

MONASTIC WISDOM SERIES: NUMBER TWENTY-FIVE

Thomas Merton

**Monastic Observances**

*Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 5*

MONASTIC WISDOM SERIES

Simeon Leiva, ocsso, General Editor

Advisory Board

Michael Casey, ocsso

Lawrence S. Cunningham

Patrick Hart, ocsso

Robert Heller

Terrence Kardong, osb

Kathleen Norris

Miriam Pollard, ocsso

Bonnie Thurston

MONASTIC WISDOM SERIES: NUMBER TWENTY-FIVE

# Monastic Observances

*Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 5*

by  
Thomas Merton

Edited with an Introduction by  
Patrick F. O'Connell

Preface by  
James Conner, ocsa



Cistercian Publications  
[www.cistercianpublications.org](http://www.cistercianpublications.org)

LITURGICAL PRESS  
Collegeville, Minnesota  
[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)

A Cistercian Publications title published by Liturgical Press

**Cistercian Publications**  
Editorial Offices  
Abbey of Gethsemani  
3642 Monks Road  
Trappist, Kentucky 40051  
www.cistercianpublications.org

©2010 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, P.O. Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

---

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Merton, Thomas, 1915–1968.

Monastic observances : initiation into the monastic tradition 5 / by Thomas Merton ; edited with an introduction by Patrick F. O'Connell ; preface by James Conner.

p. cm. — (Monastic wisdom series ; MW25)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-87907-025-0 — ISBN 978-0-87907-921-5 (e-book)

1. Cistercians—Rules. 2. Monastic and religious life. I. O'Connell, Patrick F. II. Title. III. Series.

BX3404.Z5M47 2010

255'.1206—dc22

2010022608

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface vii

Introduction xi

Monastic Observances 1

Appendix A: Textual Notes 279

Appendix B: For Further Reading 305

Index 307



## PREFACE

Fr. Louis (Thomas) Merton gave these conferences on *Monastic Observances* during the years he was Novice Master, from 1955 to 1965. They are based on the book of the *Usages* of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance. These *Usages* were taken from the early Cistercian *Usages* from Cîteaux, as well as the *Usages* of Abbot de Rancé at the Monastery of La Trappe and the *Usages* of Dom Augustin de Lestrange at La Val Sainte in Switzerland. They were first adopted by the Second General Chapter which was held in 1894 after the unification of three Trappist congregations into one Order in 1892. They were subsequently revised after the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1917.

At the time, the Abbot General, Dom Sebastien Wyart, urged those composing the *Usages* to avoid the rigidities and penitential aspects of the "Trappist" heritage and to remain faithful to the Cistercian spirit of the early founders. Both La Trappe and La Val Sainte were known for their penitential spirit and their negativity towards anything merely "human." Unfortunately it took almost fifty years for this evolution to take place, and Fr. Louis himself played a large part in this process. He emphasized in his writings and in his classes for juniors and later for novices that the Cistercian life is a contemplative life rather than simply a penitential life.

These conferences show the ways in which he strove to foster this notion by showing that the observances are not simply rules to be obeyed, but a way of life to be lived out in accord with that primal quality that St. Benedict sought in any candidate to monastic life: "do they truly seek God" (*Rule*, c. 50). As Merton states

in the very beginning: “{They must assist our} growth as children of God, {the} formation of Christ in us” (5). The Gospels show Jesus constantly relying on the Father for everything. Whatever he says, whatever he does, comes from the Father. This shows us how we are to live in imitation of him. The monk believes that the observances come to us ultimately from the Father, and in submitting to them and surrendering one’s own will, the monk becomes ever more conformed to Christ.

It is interesting to notice that it is in these notes that Merton gives perhaps his fullest teaching on prayer: cf. the section on “THE MORNING MEDITATION” (75–92), supplemented by the section on *lectio divina* and silence (149–83). Together they show us the monastic approach to prayer. Merton believed that “contemplative life” is not merely a juridical term, but a way of life, and that one cannot claim to be a contemplative unless he loves prayer as the way to discover the presence of God in our lives and world. All of the observances must be related ultimately to prayer in order that they may be a way of life and not simply of formalism.

A number of the observances that Merton discusses have been radically changed since his time, due to the period of renewal within the Order and the Church at large. Prime is no longer a part of the divine office. The chapter of faults has been dropped. Many of the penances that he speaks of are no longer in practice. Even the basic observance of silence has been radically changed. And yet what Merton says about these practices conveys valid principles which are applicable at any time. He sees them primarily as ways of cultivating humility of spirit and opportunities to surrender ourselves to God and to the community.

Today the novices are not taught the monastic observances as in the past. But they are exposed to the basic principles found therein. Since 1969, with the Statute of Unity and Pluralism from the General Chapter, uniformity is no longer observed among all of the houses of the Order. Each house is free to determine its own observances and these are drawn up by the particular community. However the observances Merton considers in this vol-

ume stand as more than simply a testament to the past. They remain as examples of how monks of an earlier generation approached the monastic life and how they sought to give their lives to God.

We can be grateful to Dr. Patrick O'Connell for his usual diligent research into the conferences that Thomas Merton gave to the novices. His labors, as usual, are thorough and direct the reader to something much deeper than simply the externals. They show us how Merton viewed the observances and how he strove to initiate the novices to a level beyond the canonical level, to a way of living out the Mystery of Christ in their own lives.

Fr. James Conner, ocsa  
Abbey of Gethsemani



## INTRODUCTION

In Cistercian monasteries of the mid-twentieth century it was a standard part of the novice director's duties to give "repetitions,"<sup>1</sup> expositions of the official customs or observances of the Order. Apparently these presentations were frequently little more than what the name suggests,<sup>2</sup> reading or paraphrasing and providing brief comments on the various regulations included in the volume of "*Usages*."<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, when Thomas Merton turned his attention to this topic in his novitiate conferences of the late 1950s, he endeavored to do much more than merely "repeat" for his young charges material that they could easily read for themselves. In this set of conferences, Merton provided an orientation both spatial and temporal to the Abbey of Gethsemani, a brief but comprehensive tour of the "regular places" of the monastery followed by a thorough consideration of the monastic *horarium*, the succession of "exercises" that structure the monastic day (or rather the first part of that day, for in fact at the point where this "Part I" of the *Monastic Observances* course ends he has progressed only as far as the morning chapter, held immediately after the office of prime, and

1. See John Eudes Bamberger, ocsa, "Some Features of Monastic Formation," in Augusta Tescari, ocsa, Marie-Gérard Dubois, ocsa and Maria Paola Santachiara, ocsa, eds., *The Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance in the Twentieth Century*, 2 vols. (Rome: Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, 2008), 2.255-56.

2. See Armand Veilleux, ocsa, "Trappist-Cistercian Formation in the Twentieth Century," in *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.246.

