

## *The Spirit of Simplicity:* Thomas Merton on Simplification of Life<sup>1</sup>

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At the time of Thomas Merton's profession at the Abbey of Gethsemani, Abbot Frederic Dunne encouraged him to continue to publish poetry and to write several works of history. In response, early during his monastic vocation, Merton published four collections of poetry, a history of the Cistercian movement; biographies of Mary Piguët, better known as Mother Berchmans, who lived from 1876-1915 and was first a nun of the Convent of the Redemption in France and then of Our Lady of the Angels in Japan and of the thirteenth-century Flemish Cistercian mystic Saint Lutgarde of Aywières; and a study of the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic John of the Cross.<sup>2</sup>

Merton also left us two books on the greatest of the early Cistercians, Bernard of Clairvaux: a biography to mark the eighth centenary of Bernard's death; and a collection on Bernard's spirituality.<sup>3</sup> This compilation included two essays that appeared first in the order's journal, *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorum*, and "St. Bernard on Spiritual Simplicity," which originally appeared as part 2 of *The Spirit of Simplicity*, published in 1948. In the "Foreword" to this early book, Merton examined the subject of this article. Merton asserted that simplicity is one of the outstanding characteristics of Cistercian spirituality and of Cistercian saintliness. Indeed, when members of the Order were seen to grow and progress in sanctity, the chief quality that they acquired was simplicity.<sup>4</sup>

Authorship of *The Spirit of Simplicity* is inscribed anonymously as by "A Cistercian Monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani." As a result, *The Spirit of Simplicity* is among the least-known of Merton's books. Written before Merton's meteoric rise to fame, it is nevertheless foundational not only to Merton's monastic scholarship, but also to Merton's continuing wide appeal.

A number of sources confirm Merton's authorship of *The Spirit of Simplicity*. In 1950, Merton sent a copy of *The Spirit of Simplicity*

to the Benedictine scholar Jean Leclercq. While no copy exists of Merton's initial correspondence with Leclercq regarding this early research on Cistercian simplicity, Merton and Leclercq subsequently explored themes raised in the book along with Merton's ongoing search for simplification of life.<sup>5</sup> When in 1980 Cistercian Publications reprinted part of *The Spirit of Simplicity*, Leclercq commented on the enduring value of this area of Merton's scholarship. "This early Merton, already full of love and enthusiasm, still marked to some degree by ingenuousness, was building the solid foundation upon which would rise Merton the activist and social critic of the following decades."<sup>6</sup> Adding a foreword to the work's re-publication, Patrick Hart concluded,

these studies...are as relevant today as when they were written—perhaps more so.... In fact the interest extends far beyond the monastic enclosure to the university campus, the market place and even the family household. Everywhere one hears the question: how can I lead a deeply contemplative life in the midst of my present activities? ...Is union with God possible? Thomas Merton struggled with these problems in his own monastic life and finally came to the conclusion that there is a Martha, a Mary and a Lazarus in each of us, and we must learn to live together in peace, ever striving to arrive at a balanced measure in our lives.... In the final analysis, the most perfect way for each person is the total response in faith and love to one's personal call, to one's God-given vocation.<sup>7</sup>

In European history, the eleventh and twelfth centuries were times of renaissance and reformation. Wealthy monasteries, notably the Abbey of Cluny in Burgundy, with its church, constructed between 1088 and 1130, that was taller than the Vatican and the greatest ecclesiastical structure that had ever been built in the West, dominated the era.

The emergence of the Cistercian movement can be understood both positively, as a return to the sources of Benedictine monasticism, and negatively, as a reaction to the excessive power of Cluny. Bernard's *Apology to William of St. Thierry*, quoted several times by Merton, is the *pièce justificative* in the controversy between the Cluniac and Cistercian spirituality.<sup>8</sup> Of noble birth, William and his brother Simon studied at the Benedictine Monastery of Saint Nicaise at Reims. Both embraced the religious life and became

abbots, Simon at St. Nicolas-aux-Bois in the diocese of Laon, and William at St-Thierry near Reims where he implemented reforms associated with Pope Gregory VII and the Cluniac movement. A long-time friendship with Bernard led William to abdicate. He became a Cistercian at Signy where he wrote on the spiritual life until his death in 1148.

