death and resurrection of Christ, must die the spiritual death in which his exterior self is destroyed, and his inner self rises from death by faith and lives again "unto God." He must taste eternal life... The Christian life is a return to the Father, the Source, the Ground of all existence, through the Son, the Splendor and the Image of the Father, in the Holy Spirit, the Love of the Father and the Son. And this return is only possible by detachment and "death" in the exterior self, so that the inner self, purified and renewed, can fulfill its function as image of the Divine Trinity.

Zen and the Birds of Appetite –pp 82 – 83:

Buddhism and Biblical Christianity agree in their view of man's present condition. Both are aware that man is somehow not in his right relation to the world and to things in it, or rather, that man bears in himself a mysterious tendency to falsify that relation, and to spend a great deal of energy in justifying the false view he takes of his world and of his place in it. This falsification is what Buddhist call Avidya... usually termed "ignorance," is the root of all evil and suffering because it places man in an equivocal, in fact impossible position... It is a disposition to treat the ego as an absolute and central reality and to refer all things to it as objects of desire or of repulsion. Christianity attributes this view of man and of reality to "original sin." ... The Story of the Fall tells us in mythical language that "original sin" is not simply a stigma arbitrarily making good pleasure seem guilty, but a basic inauthenticity, a kind of predisposition to bad faith in our understating of ourselves in the world... Hence, Buddhism says, deluded life itself is a state of *Dukkha*, and every movement of desire tends to bear ultimate fruit in pain rather than lasting joy, in hate rather than in love, in destruction rather than in creation.

Zen and the Birds of Appetite – pg 8:

The "mind of Christ" as described by St. Paul in Philippians 2 may be theologically worlds apart for the "mind of Buddha" – this I am not prepared to discuss. But the utter "self-emptying" of Christ – and the self-emptying which makes the disciple one with Christ in His kenosis – can be understood and has been understood in a very Zen-like sense as far as psychology and experience are concerned. Thus with all due deference to the vast doctrinal differences between Buddhism and Christianity, and preserving intact all respect for the claims of the different religions: in no way mixing up the Christian "vision of God" with the Buddhist "enlightenment," we can nevertheless say that the two have this psychic "limitlessness" in common. And they tend to describe it in much the same language. It is now "emptiness," now "dark night," now "perfect freedom," now "no-mind" now "poverty."

Merton's reflections on this false self:

New Seeds of Contemplation - Chapter 5: To say I was born in sin is to say I came into the world with a false self I was born in a mask. I came into existence under a sign of contradiction, being someone that I was never intended to be and therefore a denial of what I am supposed to be. And thus I came into existence and nonexistence at the same time because from the very start I was something that I was not.

New Seeds of Contemplation – Chapter 7: **People who know nothing of God and whose lives are centered on themselves, imagine that they can only find themselves by asserting their own desires and ambitions and appetites in a struggle with the rest of the world. They try to become real by imposing themselves on other people...cutting themselves off from other people and building a barrier of contrast and distinction between themselves and other men... I am all the more something because you are nothing. And thus I spend my life admiring the distance between you and me... The man who lives in division is living in death...**

New Seeds of Contemplation pp 34-35: **All sin starts from the assumption that my false self, the self that exists only in my own egocentric desires, is the fundamental reality of life to which everything else in the universe is ordered. Thus I use up my life in the desire for pleasures and the thirst for experiences, for power, honor, knowledge, and love to clothe this false self and construct its nothingness into something objectively real. And I wind experiences around myself and over 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.**

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander – pp 224 – 225

Man, thinking of himself secretly as a completely free autonomous self, with unlimited possibilities (after all he is taught my society that this is what he is), finds himself in an impossible predicament. He is “as a god” and therefore everything is within reach. But it turns out that all he can successfully reach by his own volition is not quite worth having. What he really seeks and needs – love, an authentic identity, a life that has meaning – cannot be had merely by willing and by taking steps to procure them. No amount of ingenuity can “buy” these – no psychological or sociological manipulation can encompass them, no inspirational religious self-help, no ascetic technique, no drug can do the trick. The things we really need come to us as gifts, and in order to receive them as gifts we have to be open. In order to be open we need to renounce ourselves, in a sense we have to die to our image of ourselves, our autonomy, our fixation upon our self-willed identity. We have to relax the psychic and physical cramp which knots us in the painful, vulnerable, helpless “I” that is all we know as ourselves. The chronic inability to relax the cramp begets despair.

New Seeds of Contemplation Chapter 5: **God leaves us free to be whatever we like. We can be ourselves or not, as we please...** We may wear now one mask and now another, and never, if we so desire, appear with our own true face. **But we cannot make these choices with impunity. Causes have effects.**

There’s a path beyond the false self:

New Seeds of Contemplation – Chapter 5: **... there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him.... That is something that no man can ever do alone. Nor can all the men and all the created things in the universe help him in this work. The only One Who can teach me to find God is God, Himself, Alone. ... Our vocation is not simply to be, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life, our own identity, our own destiny... we are even called to share with God the work of creating the truth**

of our identity.... To work out our identity in God, which the Bible calls “working out our salvation,” is a labor that requires sacrifice and anguish, risk and many tears. It demands close attention to reality at every moment and great fidelity to God as He reveals Himself, obscurely, in the mystery of each new situation.

