

deck beneath my feet' (p. 391). She also found that she had been drawn by God 'to that faraway place to quiet me, to give me time to scrape off the hardened crust of my false self' (p. 391).

Throughout the book the author demonstrates her deep immersion in Merton's works through her wide range of quotations; but she does not go into the details of the conferences he gave in Alaska. The text of those can be found in the expanded volume of his Alaskan journal, *Thomas Merton in Alaska*, published in 1989. The conferences have much to teach us. In Bonnie Thurston's excellent article, 'I spoke mostly of prayer', which looks at their content in detail, she considers that they form 'one of the richest sources for Merton's mature teaching on prayer'.* *We are all poets here* has no index but does include details of Merton's itinerary, a brief bibliography and a generous selection of photographs, many taken by Merton himself whilst in Alaska. This is a book to cherish, one that bears eloquent testimony to how Merton, fifty years after his death, continues to inspire and challenge his readers.

* Bonnie Thurston, 'I spoke mostly of prayer', *The Seasonal*, vol. 35:3, Fall 2010, p. 12.

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The Spirit of Simplicity

Jean-Baptiste Chautard, OCSO

Translated and annotated by Thomas Merton

Ave Maria Press

Notre Dame, Indiana

ISBN 13-978-1-59471-781-9 (pbk) xviii +139 pages

£10.88

This new edition adds a succinct and useful preface and a timely afterword by Abbey of Gethsemani Abbot Dom Elias Dietz, OCSO to the first 1948 anonymously published version. The former provides a context for the genesis of 'this unique little book' (p. vii); the latter offers updated information on the original sources from which the spirit of simplicity of Cistercian monasticism flowed, and replaces Merton's own suggestions, many of which are now out of date. The book comprises two parts: the first is Merton's translation from the French and notes of 'an official

report', of pamphlet length, by Abbot Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, OCSO on the spirit of simplicity characteristic of the Cistercian Order 'demanded and approved by the General Chapter' in 1925 after the merging of three congregations of Strict Observance into what is now familiarly known as the Trappists to avoid the danger of excessive formalism; the second complements the first with a selection of St. Bernard's texts 'On Interior Simplicity' translated and discussed by Merton. A set of photographs of Cistercian monasteries and a plan based on the Abbey of Fontenay are inserted between the two parts. The volume addresses the two basic layers of simplicity characteristic of Cistercian spirituality. The first chapter of the report introduces the 'interior simplicity' that defines the heart, the gaze, the intention, and the outlook of each soul, and produces the unity of the monastery. Yet, in his foreword, Merton notes that since the rest of the report 'deals principally with external simplicity ... in clothing, buildings, the liturgy and so on', it was deemed 'worthwhile to add a second section devoted to a brief outline of the doctrine of St. Bernard on interior simplicity.' (p. xvi)

The overall result can be appreciated on different grounds, for the book offers valuable insights on both the content and the context of Cistercian spirituality as it deals with the monastic journey through the geography of the heart 'toward its last end: God' (p. 7) and with its historical development 'to keep *progressing* in the love of our order and of our fathers' (p. 12). Merton readers will notice his incipient yet already remarkable dialogic engagement with the texts in hand as well as his earnest effort to base his comments on primary sources, and to reclaim and yet reframe the authorized voices of his tradition.

The seeds of his later pedagogical discernment between the true and the false self, the antecedents of his writings on the new man and the gist of his contemplative vision and prophetic mission are encapsulated in a constellation of seminal statements like the following, from a section on the practical application of St. Bernard's doctrine on simplicity: 'St. Bernard has really vindicated the fundamental goodness of human nature ... 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* ... trying to return to the original simplicity, immortality, and freedom which constitute his real self, in the image of God.' In the meantime, while living on earth, 'our chief, in fact our only, task is to get rid of the 'double' garment, the overlying duplicity that is *not ourselves*' (p. 79).

