

# A MONASTIC CORRESPONDENCE

by **Thomas Merton & Jean Leclercq**, O.S.B.

## Thomas Merton to Jean Leclercq

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Gethsemani  
Trappist  
Ky

April 22, 1950

My Dear Rev. Father:

Another film of the St. Bernard Sermons is now on the way to you. This time I looked it over to see if it was all right and it was legible on our machine. I am sorry the first attempt was not too good: you must forgive our young students who are just trying their hand at this kind of work for the first time. Pray that they may learn, because in the future many demands will be made on their talents — if any.

I might wish that your travels would bring you to this side of the Atlantic and that we might have the pleasure of receiving you at Gethsemani. We have just remodelled the vault where our rare books are kept and have extended its capacities to include a good little library on Scripture and the Fathers and the Liturgy — or at least the nucleus of one. Here I hope to form a group of competent students not merely of history or of texts but rather — in line with the tradition which you so admirably represent — men competent in all-round spiritual theology, as well as scholarship, using their time and talents to develop the seed of the word of God in their souls, not to choke it under an overgrowth of useless research as is the tradition in the universities of this country at the moment. I fervently hope that somehow we shall see in America men who are able to produce something like *Dieu Vivant*. Cistercians will never be able to do quite that, I suppose, but we can at least give a good example along those lines. Our studies and writing should by their very nature contribute to our contemplation at least remotely and contemplation in turn should be able to find expression in

channels laid open for it and deepened by familiarity with the Fathers of the Church. This is an age that calls for St Augustines and Leos, Gregories and Cyrils!

That is why I feel that your works are so tremendously helpful, dear Father. Your *St Bernard Mystique* is altogether admirable because, while being simple and fluent, it communicates to the reader a real appreciation of St Bernard's spirituality. You are wrong to consider your treatment of St Bernard superficial. It is indeed addressed to the general reader but for all that it is profound and all-embracing and far more valuable than the rather technical study which I undertook for *Collectanea* and which, as you will see on reading it, was beyond my capacities as a theologian. The earlier sections especially, in my study, contain many glaring and silly errors — or at least things are often very badly expressed there.<sup>1</sup> If I write a book on the saint I shall try to redeem myself, without entering into the technical discussions that occupy M. [Etienne] Gilson in his rather brilliant study.<sup>2</sup> But there again, a book of your type is far more helpful.

Be sure that we are praying for the work you now have in hand, which is so important and which implies such a great responsibility for you. Any other material help we can give will also be a pleasure. Do not bother about any question of cost for the films. But if you do have a *tirage a part* [offprint] of one or another article by you, on your present researches into our Cistercian manuscripts, we would greatly appreciate it.

I had heard that you were helping to prepare for the press Dom Wilmart's edition of Ailred's *De Institutione Inclusarum* [Institution for Recluses] but perhaps you have put this on the shelf for the time being. Are the Cistercians of the Common Observance editing the works of Ailred? Where are they doing so and when is the work expected to be finished? By the way, about the spelling of Ailred: the most prominent English scholars seem to be spelling him as I have just done, with an "i." I wish there could be some unity on this point. My work on him is in abeyance at the moment, but when I get on with it I suppose I had better go on using this spelling. What do you think about that?

Rest assured, dear Father, that I am praying for you and that our students are doing the same. Please pray for us too. I have too much activity on my shoulders, teaching and writing. Please pray for our Lord to live and

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1. Thomas Merton, "The Transforming Union in St. Bernard and St. John of the Cross," *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 10 (1948), pp. 107, 210; 11 (1949), pp. 41, 352; 12 (1950), p. 25.

2. Etienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940).

work in me in such a way that all I do will nourish His life in my soul. I ask the same favor for you, in your travels and labors for His glory.

With every good wish, and in union of prayers,

Your devoted brother in Christ

fr. M. Louis, O.C.R.

### **Jean Leclercq to Thomas Merton**

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Clervaux, 5. 5. 50

Dear Reverend Father,

I was just going to write to you when I received, yesterday, your last letter. Thank you for the new film which has already arrived.

Thank you also for your prayers and encouragement. I know that some scholars and professors criticize my books because they are too "human," not sufficiently, not purely "scientific," objective: but I do not care about having a good reputation as a scholar among scholars, although I could also do pure scholarly work, and I sometimes do, just to show that I know what it is. But I also know that many monks, and they are the more monastic monks, in several Orders — Camaldolese, Cistercians, Trappists, Benedictines of the strictest observances — find my books nourishing, and find in them an answer to their own aspirations. I thank God for that, my only merit — if any — is to accept not to be a pure scholar; otherwise I never invent ideas: I just bring to light ideas and experiences which are to be found in old monastic books that nobody, even in monasteries, ever reads today.

Since you seem to want me to do so, I am sending you today some offprints, just about "monastica." As you will see, I always say and write the same thing, because only one is necessary, and it is the only thing you would find in old monastic texts. Yesterday I also received an offprint of a review of Spicq, *L'exegese medievale*; I am sending it to you as well, because in this paper there are some essential things about the monastic way of reading Scripture. I have no more copies of my first volume of *Analecta monastica*; maybe you have it. I think that what I wrote there in the general Introduction, and in the special introduction to the Cistercian

commentary of Gilbert of Stanford on the Canticle of Canticles, is in the same line, and in full agreement with what you feel and what you write to me.

I think you have an important job to do at Gethsemani: first for America, and then for the whole Cistercian Order: to come back to the Cistercian idea. But there are two difficulties. The first is to keep the just measure in work, either manual or intellectual. Both forms of work, and especially the second, entail a danger of activism (mental activism), multiplicity and complexity, which are contrary to monastic "simplicity": that is a personal question which each monk has to solve for himself if he wants to work and stay a monk; some are unable to do both and have to choose to remain monks. The second difficulty is more of the historical order, if we want to study the Cistercian tradition. I am alluding to the illusion of believing that the Cistercian tradition began with Cîteaux. I am becoming more and more convinced that the Cistercian tradition cannot be understood without its roots which were in pre-existing and contemporary Benedictine — and generally, monastic — tradition. That is why in my studies I never separate the different forms and expressions of the unique monastic thought and experience. For instance, if one begins to study the Mariology of the Cistercian school without taking into consideration previous and contemporary monastic thought at the time about the Virgin, then one tends to think that the Cistercians were at the origin of all true and fervent Mariology. Yet if one recalls what St. Anselm and the monks of the Anglo-Norman eleventh century wrote, then possibly one might come to the conclusion that in this field Cistercians, far from making progress may even have retrograded (I think, for example, of the Conception of Our Lady). The only way to avoid such pitfalls is to be quite free from any order-emphasis, any "order politics," and to search solely for the truth in the life of the Church of God.

Since you ask me what I think about your books, then I tell you even though I am no special authority on the matter. I suppose that the condition of our relations resides in perfect sincerity and loyalty.

I arrived back at Clervaux a few days ago, and have just had time to read the Prologue and the first two chapters of *The Waters of Siloe*. I shall read the rest and then tell you my impressions. So far, I must say that I thoroughly enjoy your pages: both what you say and the way you say it. I think that one immediately feels that you "believe" in the contemplative life, and this faith of yours is more forceful for convincing your readers than would be the most scientific treatment of the subject.