New Seeds of Contemplation – Chapter 39:

The presence of God in His world as its Creator depends on no one but Him. His presence in the world as Man depends, in some measure, upon men... we are able to decide whether we ourselves, and that portion of the world which is ours, shall become aware of His presence, consecrated by it, and transfigured in its light... We have the choice of two identities: the external mask which seems to be real and which lives by a shadowy autonomy for the brief moment of earthly existence, and the hidden, inner person who seems to us to be nothing, but who can give himself eternally to the truth in whom he subsists. It is this inner self... that we live “in Christ.”

Yet we must not deal in too negative a fashion even with the “external self.” This self is not by nature evil, and the fact that it is unsubstantial is not to be imputed to if as some kind of crime. It is afflicted with metaphysical poverty: but all that is poor deserves mercy... It is possible to speak of the exterior self as a mask... The mask that each man wears may well be a disguise not only for man’s inner self but for God, wandering as a pilgrim and exile in His own creation. And indeed, if Christ became Man, it is because He wanted to be any man and every man. If we believe in the Incarnation of the Son of God, there should be no one on earth in whom we are not prepared to see, in mystery, the presence of Christ.

Journal Entry October 2, 1958: **Finally I am coming to the conclusion that my highest ambition is to be what I already am. That I will never fulfill my obligation to surpass myself unless I first accept myself, and if I accept myself fully in the right way, I will already have surpassed myself. For it is the unaccepted self that stands in my way and will continue to do so as long as it is not accepted. When this has been accepted – it is my own stepping stone to what is above me. Because this is the way man has been made by God. Original sin was the effort to surpass oneself by being “like God” – i.e. unlike oneself. But our Godlikeness begins at home. We must first become like ourselves and stop living “besides ourselves.” -**

[Conference 2b: Contemplation and the True Self – A closer look at Contemplation and the True Self with Characteristics.](#)

The New Man pp 9-10: **Man... can only fully be said to be alive when he becomes plainly conscious of the real meaning of his own existence, that is to say when he *experiences* something of the fullness of intelligence, freedom and spirituality that are actualized within himself. But can we really expect man to attain to this kind of consciousness? ... To find life we must die to life as we know it. To find meaning we must die to meaning as we know it... To find the full meaning of our existence we must find not the meaning that we expect but the meaning that is revealed to us by God. The meaning that comes to us out of the transcendent darkness of His mystery and our own. We do not know God and we do not know ourselves... The true meaning has to be revealed. It has to be “given.”**

pg 11: **Man is fully alive only when he experiences, at least to some extent, that he is really spontaneously dedicating himself, in all truth, to the real purpose of his own personal existence... The purpose is life in the fullest sense of the word – not mere individual, self-centered, egotistical life which is doomed to end in**

death, but a life that transcends individual limitations and needs, and subsists outside the individual self in the Absolute – in Christ, in God.

pg 14: **Contemplation is at once the existential appreciation of our own “nothingness” and of the divine reality, perceived by ineffable spiritual contact within the depths of our own being.** Contemplation is the sudden intuitive penetration of what really IS. It is the unexpected leap of the spirit of man into the existential luminosity of Reality Itself, not merely by the metaphysical intuition of being, but by the transcendent fulfillment of an existential communion with Him who IS.

So how do we proceed into Contemplation?

The Inner Experience pg 5: **Sad is the case of that exterior self that imagines himself contemplative and seeks to achieve contemplation as the fruit of planned effort and of spiritual ambition.** He will assume varied attitudes, meditate on the inner significance of his own postures, and try to fabricate for himself a contemplative identity: and all the while there is nobody there. **There is only an illusory, fictional “I” which seeks itself, struggles to create itself out of nothing, maintained in being by its own compulsion a prisoner of his private illusion.**

New Seeds of Contemplation pg. 185:

Contemplative experience... is not “something you can buy” with any coin, however spiritual it might seem to be. It is a pure Gift of God, and it has to be a gift, for that is part of its very essence... It is a sign of the goodness of God... **too ardent a desire for contemplation can be an obstacle to contemplation, because it may proceed from delusion and attachment from one’s self.**

New Seeds of Contemplation pg 279: **As long as there is an “I” that is the definite subject of a contemplative experience, an “I” that is aware of itself and its contemplations, an “I” that can possess a certain “degree of spirituality,” then ... We remain in the realm of multiplicity, activity, incompleteness, striving and desire. The true inner self, the true indestructible and immortal person, the true “I” who answers to a new and secret name known only to himself and to God, does not “have” anything, even “contemplation.” This “I” is not the kind of subject that can amass experiences, reflect on them, reflect on himself, for this “I” is not the superficial and empirical self that we know in our everyday life.**

New Seeds of Contemplation:

