

infallible light and your own justice, which you have chosen. This is the exact opposite of everything Jesus ever did or taught.

Through careful use of quotations from a variety of Merton's books on spirituality, Finley leads his readers to Merton's awakening not only to his own true nature but that of everyone. Finley quotes from Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* where out of his own personal epiphany experience, Merton pinpoints an awareness that becomes utterly life-changing.

At the centre of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us...

As I re-read this book I clearly saw the reason why so many people over the past twenty five years have found the book so helpful. Finley's exposition of Merton's teaching demonstrates well how Merton's academic study of the early monastic and contemplative practice in both the Christian and Zen traditions was integrated into his own lived experience. The book shows how Merton is then able to convey this to his readers in a contemporary language which is readily accessible to those drawn to contemplative prayer. In an age when much traditional religious language has become no more than soporific

sound-bites, the language of Merton still speaks in a lively way to today's spiritual seeker.

Following those who, for the last twenty-five years, have been challenged and enriched by *Merton's Palace of Nowhere*, I am sure that the publication of this anniversary edition will prompt a whole new crop of readers to take its wise guidance on their life's journey. That many will buy the book, read it, live it and follow it up with many more of Merton's books is my fervent hope.

**Father Patrick Eastman** is a retired Roman Catholic priest and an approved Zen teacher. He is a member of the committee of the Thomas Merton Society and regularly gives retreats.

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### Living with Wisdom – A Life of Thomas Merton

Jim Forest

Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York

ISBN 088344755X

£8.99

**T**his book came to me a few days before Christmas – a season when we get back in touch with old friends. In many ways, that may be your experience if you were to read this book. You may well have seen or owned it before, but maybe lost or loaned it, or you may have never quite got round to buying it; but as you read it, it will probably feel familiar. This book is written by someone who was inspired by Merton, and later became a friend. It gives an overview of Merton's life, from his itinerant early years, to his search for satisfaction, to his conversion and commitment to the Cistercians, to his

sudden fame and then the years of change as he embraced the causes and stimulus of the world he had once fled. The book is liberally sprinkled with quotations from Merton's letters and books, which allows one to gain a feel for Merton's style. It helpfully has all the references you need to trace the quotes but, strangely, no bibliography. There are also plenty of black and white photographs, not only of Merton but of friends and places connected with him, which add to the pen portrait.

St John of the Cross wrote that in the end we will be examined by love, and this life of Merton is obviously written by someone with a great deal of love and affection for Merton. There is a delightful story of his first meeting with Merton in which the intense, gaunt, severe Cistercian monk he imagined from his reading of the Seven Storey Mountain turned out, in reality, to be a rotund, laughing, Pablo Picasso look-alike! I was left wondering though, why Forest had not included any more stories from his own experience of Merton, which would have surely added significantly to this book which is after all a biography written by a friend. He is not blind to Merton's idiosyncrasies nor to how difficult it was for his superiors to help and hold him as he later grew frustrated with his life at Gethsemani Abbey. As Forest came to know and befriend Merton through his work with the peace movement in the USA in the 1960s, this aspect of Merton's life and thinking receives plenty of attention.

This book was first published in 1991 and Merton-related publishing has since flourished. You may well wonder why it has been reissued and at whom it is aimed. It is not for you if you are looking for an in-depth or a searching, critical

treatment of Merton. You will need to go elsewhere for a detailed examination of certain aspects of Merton's thinking: on contemplation, for example. However, in a world where the most famous Merton in the UK is a comedian or a London borough, this is a sound introduction for those who have yet to make his acquaintance. It is a safe book to recommend and lend. *Living with Wisdom* is not the last word on Merton, but it is a good first word. And like an old friend it can gently remind even seasoned Merton readers of a few truths that might lie buried in the past.

**Keith James** is Rector of Bewdley in Worcester Diocese.

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### **Awake to God**

Melvyn Matthews  
SPCK, London  
ISBN 0281058016  
£12.99

### **The Mind of Christ**

David Scott  
Continuum, London  
ISBN 0826490743  
£10.99

**H**ere are two new books from two of our leading Anglican authors.

In *Awake to God* Melvyn Matthews develops and elaborates themes he touched upon in an earlier book, *Both Alike to Thee*. The subtitle of that book was 'Retrieving the Mystical Way'; here it is 'Explorations in the Mystical Way'. Matthews wants to pursue his explorations in the light of our experience of postmodernism and he opens with the challenge to see postmodernism as an