3. *Regulations of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance Published by the General Chapter of 1926* (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Sons, [1927]).

for reasons that will be suggested below, the second part of the course was never given). Unlike the conferences in which Merton introduced the novices to the riches of monastic tradition, extending back through the middle ages to the patristic era and from the Clairvaux of St. Bernard through the Monte Cassino of St. Benedict to the Egyptian desert of John Cassian and the desert fathers,<sup>4</sup> these lectures were focused on the familiar setting of their own monastery and what could quickly become the all too familiar pattern of their daily life. But like all of the classes that Merton prepared and presented during the decade of his tenure as novice master (1955–1965), and perhaps more concretely than most, the *Monastic Observances* conferences were intended to reveal the inner dynamic of the monastic vocation, its orientation toward contemplative union with God with and in the crucified and risen Christ, as lived out in a community formed and nurtured by the *Rule* of St. Benedict. Thus Merton is primarily interested in considering the spiritual significance of the places and events, the rhythms and rituals that structure the Cistercian life. This is undoubtedly the most practical series of conferences that Merton gave to his young charges, but it is marked throughout by a desire to show how such a framework could and should be more than a meticulously arranged set of formal activities to which the monk was expected to conform, how it was developed to create a balanced integration of work and prayer, a complementary alternation between the public “work of God” in the liturgy and periods of solitary reflection and meditation, all oriented to deepening communion with God and with one’s monastic brothers. For non-monastic readers (and even for monks who entered Cistercian life in the very different environment that

4. See Thomas Merton, *Cassian and the Fathers: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition*, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell, Monastic Wisdom [MW], vol. 1 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005); Thomas Merton, *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 2*, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell, MW 9 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2006); Thomas Merton, *The Rule of Saint Benedict: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition 4*, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell, MW 19 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009).

followed the Second Vatican Council), these conferences allow an unparalleled look at daily life behind the enclosure walls at a point in time just before that life would undergo a radical restructuring. For students of Thomas Merton, *Monastic Observances* provides an opportunity to watch him introduce aspiring monks to the traditional way of life in which he himself had been formed and which he had lived for almost two decades, a way of life that he deeply valued and loved, even as he continued to struggle with some of its more problematic aspects.

\* \* \* \* \*

The presentation of these conferences (which encompass only about seven hours of the monastic day!) extended in a rather leisurely and evidently somewhat sporadic pattern over a period of almost three years, which means that none of the novices could have been present for the whole series during their novitiate of approximately two years. So the orientation they provide, useful as it may have been, could not have been considered essential for their making sense of the daily routine, which the new monk in formation would obviously have become quite accustomed to within a few short weeks at most—clearly the focus was on exploring the spiritual significance of the various places and exercises rather than simply identifying what they were.

The class must have begun some time during, or just before, Lent, as on page 6v of Merton's own typescript,<sup>5</sup> which he had in front of him as he spoke during each conference, one of the brief notes that he regularly jotted down on the backs of the typed pages, to remind him about announcements to be made at the beginning of class, mentions "Lenten books." Nineteen pages later, on page 25v of the typescript,<sup>6</sup> he makes note of the Solemnity of St. Benedict—not the main feast celebrated (or not celebrated, as it regularly fell during Lent) on March 21—but the Feast of the Translation of St. Benedict on July 11; and on the same

5. Page 19 of this edition.

6. Page 59 of this edition.

page the date of the Feast of St. Symphorosa and her seven sons—July 18—is also noted. Not until page 31 of the typescript<sup>7</sup> is reached can the year in question be determined: there Merton observes that the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost falls on the first Sunday of August, a correspondence that occurs during the relevant period only on August 4, 1957, so the conferences had begun during late February or early March of that year. The subsequent progression of the course can be traced by means of a number of indications provided by the typescript. On page 44<sup>8</sup> occurs the first of a number of marginal dates made by the typist who was assigned to make a copy of the notes on stencils for eventual distribution to the novices; he had reached this point in the text on “10/26”; Merton’s own note four pages later (47v)<sup>9</sup> mentions an exam scheduled for “Fri 20th”—a combination that occurred in December 1957, a date confirmed by notes two pages later (49v)<sup>10</sup> referring to “decorations—Bl Mother Crib Tree”. The next typist’s note, on page 51,<sup>11</sup> is dated “12/31”, but then there is apparently a substantial hiatus in the conferences, as only three pages later<sup>12</sup> the date is “3/17”, and five pages after that,<sup>13</sup> “5/2”, although the next marginal date, “5/6”, is on page 63,<sup>14</sup> four pages afterward. Merton himself refers to the Feast of the Ascension, which was celebrated on May 15 in 1958, in his note on page 66v;<sup>15</sup> subsequent notes refer to the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6) (73v)<sup>16</sup> and to the (September) ember days (78v).<sup>17</sup> At

7. Page 70 of this edition.

8. Page 100 of this edition.

9. Page 108 of this edition.

10. Page 112 of this edition.

11. Page 116 of this edition.

12. Page 122 of this edition.

13. Page 134 of this edition.

14. Page 142 of this edition.

15. Page 153 of this edition.

16. Page 166 of this edition.

17. Page 177 of this edition; the September ember days were the Wednesday, Friday and Saturday following the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Sept. 14).

this point, these conferences were apparently put aside, since the typist's note on the facing page<sup>18</sup> is dated "3/12", though he apparently did a good deal of catching up on that day since his next note, on page 87,<sup>19</sup> is dated only a day later. Merton's own reference to "Pasternak" on page 82v<sup>20</sup> must be related to the Russian novelist's disappearance from public view, which Merton noted in a journal entry for March 3, 1959;<sup>21</sup> seven pages later (89v)<sup>22</sup> he jots a reminder that there would be no conference on the Feast of St. Joseph (March 19), and on page 92v<sup>23</sup> he mentions "visitation—Father Immediate"—a reference to the arrival of Dom Columban Bissey, the Abbot of Melleray, the motherhouse of Gethsemani, which took place on April 11, 1959.<sup>24</sup> A typist's note on page 98<sup>25</sup> is dated "5/5", but only three pages later (101v)<sup>26</sup> Merton himself refers in a note to the Feast of the Visitation (July 2), so again there must have been a considerable gap in the progression of the conferences. The last few months of the course can be traced by the typist's marginal dating<sup>27</sup> from "Sept 26 '59" (103), through "Sept 28" (105), "10/16" (107), "10-23" (109), "10-26" (110), "1-11" (112), "1-12" (114), "1-16-60" (115), and "1-27" (117—the final page of the typescript).<sup>28</sup> Since the typist, at this

18. Page 176 of this edition.

19. Page 192 of this edition.

20. Page 184 of this edition.

21. Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's True Life. Journals, vol. 3: 1952–1960*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1996), 265; see also *Search for Solitude, 270–71* [7/25/59]—the news that Pasternak had left Moscow of his own free will.

22. Page 198 of this edition.

23. Page 205 of this edition.

24. *Search for Solitude*, 274.

25. Page 215 of this edition.

26. Page 221 of this edition.

27. Pages 224, 227, 231, 233, 235, 238, 241, 245, 250, respectively, of this edition.

28. The differences in the style of the dating notations suggest that there may have been one or even two additional typists who worked on this part of the text.

point at least, was presumably somewhat ahead of Merton's actual presentations, in order that the multigraphed copy of the notes could be distributed to the novices by the time the course was actually concluded, it is therefore probably accurate to assume that the *Monastic Observances* conferences drew to a close some time in early February, 1960. Given the relatively modest length of the text, it is evident that the course would not have extended over such a lengthy period of time if these conferences had been given throughout the entire period on a regular weekly basis. The available dating confirms that there must have been considerable intervals when they were put aside. It is perhaps significant that the time frame for these conferences overlaps that for the initial presentation of the conferences on the Benedictine *Rule*, which Merton discussed between the summer of 1957 and early February 1959,<sup>29</sup> and particularly that datable references for the later part of those conferences are clustered between early September 1958 and early February 1959, the precise period when there is a considerable gap in the *Observances* dating. So it is possible, even likely, that for at least part of this period Merton may have alternated material from these two sets of conferences—moving between the foundational basis of the monastic life in the *Rule* and its practical implementation in the Cistercian observances.

\* \* \* \* \*

There are two significant limitations in the *Monastic Observances* conferences, both resulting from the particular time period in which they were given. The first is that they are incomplete; the second, that they were about to become obsolete.