In my opinion, you point out the very essence of monastic life when you say that it is a contemplative life. The Benedictine tradition is certainly a contemplative tradition: the doctrine of Benedictine medieval writers (and almost always up to our own days — the twentieth century is an exception, alas!) is a doctrine of contemplation and contemplative life. But we must confess that Benedictine history is not entirely — and in certain periods not at all — contemplative. Nevertheless, even when Benedictines were busy about many things, they never made this business *circa plurima* an ideal, and they never spoke about it; their doctrine was always that of the *unum necessarium*.

I think you are quite right when you say that we fall short of this ideal for want of simplicity. There have always been — and there still are today — attempts to get back to this simplicity. And one such attempt has always been writing. But the danger is always there, and even today Cistercians do not always succeed in avoiding it. For instance, from the Cistercian — and even simple monastic — point of view, Orval (the new Orval) has been and remains a scandal: it is a sin against simplicity: first because it is luxurious, and then because, on pretext of observing the statutes forbidding gold and other certain materials, they have used precious and exotic materials which give the same impression as would gold, without being gold, and so on. And the festival held in honour of the consecration of Orval was also scandalous and has been felt as such even by Cistercians and Trappists. In the same way, the noise and publicity made over Gethsemani on the occasion of its centenary, and the write-up in magazines having, in the same issue, pictures of pin-up girls, was also scandalous, and has been felt as such (But perhaps that was in keeping with the “American style”). You see, dear Reverend Father, that I do not spare you. But it is in order to show how great is the temptation.

I find your pages about Rome perfectly sincere and just. I am glad that you were allowed to write so freely. Others, I know, have not had that same liberty, nor do they even now. But I hope that the love of truth will make people surrender all “order-orthodoxy” and “order-politics.”

I know the Procurator General of the S. O. C.\* [Sacred Order of Cistercians, or Common Observance], Abbot M. Quatember, very well. He has, in my opinion, a good idea of what Cistercian life is and should be. He tries to promote this life in Hauterive, and I think he succeeds. Fortunately, till now, Hauterive has continued to be a small monastery. The danger for spiritual enterprises is always prosperity. Is the union of O. C. R. [Order of Reformed Cistercians, or Trappists] and S. O. C. an utopic dream? I would

like to think not. But this re-union of brothers, who have sometimes been and sometimes remain fence-brothers, must be prepared by prayer and study in an atmosphere of search for Cistercian truth, and in an atmosphere of peace.

Yes, I did give Wilmart's transcription of Aelred's *De institutione inclusarum* to Abbot Quatember for the *Analecta S. O. C.* But I have heard nothing about this text for some years now. I will make enquiries on the next occasion. Wilmart's text is not a critical and definitive edition; but since Fr. Sage now wants to become a Trappist and give up the project of editing this text, then Wilmart's will come in useful. If you want to make a critical edition of it, let me know, and I will hold back the Wilmart text. My friend and collaborator, Dr. C. H. Talbot, has prepared the edition of Ailred's sermon for the *Analecta S. O. C.* I think it is finished and will soon be at the printer's. I have no idea about the spelling of Ailred. In French I always write Aelred, like Wilmart and everyone else. When Dr. Talbot writes to me he always writes Aelred. But if scholars write Ailred, I think you may, and should, on this point do what scholars do.

I pray for you, your monastery and the whole Cistercian order (I cannot break the unity, so strong in the *Carta Caritatis*; psychologically I have never accepted the schism of the beginning of the XIX century . . .) Pardon me the liberty of speech I take with you, and be sure that I am very faithfully yours in Our Lord and Our Lady,

f. J. Leclercq, O.S.B.

Excuse too my awful English, but my writing is so bad that it is easier for you to read me in English than in French.

### Jean Leclercq to Thomas Merton

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Bruxelles, 29. 7. 50

Reverend and Dear Father,

Retained in Brussels by the strike, I at last find time to answer your long and interesting letter of June 17.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Merton's letter of June 17, 1950, has not survived in Leclercq's files or in the archives of the Merton Center at Bellarmine College.

I am glad you approve what I wrote about *lectio divina*. I do not think that we must try to settle an opposition between the spiritual and the scientific reading of the Scriptures: we must try to reconcile these two methods as was the case in the middle ages, when the same doctors explained the Bible using both methods. I tried to explain this in a paper to be published in the collection *Rencontres* (ed. du Cerf) about *L'exegese de l'Ancien Testament*:

1. In the middle ages there were two sorts of exegetics: scientific and spiritual;
2. but there were not two sorts of scripture scholars: all used the two methods;
3. and these two methods of scripture study supposed a same conception of Holy Scripture, and especially the relations between the Old and the New Testaments.

I think that the way of teaching the Bible now common in our theological colleges is merely apologetic, which was probably very useful forty years ago. Now, thanks to a reaction against this apologetic reaction, we are finding the *media via*, the *via conciliationis non oppositionis*. One of the tasks of the monastic world today is to give a practical demonstration that this reconciliation is possible: we should not reject the results of modern biblical sciences, but nor should we be satisfied with them. (I also wrote something about that at the end of my *Saint Bernard mystique*, in the excursus: *S. Bernard et l'Ecriture Sainte*).

Probably by now you have seen that Gilbert of Stanford is not Gilbert of Hoyland: he is one of the many unknown spiritual writers who, though not all very original, show the intensity of the spiritual life in the monastic circles of the XII century.

The right source for ordering *Analecta S. O. C.* is *Casa Generalizia S. O. C.*, Via Giacomo Medici 3, Roma 129. Write to D. Canisius. But I am sure Hauterive will answer you in the same way.

I do not know personally D. Marquis, abbot of Briquebec, of whom you speak. But I have some friends who are his friends and they esteem him greatly. I quite agree that the time is not ripe for a union (I avoid the word "fusion"; I prefer "union" which supposes distinction and differences: Distinguish in order to unite) between the S. O. C. and O. C. R. Some members of the S. O. C. are not sufficiently monks to understand the O. C. R.; but I think that this union would be good for both orders and should be

prepared. Both parties should prepare an atmosphere of comprehension and sympathy, and the monastic element of the S. O. C. should come to have more influence. D. Quatember is quite favourable to this monastic element. The next general chapter of the S. O. C., in September will be of very great importance from this point of view. I think that some members of the S. O. C. have values of the spiritual and intellectual life which are quite in the Cistercian tradition . . . Fr. Neidenhoff of Lyons-Paris tells me that he received a paper from you for his special issue of *Rythmes du monde* about *l'heure des moines*. I gave him an article of which the title will suffice to tell you the theme: *Vivre a Dieu Seul* (*Soli Deo vivere*).

Since I am preparing the edition of St. Bernard (and to start with, the *Sermones in Cantica*), I shall have to study his sources. If you have any information about his dependence on Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and so on, you would be very kind to share it with me to help me in at least some orientations of my research. I feel the full weight of the difficulty of my work! And I am sometimes tempted to be discouraged. Everybody finds it natural to criticize, but there is no one who is willing to help.

I am not sufficiently acquainted with oriental mysticism to have an opinion of yoga and St. Bernard. But since all mystical experiences are fundamentally the same, there is surely some connection; and this not only in the experience itself, but also in the expression of it. From this point of view I think that depth psychology will shed some light on these profound and universal themes of the religious representation.

