



Thomas Merton: Spiritual Direction And Meditation

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Merton, whose own tortuous path to spiritual maturity is well known, here offers the knowledge gained during that experience. He discusses the meaning and purpose of spiritual direction, and how to profit from that direction.

Thomas Merton: Spiritual Direction And Meditation Details

Date : Published June 1st 1960 by Liturgical Press (first published 1960)

ISBN : 9780814604120

Author : Thomas Merton

Format : Paperback 108 pages

Genre : Spirituality, Religion, Prayer



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From Reader Review Thomas Merton: Spiritual Direction And Meditation for online ebook

Stan says

I just re-read the first half of this book - the section on Spiritual Direction. I first read this book 15 years ago. It still holds little gems that I need to mine!

This book is full of wisdom. Merton had a knack for expressing spiritual truths plainly and clearly. Of course, his focus is on spiritual direction in a Catholic setting, so non-Catholics may have to work a little to understand exactly what he is saying. That effort is worth the gems one finds in this brief treatment of spiritual direction.

Spiritual direction is sorely lacking in most Protestant circles. Some may read this book and find the concept foreign to their idea of spirituality and Christianity. Hopefully Merton's brief treatment of the origins of spiritual direction among the desert fathers will be sufficient to show this is not a recent development, nor exclusively a Catholic practice.

His treatment of the relationship between a spiritual director and directee is only a couple of paragraphs long. However, his distinction between prudence and obedience is fascinating.

If you are interested in a brief treatment of spiritual direction, Merton's offers much insight in the first half of this book. Enjoy!

Gwen says

Sometimes the best books are small. I read this entire book in one sitting. I'm not a Catholic nor am I in any kind of monastic tradition. That doesn't really matter though. The wisdom in this short book applies to all people of faith. Anyone looking new ways to look at how they pray and live should pick this up. It's compact, but carries a good amount of weight to it.

Benjamin Vineyard says

On Spiritual Direction:

The concept of spiritual direction (also called spiritual friendships or other things) has been on my mind for a while now – my imagination captivated by the experiences of a spiritual direction relationship.

Our call as Christians is to spread the lifestyle of discipleship – the lifestyle of living by faith in Jesus, the Way, Truth and Life. Permeated by God's grace, we move and breathe. But, what does this lifestyle look like? Who will show us in tangible ways what it might look like to walk and follow after Jesus? Who will ask us the questions that open new doors of insight and help us see God's promises in Scripture even more clearly?

In informality, I think we've all had a spiritual director or two in our lives – a person who has asked us questions that really affected who we are. A person who listened far more than they spoke and was a gift of God to us in a time in life. A person who we seemed drawn to, looking forward to our next conversation because with them, Jesus and everything of God seemed to become quite tangible, thanks to God at work in the relationship.

Thomas Merton's book gets at spiritual direction, what it means, and why it's needed. His book is written for both the "professional religious (monks)" and everyone who isn't a monk or nun.

From the book:

The whole purpose of spiritual direction is to penetrate beneath the surface of a man's life, to get behind the facade of conventional gestures and attitudes which he presents to the world, and to bring out his inner spiritual freedom, his inmost truth, which is what we call the likeness of Christ in his soul. (p.16)

In essence, the direction relationship is about listening and walking together to be encouraged to walk like Christ. Having someone present with you, acting as a second pair of eyes, is so helpful, so needed. It's hard to see so much of what we need to see in order to turn and walk with Jesus, like Jesus.

Yet, as you might imagine here, there's a great deal of humility that needs to surround this relationship and relationships like it. It takes a lot of gusto to drop the pretenses or to allow someone to probe into our inner lives and challenge us where we perhaps thought we had things figured out. It's not always about being comforted but also about transformation, which takes us to the greater comforts – the love of God.

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Ted Tyler says

Before reading this book, I have to admit that approached it with a bit of skepticism. Some of the more louder voices in liberal theology have championed Thomas Merton as someone who played a key influence in their theological development.

But as I read through this book, I found myself truly enjoying this short, concise treatise on "direction" (peer discipleship) and "meditation" (connecting deeply with the Lord). I think it gives some great insights into these two topics. Merton urges the readers to engage the Lord both through feeling and thought. He deeply values Scripture, and a dynamic prayer life. There are a few minor areas where he and I do not quite see eye to eye, but I found him to be a thought-provoking writer who will challenge you in how you relate to God. Definitely worth reading over an afternoon or two.