The text of the conferences proper concludes with the note "End of Part One—Notes on Observances" (250), carrying the obvious implication that they were to be followed by a Part Two, but there is no evidence that Merton ever wrote or delivered this second half of the course. After his tour of the main areas of the

29. See *Rule of Saint Benedict*, xxxv–xxxviii.

monastery, Merton provides a detailed description of the first part of the monastic day, from the beginning of the night office through morning chapter. Along the way he discusses the period of meditation following vigils; the office of lauds; Mass and communion; *lectio divina*; the light breakfast called mixt; and the office of prime. But the activities of the rest of the day, including the little hours of tierce, sext and none, and the later offices of vespers and compline, are not considered, nor is monastic work,<sup>30</sup> the main meal (which would probably have also included some notice of the reading that accompanied it), nor the conventual, or community, Mass, which Merton said he intended to consider at a later point (109). Thus it is clear that the conferences as presented are significantly truncated. It is possible that Merton simply lost interest in the topic, or that the extended period of time devoted to the first part had prompted an indefinite postponement of the second, or that the variety of other courses given during the final five years of Merton's mastership left no room for continuing the *Observances* material. But the text itself provides a more likely explanation. Merton notes as he nears the completion of this first part (226) that the *Usages* were currently being revised, a process that had begun in 1958, mandated by the Cistercian General Chapter of that year.<sup>31</sup> Rather than continuing to cite a text that was about to be superseded, Merton would

30. But see Merton, *Rule of Saint Benedict*, 130–42, which does discuss this topic in detail.

31. See *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 1.246, 263–64. See Merton's own September 28, 1964 comments, shortly before the revised *Usages* were published: "Looking through the *Usages* for things that might be dropped as 'artificial'—noticed with alarm that they are all built into the very structure of the life. To take away these observances would be in fact to take away what practically constitutes the 'Trappist Life' for many monks! This is very serious. It seems that there is no real 'adaptation' possible?? That all that can be expected is to preserve what we have in a fairly reasonable and alert spirit—in community: and be at peace away from all this when one is free. It is a problem—probably more easily accepted in French monasteries" (Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals, vol. 5: 1963–1965*, ed. Robert E. Daggy [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997], 150).

quite logically have decided to wait until after the new edition had appeared before continuing his commentary, which referred continually to the *Usages*. In the event, the process of revision took considerably longer than had been expected, and the revised version,<sup>32</sup> issued only in mimeographed form as it was anticipated, rightly, that further alterations in the Cistercian observances would be needed in implementing the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council, appeared only in 1964.<sup>33</sup> Merton, who would resign as novice master to become a full-time hermit in August 1965, never got around to completing his overview of the *Observances* during the final year of his mastership.

The changes naturally had a profound impact as well on the parts of the *horarium* discussed in Part One of the conferences. Most obvious, of course, was the disappearance of Latin, both in the Mass and in the Office,<sup>34</sup> a development about which Merton himself was profoundly ambivalent.<sup>35</sup> But there were numerous

32. *Usages of the Cistercian Monks of the Strict Observance* (Monte Cistello [Rome]: [Cistercian Generalate], 1964).

33. These revised *Usages* remained in force for only about four years, as the Statute on Unity and Pluralism, passed by the Cistercian General Chapter of 1969, allowed for "the principle of diverse usages, within specified limits" (John Eudes Bamberger, *ocso*, "The Office of Secretary General," in *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.79).

34. As early as 1965, the women's monasteries began to use the vernacular in the office, while in 1966, permission was granted to monasteries in mission countries to celebrate the office in the vernacular (*Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.27); general permission was granted by the Congregation of Religious in December, 1967 (*Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.282-83).

35. As early as September 13, 1957, Merton wrote in his journal: "More and more I agree with Dom Gregorio. We need the psalms in *the vernacular*. We need a public prayer that can be appreciated without college courses in Latin, history, liturgy, etc. etc. A prayer that the *people* can understand. Useless to say that they are a bunch of fools" (*Search for Solitude*, 118). Yet he himself loved the Latin office and continued to recite it in the hermitage: see for example his June 10, 1965 letter to Mother Mary Margaret: "Even though the Church officially and publicly encourages monks to retain the Latin liturgy, I am afraid that there are very many communities, perhaps the majority in this country, which are seeking the vernacular at any price. They are of course free to ask for this concession, and I am

other significant changes as well to the monastic *horarium*. A period of experimentation that began with the General Chapter of 1967 “left each community free to organize its Office, on condition that it include the various traditional elements and that the 150 psalms be distributed over one or two weeks,”<sup>36</sup> culminating in legislation passed in 1974 that “leaves the choice of the readings, the distribution of the Psalms, and the adaptation of the changed elements to the decision of the Abbot and the community.”<sup>37</sup> Private Masses distinct from the daily conventual Mass were replaced by a single concelebrated Mass at which all received communion.<sup>38</sup> The suppression of the office of prime was agreed upon in principle by the 1965 General Chapter, and accepted by the Vatican in 1967.<sup>39</sup> Likewise the daily chapter was no longer held in most houses of the order.<sup>40</sup> The General Chapter of 1967 granted permission for “brief oral communications,” so that the dependence on sign language so closely identified with Trappist life in the preconiliar era no longer obtained.<sup>41</sup> The monastic calendar was brought into closer alignment with the Roman calendar.<sup>42</sup> Customary practices like the chapter of faults

---

sure that many will perhaps regret it after they have lost what they had. But this is an irreversible trend, I think, at least in the U.S. For my own part, as I have hopes of a more solitary life, and they seem about to be realized, I think that at least I will be able to keep the old Latin office *privatim*” (Thomas Merton, *The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction*, ed. Patrick Hart [New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990], 283–84). See also his August 1966 letter to Dame Marcella Van Bruyn: “I still say the old office. . . . I am going to keep the office in Latin *usque ad mortem*. I read the Vulgate for my *lectio divina*. I am horribly conservative in these respects” (*School of Charity*, 311).

36. *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.284.

37. *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.285.

38. *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.282.

39. *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.27, 30, 31.

40. Michael Casey, *ocso*, “Evolution of Cistercian Spirituality,” in *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.236.

41. Casey, in *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.231.

42. *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.286–87.

and the weekly use of the “discipline,” the penitential practice of (largely symbolic and ceremonial) scourging, disappeared at about the same time. By the time Merton resigned as novice master in August 1965 significant changes in the pattern of daily life in Cistercian monasteries had already begun to be implemented, and the change to a less uniform system of observances was given explicit sanction by the adoption of the Statute on Unity and Pluralism by the General Chapter of 1969. Thus without intending it, Merton provided in these conferences a vivid valedictory witness to the traditional pattern of daily life in a Cistercian monastery as it had been lived generally since the medieval era, and particularly since the reunion of the three congregations of Strict Observance Cistercians in 1892. It is thus a document of particular historical interest in preserving, in detail, a record of a lifestyle just at the point when it was about to undergo permanent and wide-ranging alteration.<sup>43</sup> This raises the question whether their value is therefore exclusively, or primarily, historical. To arrive at a satisfactory answer to this question requires a closer look at the contents of the *Monastic Observances* text.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is no doubt that some of what Merton is teaching his novices here is contingent upon the practices that were in force at the time of writing. A reader familiar with Merton’s later essays

43. Certain changes in the monastic schedule had already begun to take place at the time Merton was presenting these conferences, specifically the discontinuation of the daily recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin and the drastic reduction of the frequency of recitation of the Office of the Dead, from almost daily to twice a month, authorized by the General Chapter of 1955 (Casey, in *Cistercian Order in the Twentieth Century*, 2.230), which allowed for more sleep before the night office and more time for *lectio divina* after it; see Merton’s comments on the changes in his journal entry of August 14, 1956 (the day after the new schedule took effect) (*Search for Solitude*, 64); Merton also mentions the change in his discussion of the Cistercian daily schedule in *The Silent Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957), 119–20.