I do not know your *Spirit of Simplicity*, but I would be pleased to read it if ever I get the opportunity. I read recently the *Vie de Rance* by Chateaubriand. It increased my desire to read Rance. I fear our judgements about him have been influenced by Chateaubriand and the romanticism of the monastic restorers of the last century. Whatever we may find excessive in Rance is part of his times and is to be found also in Benedictines of the same generation: the Murist and Vannist writings are very austere: too much so for our liking. I fear that what we reprove in Rance is dependent more on De Lestrangle and other romantics.

The *De institutione inclusarum* prepared by Dom Wilmart will not be published: the manuscript has been lost by the printer . . . That happens in Italy.

The *Consecration monastique* de Dom Casel has not yet been published. But there is a **wonderful** book by Fr. Bouyer which has just come out: *Le sens de la vie monastique* (Coll. Tradition monastique, ed. Brepols, Turnhout, Belgium). He has also recently written a very profound book: *Vie*

de St Antoine in coll. *Figures monastiques*, ed. de Fontenelle, Abbaye S. Wandrille, Seine Infre. France.

I quite understand your aspiration to a solitary life. I think there has always been an eremitical tradition in the Cistercian and Benedictine Orders. In my opinion we are not to discuss personal vocations according to principles of Community life, nor according to universal laws. We must always be very respectful for these vocations, provided they are real vocations and not illusions. Personally, though I am quite inapt for the eremitical life, I have always encouraged my confreres who aspire to such a life. Now, in France, there are some Benedictine monks who live as hermits in the mountains. Nobody knows it except God. The tradition of hermitages near monasteries or "inclusi" in monasteries seems very difficult to revive today. So we must find some new solutions to this problem. It is a permanent problem and one which is a very good sign of the monastic fervour of the times: whenever cenobia are what they ought to be, they produce inevitably some eremitical vocations. The eremitic vocations disappear in times and countries where monasticism has ceased to be monastic.

Practically, now, the solution for such vocations is nearly always to move to an eremus, a charterhouse, or the eremi of the Camaldoli, that I know for sure. Last year when I was in the eremus of Camaldoli, the master of novices was expecting an American Trappist. (I shall probably have to go again this year to the eremo at Frascati in order to study the writings of the founder). The revival of the eremitic tendency in France has led to the enquiry being made by CHOC about eremitic life. I can quite understand that your abbot would like you to find a solution within the Cistercian life. Perhaps it is a providential occasion to restore reclusion. This is still practised in Camaldoli. I saw that last year.

I would like to consult the book G. B. BURCH, *The Steps of Humility* by Bernard, second ed. Cambridge, Mass. 1940. I cannot find it in Europe. Could you find it for me and either sell or lend it to me?

With renewed greetings, very dear Father, and in osculo sancto. Please pray that my life and work will be what the Lord wishes.

f. J. Leclercq, O. S. B.

**Thomas Merton to Jean Leclercq**

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Oct. 9th 1950

My Reverend and Dear Father:

It is a long time since I received your July letter which I read and pondered on with deep satisfaction. It is a privilege for which I am deeply grateful, to be able to seek nourishment and inspiration directly from those who keep themselves so close to the sources of monastic spirituality.

Your remarks on St Bernard's ideas of Scripture are extremely important to me. I have been meditating on your appendix to Saint Bernard Mystique, and also I have been talking on this very subject to the students here. I agree with your conclusions about Saint Bernard and yet I wonder if it would not be possible to say that he did consider himself in a very definite sense an exegete. My own subjective feeling is that the full seriousness of St Bernard's attitude to Scripture is not brought out entirely unless we can in some sense treat him as an exegete and as theologian, in his exposition of the Canticle. Naturally he is not either of these things in a purely modern sense. But I think he is acting as a theologian according to the Greek Fathers' conception at least to some extent (see end of Lossky's first chapter: *Theol. Myst. de l'Eglise orientale*). I think that is essentially what you were saying when you brought out the fact that he was seeking less to nourish his interior life than to exercise it. As if new meanings in his own life and Scripture spontaneously grew up to confirm each other as soon as Bernard immersed himself in the Sacred Text. Still, there is the evident desire of the saint to *penetrate* the Text with a certain mystical understanding and this means to arrive at a living contact with the Word hidden in the word. This would be tantamount to saying that for Bernard, both exegesis and theology found their fullest expression in a concrete mystical experience of God in His revelation. This positive hunger for "theology" in its very highest sense would be expressed in such a text as Cant. lxxiii, 2: "Ego . . . in profundo sacri eloquii gremio spiritum mihi scrutabor et vitam" [Deep in the bosom of the sacred word I shall search my spirit and my life]. He is seeking "intellectum" and "Spiritus est qui vivificat: dat quippe intellectum. An non vita intellectus" [The Spirit gives life: indeed he gives understanding. And is not understanding life?] As you have so rightly said (p. 488) "Sa lecture de l'E. Ste prepare et occasionne son experience du divin" [His reading of Scripture prepares and occasions his experience of

the divine]. But I wonder if he did not think of Scripture as a kind of cause of that experience, and in the same sense, “servata proportione” [keeping due proportion], as a Sacrament is a cause of grace? Scripture puts him in direct contact with the Holy Spirit who infuses mystical grace, rather than awakening in his soul the awareness that the Holy Spirit has already infused a grace to that spoken of in Scripture. Or am I wrong? In any case, words like “scrutabor” [I shall search] and “intellectus” [understanding] tempt me to say (while agreeing in substance with all your conclusions) that there must have been a sense in which St Bernard looked upon himself both as an exegete and as a theologian in his exposition of the *Canticle*. Although I readily admit there can be no question of his attempting as a modern author might to “make the text clear” or to “explain its meaning.” That hardly concerned him, as you have shown. But do you not think, that in giving the fruit of his own contacts with the Word through Scripture he was in a sense introducing his monks to a certain mystical “attitude” towards the scriptures — not a method, but an “atmosphere” in which Scripture could become the meeting place of the Soul and the Word, through the action of the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps these are useless subtleties: but you guess that I am simply exercising my own thought in order to confront it with the reactions of an expert and this will be of the greatest service to me in the work that has been planned for me by Providence. I am also very much interested in the question of St. Bernard’s attitude toward “learning,” and feel that a distinction has not yet been sufficiently clearly made between his explicit reproofs of “scientia” in the sense of philosophia, and his implicit support of scientia in the sense of theologia, in his tracts on Grace, Baptism, and his attacks on Abelard, not to mention (with all due respect to your conclusions) his attitude to the *Canticle* which makes that commentary also “scientia” [knowledge] as well as “sapientia” [wisdom]. Have you any particular lights on this distinction between science and wisdom in the Cistercians, or do you know of anything published in their regard? It seems to me to be an interesting point, especially to those of us who, like yourself and me, are monks engaged in a sort of “scientia” along with their contemplation! (It is very interesting in William of St. Thierry.)