The only way to get rid of misconceptions about contemplation is to experience it... For contemplation cannot be taught. It cannot even be clearly explained. It can only be hinted at, suggested, pointed to, symbolized... there really is no adequate psychology of contemplation. To describe “reactions” and “feelings” is to situate contemplation where it is not to be found, in the superficial consciousness where it can be observed by reflection. But this reflection and this consciousness are precisely part of that external self which “dies” and is cast aside... **Contemplation is not and cannot be a function of the external self. There is an irreducible opposition between the deep transcendent self that awakens only in contemplation and the superficial, external self which we commonly identify with the first person singular... The “I” that works in the world thinks about itself, observes its own reactions and talks about itself is not the true “I” that has been united to God in Christ...** Contemplation is precisely the awareness that this “I” is really “not I” and the awakening of the unknown “I” that is beyond observation and reflection and is incapable of commenting upon itself... **Contemplation does not arrive at reality after a process of deduction, but by an intuitive awakening**

in which our free and personal reality become fully alive to its own existential depth which open out into the mystery of God. (pp 6-9)

Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish or from doubt... For every gain in deep certitude there is a corresponding growth in superficial "doubt"... It is a terrible breaking and burning of idols, a purification of the sanctuary so that no graven thing may occupy the place that God has commanded be left empty: the center, the existential altar which simply "is". In the end the contemplative suffers the anguish of realizing that he no longer knows what God is... There is "no such thing" as God because God is neither a "what" nor a "thing" but a pure "Who". He is the "Thou" before whom our inmost "I" springs into awareness. He is the I Am before whom with our own personal and inalienable voice we echo "I am." (pp 12-13)

Contemplative Prayer – pg 34 ...we should not look for a "method" or "system," but cultivate an "attitude," and "outlook": faith, openness, attention, reverence, expectation, supplication, trust, joy. All these finally permeate our being with love in so far as our living faith tells us we are in the presence of God, that we live in Christ, that in the Spirit of God we "see" God our Father without "seeing." We know him in "unknowing." Faith is the bond that unites us to him in the Spirit who gives us light and love.

New Seeds of Contemplation Chapter 6:

Our part is to consent and to be aware and open to God, to have a pure, active desire for God's presence and to wait patiently

When I consent to the will and the mercy of God as it "comes" to me in the events of life, appealing to my inner self and awakening my faith, I break through the superficial exterior appearances that form my routine vision of the world and of my own self, and I find myself in the presence of hidden majesty.

Although God lives in the souls of men who are unconscious of Him, **how can I say that I have found Him and found myself in Him if I never know Him or think of Him, never take any interest in Him and then turn away and give all my mind and all my will to created things, desiring only ends that fall far short of Him? ... If my love does not reach out toward Him but scatters itself in His creation, it is because I have reduced His life in me to the level of formality, forbidding it to move me with truly vital influence.**

Inner Experience – pg 7 The inner self is as secret as God and, like Him, it evades every concept that tries to seize hold of it with full possession. It is a life that cannot be held and studied as object, because it is not "a thing." It is not reached and coaxed forth from hiding by any process under the sun, including meditation. **All that we can do with any spiritual discipline is produce within ourselves something of the silence, the humility, the detachment, the purity of heart, and the indifference which are required if the inner self is to make some shy, unpredictable manifestation of his presence. At the same time, however, every deeply spiritual experience, whether religious, moral, or even artistic, tends to have in it something of the presence of the interior self. Only from the interior self does any spiritual experience gain depth, reality and a certain incommunicability. But the depth of ordinary spiritual experience only gives us a derivative sense of the inner self. It reminds us of the forgotten levels of interiority in our spiritual nature and of our helplessness to explore them.** Nevertheless, a certain cultural and spiritual atmosphere favors the secret and spontaneous development of the inner self.

New Seeds of Contemplation pp. 212 – 213: **When we consider the fidelity, the resoluteness, the determination to renounce all things for the love of God,... we remain aghast at our own weakness, our own poverty, or evasions, our infidelity, our hesitancy... We are left helpless, knowing very well that we are asked to give up everything, yet not knowing how or where to begin... If we resolutely face our cowardice and confess it to God, no doubt He will one day take pity on us, and show us the way to freedom in detachment.**

Thoughts in Solitude: pg 34 – **What does it mean to know and experience my own “nothingness”?** It is not enough to turn away in disgust from my illusions and faults and mistakes, to separate myself from them as if they were not, and as if I were someone other than myself. This kind of self-annihilation is only a worse illusion, it is a pretended humility which by saying “I am nothing” I mean in effect “I wish I were not what I am.” ... **To really know our ‘nothingness’ we must also love it. And we cannot love it unless we see that it is good. And we cannot see that it is good unless we accept it. To love our “nothingness” in this way, we must repudiate nothing that is our own, nothing that we have, nothing that we are. We must see and admit that it is all ours and that it is all good: good in its positive entity since it come from God: good in our deficiency, since our helplessness, even our moral misery, our spiritual, attracts to us the mercy of God.**