on monastic renewal<sup>44</sup> and his often sardonic and sometimes scathing comments in his journal and correspondence about what he sees as ossified, deadening routine may be surprised and even dismayed at an apparently complacent acceptance of what in retrospect clearly seem to be outmoded and even potentially harmful aspects of Trappist life. To some extent this can be attributed to the fact that Merton is introducing the novices to monastic life as it was practiced at the time, and so would naturally want to put the best face on even what might be considered the most retrograde aspects of the life. It is surely somewhat unsettling to find that the conferences proper come to their climax with a brief discussion, and justification, of the use of the discipline, the whip employed once a week by each monk to scourge himself (249–50). This is preceded by a longer, very detailed discussion of the chapter of faults, when monks would accuse themselves and one another of various infractions of the rule and usages (215–39), and of the public penances assigned by the abbot to make reparation for various infractions, such as lying prostrate outside the church or the refectory, or having to beg one's food from the assembled brothers, or to kiss each one's feet during mealtime (239–49). Such practices may seem to a contemporary reader disconcerting survivals from a pre-modern era, and Merton's matter-of-fact (though in fact quite nuanced) discussion may strike some as just as disconcerting, if not more so. While it is unlikely that Merton mourned the passing of these customs as he did the disappearance of the Latin liturgy, the impression given by the text is that he wasn't particularly bothered by their continued existence, and even that he regarded agitation for their abolition as somewhat misplaced—a preoccupation with details rather than a concern for authentic renewal. They must be situated in the context of the conferences as a whole to be properly evaluated.

44. Collected in Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971).

The content of these conferences can largely be classified into three interrelated types of material: factual information, practical instruction, and spiritual insight. The first two tend to be time-conditioned to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the particular topic; the third is generally of more enduring significance. The priority from Merton's own perspective of this last category is evident in the brief prefatory remarks with which he begins the *Observances* text (5–6). The words “life,” “live,” and “living” recur with an impressive intensity in the opening paragraphs: “Our observances are an integral part in our monastic life. They must *live*. {They must be} part of a living organism. They must *help us to live*, help our life of charity in the Spirit” (5). The emphasis is on the necessity to discover the spiritual vitality of monastic exercises as the “exact opposite of mere mechanical routine” (5). Merton draws on the traditional Pauline distinction between letter and spirit to indicate the absolutely essential need to discover the inner spiritual meaning of the pattern of monastic life and its various components, of penetrating to the spirit “while carrying out the letter properly” (5). In successive sentences he juxtaposes the dynamic “formation of Christ in us” with a static “formalism” that “stifles the free breath of the Spirit {and} kills the spiritual life” (5), and later the vitality of “monastic tradition” with the deadness of a “traditionalism” that clings to “the old as such” (6). He warns against both the mistaken equation of perfection with “exterior observance for its own sake” (6) and the “sloppiness, laziness, sensuality” (6) that comes with a devaluation and disregard of the outward expression of inner realities, a failure to be “observant” in both senses. Properly understood and properly practiced, Merton emphasizes, the observances are “the visible expression and the outward aid” (5) to a life of prayer, a life of “*fraternal union*” (5), a Eucharistic life, a life “leading to contemplation in the spirit of wisdom and understanding” (6), ultimately a Trinitarian life: “to live in Christ, by charity, in the Holy Spirit, {and} to grow in the works of love—love for God” (5). It is in light of these principles that Merton invites his novices to take a careful look at their new

environment and the new pattern of organization that structures their days in this environment.

In introducing the first major section of the course, on the physical layout of the monastery (7–30), he emphasizes both that “Everything about the regular, traditional plan of the monastery has a meaning and a purpose” (7) and that this traditional plan does not entail a rigid, inflexible conformity that forbids all adaptations. In his overview of the monastery as a whole, he begins with a focus, drawn from St. Benedict, on the monastery as *domus Dei*, the house of God, where everything is arranged in such a way as to minimize “preoccupations and anxieties over material things or over anything at all” (8) so that the virtues of peace and love, faith and wisdom, are more easily practiced and made one’s own. Again, he highlights the Trinitarian nature of authentic monastic life: “The abbot represents the heavenly Father; the brethren are sons living together in a unity of charity that transcends nature, forming as it were one son, in the bond of the Holy Spirit” (8–9), so that the harmony of the community may mirror “the internal peace and unity of the Three Divine Persons in One Nature” (9).

Turning to the various specific locations that make up the monastic environment as specified in the *Usages*, Merton begins the process of interweaving basic descriptive information with prescriptive instructions on proper behavior and reflections on religious and spiritual meaning, with the last clearly the most important even where it is not the most extensive element. Thus he provides a clear exposition of the fourfold division of the Cistercian church, a description of its various fixtures, a somewhat lengthy excursus on Gethsemani as a minor basilica, details on the set-up of the sacristy and provisions for liturgical books and garb, and even a detailed description of the cemetery as an adjunct to the church. He briefly emphasizes the importance of “reverence and modesty” (11) in church so as not to disturb others’ prayer, and will later return to prescribe in detail proper deportment in choir and sanctuary (48–57). But his initial focus is on the laconic but significant statement in the *Rule* that the

oratory should be what its name implies, a place of prayer, both communal and solitary, where “[e]verything {is} intended to lift the mind and heart to God” (10). Such a focus is of course self-evident when talking about a church, but the same emphasis is found in the treatment of the cemetery, as Merton follows his explanation of the orientation of the graves with a rather lyrical celebration (reminiscent of his poem “The Trappist Cemetery—Gethsemani”<sup>45</sup>) of the deceased monks as “definitively ‘the community’—members with an eternal stability that will never be broken” (17), that should prompt reverence and love in the living brothers and call forth not only prayers for the dead but meditation on the mystery of vocation that brought so many diverse figures, from so many disparate places, to rest together there, as well as on the eschatological fulfillment of that vocation.

Discussion of the cloister combines background information about its relation to the classical atrium and the distinctive functions of its various wings, inspirational quotations from medieval commentators and reflections on its Marian symbolism and associations, and instructions about keeping silence there and in adjacent interior spaces (e.g. “No useless loudspeakers should be blaring in the regular places” [21]). Subsequent descriptions of the auditorium, chapter room, scriptorium, dormitory and refectory are oriented more toward functional information (e.g. the seating arrangements in chapter [24]; the location and function of the “*common box*” [25]) and specific directives (e.g. keeping the scriptorium desk neat [26]; sweeping out the cell [28–29]; proper decorum in entering and leaving the refectory [29]); but the deeper spiritual dimension is not overlooked, as St. Bernard’s description of the monastery as a “*schola Christi* and an *auditorium Spiritus*” is associated particularly with the chapter

45. Thomas Merton, *A Man in the Divided Sea* (New York: New Directions, 1946), 89–91; Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977), 116–18. For a discussion, see Patrick F. O’Connell, “Thomas Merton’s Wake-Up Calls: Aubades and Monastic Dawn Poems from *A Man in the Divided Sea*,” *The Merton Annual*, 12 (1999), 156–63.

room, “where we meet to hear the word of God and where the Spirit of God speaks to our hearts” (23), and the various gestures prescribed in the refectory are associated with the presence of God in the community and the table fellowship of Jesus (29–30).