*The Spirit of Simplicity* opens with a six-page foreword. Part One includes Merton's translation and comments on the report of the 1925 General Chapter of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance. Within the text are eleven plates of twelfth-century Cistercian monasteries and the plan for typical twelfth-century Cistercian church architecture. Part Two, "St. Bernard on Interior Simplicity," has selections from Bernard, Merton's commentary and a three-page conclusion. Notable is Merton's careful reading of selections highlighting Bernard's teaching on simplicity.

Several times Merton quotes Bernard's 1127 treatise against Cluny. Bernard criticized the building of such great structures and the comfortable lifestyle of the monks. Bernard was scathing:

Oh, vanity of vanities, whose vanity is rivaled only by its insanity! The walls of the church are aglow, but the poor of the Church go hungry. The stones of the church are covered with gold, while its children are left naked. The food of the poor is taken to feed the eyes of the rich, and amusement is provided for the curious, while the needy have not even the necessities of life.<sup>9</sup>

Merton did not dwell on Bernard's critique of Cluniac monasticism. He did emphasize that Bernard was "*just as strong in castigating Cistercians, who were bordering on Pharisaism in their contempt of Cluny, as the easy-going Cluniacs themselves.*"<sup>10</sup> Believing in the need to live out of the spirit as well as the letter of Benedict's teaching on simple living, Merton commented,

...when Cistercians build in fake, overdecorated gothic in preference to something on simple, functional modern lines, they are unconsciously contradicting the whole Cistercian tradition and ideal in their very attempt to preserve it. On the other hand, the more functional and the less antiquarian our use of gothic styles, the more true will they be to the spirit of the purest Cistercian art.<sup>11</sup>

For the early Cistercians, Merton observes, simplicity consisted in “getting rid of everything that did not help the monk to arrive at union with God by the shortest possible way. And the shortest possible way to arrive at union with God, who is Love, is by loving Him, in Himself, and in our brethren.”<sup>12</sup> Merton continues in order to attain charity, the love of God, the early Cistercians discarded everything, especially “means of getting to God that were less direct.”<sup>13</sup>

Discerning the radical implications of the doctrine of simplicity, Merton observes how Bernard and other early Cistercians emphasized the need to simplify art, architecture and life-style. A monastic son of Bernard, Merton is seeking to recover this aspect of the *Rule of Benedict* in ways relevant to twentieth-century Christians who are often burdened with the worries of this life. “For nothing is as inconsistent with the life of *any* Christian as overindulgence. Our Lord says: Take care that your hearts are not weighed down with overindulgence. Luke 21:34.”<sup>14</sup>

Merton defines simplicity as the perfect conversion of the will to God and a genuine humility according to which the simple person is not afraid to be thought a fool by the world, that he or she may be wise unto God. Who truly seeks God simplifies her or his life. This teaching is a re-statement of *RB* 58: 24, to which the charter documents of the Cistercian order are faithful. Monks must unencumber their lives. “If he has any possessions, he should... give them to the poor beforehand ....”

To summarize the first part of Merton’s essay, simplicity is a broad theological category including qualities such as humility, obedience and charity. Merton sees the General Chapter of 1925 as a wake-up call for the spiritual children of Benedict and Bernard to ground their search for the greatest desired end, namely, the knowledge of self, uncluttered lives and ultimately union with God. By entering into the fundamental spirit of simplicity of the first Benedictines and Cistercians, and of all the saints, Merton believed that the monks of Gethsemani should give up active works and all non-essentials to concentrate on living contemplatively. By implication all Christians are to follow the path of simplicity, silence, solitude and stillness. In short, for Merton, simplicity is an essential mark of our truest humanity.

In Part Two, “St. Bernard on Interior Simplicity,” Merton highlights the relationship between his call for simplicity and his understanding of anthropology: “The whole aim of the Cistercian life—and the Fathers of the Order are unanimous on this point—

is to set men apart from the world that their souls may be purified and led step by step to perfect union with God by the recovery of our lost likeness to him."<sup>15</sup> For Merton, practices such as simplicity, solitude and silence help monks come to perfect union of wills with God, by love. Bernard calls this union with the Holy One "Mystical Marriage." These cornerstones of Cistercian asceticism are practices by which we may all claim our full humanity as God's children in the image and likeness of God.

