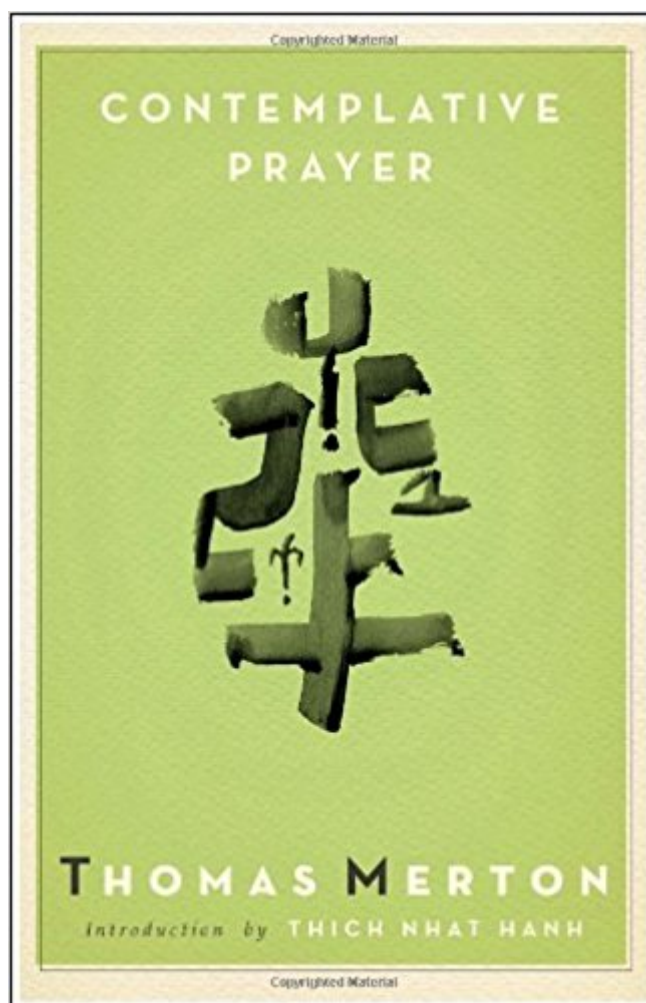


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Contemplative Prayer (Image Classics)



Synopsis

In this classic text, Thomas Merton offers valuable guidance for prayer. He brings together a wealth of meditative and mystical influences “from John of the Cross to Eastern desert monasticism” to create a spiritual path for today. Most important, he shows how the peace contacted through meditation should not be sought in order to evade the problems of contemporary life, but can instead be directed back out into the world to affect positive change. *Contemplative Prayer* is one of the most well-known works of spirituality of the last one hundred years, and it is a must-read for all seeking to live a life of purpose in today’s world. In a moving and profound introduction, Thich Nhat Hanh offers his personal recollections of Merton and compares the contemplative traditions of East and West.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book, ‘*Contemplative Prayer*’, was Thomas Merton’s last book. A prolific writing on spiritual topics, Merton was perhaps in an ideal setting to be able to write about the ideas and methods of contemplative prayer, being a Trappist. Trappists devote themselves to prayer, adding the disciplines of silence and solitude, things that are needed for the contemplative side of things to emerge. In the introduction by Merton’s friend, Thich Nhat Hanh, there is a nine-fold prayer that relates to many of Merton’s ideas about contemplative prayer. However, it is a mistake (and both Hanh in the introduction and Merton in the text mention this) to think that prayer is something in and

of itself - Christians and Buddhists tend to have the understanding that prayer without practice lacks efficacy. Merton traces a strong history of contemplative prayer, from the earliest Christians (particularly the Desert Fathers and early monastics) to the latest theologians (Hahn relates Merton's ideas to Paul Tillich, and without mentioning him by name, Merton also seems to strive for that same purity that was the pursuit of Kierkegaard). Merton concentrates especially on various 'via negativa' methods and theologies - St. John of the Cross is but the most powerful example, but Merton draws on Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Catherine of Siena, Meister Eckhart and others. This is not a how-to manual for contemplative prayer. This was a subject that was beginning to interest Merton more and more near the time of his death, and we can but wonder if he would have gone on to produce more practical writing on the topic after this piece.

This book is profound: in a mere 116 pages Merton reveals indispensable spiritual insights one after another. Contemplation is the practice of seeking clarity--a clear vision of who we are, a clear vision of our relationship to God. So, with honest, relentless precision, Merton exposes our false postures of ego, pride, attachment, fear--those unholy but seductive impulses that cloud our souls and separate us from God. It is obvious that "Contemplative Prayer" is the product of an experienced contemplative, one who has experienced and reflected upon a lifetime of struggle, enough so that he can boil down the essence of spiritual survival into a handful of simple words. But he does much more than that: after shattering each underpinning of our personal complacency, he draws back and puts his observations in their monastic and theological context, giving us a fuller, deeper understanding of the religious tradition we belong to. For example, at one point, Merton elegantly and brilliantly summarizes "Dark Night of the Soul" (St. John of the Cross) in a way that makes it fully relevant to the modern reader. As a bonus, this edition contains an introduction by the distinguished Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (who in some respects is himself a Buddhist version of Thomas Merton). Hahn explores and compares the spiritual struggles of Buddhism and Christianity with respect to prayer, meditation, practice, and God--on those crucial levels we see that ultimately we have one nature, despite the obvious and superficial differences that tend to separate us. On a literary note, "Contemplative Prayer" will be particularly interesting to those drawn to existentialism or seeking a deeper understanding of it.

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