I wish I could give you some information on St. Bernard in his relation to the Greek Fathers. I have none of my own; the topic interests me but I have barely begun to do anything about it, since I know the Greek Fathers so poorly. However, I can tell you this much: in Danielou’s *Platonisme et T. M.* on pages 7 and 211 there are references to St. Bernard’s

dependence (?) on St. Gregory of Nyssa. The opening of St. Bernard's series of *Sermons* obviously reflects the idea of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa that the *Canticle of Canticles* was for the formation of mystics while *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* applied to the beginners and progressives. I find Bernard's echo of this point an interesting piece of evidence that he considered the monastic vocation a remote call to mystical union — if not a proximate one. Then, too, Gregory's homilies on the *Canticle of Canticles* are full of a tripartite division of souls into slaves, mercenaries and spouses. Gregory's apophatism is not found in St. Bernard, but in his positive treatment of theology Bernard follows Origen. I think Fr. Danielou also told me that Bernard's attitude toward the incarnate Word is founded on Origen — I mean his thoughts on *amor carnalis Christi* [carnal love of Christ] in relation to mystical experience. I may be wrong.

A copy of *The Spirit of Simplicity* was mailed to you but my own contribution to that work is confused and weak, I believe. I refer to the second part.

I agree with what you say about Abbe de Rance and feel that my own treatment of him in *Waters of Siloe* had something in it of caricature. It is certainly true that Abbe de l'Estrange was much more austere than Rance. To my mind the most regrettable thing about both of them was their exaggeration of externals, their ponderous emphasis on "exercises" and things to be done. Nevertheless perhaps that is a sign of my own tepidity. It is true that the monastic life does demand faithful observance of many little exterior points of Rule. These can certainly not be neglected *en massé* [as a whole] without spiritual harm. But one sometimes feels that for the old Trappists they were absolutely everything.

The Desert Fathers interest me much. They seem to have summed up almost everything that is good and bad in subsequent monastic history (except for the abuses of decadent monasticism —) I mean everything that is good or bad in various monastic *ideals*.

Your news of the *De institutione reclusarum*\* [Instruction for Recluses] — which you tell me with such detachment, is sad indeed. Do not think that manuscripts are only lost in Italy. A volume of our poems was printed by a man whose shop was in the country. Goats used to wander in to the press and eat the authors' copy. This fortunately did not happen to our poems. Perhaps the goats were wise. They sensed the possibility of poisoning.

I am extremely eager to get Fr. Bouyer's new book on monasticism, but have not yet been able to do so. I feel that our book dealer sometimes

takes orders and then forgets about them — I mean for books to come out later. I liked his *Saint Antoine*. Still, I wonder if he does not overdo his interest in the fact that in the early ages of the Church people were so clearly aware that the fall had put the devil in charge of material things. Fr. Danielou's *Signe du Temple*, in its first chapter, gives a good counterpoise to that view — for heaven still shone through creation and God was very familiar with men in Genesis!

The other day we mailed Burch's *Steps of Humility* to you and it should be in your hands shortly. If you wish to send us something in return we would like to get Wilmart's *Pensees du B. Guigue*, if this is Guigo the Carthusian. I have never yet gone into him. His lapidary style fascinates me. He is better than Pascal. Yet I love Pascal.

Your page on the eremitical vocation was very welcome. Someone told me the Carthusians were at last coming to America. I know the Trappist who has gone to Camadoli. He was with me in the novitiate here. I wonder if he is happy there. His departure surprised me and I think his arrival surprised some of the Camaldolese.

Cistercian monasticism in America is of a genus all its own. Imagine that we now have one hundred and fifty novices at Gethsemani. This is fantastic. Many of them are sleeping in a tent in the preau. The nucleus of seniors is a small, bewildered group of men who remember the iron rule of Dom Edmond Obrecht and have given up trying to comprehend what has happened to Gethsemani. The house has a very vital and enthusiastic (in the good sense) and youthful air like the camp of an army preparing for an easy and victorious war. Those of us who have been sobered by a few years of the life find ourselves in turns comforted and depressed by the multitude of our young companions of two and three months' standing: comforted by their fervor and joy and simplicity, and depressed by the sheer weight of numbers. The cloister is as crowded as a Paris street.

On the whole, when the house is completely full of men who are happy because they have not yet had a chance to suffer anything (although they believe themselves willing) the effect is a little disquieting. One feels more solidly rooted in God in a community of veterans, even though many of them may be morose. However, I do not waste my time seeking consolation in the community or avoiding its opposite. There is too little time for these accidentals.

I close this long letter thanking you again for yours, which are always so full of interest and profit. I cannot place the reference to a contribution of mine to *Rhythmes du Monde*; maybe there is some mistake — or my

publisher went directly to them. I would be interested in seeing your *Soli Deo Vivere!* I sent something to *Dieu Vivant*. I like them. Is the magazine *Opus Dei* worth the trouble of getting a subscription? I wish we could feel here that *Irenikon* was essential for us. Can you persuade us that it is? Or that it is important? The thought of reunion with the Greeks is one that haunts me.

Once again, dear Father, thank you for your advice and inspiration. May Jesus bless your great work for His glory and for the vitality of monasticism everywhere. Pray for me in my turn to be more and more a child of St Benedict — and if it be God's will, that I may some day find a way to be something of an eremitical son of St Benedict! What of these Benedictines in the mountains of France? Have you more information about them? I am not inquiring in a spirit of restlessness! Their project is something I admire on its own merits.

Your devoted brother in Christ,

fr. M. Louis Merton, O.C.S.O.

### Jean Leclercq to Thomas Merton

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Paris, 26. 10. 50

Dear Reverend Father,

Some weeks ago I received the nice little book *Spirit of Simplicity*. We already had the French text of the report of Dom Chautard. But your volume with his notes, pictures and references and texts is precious. Thank you very, very much.

I have also received your kind letter of 9. 10. 50 and thank you for it. Of course, I agree that St. Bernard was a theologian in the traditional sense of the word: loqui Deo de Deo. This meaning has been preserved in the monastic tradition, and I explained that in my *Jean de Fecamp*. I am coming to notice more and more how much not only St. Bernard, but the whole monastic world of the twelfth century, Cistercian and Benedictine, is full of Origen. I gave a lecture on this subject three weeks ago at Chevetogne, and I have been asked to publish it in *Irenikon*. In it I pointed out this relation between the Greek fathers and medieval monasticism. I had already dealt with the question in a very general way in 1945. Now I see things better.

Maybe I shall collect everything I find on the matter and write a little article. The works of Origen which have been the most read by monks are his commentaries on Holy Scripture. And it is his exegesis, more than his doctrine, which influenced monks and Bernard.

Your distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia* is quite exact. It is a very traditional distinction, which obliged Thomas\* [Aquinas] in the *In Quaestio* also to treat *theologia* as *sapientia*, although in another meaning of *Sapientia*. For him

*sapientia* is cognitio per altissimas causas  
*scientia* is cognitio per causas immediatas.

For tradition, Poets and monks, and in the Franciscan school,

*scientia* is cognitio per intellectum  
*sapientia* is “*scientia sapida*”: *recta sapere*:

it is this savour, *gustus*, which we find so frequently in Bernard, William of Saint-Thierry and all other monks.

Another distinction which we often find in monastic literature is that between *scientia*: *cognitio intellectualis*

*conscientia*: *cognitio ad vitam*

(I wrote a chapter “*Science et conscience*” on this in my *Pierre de Celle*.)

After further information, I now think that Rance was no Cistercian at all. So you were quite right in what you said in *Waters of Siloe*.

I am now working on the unprinted writings of Gaufridus Antissiodorensis (= Altacomba = Claravallensis): a very good witness of the second generation of Cistercians and of St. Bernard. He insists constantly on discretion. I shall publish the more significant texts.