...St. Bernard has really vindicated the fundamental goodness of human nature in terms as strong as have ever been used by any philosopher or theologian. And if the first step in the Cistercian ascent to God is for the monk to *know himself* ... the whole life of such a one will consist in *being himself*, or rather trying to return to the original simplicity, immortality and freedom which constitute his real self, in the image of God.<sup>16</sup>

Merton is developing a key idea. Contemplation strengthens us to claim our true self and to resist cultural pressure to conform to a false self. Augustine calls the true self a divine center, Calvin a divine spark and other theologians "soul." For Merton, the "real self" or "true self" is the God-given center of our being. If we go to the heart of our lives; if we do not buy into culture's false claims, we find the risen Christ, one with us, alive in us, giving us strength to engage the powers and principalities, even death.

Merton next presents the idea of "intellectual simplicity." By this phrase he means not only eliminating all that is superfluous, unnecessary or indirect, but also concerning ourselves exclusively with "*the one thing necessary*—the knowledge and love of God, union with Him."<sup>17</sup> Merton acknowledges that intellectual simplicity is more than a matter of knowledge. It prepares the contemplative for the deeper and more searching simplification of life that follows, namely, obedience, purification of the will and "social simplicity."<sup>18</sup>

Continuing this argument in the paragraphs that follow, Merton describes the process as follows: Cistercian simplicity begins in humility and self-denial, moves through the monastic vow of obedience, is perfected by love and culminates in a spiritual unity and peace. The Holy and Undivided Trinity is reflected not only in the souls of individuals, but also in the community. God is pleased to bend down and raise up those persons who move in

the direction of simplicity. By their humility they manifest unity in community. By their mystical prayer, they attain a closer and far more intimate union with God and bear such fruits of the Spirit as love.

Merton stresses returning to the sources of his life in community, the *Holy Bible*, the *Rule of Benedict* and the earliest Cistercian writings. A cornerstone of post World War II United States monastic renewal, of which Merton's books were a principal catalyst, these sources led Merton and an entire generation back to the desert saints in whom one may discern the basic realities of the interior life such as faith, humility, charity, meekness, discretion, and self-denial. To highlight this heritage, Merton wrote, in addition to *The Spirit of Simplicity*, an anthology of early monastic sayings, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, in which he declared, "What the Fathers sought most of all was their own true self, in Christ."<sup>19</sup>

Recovery of the earliest sources of Western monasticism led religious seekers to self-knowledge and simplicity. For Merton, recovering the purity of such practices as *lectio divina*, contemplation and simplicity would allow monks to know themselves, simplify their lives and foster love, unity, peace and "eternal union with the uncreated Simplicity that is the Triune God, that He may make perfect in us as in our Fathers the image of that Simplicity."<sup>20</sup>

### **The Spirit of Simplicity in Merton's Other Writings**

Having reclaimed Merton's crucial work as translator and commentator on monastic classics, we can now briefly locate that work as part of Merton's wider literary activity. Written in the same period as *Spirit of Simplicity* and completed on July 1, 1948, *Seeds of Contemplation* reflected Merton's maturing understanding of simplicity. Less read than its revised successor, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, the original *Seeds* presents a collection of notes and personal reflections on many themes running throughout Merton's writing, including his desire for simplicity in pursuit of God and his distinction between the false self and the true self. A few brief passages suffice:

For how can I receive the seeds of freedom if I am in love with slavery and how can I cherish the desire of God if I am filled with another and an opposite desire? God cannot plant His liberty in me because I am a prisoner and I do not even desire

to be free. I love my captivity and I lock myself in the desire for the things that I hate, and I have hardened my heart against true love.<sup>21</sup>

Merton stresses desiring God, "God alone" according to words on the gate that opens into the monastic quarters.<sup>22</sup> Simplification of life is part of the process by which we disencumber our lives of all that detracts from this one good thing. Our attachments can get the best of us and prevent us from living into our truest self. According to Merton, "For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self."<sup>23</sup>

Continuing his discussion of our truest selfhood in chapter 4, "We are One Man," Merton states that one goes into the desert not to escape others but to find them in God. One goes to the monastery not because it is there that one can be "holier than thou." Rather, one discovers one's true self in relation with God, nature and others.