New Seeds of Contemplation pp. 231 – 232: **“Be empty and see that I am God.”** It is our emptiness in the presence of the abyss of His reality, our silence in the presence of His infinitely rich silence, our joy in the bosom of the serene darkness in which His light holds us absorbed, it is all this that praises Him. It is this that causes love of God and wonder and adoration to swim up into us like tidal waves out of the depths of that peace, and break upon the shores of our consciousness in a vast, hushed surf of inarticulate praise, praise and glory. **This clear darkness of God is the purity of heart Christ spoke of in the sixth Beatitude (Blessed are the Pure of Heart)...** And this purity of heart brings at least a momentary deliverance from images and concepts, from the forms and shadows of all the things men desire with their human appetites... **In the vivid darkness of God within us there sometimes come deep movements of love that deliver us entirely for a moment, from our burden of selfishness, and number us among those little children of whom is the Kingdom of Heaven...** This is the gift of understanding: we pass out of ourselves into the joy of emptiness, of nothingness, in which there are no longer any particular objects of knowledge but only God’s truth without limit, without defect, without stain... It is the true light that shines in everyone, in “every man coming into this world.” It is the light of Christ, “Who stands in the midst of us and we know Him not.”

Important Characteristics -Humility, Spiritual Freedom and Love

New Seeds of Contemplation – Chapter 8

In humility is the greatest freedom. As long as you have to defend the imaginary self ... you lose peace of heart.... As soon as you begin to ... imagine your virtues are... yours, you become a prisoner of your own vanity... you will begin to see sins and faults everywhere in the actions of other men.... perfect joy is possible only when we have completely forgotten ourselves... we are at last free to serve God in perfection for His own sake alone.... Be content that you are not yet a saint, even though you realize that the only thing worth living for is sanctity. Then you will be satisfied to let God lead you to sanctity by paths you cannot understand... Those who have gone by that way have finally found that sanctity is in everything and God is all around them.

New Seeds of Contemplation pg. 181

It is almost impossible to overestimate the value of true humility and its power in the spiritual life. **For the beginning of humility is the beginning of blessedness and the consummation of humility is the perfection of all joy... faith and humility are inseparable. In perfect humility all selfishness disappears and your soul no longer lives for itself or in itself for God:** and it is lost and submerged in Him and transformed into Him... everyone who humbles himself is exalted because, living no longer for himself or on the human level, the spirit is delivered of all the limitations and vicissitudes of creaturehood and of contingency, and swims in the attributes of God, Whose power, magnificence, greatness and eternity have, through love, through humility, become our own.

New Seeds of Contemplation pp. 188 – 190:

A humble man is not disturbed by praise. Since he is no longer concerned with himself, and since he knows where the good that is in him comes from, he does not refuse praise, because it belongs to the God he loves, and in receiving it he keeps nothing for himself but gives it all, with great joy, to his God... A man who is not humble cannot accept praise gracefully... he passes it on to God so clumsily that he trips himself up and draws attention to himself by his own awkwardness. One who has not yet learned humility becomes upset and disturbed by praise... **The humble man receives praise the way a clean window takes the light of the sun. The truer and more intense the light is, the less you see of the glass... True humility excludes self-consciousness, but false humility intensifies our awareness of ourselves to such a point that we are crippled...** A humble man can do great things with uncommon perfection because he is no longer concerned about incidentals, like his own interests and his own reputation, and therefore he no longer needs to waste his efforts defending them. **For a humble man is not afraid of failure... he is no longer afraid of anything... since perfect humility implies perfect confidence in the power of God... Humility is the surest sign of strength.**

New Seeds of Contemplation – Chapter 27

- Perfect spiritual freedom is a total inability to make any evil choice.
- Freedom therefore does not consist in an equal balance between good and evil choices but in the perfect love and acceptance of what is really good and the perfect hatred and rejection of what is evil.
- God, in Whom there is absolutely no shadow or possibility of evil or sin, is infinitely free. In fact, He is Freedom.
- All true freedom comes to us as a supernatural gift of God, as a participation in His own essential Freedom by the Love He infuses into our souls, uniting them with Him first in perfect consent, then in a transforming union of wills.
- The simplest definition of freedom is this: it means the ability to do the will of God. To be able to resist His will is not to be free. In sin there is no true freedom.

New Seeds of Contemplation – Chapter 8: **To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that love is the reason for my existence, for God is love. Love is my true identity... If, then, we want to seek some way of being holy, we must first of all renounce our own way and our own wisdom. We must “empty ourselves” as He (Christ) did....** None of this can be achieved by any effort of my own, by any striving of my own... **It means leaving all the ways that men can follow or understand. I who am without love cannot become love unless Love identifies me with Himself.... And that is what is called sanctity.**

And so one of the worst illusions of the life of contemplation would be to try to find God by barricading yourself inside your own soul...cutting yourself off from the world and other men by stuffing yourself inside your mind and closing the door like a turtle... self-hypnotism is the exact opposite of contemplation.

We do not “possess” Him (God) until He takes full possession of us... **The more I become identified with God, the more will I be identified with all others who are identified with Him. His Love will live in all of us...** And we shall love one another and God with the same Love with which He loves us and Himself. This love is God Himself.

