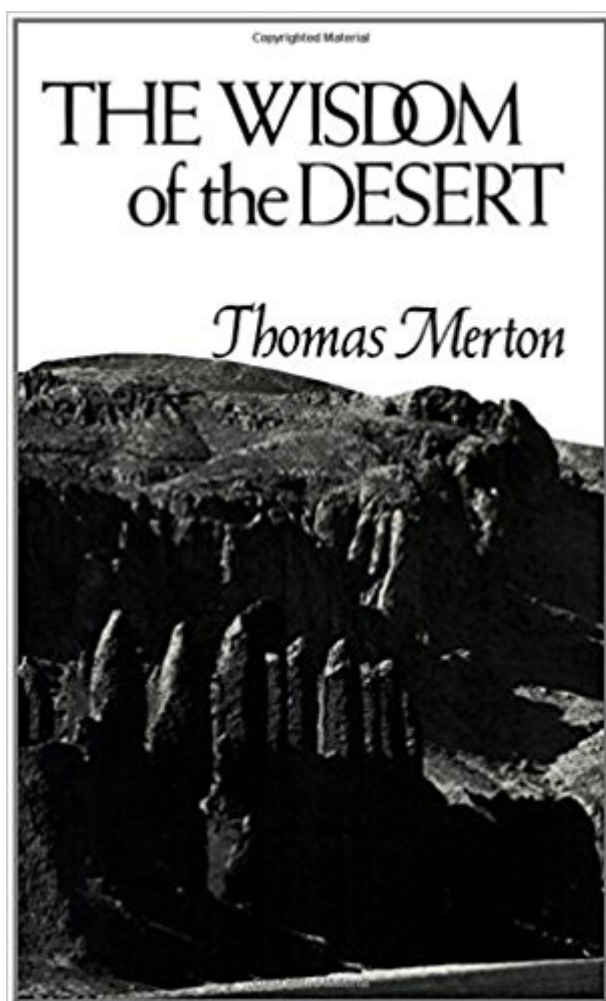


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The Wisdom Of The Desert (New Directions)



Synopsis

The *Wisdom of the Desert* was one of Thomas Merton's favorites among his own books—surely because he had hoped to spend his last years as a hermit. The personal tones of the translations, the blend of reverence and humor so characteristic of him, show how deeply Merton identified with the legendary authors of these sayings and parables, the fourth-century Christian Fathers who sought solitude and contemplation in the deserts of the Near East. The hermits of Scete who turned their backs on a corrupt society remarkably like our own had much in common with the Zen masters of China and Japan, and Father Merton made his selection from them with an eye to the kind of impact produced by the Zen mondo.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

• In fact, Thomas Merton does not so much introduce the Fathers of the desert; he stands in their midst, one of them. • - Father Daniel Berrigan

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) entered the Cistercian Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, following his conversion to Catholicism and was ordained Father M. Louis in 1949. During the 1960s, he was increasingly drawn into a dialogue between Eastern and Western religions and domestic issues of war and racism. In 1968, the Dalai Lama praised Merton for having a more profound knowledge of Buddhism than any other Christian he had known. Thomas Merton is the author of the beloved

classic The Seven Storey Mountain.

I know it is not necessarily a Thomas Merton composition, but this is my favorite Thomas Merton book. Merton's love and reverence for the desert fathers shines on every page, and the wisdom he presents is as close to the truly universal as anything offered in Christianity. The sayings Merton chooses express the inner-experience very well. These desert fathers were not men who looked outside of themselves for a savior, or for something from some other world. They looked inside of themselves for a savior, and understood it was something that can be discovered and realized in our world. It is so interesting to read these sayings, which were written prior to anything formal like the Council of Nicea. In our time, it is easy to forget that we have one, mainstream, version of Christianity, whether it be Catholic, Protestant, or even the more isolated sects like Mormonism. However, Christianity in its current state is a development. The sayings of these desert fathers proves that. They existed before modernity, but they exemplify what modern Christianity sees as an ideal. They lived it. These sayings are a primary source. If you want to be inspired, this is a wonderful book. Merton does not offer his usual high brow analysis that is very difficult to fully grasp. This is a simple presentation by a remarkable monk who managed to live and inspire many people, whether Christians or not. This book will enhance your Christian faith, and if you aren't a Christian, this book will reveal why Christianity is so remarkable. It's a win-win.