Fr. Bouyer’s new book has not come out yet. It will surely interest you. For any books you need in France, I advise you to write to:

Librairie Sainte Marie  
 5, Rue de la Source,  
 Paris XVIe

(it is our monastery in Paris). They have a service specially for that, and they send many books to Canada and elsewhere, and they do the necessary research well and rapidly. They would help you and at the same time you could help them by ordering your books there.

I hope I shall find Burch in Clervaux next week. I will send you the *Pensees* of Guigues, who is really Guigo the Carthusian. A nice book.

About the eremitical vocation: it is clear that the Cistercian vocation and life are, in themselves, eremitical. So a Cistercian normally, should not

have to seek this anywhere else than in his enclosure. The Cistercian's solitude depends on his silence. But it may happen that for accidental and psychological reasons, for example if there are too many monks in the same monastery, or if a monk has too much to do, he longs for more silence. Then I think that the solution for him is to change his monastery and seek silence and quiet elsewhere, in another Cistercian monastery.

I do not know *Opus Dei*. But I think *Irenikon* is quite worth the trouble of getting a subscription.

My confreres in the mountains of Vercors are not making any noise. So I think all is well with them.

Do you have in your library *Histoire de l'Ordre de S. Benoit* by D. Ph. Schmitt, Maredsous 1942-1948, 5 volumes? I have a copy of it to sell. I bought it for a monastery in Germany, and afterwards they wrote and said they did not want it. It is a fundamental work though not everything is exact in it, especially concerning Cistercian origins. But the nomenclature, bibliography, and matter are complete and it is a very useful book. If you need it, I could sell it to you. Payment should be easy: I think my monastery has an account in America.

All best wishes Father. Please pray for me. Next week I am going to Germany in search of Bernard's manuscripts.

Always very sincerely yours,

f. J. Leclercq

### Jean Leclercq to Thomas Merton

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Clervaux, 17. 3. 53

Dear Father Louis,

It was very kind of you indeed to send your *Sign of Jonas*, thank you sincerely. I will try to answer you in my bad English, but most of us Frenchmen still write with a pen, as in the middle ages, and it takes me longer to write, even in French, with the typewriter. And I am not in the excellent condition Sertillanges requires for intellectual life: about every five minutes the bell rings and I have to go to Choir — with joy — or to wash dishes — also with joy — or something else.

As you are accustomed to receiving praise, I shall not send you one more letter of that sort. I'll just say that I surveyed your book and I liked it. I think that I shall read it when I find time. It is written with this kind of freshness, a little "primitive" that we like in Americans (I suppose you accept me speaking to you simply, like a monk to a monk). I think this book with *Seeds of Contemplation*, is exactly the kind of book you are made to write. I've got an idea. Maybe you have heard of the little collection *Tradition monastique* in which appeared the wonderful book by Bouyer, *Le sens de la vie monastique*? I am one of the directors. Maybe it would be possible to publish a translation of your *Journal* or parts of it. Would you agree (since I see that your Abbey keeps the copyright), to reserve us the possibility of publishing a French translation in this collection? It does not depend only on me. But if you give me your agreement on the principle, I will get in touch with the publisher etc.

I am ashamed to say, but I must confess that I did not read *Seven Storey Mountain*. I didn't find time. But I know that my confreres like the book, and *Seeds* as well. I suppose that you are aware of the criticism made in Europe, especially in England, on your *Ascent*, and even in France, coming from the pen of Fr. Bouyer in *Vie spirituelle*. But these are the sort of criticisms that Europeans are prepared to make. And the Church is everywhere, in the Old and the New World. In Europe we are so complicated: textual criticism has come to have such importance. We cannot even quote the *Pater noster* without putting a reference in the footnotes.

Now for some remarks and questions:

1. What is this XIV century manuscript you mention on p. 64? You sent me the microfilm of a XII century ms of a sermon of St. Bernard. Have you another one? On which folio is this picture in an "I" that you mention? I suppose that he is standing in the "I" with a book in his hand?
2. Will you publish this book you promise on p. 269? Some years ago an English Trappist, then an American Trappist asked me for permission to publish an English translation of *St. Bernard mystique*. I gave, of course, my agreement and sent both letters to the publishers, Desclee. Then I heard no more about it. I suppose, and I quite understand, that the English or American publishers were afraid of the concurrence of Thomas Merton. The German translation will appear next week at Pustet, for the centenary.
3. On p. 159 there is a sentence on the Common Observance for which I must reproach you. I think it is an injustice: it is not exact. Let me tell

you this: I am charged with organizing a congress on the theology of St. Bernard, and I invited a Cistercian of the Common Observance, whom I know to be a Doctor of Theology and, nevertheless, a very good monk. But recently, after many months, he wrote to say that he could not accept to come because, being in charge of the monastery hens and other things as well, in addition to Choir, Chapter and so on, he had not found time to prepare a communication. On the other hand I know several Trappists who are in pretty good condition for intellectual work. It is a sin against the motto of your Order: *Una caritate*. There seem to be two charities: one for the Trappists and another for the Common Observance. I think that the fault lies not only (maybe not chiefly) with you, but with your censors. And since your books, even in English, are expected to be read in Europe, I would suggest that one of the censors be European. There are some points of view that a European would feel. You remember the difficulties with the French translation of the *Waters of Siloe*, and the trouble this gave P. Dimier.

I recently met in London the censor for the English books in your Order. A very sweet person, and an "echter Trappist."

Of course I understand that you are quite persuaded that the Trappist life is a very high state of perfection, and you are doing good apologetic work for it; but you must not forget that it is not the only form of contemplative life, at least in Europe.

Excuse me for all this. I give you an occasion for "gouter les humiliations." But you know that I do so because I esteem you and your life, and because I am very sincerely yours in the charity of Christ,

f. J. Leclercq

### Thomas Merton to Jean Leclercq

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May 18, 1953

My Dear Father in Christ:

Forgive me for my delay in answering your good letter. *Jonas* is already being translated for Albin Michel, so I regretfully decline your kind offer. It would have been an honor to appear in *Tradition Monastique*, in

which series I already know your volume and that of Pere Bouyer. By the way, has the promised Casel volume appeared in this series yet? I am anxious to see it. Now for your questions:

1 — The XIV Century manuscript of St. Bernard is marked as n. 4 in the list of manuscripts and incunabula contributed by Dom Edmond Obrecht to the studies in *St. Bernard et son Temps*, Dijon, 1929, vol. ii, p. 133. I sent you a photograph of the page with the "I" which, in fact, is of no interest.

2 — I am not doing any work on a book on St. Bernard and there has been no announcement of any such book; hence I don't think it is in competition with your *St. Bernard Mystique*. If it gets finished — or started — before 1955 I will be surprised. The plan still exists, but I have no time to work on it.