Christ prayed that all men might become One as He was One with His Father, in the Unity of the Holy Spirit... we will discover not only that we love one another perfectly but that we are both living in Christ and Christ in us, and we are all One Christ. We will see that it is He Who loves in us.

The ultimate perfection of the contemplative life is... a sea of Love which flows through the One Body of all the elect, all the angels and saints, and their contemplation would be incomplete if it were not shared, or if it were shared with fewer souls... the more of us there to share it the greater will be the joy of all.

... the more we are one with God the more we are united with one another... The contemplative is not isolated in himself but liberated from his external and egotistic self by humility and purity of heart – therefore there is no longer any serious obstacle to simple and humble love of other men.

The more we are alone, the more we are together; and the more we are in society, the true society of charity, not of cities and crowds, the more we are alone with Him. For in my soul and in your soul I find the same Christ Who is our Life, and He finds Himself in our love, and together we all find Paradise, which is the sharing of His Love for His Father in the Person of Their Spirit.

We all become doors and windows through which God shines back into His own house. When the Love of God is in me, God is able to love you through me and you are able to love God through me.

He (God) is at once infinite solitude (one nature) and perfect society (Three Persons). One infinite Love in three subsistent relations. The One God... is a circle of relations in which His infinite reality, Love, is ever identical and ever renewed... always beginning and never ending...the One Love of the Three Persons is an infinitely rich giving of Itself which never ends and is never taken, but is always perfectly given, only received in order to be perfectly shared. It is because the Love of God does not terminate in one self-sufficient self that is capable of halting and absorbing it, that the Life and Happiness of God are absolutely infinite and perfectly inexhaustible. Therefore in God there can be no selfishness... we will one day live entirely in God and in one another as the Persons of God live in One another.

The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton October 23, 1968 talk - pg 306

Faith is not the suppression of doubt. It is the overcoming of doubt, and you overcome doubt by going through it. The man of faith who has never experienced doubt is not a man of faith. Consequently, the monk is one who has to struggle in the depth of his being with the presence of doubt, and to go through what some religions call the Great Doubt, to break through beyond doubt into a certitude which is very, very deep because it is not his own personal certitude, it is the certitude of God Himself, in us. **The only ultimate reality is God. God lives and dwells in us. We are not justified by any action of our own, but we are called by the**

voice of God...to pierce through the irrelevance of our own life, while accepting that our life is totally irrelevant in order to find relevance in Him. And this relevance in Him is something that can only be received, not something we grasp or possess. It is something that can only be received as a gift. **Consequently, the kind of life that I represent is a life that is openness to gift; a gift from God and a gift from others. It is not that we go out into the world with a capacity to love others greatly. This too we know in ourselves, that our capacity for love is limited. And it has to be completed with the capacity to be loved, to accept love from others, to want to be loved by others, to admit our loneliness and to live with our loneliness because everybody is lonely.** This is then another basis for the kind of experience I am talking about, which is a new approach, a different approach to the external experience of the monk. The monk in this solitude and in his meditation seek this dimension of life. .. **And the deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and it is beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear brothers, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.**

Conference 3: Contemplation in Life and Action

Key ideas:

- A call to be engaged in the world
- Merton describes his difficult world – much hasn't changed
- Non-Violence as the key to Contemplation in Action

The spiritual life is not a life of quiet withdrawal, a hothouse growth of artificial ascetic practices beyond the reach of people living ordinary lives. It is the ordinary duties and labors of life that the Christian can and should develop his spiritual union with God... Christian holiness in our age means more than ever the awareness of our common responsibility to cooperate with the mysterious designs of God for the human race. This awareness will be illusory unless it is enlightened by divine grace, strengthened by generous effort, and sought in collaboration not only with the authorities of the Church but with all men of good will who are working for the temporal and spiritual good of the human race. – Life and Holiness pp 9 – 10

One cannot be justified by a faith that does not do works of love, for love is the witness and evidence of “new being” in Christ. But precisely this love is primarily the work of Christ in me, not simply something that originates in my own will and is then approved and rewarded by God. It is faith that opens my heart to Christ and His Spirit, that He may work in me. No work of mine can be called “love” in the Christian sense, unless it comes from Christ. But the “good” are solely tempted to believe in their own goodness and their own capacity to love, while one who realized his own poverty and nothingness is much more ready to surrender himself entirely to the gift of love *he knows* cannot come from anything in himself. – Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander pp 168-169

New Seeds of Contemplation – Chapter 7:

... reality is to be sought not in division but in unity, for **we are all “members of one another.” (pg 47) ... I must look for my identity, somehow, not only in God but in other men. I will never be able to find myself if I isolate myself from the rest of mankind as if I were a different kind of being.** (pg 51)

Love and Living, Creativity, pg 177:

All Christian life is meant to be at the same time profoundly contemplative and rich in active work... It is true that we are called to create a better world. But we are first of all called to a more immediate and exalted task: that of creating our own lives. In doing this, we act as co-workers with God. We take our place in the great work of mankind, since in effect the creation of our own destiny, in God, is impossible in pure isolation. Each one of us works out his own destiny in inseparable union with all those others with whom God has willed us to live. We share with one another the creative work of living in the world. And it is through our struggle with material reality, with nature, that we help one another create at the same time our own destiny and a new world for our descendants.

