

Thomas Merton

Taken from the Modern Spirituality Series

"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.'

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 is taken up into the mystery of Christ, by His love, by the Holy Spirit, so that in secret we live "in Christ."

Thomas Merton—"New Seeds of Contemplation."

"God utters me like a word containing a partial thought of Himself. If I am true to the concept that God utters in me, if I am true to the thought of Him I was meant to embody, I shall be full of His actuality and find Him everywhere in myself, and find myself nowhere.

To be 'lost' is to be left to the arbitrariness and pretences of the contingent ego, the smoke-self that must inevitably vanish.

To be 'saved' is to return to one's inviolate and eternal reality and to live in God."

Thomas Merton-- New Seeds of Contemplation.

"It is not complicated to lead the spiritual life. But it is difficult. We are blind and subject to a thousand illusions."

"Let us frankly recognize the true import and the true challenge of the Christian message. The whole gospel kerygma becomes impertinent and laughable if there is an answer to everything in a few external gestures and pious intention. Christianity is a religion for men who are aware that there is a deep wound, a fissure of sin that strikes down to the very heart of man's being. They have tasted the sickness that is present in the inmost heart of man estranged from his God by guilt, suspicion and covert hatred.

If that sickness is an illusion, then there is no need for the Cross. It is precisely the function of dread to break down this glass house of false interiority and to deliver man from it. Without dread, man would remain content with himself and with his 'inner life' in meditation, in liturgy or in both. Without dread, the Christian cannot be delivered from the smug self-assurance of the devout ones who know all the answers."

Thomas Merton-- Climate of Monastic Prayer

"God is invisibly present to the ground of our being, but he remains hidden from the arrogant gaze of our investigating mind

which seeds to capture him and secure permanent possession of Him in an act of knowledge.”

Thomas Merton-- Climate of Monastic Prayer

“Everyone of us is shadowed by an illusory person: **a false self**. This is the man that I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him.

For most of the people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs, which cannot exist.

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.

I wind experiences around myself and cover 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.”

Thomas Merton—New Seeds of Contemplation

“We must learn to realize that the love of God seeks us in every situation, and seeks our good. His inscrutable love seeks our awakening. Since this awakening implies a kind of death to our exterior self, we will dread His coming in proportion as we are identified with this exterior self and attached to it.

There is an irreducible opposition between the deep, transcendent self that awakens and the superficial, external self which we commonly identify with the first person singular. We

must remember that this superficial "I" is not our real self. 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. 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."

Thomas Merton--New Seeds of Contemplation