

toward a new horizon – here and now. Many thanks to Jessie Sandoval, Jeffrey Neilson and Robert Hass for bringing us this important book.

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CHAUTARD, Jean-Baptiste, OCSO, *The Spirit of Simplicity*, translated with notes and appendix by Thomas Merton, OCSO, edited by Elias Dietz, OCSO (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2017), pp. xviii + 139. ISBN: 978-1594717819 (paper) \$15.95.

The early twentieth century saw a flowering of Cistercian writing. Dom Vital Lehodey published three influential works on ascetical mysticism. Jean-Baptiste Chautard wrote a book entitled (in English) *The Soul of the Apostolate*,<sup>1</sup> which went through several editions and many printings, and which was endorsed by Pope St. Pius X as his bedside reading. The flowering continued on this side of the Atlantic with the popular writings of Fr. Raymond Flanagan, and of course, Thomas Merton, both of the Abbey of Gethsemani. In more recent years, such names as André Louf, Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating and others have joined their ranks.

Two of these authors, Chautard and Merton, combined, though not contemporaneously, to produce a little work self-published by the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1948 called *The Spirit of Simplicity*.<sup>2</sup> This book has now been republished by Ave Maria Press, edited and with a preface by Fr. Elias Dietz, OCSO, the current abbot of Gethsemani.

Fr. Elias delves into the origins of the book in his informative preface. Chautard was given the task of writing a pamphlet in preparation for the General Chapter of 1925 of the OCR (later the Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance [OCSO]). The Order had only officially been formed thirty-three years earlier, in 1892, and this General Chapter was looking to the Order's past to point a way to its future. The pamphlet was circulated, and Dom Frederic Dunne, Abbot of Gethsemani, saw it as a way to publicize the Cistercians in the United States. He set a young monk of his, Louis Merton, to translate it. This was before the appearance

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1. Thomas Merton was the (anonymous) translator of this volume: Jean-Baptiste Chautard, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, translated by a Monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani (Trappist, KY: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1946); this replaced an earlier translation first made in 1912, published in 1927, and reissued by Gethsemani in 1941. In a later paperback edition of the book (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Image, 1961), Merton was identified as the translator and provided a revised, expanded introduction.

2. *The Spirit of Simplicity Characteristic of the Cistercian Order. An Official Report, demanded and approved by the General Chapter. Together with Texts from St. Bernard of Clairvaux on Interior Simplicity. Translation and Commentary by A Cistercian Monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani* (Trappist, KY: Abbey of Gethsemani, 1948).

and success of *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Merton did more than simply translate it; he also provided copious notes. Sometimes his comments veer into asides, with nearly a full page, for example, on the role of compunction in monasticism, or the practicalities of liturgical simplicity in the twentieth century. He also added a full second section to the book,<sup>3</sup> in which he attempts to give “the massive dogmatic foundations upon which the Cistercian doctrine of simplicity is built as upon granite” (71). Here he intersperses passages from St. Bernard of Clairvaux, mostly from the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, with his own analyses, explaining how Bernard’s thought produces a theology of simplicity.

Chautard’s section feels remarkably contemporary. Following the principle of “ressourcement” before it was propagated by the Second Vatican Council (though Chautard points out that the same task was given to the various orders of the Church by the First Vatican Council), he examines the early history and documents of the Cistercian Order to determine what was the driving force behind its foundation. He identifies this force as simplicity. This simplicity was manifested on a practical level through a return to the observance of the Rule of Benedict, without mitigation or aggregation. But Chautard is careful to separate the external observances of the Rule from the spirit behind them. He points out that the internal spirit of simplicity precedes and motivates the external observances. Simplicity for Chautard does not mean only the absence of external distractions, though it does mean that too. It primarily refers to an inner unity of heart, purity of intention, humility and integrity. “The monk is a man of oneness, simplicity: his very name declares it” (8). *Monachos*, the root of the word “monk,” means “solitary.” Of course, the life of Christ provides the most potent example of the sort of simplicity he means. Christ is the ultimate pattern of the monk, and he exhorts the monk to follow Christ’s example in several passages.

This focus on the internal over the external is reflected in the structure of the book. Chautard begins, not with historical analysis, but with a chapter on what simplicity means to the individual. This frames the rest of the book as the answer to a personal question. He is addressing the contemporary Cistercian monk, but the same question could be asked by anyone on the spiritual path. He then goes on to explain how simplicity is the major factor in the thought of the founders of the Cistercian order, in the order’s earliest documents, in the decisions of the General Chapter, and how this ideal was lost then rediscovered by the various renewals,

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3. This material is also included as Part II, “St. Bernard on Interior Simplicity,” in Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton on St. Bernard* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980) 105-57.

ending with the Strict Observance and Trappist renewal in the seventeenth century. He then goes backward to show that the roots of this idea were not unique to the Cistercians, but preceded them in the works of the ancients. “There can be no doubt that the more we are able to get back to our various sources: Cîteaux, St. Benedict, the Desert Fathers, the Fathers of the Church, the more will we discover things that will help us the better to appreciate and love and, hence, to practice the virtue of simplicity” (47).

Who, then, is this book for? Naturally Merton completists will want to have it. However, those looking for the Merton of *The Seven Storey Mountain* or *New Seeds of Contemplation* and other later works will be disappointed. His notes on the text and on Bernard are relatively dry and scholarly. But they are interesting and worth reading. The book is invaluable for historians of the Order. The Trappists of the early twentieth century are often depicted as rigidly following extreme austerities through desire for penance. This book reveals another motivation behind these austerities, which is not obvious to those perusing the early Usages. But this little book will also be valuable for the casual reader as well. It talks about the necessity for simplicity in the monastic life, but it implies the necessity for simplicity in the spiritual life in general, and gives practical advice on how to attain it.

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TARR, Kathleen Witkowska, *We Are All Poets Here: Thomas Merton's 1968 Journey to Alaska – A Shared Story about Spiritual Seeking* (Anchorage, Alaska: VP&D House, 2017) pp. 400. ISBN: 978-57833-691-3 (paper) \$24.95.

Although almost all of the series of conferences Thomas Merton presented to religious women and to priests during his two weeks in Alaska in late September and early October 1968 first appeared in print barely two years after his death,<sup>1</sup> and his journals and letters from his brief sojourn there have been available since 1988,<sup>2</sup> relatively little attention has been paid to

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1. Thomas Merton, “This Is God’s Work,” *Sisters Today* 42 (Aug.-Sept. 1970) 1-7; “The Life That Unifies,” *Sisters Today* 42 (Oct. 1970) 65-73; “Prayer, Personalism, and the Spirit,” *Sisters Today* 42 (Nov. 1970) 129-36; “Building Community on God’s Love,” *Sisters Today* 42 (Dec. 1970) 185-93; “Community, Politics, and Contemplation,” *Sisters Today* 42 (Jan. 1971) 241-46; “Prayer, Tradition, and Experience,” *Sisters Today* 42 (Feb. 1971) 258-93; “Prayer and Conscience,” *Sisters Today* 42 (April 1971) 409-18; “Prayer and the Priestly Tradition,” *The Priest* 42 (July-Aug. 1986) 47-48.

2. This material first appeared in a limited edition as *The Alaskan Journal of Thomas Merton*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (Isla Vista, CA: Turkey Press, 1988); the following year a trade edition that included Merton’s Alaskan conferences as well was published: Thomas