

A Meditative Month with Merton

Review of
Come into the Silence
 By Thomas Merton
 Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2021
 xxi + 71 pages / \$10.95 paper

Reviewed by **Mark C. Meade**

Come into the Silence is part of the “30 Days with a Great Spiritual Teacher” series published by Ave Maria Press. Other volumes in the series feature such spiritual figures as Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, Francis de Sales, Thérèse of Lisieux, Francis of Assisi, Thomas à Kempis, Catherine of Siena, Augustine of Hippo, Hildegard of Bingen, Henri Nouwen, the Psalmist(s) and the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing*. Though uncredited, the prolific Jon M. Sweeney is responsible for selecting and editing the contents of this installment of the series. Merton readers will know Sweeney as editor of and contributor to *What I Am Living For: Lessons from the Life and Writings of Thomas Merton* (2018); in addition, he has edited *A Course in Christian Mysticism* (2017) and *A Course in Desert Spirituality* (2019), abbreviated adaptations of conferences Merton delivered to the novices at the Abbey of Gethsemani, drawn from the critical editions in the Monastic Wisdom Series. Most recently, he has written *Thomas Merton: An Introduction to His Life, Teachings, and Practices* (2021) and edited *Awake and Alive: Thomas Merton according to His Novices* (2022).

Like other books in this series, *Come into the Silence* provides a short introduction to the volume’s spiritual teacher along with a guide to using the book for daily prayer, followed by thirty daily reflections. Though very brief, Sweeney’s introduction effectively captures Merton’s life and significance with some explanations for a broad audience not always provided in Merton books. For example, he provides a sentence to explain the role of an abbot instead of assuming readers will be familiar with monastic life. Following the introduction, series editor John Kirvan explains how to use the book. Not having seen others in the series, I assume this chapter is reproduced for the whole series, but it nevertheless provides helpful practical suggestions. The daily reflections constitute most of the book. Each of the thirty selections consists of three segments: a passage from Merton’s work to start the day, a thought or question to ponder throughout the day, and either a final Merton passage or a concluding daily examen. I am happy that the source of each reflection is noted for easy reference. As one of the gatekeepers of Merton on social media, I am glad that each quotation clearly identifies the source, since it is common to find circulating online dubious Merton passages lacking citations. For a slim volume, *Come into the Silence* incorporates a wide array of Merton sources,

including his journals, *My Argument with the Gestapo*, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, *No Man Is an Island*, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, *Love and Living*, *The Silent Life* and *Thoughts in Solitude*. The book ends with a page of “One Final Word” encouraging the reader to discern if he or she would like to delve more deeply into the writings of Merton or would prefer to find another spiritual teacher.

Come into the Silence succeeds in its appeal to a variety of Merton readers. The selections are well-chosen and broken into a length that lends itself well to thoughtful meditation, especially with the guidance Sweeney provides in his final daily reflections. The book serves as an inviting introduction to new Merton readers while providing a different and fresh framing for those already familiar with Merton. Having enjoyed this format, I feel drawn to seeking out some of the other titles in the “30 Days” series.