

10 Penetrating Quotes on Contemplation from an American Monk

Of Thomas Merton (1915-1968), the Dalai Lama once said, "Merton introduced me to the real meaning of the word 'Christian.'"

Of himself, Merton describes his early journey to becoming a Trappist monk below:

"[I] spurned New York, spat on Chicago, and tromped on Louisville, heading for the woods with Thoreau in one pocket, John of the Cross in another, and holding the Bible open at the Apocalypse..."

The Merton Center [describes](#) him as,

"... a writer and Trappist monk at Our Lady of Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky. His writings include such classics as *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, and *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. Merton is the author of more than seventy books that include poetry, personal journals, collections of letters, social criticism, and writings on peace, justice, and ecumenism."

According to Dr. Paul Pearson, director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Merton believed that contemplation was

"...the highest and most essential of all humanity's spiritual activities prior to the beatific vision. [Merton] clearly states this in *New Seeds of Contemplation* where he says of contemplation that it is 'life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive.'"

With that in mind, here are ten penetrating insights on

contemplation and modernity from the Cistercian monk and priest:

1. "Contemplation must be possible if man is to remain human."
2. "Man has an instinctive need for harmony and peace, for tranquility, order, and meaning. None of those seem to be the most salient characteristics of modern society."
3. "...there had once existed a more leisurely and more spiritual way of life – and that this was the way of their ancestors."
4. "We must face the fact that the mere thought of contemplation is one which deeply troubles the person who takes it seriously. It is so contrary to the modern way of life, so apparently alien, so seemingly impossible, that the modern man who even considers it finds, at first, that his whole being rebels against it."
5. "We would like to be quiet, but our restlessness will not allow it."
6. "We seek the meaning of our life in activity for its own sake, activity without objective, efficacy without fruit, scientism, the cult of unlimited power, the service of the machine as an end in itself."
7. "The reason for this inner confusion and conflict is that our technological society has no longer any place in it for wisdom that seeks truth for its own sake."
8. "The contemplative way requires first of all and above all renunciation of this obsession with the triumph of the individual or collective will to power..."

9. "The basic reality is neither the individual, empirical self nor an abstract and ideal entity which can exist only in reason. The basic reality is being itself..."
10. "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."