"Above all, our life should always be seen in light of the Cross." p. 99

Mic says

This is a great book on meditation. I really liked it. I'm only giving it 3 stars because it took so long to get to

the meat of the book - about half way in is what found the most beneficial and worthwhile. I bought the book used and it had comments and notes from 2 previous owners. From their notes and highlights I gathered that they felt the same way.

Good Quotes:

“True simplicity implies love and trust—it does not expect to be derided and rejected, any more than it expects to be admired and praised.”

“A contemplative is not one who takes his prayer seriously, but one who takes God seriously, who is famished for truth, who seeks to live in generous simplicity, in the spirit. An ardent and sincere humility is the best protection for his life of prayer.”

Jeremy says

Merton is a mixed bag for me. At times he seems a bit vague in his mysticism and at other times he is deeply inspiring in his devotion to Christ. My copy of this book is thoroughly dog-eared with insights to take away but there were also large sections of the book I skimmed through. Well worth read for those interested in the topics at hand.

Frank E Dofelmier says

All who seek Understanding

If you are just starting the journey of meditation or have practiced meditation for some time , this book is a gem.

Adam Shields says

Short Review: This is a combination of two unrelated pamphlet length works by Merton. I was interested in the one about Spiritual direction and went ahead and read the one on meditation as well. The spiritual direction one is helpful but not the best I have read. Both the spiritual direction and meditation works are more about why you should do it than how to do them. Both are against some of the myths around the practices as well (spiritual direction is not about being told how to grow spiritually, but having someone to listen to God with you and help you discern a path to growth closer to Christ. or Meditation is not about emptying yourself or thinking great thoughts but about finding God and reflecting on God throughout the day.)

I like reading other streams of Christian literature in part to find different presuppositions and this is the case here. These are clearly oriented toward Catholics and to a lesser extent toward monks. I need to work a bit to related these to me.

My full blog review has some quotes to give you a sense of what the book is like.

Daniel Millard says

I was recommended this brief two-part text by my spiritual director as a "primer" for receiving spiritual direction. Turns out this was a very wise move. Merton's assessment of what a spiritual director is, is not, and should and should not be expected to provide is very rational and well-articulated. His words are not intellectually ambitious, and are perfectly graspable by the average layman (yours truly).

The second portion of the text, on meditation and mental prayer, was perhaps less obviously necessary but even more intriguing, since it is not a direction that I had pointedly attempted to take myself. The Church always recommends silence, and so little of it is to be found in modern America. Merton is cognizant of this and summarizes the practice in a way that is as applicable in 2018 as it surely was in the 1950's.

Greg says

Easy to read and inspiring.

James Scott says

Fantastic

A well balanced and thoughtful view of the practices of meditation and spiritual direction. Worthy thought and consideration for any Christian seeking a deeper life in the Holy Spirit

Ross says

Spiritual Direction and Meditation

The first half covers spiritual direction, specifically in a formal religious setting where one is working with another who has an explicit role as a spiritual director for the former. While I do not have a formal relationship of this nature, I found myself feeling enriched by Merton's teaching. These lessons could have invaluable application to the many informal, bi-directional penitent-director relationships I have with others in my spiritual family.

The section on meditation describes an approach which is strict, but not rigid. In other words, in order to benefit from meditation, approach soberly, and give consistent effort, especially in the beginning of practicing. However, the technique used is of secondary importance to devotion to God and commitment to deepening your relationship with him. Make preparation throughout your daily life, as you train yourself to keep your senses collected.

I picked up on a theme throughout the book of stressing how important it is to be honest with yourself, your

director, and God. Perhaps this was my personal focus due to my life's current station.

His tone is grounded in a mature love for Christ. Occasionally he becomes a little dismissive of approaches that don't have the same insight that he brings to the practices of direction and meditation. However, he manages to stay respectful.

Jimmy Cerone says

Oddly no nonsense take on faith for a Catholic monk. I expected more flowery language and self-laceration but Merton's directions are simple, clear, and doable (if not easy). He is fully aware that we are all human yet also fully believes we can be something more than that through an intentional connection to the divine.

Keri says

Two quotes I liked:

"We must learn to speak according to our own inner truth, as far as we can perceive it. We must learn to say what we really mean in the depths of our souls, not what we think we are expected to say, not what somebody else has just said."

"The director wants to know our inmost self, our real self. He wants to know us not as we are in the eyes of men, or even as we are in our own eyes, but as we are in the eyes of God. He wants to know the inmost truth of our vocation, the action of grace in our souls. His direction is, in reality, nothing more than a way of leading us to see and obey our real Director – the Holy Spirit, hidden in the depths of our soul. We must never forget that in reality we are not directed and taught by men..."

Debra says

Short, direct, pithy just like Merton.