The transition from this opening “tour” of the regular places to the much more extensive and detailed survey of the first part of the monastic day that will occupy the rest of the conferences proper is effected by what may seem to be a minutely detailed discussion of the monastic bells that announce the various exercises (30–38)—including among much else the names of the three large bells in the church tower (Michael, Thomas and Mary [33]); the very precise note that the bells for vigils are rung “at two twenty-eight or -nine” (35); and an extensive “quiz” (answers provided), about what various types of bell-ringing throughout the day would signal, as a challenge and incentive to practice Merton’s directive: “know your bells!” (36). But here too, as in the earlier discussion of the cemetery, the practical details are introduced by a quite lyrical reflection,<sup>46</sup> on bells as the “voice of heaven itself” (31) calling the monk to prayer, uniting him with God and also, in the spirit of John Donne’s meditation on those “for whom the bell tolls,” to the suffering and dying to whose needs “I must never become indifferent” (31). This section likewise concludes on a similarly reflective note with a brief meditative commentary on the bells for the Angelus, most meaningful when heard “in the midst of ordinary occupations—out in the field,” a reminder of “the one great reality of our life, the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption in Christ” (38).

In discussing the first of the offices of the monastic day, the night vigils (38–75), Merton begins with its spiritual significance, and that of the *opus Dei* in general, as both the monk’s work and his rest, his compensation and refreshment, the training and preparation for “more interior prayer which, indeed, accompanies

46. For a similar appreciation of the spiritual role of bells, see chapter XIV of Part One in Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1958), 67–68.

the chanting of the psalms and prolongs it" (39). As its name suggests, vigils is preeminently a time of wakefulness and attentiveness to God. Following St. Bernard, Merton stresses that while the office includes prayer of compunction and lamentation, it is above all an expression of praise and gratitude, for one comes alone before God as a penitent, "immersed in our own shame and misery" (41), but identified with the community and the entire Body of Christ in glorifying God with and in Christ. Only in this spirit are monks "Cistercians in the full sense of the word" (41) (as distinguished, implicitly, from the "Trappist" emphasis on penance). Such an approach is conducive to a "contemplative appreciation" (44) of the psalms as prayed in solidarity with Christ Himself. As he will later elaborate, providing once again a Trinitarian understanding of monastic prayer, "Since contemplation is a realization of our union with Christ in the Holy Spirit, then it is clear that for the divine office to lead to contemplation, we should strive to realize how Christ sings in us during the office, and thus become consciously united to Him in His thoughts and His love and His contemplation of the Father. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us" (60).

Having emphasized the spiritual foundation of the office, Merton can then go on, with the support of Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei*, to call attention to the "importance of rubrics and ceremonies" (45) as the outward expression of interior worship and as a salutary guard against subjectivism and a debilitating preoccupation with emotional and psychological states, which are at best a distraction and at worst a serious danger to spiritual growth. While exaggerated attention to externals can result in "the contemplation and admiration of our own punctilious zeal" (48), when properly understood and practiced the ceremonies foster an atmosphere of peace and recollection, "save us from the vulgarity and offensive singularity that inevitably creep into a too subjective . . . attitude during choral prayer" (48), and "unite us with the generations of saints and fathers who have preceded us" (48). With these caveats Merton can move on to the detailed instructions in the *Usages* on behavior in church, stress-

ing silence and reverence and order, but including such specific details as lowering the seats “only at the moment of sitting down, with the hand nearest the altar (for the sake of uniformity, and {because it is} slightly more reverent, as one turns a little toward the altar instead of away from it)” (54); one may notice even here Merton’s concern to show his novices that details which may appear to be rather arbitrary and even picayune do indeed have a meaningful rationale if one gives them due consideration.

After providing this context, both spiritual and practical, for the office, Merton now turns to the actual structure of vigils, interweaving factual information on its progression with meditative reflection on particular texts. The invitatory psalm (94[95]) “sets the tone for the whole office” (62) by its call for “spiritual alertness and attention to God” (63), while various antiphons that accompany it for different feasts and seasons either highlight some aspect of the psalm or connect it to the day’s particular celebration.

Merton then guides his audience through the successive segments of the night office: the hymn, borrowed by St. Benedict from the Church of St. Ambrose in Milan; the six psalms with their antiphons, in which the monk participates in “the mystical consciousness of the Church” which contemplates “the divine mystery—the ‘reintegration of all in Christ’” (67); the lessons (readings) and their responsories, through which the mind is provided nourishment from the word of God, the writings of the Fathers and the lives of the saints (samples of which Merton provides from the Book of Proverbs, including a reference to his much loved sapiential text of Proverbs 8 in which “Wisdom reveals herself” as “God’s own essence in so far as it contains His ideas and His plan for the world” [72], and from St. Ambrose’s commentary on “these Old Testament themes of wisdom and folly” as re-visioned “in the New Testament context” [73]); the “*Te Deum*,” the triumphant hymn of praise to the Father and to Christ “the King of Glory and conqueror of death” (74), and the briefer “*Te Decet Laus*,” that brings vigils to a conclusion (except for the collect prayer and abbatial blessing) with “a beautiful

example of the combination of rites, gestures, words and chant to make a perfect act of adoration with our whole being" (75).

The discussion of meditation that follows (75–92) is (along with the complementary section on *lectio divina* still to come) the least dependent on the particularities of the Cistercian *Usages* currently in force, and hence unaffected by revised norms. Thus it is perhaps the material of greatest lasting significance in this entire set of conferences. While it has been frequently, and correctly, pointed out that Merton does not offer a systematic "method" of prayer in his writings, in these instructions to the novices he does provide them with a clear overview of the major stages of meditation and numerous practical suggestions for how to meditate and what to meditate on.

His first point reiterates what he had emphasized at the very beginning of the conferences, that the various activities of the monastic day are not to be looked at as disconnected exercises but as contributing to a unified, holistic experience of life with God. Hence "monastic tradition always associates liturgical prayer with mental prayer. . . . [O]ne leads to the other, normally and naturally" (75–76). A failure to recognize and experience this complementarity is evidence of "an unmonastic approach . . . an unmonastic spirit" (76), and is both an effect and a cause of a disjointed spiritual life. Both psalmody and meditation are oriented to the praise and love of God, both nourished by the word of God and by an awareness of the divine presence; the first is more communal, more involved with the senses and the imagination, the second more personal, more interior, assimilating "the teaching that is given . . . from morning to night" (77) through liturgy, spiritual reading, spiritual direction, "or through *experience* itself" (77). In meditation the word "descends from the lips and mind into the *heart*" (77) (a classic formulation borrowed from the Eastern Church<sup>47</sup>).

47. See, for example, Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, revised ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 123: "Normally three levels or degrees are distinguished in the saying of the Jesus Prayer. It starts as 'prayer

Merton then goes on to present what he calls the threefold purpose or triple function of meditation, which in fact lays out the successive stages of development from meditation to contemplation. The purpose of the first level of meditation is to understand and respond to God's saving word as experienced in scripture, in the teaching of the Church, in the events and encounters of daily life. Here Merton succinctly sets out specific topics for meditation: the last things, above all "God's merciful plan" (78) of salvation; the life and passion of Jesus as the source and agency of redemption; the "economy of God's love" (79) in the Church and sacraments, especially the Eucharist; the experience of Christ's love in one's own life; the divine attributes and their "*unfathomable riches*" (79) infinitely transcending their analogies in the contingent sphere of created reality. Merton stresses that while "'thought' or *consideratio*" is central to this first kind of meditation, it "is a matter of affective thinking, of thought impregnated with love and trust and humility" (79), in which thought deepens the affections, and the engagement of the affections reciprocally illuminates "the inner meaning of the truths we behold" (79).

The second function, and second level, of meditation, according to Merton, is for one "to *enter deeply into the school of life itself*, to make his whole life a meditation, a learning from God, a school of wisdom" (80). It moves from a multiplicity of thoughts and ideas to "*the simplicity of the intimate interior embrace which unites us to God in the depths of our being. . . . a simple, general apprehension of God in faith and love*" (80), from clarity and sensible consolation to "*darkness and unknowing*" (80). There is a sense of integration in which all life is experienced in the context of prayer, as "*impregnated with the love and action of God*" (81), the meditative and active dimensions of life mutually enrich one

---

of the lips', oral prayer. Then it grows more inward, becoming 'prayer of the intellect', mental prayer. Finally the intellect 'descends' into the heart and is united with it, and so the prayer becomes 'prayer of the heart' or, more exactly, 'prayer of the intellect in the heart'".

another, and a "meditative way of life" develops that "is essentially realistic and concrete" (81) and draws one away from a sterile focus on self.