In the introduction to a later book, *Thomas Merton on St. Bernard*, which included the second part of *The Spirit of Simplicity* written by

Merton, Jean Leclercq, with whom he had corresponded since 1950¹, compares Thomas Merton to St. Bernard himself and praises the way 'Merton goes from the letter to the spirit, from customs and observances to the inner attitude'; he underlines the fact that 'what he says is valid not only for the Cistercian Order but for all Christians' as he considers that, far from being objectionable, with his 'simple eye' and 'child-like faith', 'the spirit he defines was to be at the fountainhead of the renewal to come.'² After reading a recent review of *The Spirit of Simplicity*, I cannot but adhere to the author's conclusion that the 'wedded texts of Chautard and Merton invite the deepest kind of soul work' and that their invitation 'to live with this spirit of simplicity is enticing.'³

Interestingly, when Raimundo Panikkar engaged in an intra- and inter-religious dialogue in a book with the significant title of *Blessed Simplicity*, he defined the monk, or *monachos*, as 'that person who aspires to reach the ultimate goal of life ... by renouncing all that is not necessary to it,'⁴ an almost identical definition to that provided by Merton when he summed up the teaching of St. Bernard and of the *Exordium Parvum*, or *Little Exordium*⁵ as consisting 'in *getting rid of everything that did not help the monk to arrive at union with God by the shortest possible way*' (pp. xvi-xvii). Panikkar defies the readers to ask themselves about the deep anthropological urge of people from different religions to follow the way of monkhood and finds the question only partially answerable. Merton drew elsewhere on St. Bernard to affirm that the love of God is the entire reason for our existence. In his treatise *On the Love of God (De Diligendo Deo)* St. Bernard shows, however, that love, fallen and often distorted and obscured, needs to be re-educated, so that it is reinstated in its natural simplicity, extended to all humanity, purified and raised to God.⁶ This is why monasteries have been described as schools of charity. As Chautard and Merton traced back the radiance of Cistercian simplicity to the very roots of Christian spirituality (p. 71), in St. Benedict and the Fathers of the Church, readers from all walks of life may also be inspired by the merciful wisdom of these pages and learn lessons for life and of a manner of love that casts out every fear behind each personal war and all structural violence.

Notes

1. *Survival or Prophecy? The Letters of Thomas Merton & Jean Leclercq*, Brother Patrick Hart, ed. (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002).
2. Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton on St. Bernard* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1980), pp. 17-18.

3. Thomas A. Snyder, 'Simply Cistercian – Chautard and Merton. Review of The Spirit of Simplicity', *The Merton Seasonal: A Quarterly Review*, Volume 43, Issue 2 (2018), pp. 29-32.
4. Raimundo Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1982), p. 10.
5. A 12th century Cistercian document that includes the early history of Cîteaux, incorporating official letters and documents with narrative. Available at: <https://www.ocso.org/resources/foundational-text/exordium-parvum/>
6. Thomas Merton, *The Last of the Fathers: St. Bernard of Clairvaux and the Encyclical Letter Doctor Mellifluus* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954), p. 52.

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At Play in the Lions' Den: A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan

Jim Forest

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ISBN 9781626982482 (pbk) 336 pages

£22

With *At Play in the Lions' Den*, Jim Forest offers his latest biography of iconic Catholic peace movement figures. As with his studies of Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day, Forest personally knew his third subject, Daniel Berrigan. In this case, his five-decade friendship with Berrigan warrants adding 'memoir' to the subtitle, and Forest's personal recollections add unique intimacy and insight throughout this fascinating story.

Choosing material from a life as fully lived as Daniel Berrigan's is not simple. Yet Forest captures far more than the well-known public encounters that endear Berrigan to peace and social justice advocates. For instance, he recounts lesser-known acts of friendship and quiet service, such as anonymous support roles with the homeless, indigent cancer victims, and dying AIDS patients during the epidemic's height.

Forest also chronicles Berrigan's 15-year immersion in prescribed Jesuit formation and his gradual emergence as a public anti-war figure. This is key, since counter-cultural leaders, especially those with institutional church ties, do not just mystically appear without context,