[This is still very much the state of our World](#)

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, pg 61:

We are living in the greatest revolution in history – a huge spontaneous upheaval of the entire human race... The revolution is a profound spiritual crisis of the whole world, manifested largely in desperation, cynicism, violence, conflict, self-contradiction, ambivalence, fear and hope, doubt and belief, creation and destructiveness, progress and regression, obsessive attachments to images, idols, slogans, programs that only dull the general anguish for a moment until it bursts out everywhere in a still more acute and terrifying form... All the inner force of man is boiling and bursting out, the good together with the evil, the good poisoned by evil and fighting it, the evil pretending to be good and revealing itself in the most dreadful crimes, justified and rationalized by the purest and most innocent intentions.

Faith and Violence, pg 130-132, pg 138:

In the American crisis the Christian faces a typical choice. The choice is not interior and secret, but public, political and social. He is perhaps not used to regarding his crucial choices in the light of politics. He can now either find security and order by falling back on antique and basically feudal (or perhaps fascist) conceptions, or go forward into the unknown future, identifying himself with the forces that will inevitably create a new society. The choice is between “safety”, based on negation of the new and the reaffirmation of the familiar, or the creative risk of love and grace in new and untired solutions, which justice nevertheless demands... The mentality which we have summarized as ‘Christian violence’ becomes more and more irrational in proportion as it implies both an absolute conviction of one’s own rightness and a capacity to approve the use of any means, however violent, however extreme, in order to defend what one feels, subjectively, to be right. This is an axiom. This totalism admits no distinctions, no shades of meaning. ‘Our side’ is totally right, everyone else is diabolically wicked.

[Bringing Contemplation into the World](#)

Faith and Violence pg 215 – The Contemplative Life in the Modern World – quote page 222.

The Christian is then not simply a man of goodwill, who commits himself to a certain set of beliefs, who has a definite dogmatic conception of the universe, of man, and of man’s reason for existing. He is not simply one who follows a moral code of brotherhood and benevolence with strong emphasis on certain rewards and punishments dealt out to the individual. Underlying Christianity is not simply a set of doctrines about God considered as dwelling remotely in heaven, and man struggling on earth, far from heaven, trying to appease a distant God by means of virtuous acts. On the contrary Christians themselves too often fail to realize that the infinite God is dwelling within them, so that He is in them and they are in Him. They remain unaware of the presence of the infinite source of being right in the midst of the world and of men. True

Christian wisdom is therefore oriented to the experience of the divine Light which is present in the world, the Light in who all things are, and which is nevertheless unknown to the world because no mind can see or grasp its infinity. “He was in the world and the world was made by Him and the world did not know Him. He came into His own and His own did not receive Him.” (John 1:10-11) **Contemplative wisdom is then not simply an aesthetic extrapolation of certain intellectual or dogmatic principles, but a living contact with the Infinite Source of all being, a contact not only of man and hearts, not only of “I and Thou”, but a transcendent union of consciousness in which man and God become according to the expression of St. Paul, “one spirit.”... One need not be a monk to turn this way. It is sufficient to be a Child of God, a human person. It is enough that one has in oneself the instinct for truth, the desire of that freedom from limitation and from servitude to external things** which St. Paul calls the “servitude of corruption” and which, in fact, holds the whole world of man in bondage by passion, greed, the lust for sensation and for individual survival as though one could become rich enough, powerful enough and clever enough to cheat death. Unfortunately, this passion for unreality and for the impossible fills the world today with violence, hatred and indeed with a kind of insane and cunning fury which threatens our very existence. Science and technology are indeed admirable in many respects and if they fulfill their promises they can do much for man. But they can never solve his deepest problems. On the contrary, without wisdom, without the intuition and freedom that enable man to return to the root of his being, science can only precipitate him still further into the centrifugal flight that flings him, in all his compact and uncomprehending isolation, into the darkness of outer space without purpose and without objective.

[Nonviolence – Bringing the True Self into the World](#)

Merton’s Approach to addressing the World’s Social Problems was rooted in Nonviolence, it had to be!

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, pg 96:

Christianity overcame Pagan Rome by nonviolence. But when Christianity became the religion of the Empire, then the stoic and political virtues of the Empire began to supplant the original theological virtues of the first Christians. The heroism of the soldier supplanted the heroism of the martyr... the supreme sacrifice was to die fighting under the Christian emperor... **Hence the strange paradox that certain spiritual and largely nonviolent ideologies which were in fact quite close to the Gospel were attacked and coerced in the name of Christ by the Christian soldier who was often no longer a Christian except in name: for he was violent, greedy, self-complacent, and supremely contemptuous of anything that was not a perfect reflection of himself.**

Faith and Violence, pp 14-16: Blessed are the Meek!

