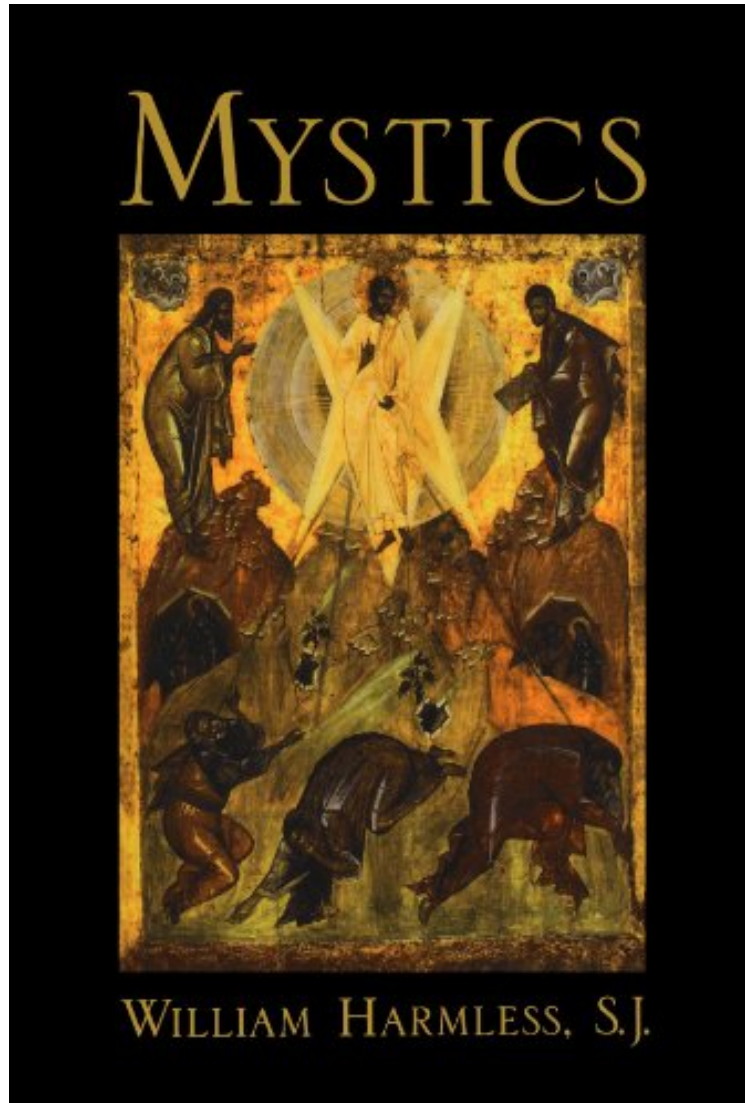


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Mystics are path-breaking religious practitioners who claim to have experienced the infinite, word-defying Mystery that is God. Many have been gifted writers with an uncanny ability to communicate the great realities of life with both a theologian's precision and a poet's lyricism. They use words to jolt us into recognizing ineffable mysteries surging beneath the surface of our lives and within the depths of our hearts and, by their artistry, can awaken us to see and savor fugitive glimpses of a God-drenched world. In *Mystics*, William Harmless, S.J., introduces readers to the scholarly study of mysticism. He explores both mystics' extraordinary lives and their no-less-extraordinary writings using a unique case-study method centered on detailed examinations of six major Christian mystics: Thomas Merton, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen, Bonaventure, Meister Eckhart, and Evagrius Ponticus. Rather than presenting mysticism as a subtle web of psychological or theological abstractions, Harmless's case-study approach brings things down to earth, restoring mystics to their historical context. Harmless highlights the pungent diversity of mystical experiences and mystical theologies. Stepping beyond Christianity, he also explores mystical elements within Islam and Buddhism, offering a chapter on the popular Sufi poet Rumi and one on the famous Japanese Zen master Dogen. Harmless concludes with an overview of the century-long scholarly conversation on mysticism and offers a unique, multifaceted optic for understanding mystics, their communities, and their writings. Geared toward a wide audience, *Mystics* balances state-of-the-art scholarship with accessible, lucid prose.

"In an era of growing interest in mysticism the need for introductions that are clear and accessible without sacrificing scholarly rigor and depth of understanding is great. Few books meet this exacting standard, but William Harmless's *Mystics* proves that the balance between outreach and analysis is not an impossible task. Harmless's *Mystics*, based on years of classroom experience in teaching mysticism, is a model for a concise and thoughtful approach to this intriguing, but difficult, topic. It will be necessary reading for all those who wish to explore the message of the mystics." --Bernard McGinn, Emeritus Professor at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago and author of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* "Harmless has provided a deep and readable history and commentary on the mystics he has chosen. His judicious selection of persons and texts, joined by his insightful discussions, make for a text indispensable to any graduate course on the history of spirituality." --Religion "Developed for classroom use (where it would likely be the highlight of the course), Harmless's book deserves readership by anyone seeking entry into a study of mystics and why they matter." --Theological Studies "Mystics is firmly rooted in the best scholarship, but it is also pitched low enough for readers new to the subject. Teachers will find that it makes an excellent introductory text. Perhaps the highest recommendation I can give this book is to say that I intend to assign it to my own students." --Commonweal "This book opens up a new area of study for specialists in the history and language of the Nordic countries, offering a tantalizing range of insights that invite further investigation." --peculum About the Author William Harmless, S.J., is Professor of Theology at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. He has been a member of the Society of Jesus since 1978 and specializes in the history and theology of early Christianity. He is the author of *Augustine and the Catechumenate* and *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*.