3 — The remark about the monks of the Common Observance understanding the truth of a statement of Sertillanges on the intellectual life which Trappists are incapable of understanding does not seem to me to be an injustice. The statement of Sertillanges is true, and there is no injustice in saying that someone agrees with the truth. Nor was it intended to be disparaging. However, if it appears so to you, perhaps they will themselves be even more sensitive about it, so I will delete it from the French edition, along with a lot of other things which will be of no interest in France. One of the censors of *Jonas* was a European. Then, too, I think the book shows clearly that I do not consider the Trappist life the highest form of contemplative life, because I believe such a theory to be plainly false. The Trappist life is a solidly austere form of the monastic life, which has its limitations, which offers opportunities for a man to become a contemplative, provided the opportunities are not ruined by excessive activity within the monastery. We have something of the spirit of St. Bernard but we have no monopoly on it. From the little I know of Hauterive I am certain they are just as good a monastery and just as proper for the contemplative life as Gethsemani — with perhaps certain advantages over Gethsemani. I do not despise the Common Observance at all, nor do I despise the Benedictines (as Dom Aelred Graham seems to think).

The more I reflect on it the more I realize that all the monastic ways to God are most worthy of praise, and that, in the end, there is no point in asking who has the most perfect interpretation of the Rule of St. Benedict. In the end, however, what I most personally and intimately feel about at least my own place in the framework of things is echoed by the remarkable articles of a certain "S" in *La Vie Spirituelle* of last October and again more recently. Do you happen to know who this "S" may be, and would there be

some chance of finding him and writing him a letter? (See "L'Eremitisme dans la vie spirituelle" V. S., Oct. 1952). I also by the way enjoyed your article in *Rhythmes du Monde* now reproduced in *Temoignages*. I hope more and more to withdraw from the field of professional writing — or at least to appear in it only as an occasional author of disjointed meditations. But I do earnestly beg your prayers that I may seek God with greater love, and that He may deign to open to us here in America the ways of solitude, within the framework of our monasticism. This, I think, is much more important than any books. I thank you again for your letter which, as you see, was stimulating. If there is anything I can do for you about our St. Bernard manuscripts, let me know. With fraternal wishes in Xto Domino,

fr. M. Louis Merton

### Jean Leclercq to Thomas Merton

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Clervaux 29 may 1953

My dear Father,

Thank you for your letter of the 18th.

The book by Casel *Die Monchsweihe* will not be coming out in the near future because we are expecting a new edition which is being prepared and then we shall revise the translation according to the new edition which will have some modifications. A little book by Cardinal Schuster has just come out in the collection: *La vie monastique dans la pensee de S. Benoit*; the little book written by my abbot, *Ambroise Autpert moine et theologien*, is forthcoming. The next volume will be the French translation of *Sancta Sophia* by Dom [Augustine] Baker. Then a little book by P. A. Dimier on *Les observances monastique*.

Thanks for sending me the photo of the picture of St. Bernard, in spite of the little interest it has.

I am sending you my little book *La doctrine del Beato Paolo Gustiniani* which is about the eremitical life of the Camoldolese. I recently went again to the hermitage of Frascati while I was in Rome, from where I have just got back. There is a real contemplative life there. It is not prosperity and numbers, but peace and prayer.

I appreciated your preface to *S. Bernard* of the CHOC.

I am glad that you are suppressing the allusion to Common Observance in the French translation of *Jonas*, and even I would like it to disappear in the other translations and re-editions. I am not the only one who finds it regrettable, in spite of your good intention.

The author of the two beautiful articles on the eremitical life who signs "S" is abbe J. Sainsaulieu. Of course you can write to him, 3 Rue de Clamart, Le-Plessis-Robinson (Seine) France. The first article of *Vie spirituelle*, October, is by my abbot.

Yes I pray for you because now, on account of your books, you have a responsibility which you must keep up. The news that you will no longer be a "professional writer" will please several people. You have done much good by your books, but you can also do so by the silence which you speak about. It is said that you can talk on the radio. But you have your vocation, of which no one is judge. Follow it.

A Dieu, my dear Father. I am always your fraternally in Dno,

f. J. Leclercq

If there are some letters of St. Bernard in the ms 4 of the Obrecht list, I would be pleased to know which ones; the list says: *Sermones, homiliae et varia*. Anything other than letters does not interest me in a manuscript of such a late epoch.

### Thomas Merton to Jean Leclercq

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August 21, 1953

Dear Father in Christ:

You must think me a very churlish and ungrateful person to leave your letter so long unanswered. We have had a busy summer, with much harvesting and other farm work. In addition to that our cow barn burned down and we have also bought a new farm, so that everyone has been exceptionally busy and I am two months behind with practically all correspondence.

Our monastery would like very much to order four copies of *Cardi-*

nal Shuster's *Vie Monastique*, and we will also be looking forward to Pere Dimier's book on monastic observances. I am presently dipping into a manuscript of his about his war experiences but I do not have time to read it continuously although I find it very interesting.

Above all I want to thank you for your *Dottrina del B. P. Giustiniani*. I find it most useful and am glad to have it, particularly because it would otherwise be quite impossible for me to make the acquaintance of his personality and ideas. You have given us a valuable source. I hope books will appear on all the great Camoldolese figures. Dom Giabbani sent me some pictures of Camoldoli and it is both beautiful and inspiring to me. I can well believe what you say about their having the true contemplative life at Frascati. I know nothing of that particular eremo. I would be interested in having some pictures of it as I may perhaps do an article on the Camoldolese — by way of exception, since I do not write for magazines any more. This would be in the hope of helping them make a foundation in this country. They are needed.

I find that in some monastic orders there is a kind of selfish and dog-in-the-manger attitude towards other orders and other forms of the contemplative life. One illusion that is very strong in this country still is the idea that the eremitical life is essentially "dangerous" and "impossible" etc. Some monks who claim to have a high contemplative ideal will actually run down the solitary life, and show a preference for the rather intense activity which is inevitable in a big, busy monastery of cenobites. It is all very well to have a big, busy monastery, but why claim that this is the highest possible ideal of contemplation! The French have a good word for that: *fumisterie* [practical joke].

If you want a microfilm of these letters we can easily send you one. I like Abbe Sainsaulieu's article on the Desert in the recent *V. S.* I will not bother him by writing to him. I have no time to write the letters that I am obliged to answer.

I was amused to think that I am supposed to be speaking on the radio. It is a great ordeal simply to speak to the monks in chapter. What would I do if I had to speak on the radio? I have not been out of the monastery for over a year, and then it was only for one day's journey. The only talk I have given outside the monastery was through the grille of the Louisville Carmel. I do not imagine that perfection consists merely in staying inside the enclosure, but the fact remains that I hate to go out and am very glad that I never have to do so. The last thing I would ever desire would be to speak on the radio.

Thank you for your prayers. I need them. And I hope they will obtain for me more and more solitude and obscurity and the humility proper to a true monk. I remember you also at Mass and beg Our Lord to give you every grace.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

fr. M. Louis, O.C.S.O.

P.S. I do not know anything about Ambrose Autpert; otherwise I would probably be asking you also to send your Father Abbot's work on him. I shall be very interested to hear about the St. Bernard celebrations at Lyon. I only heard a few words about the affair in May. We did practically nothing here.

### **Jean Leclercq to Thomas Merton**

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In via pacis 23. 9. 53.

