

## Thomas Merton Redwoods Chapter

### **Surely it is God who Saves Me** Music: *Thomas Merton*

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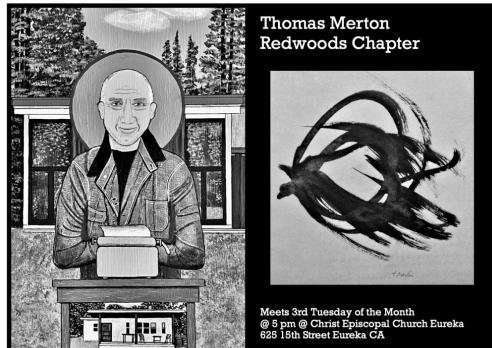
The Christian Life



Words: Carl P. Daw, Jr. (b. 1944); para. of *The First Song of Isaiah*

Music: Thomas Merton, Ray W. Urwin (b. 1950)

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## **Thomas Merton Redwoods Chapter**

Reading Group meets Third Tuesday of the Month  
5 PM in the Chapel of Our Merciful Saviour



Gracious God, you called your monk Thomas Merton to proclaim your justice out of silence, and moved him in his contemplative writings to perceive and value Christ at work in the faiths of others: Keep us, like him, steadfast in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. ***Amen.***

## Thomas Merton Biography

Thomas Merton was among the most influential Catholic writers of the twentieth century. His writings cover a broad range of subject matter: spirituality and the contemplative life, prayer, and religious biography. He was also deeply interested in issues of social justice and Christian responsibility. He did not shy away from controversy and addressed race relations, economic injustice, war, violence, and the nuclear arms race.

Merton was born in Prades, France, on January 15, 1915. His father was from New Zealand and his Quaker mother from the United States. After a brief sojourn in England, where Merton was baptized in the Church of England,<sup>[1]</sup> the family settled in New York.<sup>[2]</sup> The birth of his brother, the death of his mother, and the romance of his father with the American novelist Evelyn Scott created an unsettling life for Merton for some years. After a brief enrollment at Clare College, Cambridge, Merton settled into life as a student at Columbia University in New York. Merton developed relationships at Columbia that would nurture him for the rest of his life.

Though nominally an Anglican, Merton underwent a dramatic conversion experience in 1938 and became a Roman Catholic. Merton recounts the story of his conversion in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, an autobiography published in 1948, immediately a classic.

Merton entered the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, the Trappists, at the Abbey of Gethsemani, near Bardstown, Kentucky, in 1941.<sup>[3]</sup> Merton was known in the community as Father Louis; his gifts as a writer were encouraged by the abbot.

In addition to his translations of Cistercian sources and his original works, Merton carried on a prolific correspondence with people around the world on a wide range of subjects. Some of his correspondence takes the form of spiritual direction, some shows his deep affections for friends outside the community, and much of it demonstrates Merton's ability to be fully engaged in the world even though he lived a cloistered life.

Merton died in Bangkok, Thailand, on December 10, 1968, by accidental electrocution, while attending a meeting of religious leaders during a pilgrimage to the Far East.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Merton was not baptized in England as this biography implies. Rather, he was baptized in the Church of England while living in Prades, France. "My baptism at Prades [France], was almost certainly Father's idea, because he had grown up with a deep and well-developed faith, according to the doctrine of the Church of England. But I don't think there was much power, in the waters of baptism I got in Prades, to untwist the warping of my essential freedom, or loose me from the devils that hung like vampires on my soul." Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harvest, 1998), 6.

<sup>[2]</sup> While on Long Island, his father (Owen Merton) served as a church organist at Zion Episcopal Church in Douglaston NY, a church that Merton describes as including an eagle lectern, an American flag, and stunning stained glass windows behind the altar. Regarding the Episcopal Church, young Merton said: "one came out of the church with a kind of comfortable and satisfied feeling that something had been done that needed to be done." Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harvest, 1998), 15.

<sup>[3]</sup> Merton entered the monastery on December 10, 1948, the same calendar day upon which he died in 1968.