

THE INNER JOURNEY OF THOMAS MERTON

Review of
Jim Forest

Finding Your Centre: A Journey with Thomas Merton
Alresford, England & Rydalmere, Australia: Hunt & Thorpe, 1994
61 pages / £2.99 paperback

Reviewed by **Patrick Hart**, OCSO

This has to be the smallest book to be published about Merton in recent years. As one in a series of Everyday Spirituality pocket-size paperbacks, Jim Forest, friend and biographer of Thomas Merton (see *Living with Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), sets out to explore some of the essential teaching of Merton. One might be tempted to call it “the heart of Merton” since the author covers all the burning issues that preoccupied Merton over the years, whether the contemplative vs. the active life, East/West relations, or social concerns dealing with the plight of the poor and minorities in the United States and throughout the world.

Coming now from the Orthodox tradition, Forest naturally brings up Merton’s love of the Eastern Fathers, the use of the Jesus prayer, and his great devotion to icons. For the record, it should be pointed out that the author is mistaken when he writes that Merton took with him to the Far East in the fall of 1968 the magnificent icon (actually a triptych), a gift of Marco Pallis (*Peaks and Lamas*). He left it behind in the Hermitage chapel, hanging on the wall behind the altar while he was away. What was found among Merton’s personal effects in Bangkok following his death on 10 December 1968 was a small icon print.

This misconception in no way diminishes the value of *Finding Your Centre*. With short quotations from Merton followed by an insightful commentary by Forest for each chapter (a brief “exercise” is supplied by the author to help slow down the reader), this makes an ideal kind of pocket book to take on an afternoon stroll in the woods or the park. With the ever growing interest in centering prayer, as evidenced by the demand for workshops conducted by Abbot Thomas Keating, Fathers Basil Pennington and William Meninger, this small volume answers a real need and deserves a wide audience.

Patrick Hart, OCSO, is a monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani at Trappist, Kentucky, and serves as the monastery’s liaison for Merton matters. He has edited several Merton books, including *Love and Living*, *The Monastic Journey*, and the third volume of the Merton letters, *The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*. He has been appointed by the Trustees of the Merton Legacy Trust as General Editor of *The Merton Journals*. He served two terms as a member of the Advisory Board of the International Thomas Merton Society.