Dear Father Louis,

I received your very good letter of August 21 just before leaving Clervaux for Dijon, where I had to play on the "theatrum mundi," being the secretary of the theological congress on St. Bernard. This congress has been wonderfully interesting, much more than anyone ever expected. The lectures were all of a very high standard, from the double point of view of theology and spirituality (our chief trial is to reconcile them), and above all the atmosphere was always full of charity. Everybody was pleased and peaceful: discussion never became controversial; everything finished on Saturday afternoon with a very contemplative trip to Fontenay where we all admired the style inspired by twelfth-century Cistercian life and "monastic theology." We had Fr. Danielou, De Lubac, Mouroux, Dechanet, O. Rousseau, Congar, Pacifique Delgaauw of Tilburg, Claude Botard of Orval, and others, all agreeing on the same themes of what they all called "monastic theology," all coming to the conclusion that its characteristic is fidelity to patristic sources. They all said, too, that there is no opposition at all between "monastic" and "scholastic" theology, but the former could be useful to the latter. Professor A. Forest, a layman, but very contemplative gave a very deep and beautiful lecture on St. Bernard and contemporary thought, in

the style of his book which I suppose you know, *La vocation de l'Esprit* (Paris, Aubier, 1953), each page of which could be illustrated with texts of St. Bernard. I will not tell you more about this congress: in a few months time you will read, I hope, the text of all these lectures. Many of the Reverend Fathers at the General Chapter came from Cîteaux for two of the sessions. On Sunday morning, at Fontaines, in the rain, I had a very short talk with your Reverend Father whom I am very, very glad to have met. And now I am on my way back to Clervaux where I shall be tonight.

I tell you confidentially that your Reverend Father asked me if I could go and preach a retreat at Gethsemani. Of course, I just made objections — and I think they were sincere — and especially I pointed out that I really do not think that I speak English fluently enough. Let's wait and see if God gives further signs of His will. But of course, if Providence arranges for me to be in the States for some time, I would be pleased not only of the opportunity of seeing Cistercian manuscripts over there, and of searching for others, but also of seeing you and your community.

Before leaving Clervaux, I had four copies of Schuster's *Vie monastique* sent to you. My abbot added his little book on Anbroise Autpert as a little present.

I have no more postcards of the Eremo of Frascati. But I wrote to my friend D. Maurizio, who is master of novices there, and I asked him to send you some. I hope you will get them. It would be a great charity if you could do something to make the Camoldolese of Monte Corona better known in America. It is not a question of propaganda; the point is rather that people who have an eremitical vocation may have the chance of living it and of knowing about this religious order.

And now, my dear Father, I leave you in peace. Let us pray for one another.

f. J. Leclercq

### Jean Leclercq to Thomas Merton

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Clervaux, 13. 10. 53.

Dear Father Louis,

I am writing to ask you a service. But of course you are quite free to refuse and I shall well understand.

This is what it is about: The publication of the French text of my little book about the doctrine of Blessed P. Giustiniani has been decided. The title will be something like this: *Seul avec Dieu. La vie eremitique selon le B. P. Giustiniani*. The book will appear in the collection *Tradition monastique*. But the publisher is a little afraid because he thinks that the book will interest only the Camoldolese. What has decided him to publish the book is that it is written by a Benedictine whom he knows has nothing of the Camoldolese vocation.

You were good enough to write that you appreciated the book. Could you write a few pages to preface it? I think that if both a Cistercian and a Benedictine agree in presenting a book of this sort, any hesitation on the part of the publisher and public will disappear. It should be made clear that though such a doctrine, such a life and in particular this form of contemplative life, is an ideal not to be aimed at by all, it is a good thing that it should not be forgotten by anyone: it must remain a sign, a witness in the Church of God and in the monastic order as a whole. So I thought you could further our common ideal.

If you and your Reverend Father agree to my proposition, you could write these few (or many) pages in English and I would translate them into French.

Please convey my best regards to your Reverend Father.

Everything is going peacefully here and, as far as I hear, in all our monasteries. Our Father Abbot has just come back from the blessing of the abbot of Fontgombault a new foundation made by Solesmes. In the last century it was occupied by Trappists. The church, pure XII century style, is wonderfully clear, beautiful and peaceful. It is quite the style for our life. Here also we have one such monastery, modern but very pure.

You know, dear Father, that I am always yours in Dmno.

f. J. Leclercq

By way of a sort of compensation I am sending you a few pages I have written on St. Bernard in the *Review Camoldoli*. I think that all religious orders, chiefly monastic orders have a great deal to learn from one another.

**Thomas Merton to Jean Leclercq**

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Nov. 5, 1953

Dear Father in Christ,

It was a satisfaction to me when Father Abbot gave me permission to write the preface for your volume on Paul Giustiniani [Alone with God, Farrar, Straus]. The preface is completed and is on the way to you by surface mail. I was happy to write it, and happy to go over your book again. I feel that it is especially important that the true place of the solitary in the Church should be brought out at this time when there are so many who despise contemplation and when even in the monastic orders there is a tendency to go off the right road precisely because the values for which the solitary exists are not appreciated. If my preface does not suit you, please feel free to alter or cut as you see fit, but let me know. Perhaps I could go over the proofs of this preface.

Regarding the material side of the question: may I depend on you to get this preface censored by the two censors of our Order for the French language? I do not know who they are, but Chimay could tell you. All other material questions in regard to what I write are dealt with by an agent and he will be in touch with Plon in due course.

I have been reading with great satisfaction Cardinal Shuster's little volume. It has a very fine tone, and its simplicity and solidity make it attractive as well as useful. I like it very much and feel that it is doing me good. It makes me wonder if I might not ask Cardinal Shuster to write a preface to the translation of a forthcoming book of mine on the Psalms. Does he know English? Could you let me know, and I will send him a copy if he does. A copy will also come to you. You might like it for your series, but I do not know if the agent will give Albin Michel first option on it. Probably. But they may not take it.

It would indeed be a great pleasure to receive you at Gethsemani and have you preach our retreat. I sincerely hope that Divine Providence will bring you to America and that we will have this satisfaction. I was glad to hear of the theological conferences at Dijon and look forward to seeing them in print.

Returning to Gethsemani — could the Camoldolese at Frascati perhaps send me a picture or a relic of him? Even some pictures of their *eremo*. I am still hoping to write a little something on the Camoldolese, to make

them known in America. Any information or books they send will be useful to me and to their own cause.

I certainly agree wholeheartedly that the monastic orders have much to learn from one another, and we in America have much to learn from you in Europe. We are very isolated and provincial, I am afraid, and our undue sense of our own importance may perhaps delude us that we are the only monks in the world. It may not be possible for me to satisfy the desires of my own heart, but at least I can continue to have zeal for God's truth and for the monastic ideal. Pray for me, and may we remain united in Christ and St. Benedict.

fr. M. Louis

### **Jean Leclercq to Thomas Merton**

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23. 11. 53

Dear Fr. Louis,

I have received your letter, and then the Preface. I have read it and shall translate it. I think it is just what was necessary, and that will be useful for the book. May we be unanimous in the esteem for the contemplative life, even of solitary life, even if we are unable to live according to this ideal. For, as regards the easier life of activity, it will never be necessary to speak of it to monks. The natural tendency, with very good reasons, is always going to the active life. But it is necessary to recall that solitude and contemplation are also legitimate in the Church of God.

I shall send you a copy of the French translation of the Preface. And I think you will receive galley proofs.

The Prior of Scourmonf [Cistercian monastery in Belgium] answers me that the censors are now anonymous. So I shall send the translated introduction to the Rev. Fr. General in Rome.