The "third and highest function" (81) or stage of meditation moves "even beyond this unity within ourselves" to a participation "in God's own unity" (82), the apparent disappearance of "any knowing subject" (82) in the all-encompassing divine mystery, which paradoxically is the full realization of one's deepest identity, "the secret of our own being in the mind of God," where, Merton declares, echoing St. Paul (Gal. 2:20), "we 'are' in the fullest sense—so fully indeed that it is no longer we who are but Christ Who lives and is in us" (83). At this level of course one has passed beyond the "normal and ordinary" experience of God and is "over the threshold in the realm of purely mystical prayer" (83) where rules and degrees have lost all relevance and "God alone is the guide and master" (83). Meditation has become contemplation.

After this brief glimpse of the culmination of the process of growth in prayer, Merton returns to practical advice for setting out on the journey, including a warning not to become preoccupied with determining one's "degree of prayer" (84); recognizing that it is not the psychological but the theological effect of meditation, not subjective "lights" and consolations but the deepening of the theological virtues of faith, hope and love, that is the criterion of authentic meditation; realizing that meditation is nourished by appropriate and solid reading, that begins with training the imagination to focus on substantial realities rather than the seductive illusions of worldly existence; praying for divine assistance in learning to meditate, and in overcoming the inertia caused by a lack of deep desire for prayer; making use of visual aids, including prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, and of simple prayer forms like the Jesus Prayer.

While Merton had warned against attempts to "measure" one's success in meditation, he does indicate five "Signs of Progress," but they are all paradoxically linked to letting go of preoccupation with "getting somewhere" (87) in the spiritual life. The

first is peace, which is dependent upon abandonment to the loving presence of Jesus and counters all agitation and anxiety with a tranquil acceptance of one's own spiritual poverty. Simplicity, the second sign, is marked by a decrease in the ability "to see and measure what is going on" (88), and a reduction in activity of reason, imagination and the emotions. Obscurity, as St. John of the Cross teaches, is a third sign of progress: the "*inability to make a discursive meditation*" (88) may be, for those who have reached a certain stage in prayer, an indication that a "blind 'turning to' God . . . a semi-passive yielding to grace in obscurity" is now to be "the whole essence of our prayer" (88–89). Purity, the *puritas cordis* taught by Cassian that is a complete surrender of self-will, the "little way" of St. Thérèse that is "unknown and poor, and yet utterly common, for it is the way of the Gospel" (90), is a fourth sign of progress. The final sign Merton mentions is generosity, a "patient and unobtrusive" charity that does not call attention to itself, that goes unnoticed even by oneself. Like all these signs of progress, it "has ceased to measure . . . . It does not compare itself with others. It minds its own business. . . . It has renounced ambition" (90–91).

In this context, Merton brings his teaching on meditation to a close by considering the question of the desire for mystical prayer. While he calls such a desire "perfectly licit" (91), not surprisingly he recommends humility, a sense of proportion that makes love, not mystical experience, the goal, and a sense of humor coupled with common sense. He concludes, "IT IS BEST NOT TO THINK TOO MUCH ABOUT BECOMING A 'MYSTIC.' You are more likely to become one if you forget all about it, and love God" (91). This teaching on meditative and contemplative prayer is certainly consistent with, and comparable to, that found in Merton's published writing, but its specific purpose of introducing the topic to the novices gives it a succinctness and orderliness of exposition not available elsewhere in precisely the same way.

Merton then returns to liturgical prayer with a discussion of the office of lauds (92–103), beginning with the admonition that to suppose that the "graces of contemplation" are to be received only in the context of private prayer is a "fatal illusion" (92).

Liturgical and personal prayer are mutually supportive parts of a continuum leading toward deeper union with God. "The spirit of lauds," in particular, "is a spirit of *contemplative praise*" (92), which "unites the waking of creation with the mystery of Christ's resurrection" (93). As with vigils, Merton combines a description of the constituent elements of this office with his own meditative reflections on particular texts, perhaps in even greater detail as the office is considerably shorter. He identifies the function of the introductory Psalm 66[67] as both focusing on the light of the new day and directing the monk to look forward "toward the great Day of the Lord when the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord and all nations shall praise Him" (95). Psalm 50[51] (the *Miserere*), which follows, "*the psalm par excellence of Christian compunction*" (96), is recommended as a source for meditation, which Merton models with his brief reflections on the three sections of the psalm, with their respective themes of recognizing and confessing one's sinfulness, experiencing the union of penitence and joy in receiving forgiveness, and celebrating the fruitfulness of penance for one's own life and, through one's example, for the lives of others. After a brief mention of other psalms used at Sunday lauds, Merton turns to the *Benedicite*, the hymn of the three young men in the fiery furnace from the Book of Daniel, which can "too easily become a mechanical routine" but properly serves both as a complement to the *Miserere* and as a way of incorporating all creation, all the "works of the Lord," into the Church's prayer, "our chorus of exultation" (98). He then looks at the three final psalms (148–50), successive hymns of praise that give the office its name and its character, in which redeemed humanity, risen with and in Christ, "is once again the high priest of creation, leading the choir of praise that rises from all creatures to the Father" (99). He advises his charges, in language that surely must have evoked the laughter of rueful self-recognition in oral presentation,<sup>48</sup> that

48. Because these conferences were completed before Merton's novitiate classes began to be taped in April 1962, no record of this material as it was actually presented is available. For comparison of written and oral presentation of

it is impossible to invite all creation to share in these divine praises “if we ourselves are still sunk in torpor” (99–100), or to enter fully into the acclamation of God as eternal King if anticipating the conclusion to the long night office tempts the monk “to relax in a mental stupor waiting for it all to end!” (101). He completes his treatment of lauds with the more serious admonition related to the *Benedictus*, the hymn of Zachary praising the God who enlightens those who sit in darkness and guides their feet in the way of peace (Lk. 1:79): “How tragic to sing these words every day and not know what they mean, to go on acting as if we had not received the mercy of God, as if we were abandoned, as if we still needed something, struggling to ‘save ourselves’” (103). The *opus Dei* must not be simply a performance, the fulfillment of a duty required by the monastic state. It should be and can be a source of personal and communal illumination and transformation.

Not surprisingly, the longest single section of the *Monastic Observances* conferences is devoted to Mass and communion (104–49), though Merton indicates that he intended to return to the topic later in connection with the conventual or community Mass (109), which would have been part of the second half of the series. It is safe to assume, however, that the focus there would have been largely if not exclusively on the ceremonial aspects of the celebration, since he provides a thorough discussion of the theological and spiritual dimensions of the Eucharist in the context of the “private Masses” discussed here.

