

The theology of love must seek to deal realistically with the evil and injustice in the world, and not merely to compromise with them.

# THOMAS MERTON

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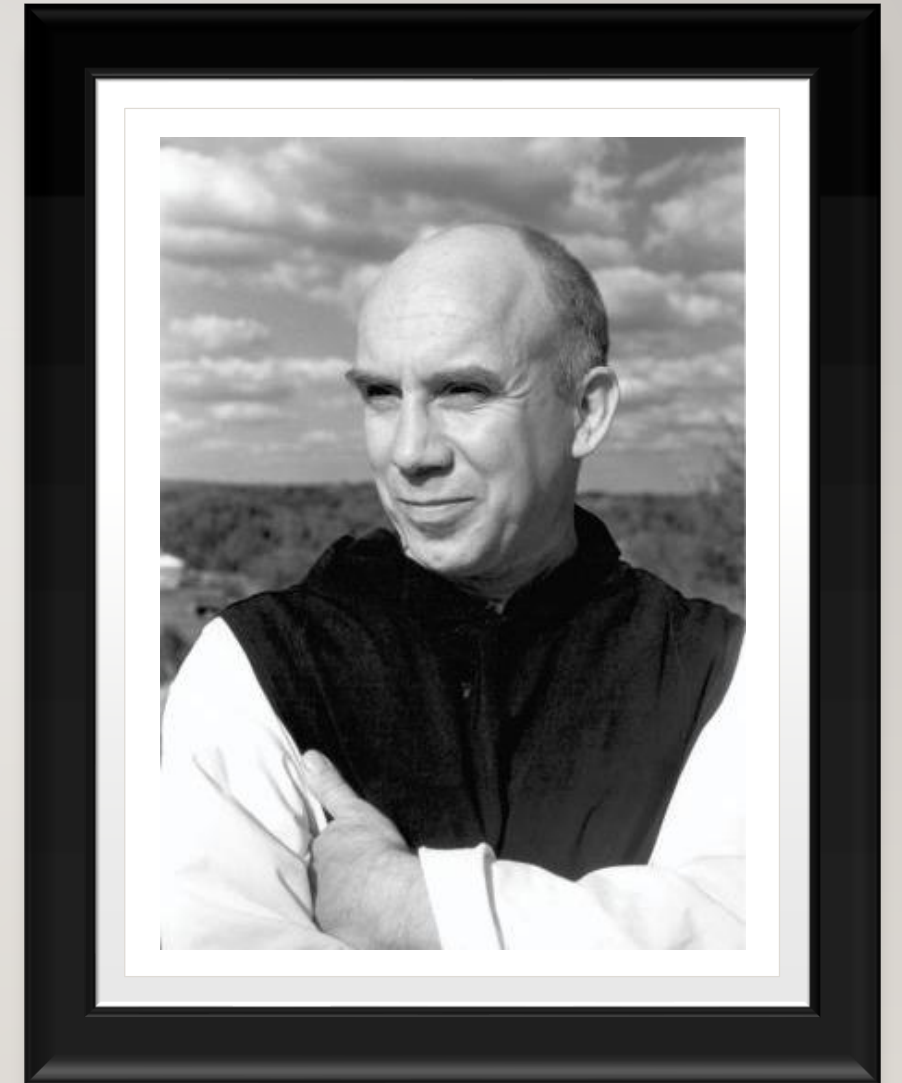
CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