My friend, D. Maurizio, Novice Master of the Eremo at Frascati, writes me that he has been delighted to see your Rev. Fr. at the Eremo, and that he gave him some pictures of the Eremo. As regards relics of Blessed Giustiniani, I wonder if they have something, but the autographs. And there is no great literature on the subject. But I shall write to D. Maurizio about that.

Yes, on the whole, the book of Card. Shuster is really a fine book. Some details seem to be nonsense, but the general impression, surely, is authentically Benedictine.

I suppose Card. Shuster would accept to write for you a preface. He is very attached to everything which is monastic. I am going to Milan for a lecture at the Catholic University on St. Bernard, Theologian. He will speak the last day. I shall pay him a visit and ask him about your preface. And I will answer you. I suppose he does read English.

Don't think at all that you, Americans, are monks of secondary quality. On the contrary, I think that you are, and for some time, in better condition than we are as regards "sancta simplicitas" [holy simplicity]. Here, in this old, too old Europe, we all are sophisticated, intellectual, complicated; we are dying of erudition. We have no spontaneity any more, nothing of the "spiritus liberatis" [liberty of spirit] which is necessary to any creation or renovation. There is in your monasticism something of ingenuous that we are tempted to despise; but you are right. We know all the constitutions, statutes, texts and so on, but we are quite unable to invent any thing adapted to new times. That is why I hope so much from you in America, especially as regards intercommunion; if some revival is to come, it will come from you. You have more liberty of mind, and more courage. We may have more austerity, more science, more aesthetic. But the sources of life are with you. I have not been alone; in Dijon last August, when we saw all the Trappists one got the impression that the Americans reminded us of the first Citeaux. In the first Citeaux there was also this kind of freshness, of liberty, of initiative, of courage in the life, of which you have something. You are probably not very conscious of it, but I expect that your abbots must feel it, when they come over here. And even this "unawareness of your importance" of which you speak, is a sign of vitality: you still believe in monastic life, you have the impression of having discovered it, it is a new reality for you. For us, it is an old, venerable institution which we try to preserve, like archeologists do for museum pieces. Of course, we also believe in monastic life, but in more of an intellectual way. Also, the first Cistercians believed that they were the only monks. The old, too old, Benedictines, protested. But it was true that the life had passed to the Cistercians. I, for instance, noticed from experience that you are more free from prejudices, more ready to accept history as it has been, than here in Europe. We always fear dangers for the uniformity, or for the reputation of the Order, or for our sentimental piety. You don't fear. You look forward to the future. Fear is proper to old people. And when we are too old, we die . . .

We are not yet dying. But I am sure that we have at least as much to learn from you as you have from us. That's why everything that helps us to know your ways and methods is useful to us.

Excuse this long digression. I am very sincerely

Yours in Christ,

J. Leclercq

[P.S.] I am gathering the texts for the volume *S. Bernard theologien*, which will result from the Dijon Congress. I think that in spite of its European erudition, it will give a good idea of St. Bernard's theology. But we still need more freshness and creative strength. We feel it, and are unable to have it. Let's do humbly what we can . . .

### Thomas Merton to Jean Leclercq

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December 7, 1953

Dear Dom Leclercq,

Many thanks for your very kind letter of Nov. 23. I am glad the preface satisfied you, and am still gratified at having been able to write it. Thank you also for offering to ask Cardinal Shuster about his preface.

I received a letter and some books from Dom Maurizio at Frascati. Father Abbot had left them in Rome to be posted from there and they came late. *There were no pictures*. I am very glad to be in relations with Frascati.

What you say about our American monks having a true monastic spirit is gratifying. I cannot deny that the Holy Spirit is truly at work here. And there is much spontaneity. But I do not think we have any of the solidity of European monasticism, and in our fervor there is much that is merely human enthusiasm. Also much provincialism.

I believe it is good for me to work for the *monastic* ideal as a whole, and not be a "propagandist" for any one order. Indeed, I think the more we work for unity among ourselves the better it will be.

God bless you — pray for me.

fr. M. Louis

[P.S.] Are you doing anything special at Clairvaux for the Marian Year?

**Thomas Merton to Jean Leclercq**

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April 27, 1954

Dear Dom Jean:

I have just written to the Agent. I suspect that Plon is unjustly penalizing you because the Agent sought some kind of material settlement for the preface. I had not stopped to think that this might happen. The only reason why I use an Agent is quite obvious — it saves me an immense amount of correspondence, contract work and business worries. If I did otherwise, I would never have any time for anything except business. I simply leave all cares to the middle-man. This of course has its hard-boiled aspects, since the Agent is bent on making a living out of his percentage. I do not think it is altogether fair of Plon to retaliate by threatening the future of your series, although in a way I see where that is logical — with the logic of the jungle.

However, if it will help your series at all to publish a book by me, I have a small volume on St Bernard about to appear. It is very slight, not a formal life, simply a brief introduction to the saint and to the recent Encyclical. It has three parts — a sketch of his life and character, an outline of his works and teaching, and a commentary on the Encyclical — followed by the text of the Papal Document itself. I had not even thought of allowing this book to be published in France. When you see it, you will probably agree that it adds nothing to the number of excellent studies of St. Bernard, including your own. I do not think it will help your series except accidentally. If the appearance of the author's name is of any use to you, I will consent to let this book appear in France — without worrying about what may happen to my reputation. I will send you the book as soon as I can procure a copy. It is not yet off the press.

I can agree with what you say about the Benedictine life. The more I come into indirect contact with the Benedictine houses of Europe, like yours and La Pierre-qui-Vire, the more I appreciate the depth and solidity of the monastic spirit, and profit by contact with it. It is indeed a paradox that you do now in fact have much more real silence and peace than many a Trappist monastery. I never felt any sympathy with Rance's ideas about erudition, and I am sure that the work done by Benedictines today in this field is perfectly monastic and truly fruitful in the line of monastic spirituality.

The last thing in the world a monk should seek or care about is material success. That which I see in my own labors is as much a surprise to me as it is to anybody else. Nor can I find in myself the power to get very interested in that success. I do not claim this to be a virtue, because I never really understood money anyway. I do not know how much our books have acquired. The figures are not communicated to me and if they were I would probably not understand them anyway.

In any case I have instructed the Agent to take some kind of cognizance of the problem you mention in your letter. It is of course inevitable that such things should be said about me, and I do not see what there is to be done about it. Thank you for defending the truth. Meanwhile, I have also told the Agent that if you want the St. Bernard book, *The Last of the Fathers*, I would like you to have it on a "poor" basis. That will at least give me the satisfaction of cooperating in a work which I admire, for I have derived great pleasure and profit from reading the volumes that have reached me so far. It is quite certain that if the monastic life is to fulfil its important role in our world today there must be books that reflect the peace and sanity and depth of the true monastic tradition. Not all monastic books fulfil that function, for in every part of the Church cockle can be intermixed with the good wheat.

Please do not feel yourself obliged to write a review of *Bread in the Wilderness*. My only way of getting a copy to you was to have the publisher send you a review copy. If however you do write a review I shall feel very pleased and honored.

Please commend me to the prayers of your dear Lord Abbot and ask his blessing for me. Let us continue in union of prayers and in solitude, in limine aeternitatis [on the threshold of eternity].

Your devoted brother in Christ,

fr. M. Louis