*One of the greatest paradoxes of the mystical life is this: that a man cannot enter into the deepest center of himself and pass through that center into God, unless he is able to pass entirely out of himself and empty himself and give himself to other people in the purity of a selfless love.*<sup>24</sup>

Merton reiterates what he explored in *The Spirit of Simplicity*. He regards Cistercian practices such as detachment and renunciation as essential to recovery of freedom and of the true self. Reading what Merton first penned over fifty years ago, contemporaries may find chapter 18 on detachment strikingly descriptive of our lives as busy non-monastics:

...many contemplatives never become great saints, never enter into close friendship with God, never find a deep participation in His immense joys, because they cling to the miserable little consolations that are given to beginners in the contemplative way.

How many there are who are in a worse state still: they never even get as far as contemplation because they are attached to activities and enterprises that seem to them to be important. Blinded by their desire for ceaseless motion, for a constant sense of achievement, famished with a crude hunger

for results, for visible and tangible success, they work themselves into a state in which they cannot believe that they are pleasing God unless they are busy with a dozen jobs at the same time.<sup>25</sup>

In chapter 24 on renunciation, Merton writes in a way that appealed to a generation of spiritual seekers:

Life in a Trappist monastery is fundamentally peasant life. The closer it conforms to the poverty and frugality and simplicity of those who have to dig their living out of the land, the more it fulfills its essential purpose, which is to dispose men for contemplation.<sup>26</sup>

While the time has passed during which one might characterize Trappist monasticism as peasant life, Merton's main point remains pertinent. Possessions, superfluous religious practices and inane images are distractions. The contemplative must never lose sight of her or his simple desire for union with God. Only then can one experience ecstatic union with God and pure love.

In a later collection, *Thoughts in Solitude* (1958), Merton addresses a theme that later preoccupies him into the 1960s. He worries about technology and mass society. Machines bring new levels of noise and business to the community, thereby posing an obstacle to communing with God and discovering one's true self. Technology poses a wider threat:

In an age when totalitarianism has striven, in every way, to devaluate and degrade the human person, we hope it is right to demand a hearing for any and every sane reaction in the favor of man's inalienable solitude and his interior freedom... [S]ociety depends for its existence on the inviolable personal solitude of its members. Society, to merit its name, must be made up not of numbers, or mechanical units, but of persons. To be a person implies responsibility and freedom, and both these imply a certain interior solitude....

When men are merely submerged in a mass of impersonal human beings pushed around by automatic forces, they lose their true humanity, their integrity, their ability to love, their capacity for self-determination.... No amount of technological progress will cure the hatred that eats away the vitals of



materialistic society like a spiritual cancer. The only cure is, and must always be, spiritual.<sup>27</sup>

Mass, technological society can confuse people about what is unreal and what is truly real. For Merton, society depends for its existence on the inviolability of each person, each with the capacity to find personal simplicity and solitude. One need not become a monk to go to desert places:

...the "unreality" of material things is only relative to the *greater* reality of spiritual things....

The Desert Fathers believed that the wilderness had been created as supremely valuable in the eyes of God precisely because it had no value to men....

[L]ook at the deserts today. What are they? The birthplace of a new and terrible creation, the testing-ground of the power by which man seeks to un-create what God has blessed. Today, in the century of man's greatest technological achievement, the wilderness at last comes into its own. Man no longer needs God.... When man and his money and machines move out into the desert, and dwell there, not fighting the devil as Christ did, but believing in his promises of power and wealth, and adoring his angelic wisdom, then the desert itself moves everywhere. Everywhere is desert. Everywhere is solitude in which man must do penance and fight the adversary and purify his own heart in the grace of God.<sup>28</sup>

One figurative wilderness is the simple life. Merton writes, "The more we are content with our own poverty the closer we are to God for then we accept our poverty in peace, expecting nothing from ourselves and everything from God."<sup>29</sup> In this passage, poverty is less a monetary concept than a door to freedom and source of hope. When one knows that she or he has found her or his vocation, that person stops thinking about how to live and begins to live. Simplification of life allows one to hear God, find God and measure life by the embrace of God. "Solitude...has to be a communion in something greater than the world, as great as Being itself, in order that in its deep peace we may find God."<sup>30</sup> Merton concludes that by the gift of silence, and poverty, and solitude, where everything one touches is turned into prayer, one is enriched. The sky is our prayer, the birds are our prayer, the wind in the trees is our prayer. God is all in all and is all. So discovering God,

one responds with gratitude. The natural response welling up from a life given to simplicity and solitude is gratitude.