Non-violence is perhaps the most exacting of all forms of struggle, not only because it demands first of all that one be ready to suffer evil and even face the threat of death without violent retaliation, but because it excludes mere transient self-interest, even political, from its considerations. In a very real sense, he who practices non-violent resistance must commit himself not to the defense of his own interests or even those of a particular group: he must commit himself to the defense of objective truth and right and above all man... Christian non-violence is not built on a presupposed division, but on the basic unity of man. It is not out for the conversion of the wicked to the ideas of the good, but for the healing and reconciliation of man with himself, man the person and man the human family... For the Christian, the basis of non-violence is the Gospel message of salvation for all men and of the Kingdom of God to which all are summoned. The disciple of Christ... proves his faith by the gift of his whole self to the Lord in order that all may enter the Kingdom...

The great historical event, the coming of the Kingdom is made clear and is “realized” in proportion as Christians themselves live the life of the Kingdom in circumstances of their own place and time. **By their example of a truly Christian understanding of the world, expressed in a living and active application of the Christian faith to the human problems of their own time. Christian manifest the love of Christ for men (Jn 13:35, 17:21), and by that fact make him visibly present in the world.**

Seeds of Destruction - A Tribute to Gandhi: pp 225 – 234

It is certainly true that Gandhi was not above all criticism; no man is. **But it is evident that he was unlike all other world leaders of his time in that his life was marked by a wholeness and a wisdom, an integrity and a spiritual consistency that the other lacked, or manifested only in reverse, in consistent fidelity to a dynamism of evil and destruction... His way was no secret: it was simply to follow conscience without regard for the consequences to himself, in the belief that this was demanded of him by God. Perhaps indeed for a long time these results would remain hidden as God’s secret. But in the end the truth would manifest itself.** What has Gandhi to do with Christianity? Everyone knows that the Orient has venerated Christ and distrusted Christians since the first colonizers and missionaries came from the West... **Gandhi certainly spoke often of Jesus, whom he had learned to know through Tolstoy. And Gandhi knew the New Testament thoroughly. Whether or not Gandhi “believed in” Jesus in the sense that he had genuine Christian faith in the Gospel would be very difficult to demonstrate, and it is not my business to prove it or disprove it.** I think the effort to do so would be irrelevant in any case. **What is certainly true is that Gandhi not only understood the ethic of the Gospel as well, if not in some ways better than many Christians, but he is one of the very few men of our time who applied Gospel principles to the problems of a political and social existence in such a way that his approach to these problems was inseparably religious and political at the same time... For Gandhi, strange as it may seem to us, political action had to be by its very nature “religious” in the sense that it had to be informed by principles of religious and philosophical wisdom.** To separate religion and politics was in Gandhi’s eyes “madness” because his politics rested on a thoroughly religious interpretation of reality, of life, and of man’s place in the world. **Gandhi’s whole concept of man’s relations to his own inner being and to the world of objects around him was informed by the contemplative heritage of Hinduism, together with the principles of Karma Yoga which blended in his thought, with the ethic of the Synoptic Gospels and the Sermon on the Mount.** In such a view, politics had to be understood in the context of service and worship in the ancient sense of ... (liturgy, public work). **Man’s intervention in the active life of society was at the same time by its very nature... his own personal service (of God and man) and worship... Political action was ... a means of witnessing to the truth and the reality of the cosmic structure by making one’s own proper contribution to the order willed by God. One could thus preserve one’s integrity and peace, being detached from results (which were in the hands of God) and being free from the inner violence that comes from division and untruth...Gandhi emphasized the importance of the individual person entering political action with a fully awakened and operative spiritual power in himself, the power of Satyagraha, non-violent dedication to truth, a religious and spiritual force, a wisdom born of fasting and prayer.** This is the charismatic and personal force of the saints... Gandhi remains in our time as a sign of the genuine union of spiritual fervor and social action... **Gandhi’s religio-political action was based on an ancient metaphysic of man, a philosophical wisdom which is common to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: that “truth is the inner law of our being.” ... Gandhi’s religious action is based on a religious intuition of being in man and in the world, and his vow of truth is a vow of fidelity to being in all its accessible dimensions.** His wisdom is based on experience more than on logic. Hence the way of peace is the way of

truth, of fidelity to wholeness and being, which implies a basic respect for life not as a concept, not as a sentimental figment of the imagination, but in its deepest most secret and most fontal reality. The first and fundamental truth is to be sought in respect for our own inmost being, and this in turn implies the recollectedness and the awareness which attune us to that silence in which alone Being speaks to us in all its simplicity... Therefore he fasted, observed days of silence, lived frequently in retreat, knew the value of solitude, as well as the totally generous expenditure of his time and energy in listening to others and communicating with them... **“Jesus died in vain,” said Gandhi, “if he did not teach us to regulate the whole of life by the eternal law of love.”... Gandhi believed that the central problem of our time was the acceptance or the rejection of a basic law of love and truth which had been made known to the world in traditional religions and most clearly by Jesus Christ. Gandhi himself expressly and very clearly declared himself an adherent of this one law. His whole life, his political action, finally even his death, were nothing but a witness to his commitment. “IF LOVE IS NOT THE LAW OF OUR BEING THE WHOLE OF MY ARGUMENT FALLS TO PIECES.”... It is true that Gandhi expressly disassociated himself from Christianity in any of its visible and institutional forms. But it is also true he built his whole life and all his activity upon what he conceived to be the law of Christ. In fact, he died for this law which was at the heart of his belief... A Christian can do nothing greater that follow his own conscience with a fidelity comparable to that which Gandhi obeyed what he believed to be the voice of God.**

