

tions that some may have, and reassuring us that "Merton's love for solitude was not an evasion from conflicts in community" (148). Merton faced the world and he faced himself, which enabled him to find real hope for unity with all in the solitude of the heart.

After you read this book, which can be ordered through the Merton Center ([www.merton.org/seeds](http://www.merton.org/seeds)), share your own seeds of hope with others.

Gray Matthews

FOREST, Jim, *Living with Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton*, Revised Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), pp. xxvi + 262. ISBN 978-1-57075-754-9 (paper) \$22.00.

Those of us who study the life and work of Thomas Merton are often asked, in one form or another, the same question from a myriad of well-wishing people who may have just heard of Merton for the first time and want to learn more. Whether in the basement hall of some parish, at a dessert reception after a Merton lecture or on a plane ride home from the International Thomas Merton Society conference, inevitably those at first unfamiliar with our beloved Fr. Louis and now intrigued by our enthusiasm for this figure will ask: "What books would you recommend for me to learn more about Thomas Merton?"

I have found myself in this situation enough times now to have a quick list ready to give at a moment's notice. It usually follows this sequence: *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *New Seeds of Contemplation* and *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* for the "must read" primary source texts from each major Mertonian era. Then comes the recommendation for which of the many biographies I would endorse. My choice has always been Jim Forest's *Living with Wisdom*.

At this point Forest's book has been around for quite some time, if in a variety of forms. In 1979 Forest published *Thomas Merton: A Pictorial Biography* (Paulist), the first incarnation of what would eventually become *Living with Wisdom* (Orbis, 1991) and now the revised edition under review here. The first book, as Forest recalls in the acknowledgments of the revised edition, was much smaller yet featured an element that would remain a distinguishing staple of Forest's biography for decades to come – lots of photographs. When invited by Orbis Press to expand the text twelve years later, Forest returned to the manuscript to enlarge what had been primarily a pictorial collection. It is this 1991 text that has been an

accessible volume and a helpful introduction to the life of Merton for nearly two decades. This revised edition stands in the shadow of that first version and it is in that context that we look at its new manifestation.

There are a few things that *Living with Wisdom* is not. It is not an academic text. For a scholarly biography, Michael Mott's *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* remains the flagship resource. Forest's book is also not a monograph dedicated to a particular period or influence in Merton's life. There are plenty of other volumes to consult for that sort of study. It is instead a general introduction to his life and work. Forest explains his intention well when in his preface he writes, "Nothing will please me more than to know that this book helped open the door to Merton's own writing and to some of the other books about him" (xvi). This is a text that serves as a general orientation guidebook or something of a "Merton's Life 101" course. It is precisely for this reason that it is so highly recommended to those who are getting to know Merton for the first time.

There are some significant and helpful changes to the revised edition. Perhaps most noticeably, the size and cover design are different. There are about forty additional pages in the revised edition that can be accounted for in added content, additional images and the inclusion of several resources not found in the earlier version. For example, in the front of the book one will find a seven-page chronology of Merton's life. This is a wonderful asset for it chronicles not only the major liminal experiences throughout his life, but lists his major publications alongside these biographical details. It is a nice "at a glance" reference tool. Forest includes an afterword to this edition that is insightful and reflective, marking recent developments in the world of Merton scholarship as well as tracing future trajectories of interest in and study of Merton's work.

Also new to this edition is a one-page list of Internet resources, something that would not have been conceivable in 1991 when the earlier version was published. Additionally, if one compares the chapter endnotes from each edition, a major difference between the two is noticed. The 1991 edition was printed four years before the first volume of Merton's journals was published. All references to the journals in the earlier edition contain only the dated entry, whereas the new edition includes cross-references to the page location of each entry in the seven-volume collection of his journals.

This is a helpful improvement on the earlier text. Perhaps most helpful, though, is the addition of a reasonably comprehensive index. For a book this size, the number of index entries is pleasantly surprising.

Forest organizes his presentation of Merton's life in twenty-eight chapters. Although the number remains the same as the earlier edition, five of the chapters have been re-titled ("The Court of the Queen of Heaven" in place of "Gethsemani and Harlem," "Father Louis" in place of "Vows," "Abbey Forester" in place of "In the Belly of a Whale," "Containing the Divided Worlds" in place of "The Hermit of Times Square," and "A Hermitage on Mount Olivet" in place of "Blessings"). Although the chapter headings have dramatically changed, little difference exists in the content of each section except for a few additional journal entries and other minor modifications.

Forest, having known Merton personally, writes in a way that reveals a comfort with and connection to his subject that few other Merton biographers have successfully accomplished. The book is written in a popular style and in accessible language that invites the reader into the life and experiences of Merton through the lens of the author. The book continues to live up to its subtitle, namely "a life" of Thomas Merton. Whereas some other biographers have made claims that imply their work is the definitive, authentic or most honest depiction of Merton's life to date, Forest's book is more humble and forthright about the scope and breadth of its project. As such, the particular moments of Merton's life – from the disappointment of not becoming a Franciscan friar to the frustration of censorship from the Cistercian Order to the experience of falling in love with M. – are generally presented without gloss or hyperbole. As best an author can, Forest allows the sequence of events in Merton's life to stand on their own and reveal something of a glimpse into the complex and multifaceted person that this modern monk was.

The choice to include as many quotes from Merton's own texts as Forest has suggests the author's willingness to step aside so that Merton might introduce himself. In so doing, the reader is invited to continue learning about Merton by setting *Living with Wisdom* down in order to pick up one of Merton's own books. In addition to the inclusion of the recently published journals, Forest does a fine job of referencing several texts by and about Merton that were published since the earlier edition of *Living with Wisdom*. Among

these additions are Merton's own *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* (Orbis, 2004), *Cassian and the Fathers: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* (Cistercian Publications, 2005) and *In the Dark before Dawn: New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New Directions, 2005).

This book is without a doubt a necessary addition to anyone's Merton library. Unlike some revised texts that offer only aesthetic and minor changes, thereby rendering the new book's purchase unnecessary, owners of the 1991 edition of this book will find "upgrading" to the revised edition an investment well worth making. Forest's revised *Living with Wisdom* will continue to be a reliable introduction to Merton's life even as additional biographies and studies are published. While this book is perfect for those just getting acquainted with the monk from Gethsemani, it is also a refreshing "biographical booster shot" for those of us deeply enmeshed in the particularities of Merton scholarship.

Daniel P. Horan, OFM

HARMLESS, William, SJ, *Mystics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. xvii + 350. ISBN 978-0-19-530038-3 (cloth) \$125.00; 978-0-19-530039-0 (paper) \$18.95.

Unlike his previous book, the splendid *Desert Christians*, an intensive examination of the entire body of fourth- and fifth-century desert father literature, *Mystics*, the most recent work of William Harmless, ranges widely but selectively over the whole course of the Christian era, but has in common with its predecessor a depth of insight and clarity of presentation that make it a superb introduction to the varieties of mystical experience and expression within and even beyond the Christian tradition.

After an introductory chapter providing a preliminary orientation to the meaning and significance of mysticism, the author examines eight particular figures whom he considers representative mystics, six Christians, a Muslim and a Buddhist, and concludes with an extensive summary chapter that draws together into a more systematic exposition the insights provided by the lives and writings of his chosen examples. Thus the major focus, as the title indicates, is on mystics rather than mysticism, on specific persons rather than on abstract theory, but in his final synthesis Fr. Harmless does provide a clear and balanced evaluation of various recent approaches to mysticism, and a satisfying and convincing discussion of its essential elements.