The initial section of these conferences on the Eucharist considers the practical issue of making provision for each monk-priest to celebrate a daily private Mass, giving due consideration both to the fact that ordination of virtually every choir religious is “not the normal thing, according to the tradition of the Order” (104), yet certainly had become the norm at that time (though no longer) in Cistercian monasteries, and to the consequent need to provide time in the *horarium* for Mass, theoretically permissible

---

other novitiate courses, see *Cassian and the Fathers*, xlvii–liv; *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism*, li–lxi; *Rule of Saint Benedict*, xlii–xlvi.

during any period set aside for *lectio*, but in practice normally taken care of immediately after lauds. This leads into the related issue of the anomaly of the non-priests customarily receiving communion at these private Masses rather than at the conventual Mass later in the morning, which would entail a longer fast as well as a longer Mass, cutting into work time, as well as raising the whole question of multiple private Masses being celebrated simultaneously, which Merton recognizes as a problem but defends by recourse to the encyclical *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII. He notes, "It is possible that a satisfactory solution to some of these problems might someday be worked out. In practice we have to be satisfied with what we have at the moment" (108). The solution, of course, with relaxation of the fasting laws and especially the reinstatement of concelebration, was much closer than Merton or his audience realized at the time.<sup>49</sup>

Having dealt with these practical issues, Merton then turns his attention to a fundamental understanding of the meaning of the Mass, which has both doctrinal and spiritual dimensions. He is especially careful in this section to provide the novices with a solid grounding in Eucharistic theology, to correct inadequate notions which some of his more pious charges might have brought with them into the monastery, such as the idea that the Mass is principally "a device to produce the Blessed Sacrament" (110) for personal worship, or the "naïve and artificial" (111) allegorical approach popular earlier in the century that fancifully associated the parts of the Mass with events of Christ's passion. Merton directs his students' attention to the text of the ordinary of the Mass, with its prayers clearly indicating the central meaning of the Mass as mutual gift, the sacrificial offering of Christ to the Father in praise and thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), and God's gift

49. Though ambivalent about concelebration as a manifestation of a unity he did not feel, at least at that point, Merton writes in his journal for July 12, 1965, after concelebrating for the first time: "There is no question that this makes far more sense than the old way (private Mass, then High Mass) for here the community *all* assembles, and most go to communion, and guests are there, etc." (*Dancing in the Water of Life*, 268–69).

of Himself to His people as the Bread of Life and the Cup of salvation, through which "WE IN TURN BECOME THE FATHER'S GIFT TO THE SON AND THE SON'S GIFT TO THE FATHER; AND MORE: GOD GIVES HIMSELF TO OUR NEIGHBOR THROUGH OURSELVES AND TO US THROUGH OUR NEIGHBOR" (119). Merton makes sure the novices are aware of the theological meaning of "real presence" by a systematic outline of erroneous and inadequate understandings and a clear and comprehensive presentation of the traditional doctrine of transubstantiation, including the distinction between sacramental presence and "sensible local and natural presence" with its "vain imaginings" and sentimentality (126) (Christ as prisoner of the tabernacle, etc.).

Doctrinal clarity about Christ's presence in the Eucharist is the foundation for awareness of the effect of communion, becoming one with Christ in His body, soul and divinity, "as intimately united to the Word of God as if He were the soul of our soul and the being of our being" (130), the "mysterious and anticipated realization" of eternal life here and now (131). Merton emphasizes the centrality of joy in this sacramental union, not joy as a superficial emotion but as a deep and abiding awareness of sharing in the divine life through Christ's absolutely unmerited gift of Himself: "it is God Himself who is substantially present to our souls and is Himself their joy" (136). At the same time the Eucharist is both sign and cause of unity with all those who share in the one Body of Christ, and indeed with all those for whom Christ offered His life, to "the exclusion of none" (141). Here Merton emphasizes the intrinsic relationship of Eucharistic communion to issues of poverty, injustice, oppression, "the intolerable scandal of race prejudice" (142):

The meaning of the Eucharist is not clear, the glory of Christ is not visible in His Church, if it is merely a ceremony by which we display *our union with our friends and immediate neighbors* while at the same time remaining indifferent to those who belong to a different class, a different race, a different society, a different school of thought . . . . No Christian should be able to rest satisfied on this earth as long as there are other

men who are in want, who are abandoned, ill-treated, robbed and oppressed by other men. Our Eucharistic life has reference to this greatest of all duties, after our duty to God Himself—really one and the same duty. (141–42)

Here one of the earliest and most forthright expressions of Merton's "turn toward the world" in the late 1950s is firmly rooted in a quite traditional Eucharistic theology and spirituality, and is addressed not to an audience of social activists but to aspiring monks in a cloistered contemplative monastery. Merton is already affirming, as he will repeatedly do in the final decade of his life, that authentic monastic life must be a way of engaging with, not escaping from, the problems facing the rest of humanity.

This embeddedness in tradition is made more evident by the fact that he goes on to conclude his teaching on the Eucharist by providing suggestions on how to make a proper thanksgiving after communion and instruction on visits to the Blessed Sacrament throughout the day. Social awareness and traditional devotional practices are not viewed as in any way incompatible; both flow from an awareness of the full range of effects of Eucharistic intimacy with Christ.

The separation of the section on *lectio divina* that follows (149–83) from the earlier section on meditation is somewhat artificial, but it is pedagogically effective in that it reinforces Merton's repeated point about the alternating rhythms of communal and private prayer creating a complementary unity, and it does reflect the actual monastic schedule that includes both the short period for personal reflection between vigils and lauds and the longer period for *lectio* before prime.

In actuality, Merton's instruction in this section ranges much more widely than just a discussion of spiritual reading. Beginning with the importance, not always recognized in the past, of distinguishing between the time of *lectio* and "intervals," the periods between formal exercises, he declares, "To regard *lectio divina* as something incidental or unimportant is to miss the whole point of the contemplative life" (150). This leads into a reflection, based

on St. Bernard, on the traditional interpretation of the story of Martha and Mary (and Lazarus) as teaching the priority of the contemplative dimension in monastic life, and on the role of *lectio* in “*provid[ing] us with ‘contemplative leisure’*” (153), which “does not imply a neglect of good works” (151) but is opposed to making work an end in itself and to looking for one’s identity and worth in one’s accomplishments. This, Merton suggests, is the spirit of Babel, a futile effort to be one’s own creator, that can only end in “division and confusion” (154).

This allusion to the scene of “wrangling of tongues” (155) leads quite naturally into a lengthy excursus on Cistercian silence (155–67), of course one of the best known characteristics of traditional Trappist life. Merton stresses silence as “*a positive presence, the presence of Him Who is not heard, so that when all confused sounds and trivial noises are hushed, then the eloquent voice of reality, of God Himself, makes itself heard in peacefulness and silence*” (155). He strikes a familiar Mertonian note in pointing out that an atmosphere of authentic spiritual silence incorporates such “good natural sounds” as birds, rain and wind, but should exclude artificial noise such as “the agitation of many machines” as well as the meaningless chatter prevalent in “the world” (155–56). He explores the various implications of the Cistercian rule of silence, emphasizing that it is not a rejection of communion with others, within or without the enclosure, but a preference for “*inner communication that is higher and better than communication by words*” (157), and that it is waived when the needs of charity demand it. He provides a detailed exegesis of the directives in the *Usages* on silence and on the use of signs, to make sure that the novices understand exactly what is required of them in their new way of life. He acknowledges that for novices to exercise their newfound skills in sign-making is normal and natural, and that “the pleasure of useless signs and spontaneous fooling is the *one very definite form of recreation* which is still within reach” (161), but warns that this can become a kind of addiction, and that they should not “*depend on this as a safety valve*” (161). Mention in the *Usages* of the “Great Silence” in force

“from the evening Angelus to the end of the collect of Prime” (166) returns the focus to the period of *lectio*, generally about a half hour between the end of Mass and mixt, but more than two hours if one is not at private Mass—Merton’s appreciative comments on this period as “a very fine opportunity to do some serious reading and thinking . . . with its special silence, its relative coolness in summer” (166) seem more applicable to himself than to the novices, as it principally pertains to a priest celebrating the conventual Mass or a later Mass for guests.

