



**CHOOSING TO
LOVE THE
WORLD**
On Contemplation

Thomas Merton

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Excerpts: Contemplative Listening

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 *absolute poverty* is the pure glory of God in us. It is, so to speak, His name written in us—as our poverty, 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 billion 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.



God is known when He is apprehended as unknown, and He is heard when we realize that we do not know the sound of His voice. The words He utters are words full of silence, and they are bait to draw us into silence. The truths he manifests are full of hiddenness, and their function is to hide us, with themselves, in God from whom they proceed. If we hide the precepts of His wisdom in our heart—precepts of humility, meekness, charity, renunciation, faith, prayer—they themselves will hide us in Him. For the values which these virtues communicate to us, the life which they give to us, are completely hidden from the eyes of men. They bring us to the source of a life that is unknown to the natural wisdom of man, and yet from this source Man's nature itself proceeds, is nourished and sustained. Thus the hidden things that are communicated to us in the words and precepts of the Gospel transform our lives and raise them from the level of distinct knowledge and clear evidence, natural prudence and plain practicality, to another level which is hidden and obscure to the mind of man.



What is the real root of personality in man? It is obviously that which is *irreplaceable*, genuinely unique, on the deepest spiritual level. *Personalism* is the discovery, the respect, but not the cult, for this deep reality. Secular personalism is a kind of craze for individuality, a rage for self-manifestation in which the highest value is sought in the *recognition* by others of one's own uniqueness.

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