



# PRAYING WITH THOMAS MERTON DURING SEASONS OF DARKNESS

Virtual Men's Retreat on Saturday Dec 12

How do we reconcile an all-loving and all-powerful God with a world of suffering? The writings of influential author and Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915 - 1968) offer some helpful wisdom in responding to this age-old question of theodicy. Moreover, his personal trials, teachings, poetry, and prayers invite us to bring our own questions of suffering honestly to God in prayer. During this Saturday afternoon retreat (2:30 - 6 PM), we will learn about the life, theodicy, and theodical spirituality of this Trappist monk; and explore ways that his wisdom can help us pray honestly during our own seasons of darkness.

"You don't get to God through a system. You speak from your heart. That is the basic idea, and that is what the Book of Job is saying...You realize that prayer takes us beyond the law...In other words, there is no law in prayer, there are no systems. Systems are fine up to a point, but all they are for is to help you get to the point where there is no system where you deal with God absolutely in your freedom and His freedom."

- Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, 118.

"It would be a grave error to suppose that Buddhism and Christianity merely offer various *explanations* of suffering, or worse, justifications and mystifications built on this ineluctable fact. On the contrary both show that suffering remains inexplicable most of all for the man who attempts *to explain it in order to evade it*, or who thinks explanation itself is an escape. Suffering is not a 'problem' as if it were something we could stand outside and control. Suffering, as both Christianity and Buddhism see, each in its own way, is part of our very ego-identity and empirical existence, and the only thing to do about it is to plunge right into the middle of contradiction and confusion in order to be transformed by what Zen calls the 'Great Death' and Christianity calls 'dying and rising with Christ.'"

- Thomas Merton, *Thoughts On the East*, 41.



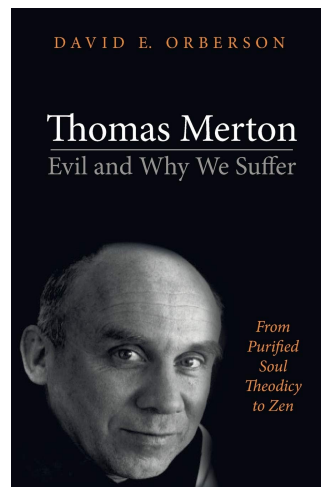
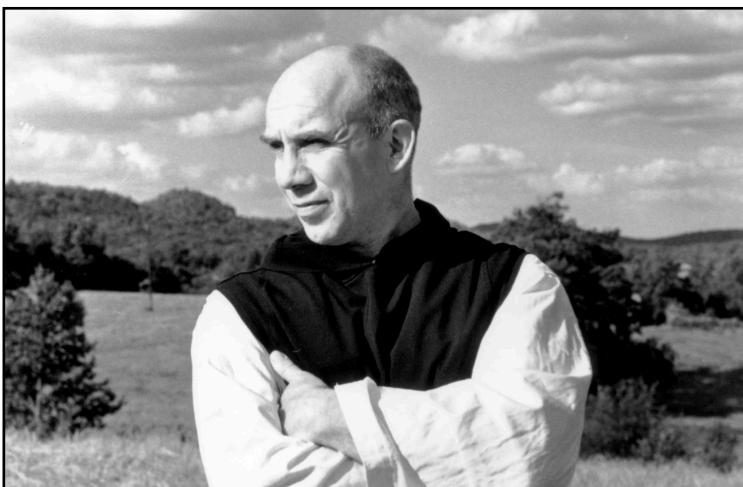
The Rev. Daniel London, PhD, is the rector of Christ Episcopal Church in Eureka CA. He has taught courses on Christian Spirituality, World Religions, the Gospel of John, and Christian Social Ethics at Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Graduate Theological Union, the Episcopal School for Deacons, and the Center for Bible Study. He is the author of *Theodicy and Spirituality in the Fourth Gospel*, published by Fortress Academic Press (2020).

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SATURDAY DECEMBER 12, 2020 - 2:30 PM - 6 PM

## Retreat Schedule

- 2:30 - 3:15 PM - Welcome and Introductions
  - Who is Thomas Merton?
- 3:15 PM - Break
- 3:30 - 4:15 PM - Merton's Theodicy
  - Thomas Merton's approaches to the question of suffering
- 4:15 PM - Small Group Discussions
  - How do you respond to the question of suffering?
  - Which approaches of Merton resonate most with you?
- 4:45 PM - Merton's Theodical Spirituality
  - How did Thomas Merton bring the question of suffering to God in prayer?
  - How can we pray our questions of suffering and experience a divine response during seasons of darkness?
- 5:15 PM - Group Discussion and Final Thoughts
- 5:30 PM - Break
- 5:45 PM - Closing Remarks from Deacon Stephen
- 6 PM - Prayer and Dismissal



The recommended (but certainly not required) book for this retreat is *Thomas Merton: Evil and Why We Suffer: From Purified Soul Theodicy to Zen* by David E. Orberson