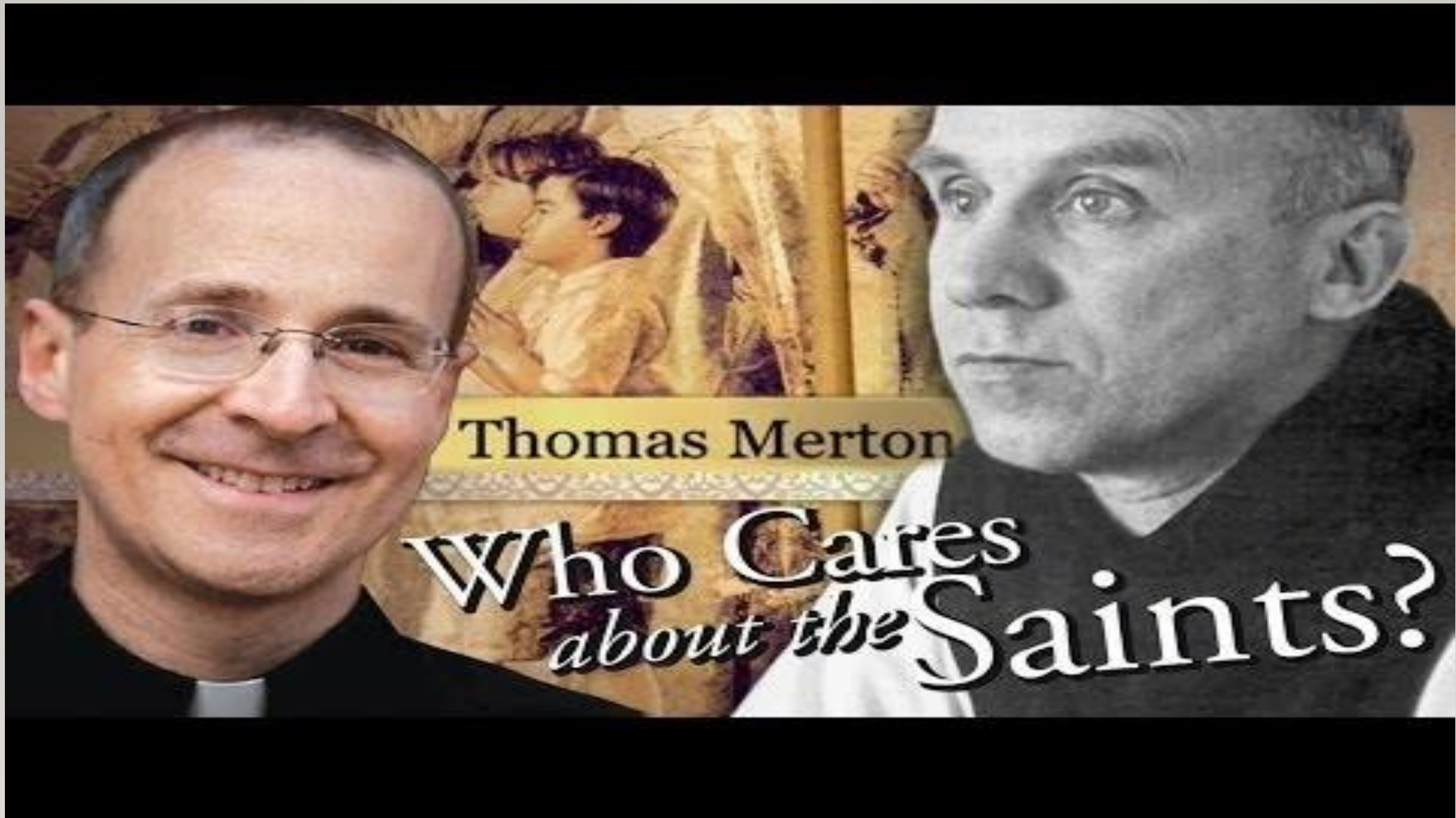
# THOMAS MERTON

## 1915-1968

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- Born in Prades, France
- Difficult childhood and adolescence
- Converted to Catholicism in 1938
- Took initial vows as Trappist Monk in 1941
- Ordained as a priest in 1949
- Prolific writer – influential spiritual master
- Died in 1968





Thomas Merton

Who Cares  
*about the* Saints?



# DEVOTIONAL FRAME

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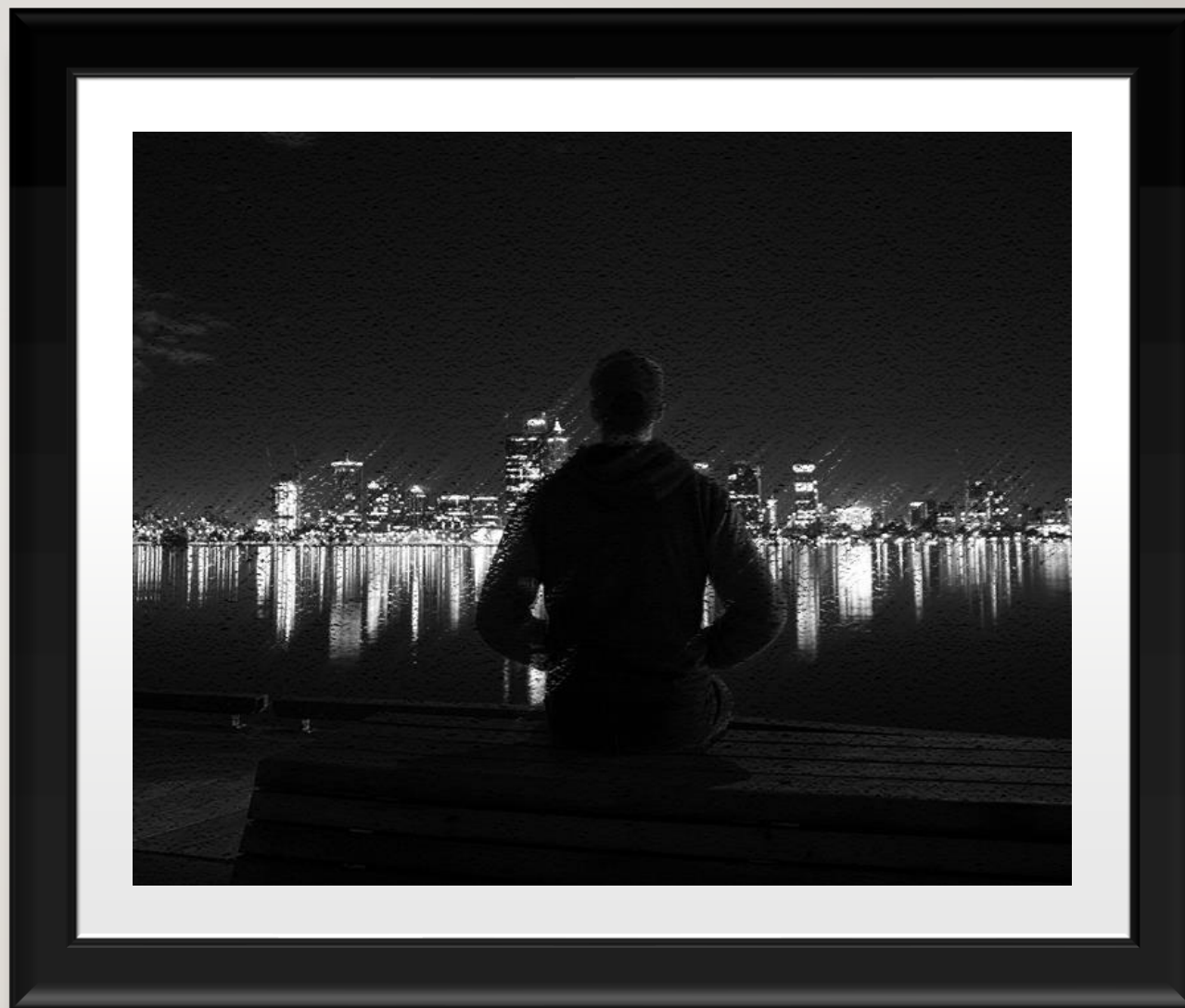