Faith and Violence, Religion and Race in the United States, pg 130-132:

The non-violent Negro civil rights drive has been one of the most positive and successful expressions of Christian social action that has been seen anywhere in the twentieth century. It is certainly the greatest example of Christian faith in action in the social history of the United States...The passage of the Civil Rights Bill has only brought the real problem to a head. The struggle for rights now enters a new and more difficult phase. Hitherto the well-intentioned and the idealistic have assumed that if the needed legislations were passed, the two races would “integrate” more of less naturally, not without a certain of difficulty, of course, but nonetheless effectively in the end. **They have also assumed as axiomatic that if something is morally right and good, it will come to pass all by itself as soon as obstacles are removed. Everyone seemed to believe with simple faith that law and order, morality, the “American way of life” and Christianity are all very much the same thing. Now it is becoming quite clear that they are not so at all. Many Christians, who have confused “Americanism” with “Christianity” are in fact contributing to the painful contradictions and even injustices of the racial crisis.** For the one thing that has been made most evident by the long and bitter struggle of the South, and now of the North, to prevent civil rights legislation from being passed or enforced or made effective, is that the legislators and the police themselves, along with some ministers and indeed all those whom one can call “the establishment,” seem to be the first to defy the law or set it aside when their own interests are threatened. In other words, we are living in a society that is not exactly moral, a society which misuses Christian clichés to justify its lawlessness and immorality. And so there are many who think that non-violence has not proved itself a success. It is considered naïve and overly simple and it does not get real results. **Certainly, nonviolence postulates a belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature. But this attitude of optimism can come to be confused with shallow confidence in the morality and intrinsic goodness of a society which is proving itself torn by vicious internal contradictions...** The problem of American racism turned out to be far deeper, far more stubborn, infinitely more complex. It is also part of a much greater problem: one that divides the whole world into what may one day turn into a revolutionary interracial war of two camps: the affluent whites and the impoverished non-whites... The Negro is

integrated by law into a society in which there really is no place for him – not that a place could not be made for him, if the white majority were capable of wanting him as a brother and a fellow-citizen.

A final attitude:

Letter to Jim Forest, February 21, 1966: ...**do not depend on the hope of results.** When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on, essentially an apostolic work, **you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself.** And there too a great deal has to be gone through, as **gradually you struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people... it gets much more real. In the end,...it is the reality of personal relationship that saves everything.**

[Summary, What Challenged You? and Closing Prayer](#)

Questions?

What struck you most?

What Challenged you?

- I don't understand it.
- I understand it but I don't buy it
- I buy it but I don't see how I can do it.
- I'm doing it but it's hard

Closing Prayer:

“O God, we are one with You. You have made us one with You. You have taught us that if we are open to one another, You dwell in us. Help us to preserve this openness and to fight for it with all our hearts. Help us to realize that there can be no understanding where there is mutual rejection. O God, in accepting one another wholeheartedly, fully, completely, we accept You, and we thank You, and we adore You, and we love You with our whole being, because our being is Your being, our spirit is rooted in Your spirit. Fill us then with love, and let us be bound together with love as we go our diverse ways, united in this one spirit which makes You present in the world, and which makes You witness to the ultimate reality that is love. Love has overcome. Love is victorious. Amen.” – Closing statements and prayer from an informal address delivered in Calcutta, India (October 1968)

Book List – used / referenced in this workshop

- The Seven Storey Mountain (1948) – Merton’s autobiography up to 1944
- The Sign of Jonas (1946 - 1952)
- Thoughts in Solitude (written mostly in 1953, published in 1959)
- No Man is an Island (1955)
- The New Man (1961)
- New Seeds of Contemplation (written 1961 - update Seeds of Contemplation, published 1962)
- Life and Holiness (1963)
- Seeds of Destruction (1964)
- Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (based on notebooks written from 1956, published in 1966)
- Raids on the Unspeakable (1966)
- Faith and Violence (1968)
- Contemplative Prayer (1968)
- Faith and Violence (1968)
- Zen and the Birds of Appetite (1968)

Published posthumously:

- The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton (1973)
- Love and Living (1979)
- The Intimate Merton – His Life from His Journals (1999)
- The Inner Experience (2003)
- Thomas Merton – A Life in Letters (2008)

Books about Merton:

- Merton’s palace of nowhere (1978)
- Thomas Merton an Introduction (1997)
- The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia (2002)