As a point of congruence in the dual theme of self knowledge and simplicity, let me cite that well-known passage where Merton recounts his experience from 1958 at the corner of Fourth and Walnut in Louisville, Kentucky. As revised for *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Merton re-iterates his rejection of monasticism as flight:

... but the conception of "separation from the world" that we have in the monastery too easily presents itself as a complete illusion: the illusion that by making vows we become a different species of being, pseudoangels, "spiritual men," men of interior life, what have you.

Certainly these traditional values are very real, but their reality is not of an order outside everyday existence in a contingent world, nor does it entitle one to despise the secular ... we are in the same world as everybody else, the world of the bomb, the world of race hatred, the world of technology, the world of mass media, big business, revolution, and all the rest. We take a different attitude to all these things .... But does that entitle us to consider ourselves different, or even *better*, than others?

Simplicity and other practices enable us to participate in the Divine Nature and thereby become one with the God of infinite love:

I have the immense joy of being *man*, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.<sup>31</sup>

So describing that particular moment of epiphany, Merton understands his vocation in an entirely new way. His calling is not to escape from the world but to engage the world at the deepest level in suffering and transformation. Whatever the circumstances that led him to Gethsemani—his wild youth, his open sexuality, his possible draft resistance, his horror at a world marked by genocide and other evils—by the time of this Louisville experience, Merton has resolved a crisis of generativity and is assuming a new calling,<sup>32</sup> that of nurturing a new world into being, one free of

bombs, racism, the worst effects of technology, media, big business and the rest. Merton's controversial writings on social issues and inter-religious authority may be seen as the fruit of his dual affirmation of his true self and of simplicity.

### **Why Merton and the Twentieth-Century Monastic Revival Matter**

For fifteen hundred years, the Benedictine *Rule* has offered Christians a way of living in moderation. Nowhere in the spirituality of St. Benedict is there anything that imposes a particular system of practices—prayer, psalms, praise, whatever—on believers or a particular aesthetic for the Church. Each person, each monk and each community must find his or her own way. But without simplicity one cannot fully carry out the task assigned them in the church or the world.

Merton's thinking about simplicity clearly influenced his thinking in three areas: Christian humanism; a growing protest against some forms of technology; and his emphasis on simplicity in Cistercian art. The following paragraphs briefly explore these themes.

First, Merton traced the development of Christian humanism to medieval Europe, notably the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a period when historians have discerned the emergence of the idea of the self. Merton cited the School of Chartres for its platonizing scholars who were also deeply intrigued by the natural world; the School of St. Victor for its motto, "learn everything, you will find nothing superfluous;" and St. Thomas for his openness to Aristotle, the Arabs, and the claims of reason and nature.<sup>33</sup>

For Merton, monastic culture and Christian humanism emphasized love, forgiveness and the common good. By contrast, narcissism, depersonalization and totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia characterized modern secular society. Merton concluded that all humanists must come together in new ways to foster a more human and desirable future. He returned occasionally to this theme, for example, in the paper he delivered at the monastic conference before he died in Thailand, where he insisted, "The whole purpose of the monastic life is to teach men to live by love."<sup>34</sup>

To love others, we must first know ourselves, bridling monsters deep in the depths of our being, including illusions fed by

corporate advertising, greed and other forces of self-destructiveness. Merton insists that people tame their own desires, ambitions and appetites and limit themselves in appropriate ways. We may share in the limited supply of created goods without imposing a false difference between ourselves and others.<sup>35</sup> As we use God's given gifts mindfully, we move towards a unity, wholeness and our truest self that is at the core of our otherwise fragmented lives.

Secondly, Merton criticized a society organized around machines. Technology had come to characterize and control our lives and therefore constituted a death urge. Drawing on his reading of Lewis Mumford, Merton made plain his critique of Western civilization which had come to ignore basic human needs. This was foundational to Merton's critique of technology.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, Merton manifested a passionate interest in the intersection of the sacred and the aesthetic. Son of two artists, Merton lectured on sacred art in 1954. He published some of his thoughts in "Absurdity in Sacred Decoration" and in many essays such as on the Shakers and monastic traditions. His central concern was to understand various ways in which people of different religious traditions or even different vocations have conceived the meaning and method of the "way" which leads to the highest levels of religious, or metaphysical awareness.<sup>37</sup>