- Written primarily to “fellow monks”
- Concerned with personal prayer – embedded in a life of psalmody, liturgical celebration, and lectio divina
- Through contemplation God reveals the ever deepening call to life in Christ

# DEFINING CONTEMPLATION

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- Highest expression of intellectual and spiritual life
- Response to a call: an echo of God's voice within us
- Resting in God, who loves us, is near to us, and who draws us into the divine life
- Paschal rhythm – a passage from death to life
- Firmly rooted in life



# DISCUSSION

- What experiences have you had with meditation or contemplation?
- Merton suggests that contemplation has a kind of “paschal rhythm.” In what ways have you experienced prayer as a kind of progression from “death to life?”



## INTENTION, EFFORT, AND OBSTACLES

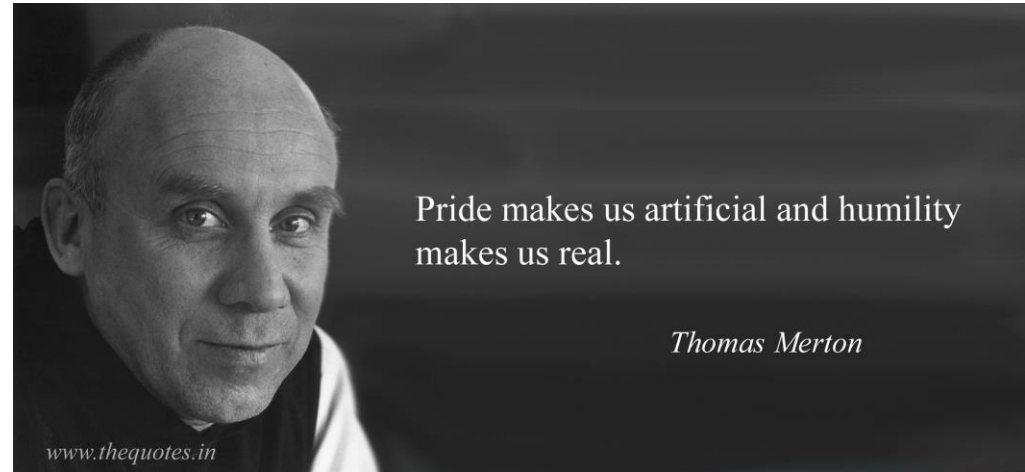
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- Difficulties of contemplative prayer
- Magic methods and systems
- Deception of “good will”
- Pride, Spiritual Vanity, and Sloth
- Superficial divide between the spiritual and the material

# HUMILITY IS KEY

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- Being led by God rather than by effort
- Renewal of God's gifts of grace, mercy, and faith
- Importance of Spiritual Direction





## DISCUSSION

- Natural gifts such as ingenuity or cleverness, writes Merton, can present great problems in the spiritual life as we look for 'tricks' and 'shortcuts.' What is wrong with this approach to spiritual growth?
- If Thomas Merton were your spiritual director, and heard you share your present practices, would he describe you as one who is led, or one who is still trying to lead?

# TAKING IT HOME

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- Set aside fifteen minutes a day for solitude and meditation. Relax from the strain and stress and simply rest in God's presence.
- Merton believed that we need to cultivate an "attitude" in our life before God. He lists eight attitudes that unite us to God: faith, openness, attention, reverence, expectation, supplication, trust, and joy. During your times of reflection, choose one of these attitudes and nurture it by concentrating on offering short, simple prayers. For example, in *faith*, simply say, "Lord, I believe in you. I know that you can do all things..."

