

Thesis Title : Thomas Merton on Contemplation and its Social Dimension:
An Evaluative Study

Proposed By : Ms. Phatsara Phongphit ID. 461-9432

Department : Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion

Majoring In : Religious Studies

Advisor : Dr. Joseph I. Fernando

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ABSTRACT

If man is called to participate in God's life, it is reasonable to regard contemplation of value and an end in itself. It may be argued that man in the modern world also needs contemplation.

Thomas Merton was a Catholic contemplative monk, who sought union with God through contemplation. Merton opened up the essence of what contemplation is for all walks of life, not only for monks and nuns. Merton strongly endorsed contemplation as an essential part of life. All his life, Merton committed himself to contemplation.

According to Merton, God is the core of contemplation. The Christians have experienced God through Jesus, who has an intimate relation with Him; therefore they take Jesus as their model and contemplate God through Jesus. Through contemplation, Merton had inner experience of the presence of God, union with God and transformation in God. Merton's contemplation helps us understand much of the meaning of the phrase found in the New Testament "I live, now not I but Christ lives

in me. And that I live now in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God who loved me” (Gal 2:20).

Merton’s contemplation was his personal experience of God which overflowed into social concern. Merton became convinced that God’s overwhelming love and mercy received in contemplation should be shared with others. When man brings his love into society and the world, he brings also God’s love to the world. Merton defines that “Christianity is a religion of love” (NM, p. 106). Merton emphasized the significance of contemplation for effective social action and social transformation.

Merton had experienced that contemplation is the source of strength for living in peace. True peace comes from intimate communion with God. Merton became aware of God’s overwhelming love and peace in his own life. Merton was a peace maker just like Gandhi and Thich Nhat Hanh who devoted their lives to peace.

This thesis aims to understand Thomas Merton’s vision of contemplation, and to evaluate Merton’s experience on contemplation in regards to social concern and how it may contribute to peace in society.