Frank Kacmarcik, arguably one of the most influential Catholic liturgical artists and design consultants in the United States during the mid-twentieth century was among those influenced by Merton on simplicity in the arts. Kacmarcik's work was marked by simplicity, meaningful proportions, timelessness, enduring quality, poetry of light and visual silence.<sup>38</sup> He designed two Merton books, *Monastic Peace* and *Nativity Kerygma*.<sup>39</sup> Without exaggerating Merton's ongoing legacy in this area, Cistercians continue to emphasize simplicity in the arts.<sup>40</sup>

### Concluding Observations

In ancient Delphi, in Greece, carved over the portals of the temple to the sun deity Apollo, two mottos anticipate themes which later came to dominate the writings of Thomas Merton: "Moderation in all things," and "Know thyself."<sup>41</sup> Nearly three millennia later Thomas Merton concluded that humankind had violated both precepts. From the margins of a culture gone awry, Merton warned that enough is enough. Discover your true self. Come to your

senses. You are about to plunge over a precipice. Do not imitate the small, mouse-like lemmings that, as their numbers soar, scatter in all directions and in large numbers self-destruct.<sup>42</sup>

In his lifetime, Merton contributed to Catholic renewal and cautioned many spiritual pilgrims against the dangers of five Ps: publicity, prestige, property, power, and perfectibility as an ideology. Since his death in 1968, Merton's writings have continued to offer sharp insights on the need for western Christians to resist cultural obsessions; simplify lifestyle; claim true selfhood through the practice of contemplation; and tame fear, the root cause of war.<sup>43</sup>

## Notes

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1. This article is a revision of a paper read at the 9<sup>th</sup> General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society, June 9-12, 2005.

2. In addition to Merton's poetry, other early titles by Merton included *Exile Ends in Glory: The Life of a Trappistine, Mother M. Berchmans, O.C.S.O.* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1948); a history of the Cistercian Order, *The Waters of Siloe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949); *What Are These Wounds? The Life of a Cistercian Mystic, Saint Lutgarde of Aywières* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1950), and *The Ascent to Truth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951).

3. *The Last of the Fathers: St. Bernard of Clairvaux and the Encyclical, Doctor Mellifluus* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954); *Thomas Merton on Saint Bernard*, Cistercian Studies #9 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980).

4. *The Spirit of Simplicity. Characteristic of the Cistercian Order* (Trappist: Gethsemani, 1948), p. i. I have found only two secondary sources: M. Basil Pennington, "Father Louis' First Book: *The Spirit of Simplicity*," in *Studiosorum Speculum. Studies in Honor of Louis J. Lekai, O.Cist.*, ed. Francis R. Swietek and John R. Sommerfeldt, Cistercian Studies #141 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1993); reprinted in Pennington's *Thomas Merton, My Brother: His Journey to Freedom, Compassion, and Final Integration* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), pp. 65-78; and Patrick F. O'Connell's entry on the book in *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), pp. 446-448. For this article, all references to "St. Bernard on Interior Simplicity" are from *The Spirit of Simplicity*.

5. Merton to Leclercq, October 9, 1950, *Survival or Prophecy? The Letters of Thomas Merton and Jean Leclercq*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), p. 23. An advantage to reading the correspondence in this source is that it includes Leclercq's letters to Merton, unlike *The School of Charity. The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Re-*

*newal and Spiritual Direction*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990).

6. Leclercq, "Introduction," *Thomas Merton on Saint Bernard*, p. 14.

7. Patrick Hart, "Foreword," *Thomas Merton on Saint Bernard*, pp. 8-9.

8. David Knowles, *Cistercians and Cluniacs: The Controversy between St. Bernard and Peter the Venerable* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 18. This essay also appears in *The Historian and Character and Other Essays* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963).

9. *Apologia* 28; *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. M. Basil Pennington, Cistercian Fathers #1 (Spencer: Cistercian Publications, 1970), pp. 65-6; for biographical details on William of St. Thierry, see [http://www.catholicity.com/encyclopedia/w/william\\_of\\_st-thierry.html](http://www.catholicity.com/encyclopedia/w/william_of_st-thierry.html)

10. *Spirit of Simplicity*, p. 44.

11. *Spirit of Simplicity*, p. 48.

12. *Spirit of Simplicity*, p. iii, Merton's emphasis. While I trust Merton would now encourage the practice, I have not attempted to render direct quotes inclusive in language.

