



**CHOOSING TO
LOVE THE
WORLD**

On Contemplation

Thomas Merton

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Choosing to Love the World

About the Author: Thomas Merton

Thomas Merton is acclaimed as one of the most influential American spiritual writers of the twentieth century. His autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, has sold over one million copies and has been translated into twenty-eight languages. Merton wrote more than sixty other books and hundreds of poems and articles on topics ranging from monastic spirituality to civil rights, nonviolence, and the nuclear arms race.

After a rambunctious youth and adolescence, Merton converted to Roman Catholicism. On December 10, 1941, he entered the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani, a community of monks belonging to the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (Trappists), one of the most ascetic Roman Catholic monastic order.

The twenty-seven years he spent in Gethsemani prior to his death in 1968 brought about profound changes in his self-understanding. This ongoing conversion impelled him into the political arena, where he became, according to Daniel Berrigan, the conscience of the peace movement of the 1960's. Referring to race and peace as the two most urgent issues of our time, Merton was a strong supporter of the nonviolent civil rights movement, which he called "certainly the great example of Christian faith in action in the social history of the United States." For his social activism Merton endured severe criticism, from Catholics and non-Catholics alike, who assailed his political writings as unbecoming of a monk.

During his last years, he became deeply interested in Asian religions, particularly Zen Buddhism and in promoting East-West dialogue. After several meetings with Merton during the American monk's trip to the Far East in 1968, the Dalai Lama praised him as having a more profound understanding of Buddhism than any other Christian he had known. It was during his Far East tour that Merton died in Bangkok on December 10, 1968.

Contact Beverly Yates
(303) 665-3151 ext. 153
beverly@soundstrue.com

Sounds True
413 South Arthur Avenue | Louisville, Colorado 80027
(303) 665-3151 | www.soundstrue.com