I have read several books on the desert Fathers and I ordered this one because I like Merton. I wanted to see which sayings he would highlight. I have ALWAYS found reading through the desert ascetic tradition, forgive the pun, rather dry. You have to read through to get some gems. I have to say that those gems are always there. Another issue I think is that for the modern reader, it is difficult to connect with this tradition because of the writing and their approach. They defined their faith through simplicity, poverty, humility and self-control. The tradition is venerated in Christianity but it is a couple of steps removed from the mainstream...understandably so. Merton's choices in selecting certain sayings didn't shed any light for me on his spirituality. Maybe I am simply not reading it as closely as I need to, but I don't see a discernible pattern apart from his own monasticism. Another book that might be of use is Yushi Nomura's work, "Desert Wisdom". It still is the Desert Wisdom tradition though so you have to work a bit to enter into this way of being. Both of these are worthwhile if you are willing to put in some time and contemplation. Desert Wisdom: Sayings from the Desert Fathers

Thomas Merton was a Trappist Monk and wrote this book that contains his favorite quotes from 'Verba Seniorum'. He chooses these for himself and his fellow monks in order to make some of the sayings of the Desert Fathers more accessible. He begins this book with a very well written introduction. Merton wrote this book not as a history of the early Desert Fathers. What he provides are a selection of extracts from their writings that had proved useful for him in his contemplative life. The book is definitely worth reading. A book you will keep by your night stand. If you are looking for a book that gives you a history of the Desert Fathers and a wide range of their writings, then this is the wrong book for you.

Merton is a mystic himself so his perspective on the Desert Fathers and their spirituality is somewhat mystical. As I read this very short book, I found myself longing to cast off our busy, everyday world filled with noise and too much STUFF for a simpler life where I meet my needs by the work of my hands and meet my God through continual prayer. The theme of the Fathers is *fuge, tace, et quiesce* -- flee, be silent, be at rest -- which Merton brings out very well. The short selection from the Sayings of the Desert Fathers gives great insight into their thinking, their prayer, their life, and their spirituality. I recommend this book (only about 50 pages) for anyone who is looking to find a new perspective on life. I also recommend it as a multiple read book, i.e., a book you can read over and over again and get more out of it each time. I have read it more than once.

Merton offered us a look into the world of desert monasticism with sayings and parables full of paradox and beauty and occasional humor. The parallels with Buddhist philosophy are obvious but so too the gospel of Thomas and other wisdom literature and even at a soon level early liberation theology with its emphasis is on love. While it is a fast read, many of the selections themselves are worthy of extended contemplation so that the book is not only an example of a certain kind of spiritual practice but an experience of it in the reading.....

Wonderful!

Priceless wisdom from people who are probably vastly misunderstood. Thankfully, Merton's introduction helps clarify these men's reasons for pursuing holiness in the desert. A great read.

Having spent time with the Philokalia (in translation) over many years, then to read Thomas Merton's prolegomena together with excerpts of such works (from Ming's opus LATIN PATROLOGY)

provides a thoughtful, helpful, and current characterization of the Desert Fathers. Indeed Merton's introduction to their era, their motives and their gifts to the Church make plain just how timely the Father's and his own words are to our own day. From the pen of one who longed for a truly eremitic life, yet who lived for nothing other than serving the Lord Jesus Christ, this reader found Merton's WISDOM OF THE DESERT a delightful volume; would that it was a bit longer...J. Patrick Wilkens

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