13. *Spirit of Simplicity*, p. i-iv (Merton's emphasis).

14. *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982), 39:8-9; hereafter *RB*. I *italicize* a word that emphasizes the universality of Benedict's way, as stressed by contemporary writers including Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily. Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) and Eric Dean, *St. Benedict for the Laity* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989).

15. *Spirit of Simplicity*, p. 76.

16. *Spirit of Simplicity*, pp. 89-90.

17. *Spirit of Simplicity*, p. 98.

18. *Spirit of Simplicity*, p. 125.

19. *The Wisdom of the Desert. Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century*, trans. Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 5.

20. *Spirit of Simplicity*, pp. 138-9.

21. *Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1949), p. 17. In *Thomas Merton. The Development of a Spiritual Theologian* *Toronto Studies in Theology* 20 (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1985), Donald Grayston explores the amplifications, additions and key themes in the successor work, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961).

22. Photo, Dianne Aprile, *The Abbey of Gethsemani. Place of Peace and Paradox* (Louisville: Trout Lily, 1998), p. 207.

23. *Seeds*, p. 26.

24. *Seeds*, p. 47.

25. *Seeds*, p. 127.

26. *Seeds*, p. 168.

27. *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958), pp. 12-13. Merton wrote the book in 1953 when James Fox allowed him to use for prayer, contemplation and writing an abandoned tool shed in the woods. The volume includes several prayers including perhaps Merton's most famous published prayer, one that begins, "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going..." p. 83.

28. *Solitude*, pp. 17-20.

29. *Solitude*, p. 53.

30. *Solitude*, p. 85.

31 Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 140-141.

32. Erik H. Erikson provided a case study of generativity, *Gandhi's Truth* (New York: Norton, 1969). See also James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

33. Merton on "Christian Humanism," essays collected as part III of *Love and Learning*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979). See also Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God. A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham, 1961); M. D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968); Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual: 1050-1200* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Matthew Fox, *Sheer Joy. Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992); Patrick F. O'Connell, "Humanism," *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*, pp. 214-215.

34 *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 333.

35. *New Seeds*, p. 47.

36. Merton read books by Mumford (1895-1990), including Mumford's two-volume *Myth of the Machine* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969-1970) about which he commented in a letter to the *New York Times* for June 11, 1967. The title of volume 1 is *Technics and Human Development*; volume 2 is *The Pentagon of Power*. For a discussion of this crucial theme in Merton's thinking, Paul R. Dekar, "What the Machine Produces and What the Machine Destroys: Thomas Merton on Technology," *Merton Annual* 17 (2004): 216-34.

37. *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Dell, 1967), p. x; *Disputed Questions* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976); *Seeking Paradise. The Spirit of the Shakers*, ed. with an introduction by Paul M. Pearson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003). In a presentation on December 11, 2004 as part of a conference on *A Hidden Wholeness: The Art of Thomas Merton*, Anthony Bannon explored simplicity as a theme in "Thomas Merton's Art of Contemplative Photography." See general articles on Merton and

"Creativity", "Shakers," and "Theory of art" in *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*.

38. Interview with Kacmarcik, May 12, 2003; scattered references in journals and letters. Charlotte Zalot, "The Inward, Outward and Upward Vision of Frank Kacmarcik, Obl.S.B., Liturgical Artist and Design Consultant," Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 2004. See also Zalot's article on Merton and Kacmarcik in *The Merton Annual*, Vol. 18.

39. Both published by Trappist: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1958.

40. Mark Irving, "Simplicity of the Cloister," *Tablet*, September 11, 2004, an account of the serenity elicited by the minimalist architect, John Pawson, who designed a new monastery in Bohemia.

41. <http://www.wdbydana.com/delphi.htm>.

42. In the 1967 film of Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* a scene depicts a mad sheep dog leading its charge to self-destruction.

43. "The Root of War Is Fear," *Seeds*, chapter 9 and *New Seeds*, chapter 16. An uncensored version appeared in *The Catholic Worker*, October 1961, reprinted in Thomas Merton, *Passion for Peace, The Social Essays*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Crossroad, 1997), pp. 11-19. Two pertinent analyses of contemporary culture are Ronald Wright, *A Short History of Progress* (Toronto: Anansi, 2004) and John Carroll, *Terror. A Meditation on the Meaning of September 11* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2002).