At this point there is one more brief detour as he considers the problem of falling asleep during meditation periods, or even in choir, and looks both at causes: spiritual dryness and/or conflicts, psychological unrest, even not being adapted for this vocation—and at solutions (even smelling salts!): generally the need for mental and spiritual balance. He acknowledges that particularly for those without a good grounding in Latin, the long offices can be boring and induce sleep, and that they can be “objectively tedious” at times for others as well, especially when “the poor quality of the chant” (168) drags out some of the responsories (a rare look in these conferences at the imperfect reality of life in the monastery rather than at the ideals at which to aim). A final comment that sleep may be induced by “reading all the wrong things” (168) during *lectio* brings the focus back at last to the subject of reading.

The period before prime in the Benedictine tradition is devoted primarily to meditation on scripture.<sup>50</sup> Merton calls attention to the relatively recent official encouragement of scripture reading among all Catholics, and notes, “this applies especially

50. Merton’s consideration of *lectio* in his conferences on the Benedictine Rule takes a broader survey of possible sources for spiritual reading (*Rule of Saint Benedict*, 134–35; see also additional notes 6 and 7 [223–25]). For the traditional connection of *lectio* with *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*, see Appendix 1 to Thomas Merton, *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism: Initiation into the Monastic Tradition* 3, ed. Patrick F. O’Connell, MW 13 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008), 332–40, Merton’s discussion of the classic source for this fourfold pattern, the *Scala Claustralium* of Guigo the Carthusian.

to monks. . . . It would be a very sad thing if monks, men of God, men who chant the office, were less able to read and appreciate the scriptures" (173). Thus he emphasizes the importance of learning how to read the Bible, beginning with the observation that though, as the word of God, it is unlike any other book, one best begins to read the Bible as one would any other book, or rather collection of books. He indicates that a meditative or devotional reading of the scriptures needs to be preceded by and grounded in a more objective approach: "Our scripture reading is not always a 'study,' but sometimes it must be" (176). There is a need to understand the literal sense of the scriptures, and to recognize the theological doctrines presented in various books. Merton provides concrete suggestions for various study plans, but stresses that for monks in particular this is not to be a dry intellectual enterprise or a strictly academic exercise. "When one studies wisely and discreetly, his study becomes a recreation, a joy, a help to the spiritual life and to prayer. When one studies unwisely, his study becomes a burden, a curse, a source of weariness and disgust" (179). Study is not to be seen as an end in itself but as a necessary, but not sufficient, preparation for being nourished spiritually by the word of God. "The main point," Merton emphasizes, following St. Bernard, "*is love*. . . . The letter without the spirit is poison" (179–80). Hence the importance in the Benedictine tradition of interiorizing the scriptures, of making them one's own by memorizing them, taking them to heart: "In *meditatio psalorum*, we enter into ourselves to 'plant,' so to speak, the word of God in the inmost depths of our being" (183). This is the ultimate purpose of *lectio*, and of course it enriches the time of choral prayer as well, as Merton shows by concluding his discussion with reflections on verse 12 of the *Miserere* (Ps. 50[51]), previously considered as a psalm of lauds, in which prayer for a clean heart and a steadfast spirit leads to union with Christ, such that "my heart is hidden in His heart by virtue of the faith and love with which I make this line my own" (183).

Then follow the two briefest sections of the conferences, on mixt (183–87) and on intervals (187–89), both largely but not

exclusively informational. Mixt is the "light refectio" taken at 5:45 or 6:00 a.m. (184), to sustain the monk until the main meal at noon. Merton investigates the etymology and original function of mixt ("not for everyone" [184]), but then turns his attention to the brief blessing before and grace after mixt (distinguishing the two), with further attention to the latter as a time for remembering benefactors (who often in the past and present provided special foods), a reminder that "the monk should cultivate a *spirit of gratitude and appreciation* towards everyone" (186). After brief mention of frustulum, the even more spartan fare provided in place of mixt on fast days, Merton turns to intervals properly so-called (as distinguished from periods of *lectio*), those brief times "usually wedged in between two other exercises" to be used "for material concerns and unavoidable cares" (187–88) like brushing one's teeth, but which are also opportunities for a quick visit to the Blessed Sacrament or the cemetery, etc. Here Merton looks ahead to other intervals throughout the day, noting that while the interval after morning work is occupied for the novices with classes it provides time for professed monks to shave, cut their fingernails and the like; the brief interval after Sunday Mass is best spent prolonging one's thanksgiving after communion, but also allows for "needs of nature" (188), while the time following afternoon work, though not actually an interval but a period for *lectio*, "is the logical time for a shower, or a shave" (188–89), but should not be frittered away, nor should the time after supper, officially an interval but "long enough for *lectio*" (189). Thus Merton accounts for and provides specific instruction about even the least consequential blocks of time during the monastic day.

What turns out to be the last of the liturgical hours to be considered by Merton (189–206) is of primarily "historical" interest today, since within a decade the office of prime would be suppressed, but it seemed to have a good deal of intrinsic attraction for Merton himself, as having a transitional function, a morning prayer more personal and more oriented toward activity than the contemplative office of lauds it complements (as compline will likewise balance vespers at the close of the day). It is transi-

tional even spatially, as its first part takes place in the church while its second moves to the chapter room (and is actually discussed under the general heading of "THE MORNING CHAPTER" in these conferences [198 ff.]). As the first of the "little hours" it sets the basic structure they will follow: hymn, three psalms with a common antiphon, capitulum and versicle, the *Pater Noster* and a brief collect prayer (to be followed for prime only by the readings and sermon in the chapter room).

Merton's affection for prime as a dawn service is evident in his detailed, verse-by-verse exegesis of its opening hymn "*Jam lucis orto sidere*" with its praise of the coming of daylight. Merton's lyrical appreciation here of the hour of sunrise, "one of the most beautiful hours of the day, and one which many people never see or appreciate," is reminiscent of the similar encomium in *Day of a Stranger*.<sup>51</sup> He continues, "It is like the hour of the creation of the world, a new start: the coolness, silence, mist, birds beginning to sing, the sun rising over the woodlands to the east, the cows lowing, brothers starting out on wagons or tractors. It is a great grace for us to be awake, alive, alert at this hour of the day. Remember and regret the days when we did not see the dawn. As the sun rises, *it is natural to pray*" (191–92). He links the hymn to the dawn prayer of Mescalero Apaches, which he quotes, and with "the prayer of the Moslem, prostrate toward Mecca at sunrise" (192), but for Christians the dawn is filled with symbolism of Christ the Light of the World. Liberated from the "*vanitates*" of worldly diversions, the monk is able to respond to "the hills, the fields, the woods, the flowers" as "given us by God as messengers" (193), though the monk is not thereby immune to temptations of "wild schemes . . . silly obsessions . . . dizzy notions" (194) from which he prays in the hymn to be freed. Merton sums up the message of the hymn as: "*the day is a grace given us by God.*"

51. Thomas Merton, *Day of a Stranger* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1981), 51; see also the opening passage of "The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air," the third section of Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 117–18.

Let us use it well" and thereby "make our whole day an act of worship giving glory to God" (195).

The rest of prime (part 1) is treated in more summary fashion. Mention of the psalms of prime becomes the occasion to point out St. Benedict's arrangement of the psalms to include recitation of the entire psalter each week. The antiphons of prime, Merton notes, are the only part of the ritual that pertains to a particular feast. The short scripture reading, or capitulum, alternates between the "splendid, solemn" text of 1 Timothy 1:17 on feast days and the simpler admonition to "Love peace and truth" (Zech. 8:19) on ordinary days: "The ferial text is more ascetic (*bios praktikos*); the festive text is more contemplative (*bios theoretikos*). Meditate on the difference between them and we will see what the Church means by action and contemplation" (197). The versicle, "Rise up O Christ . . ." heralds the coming of the light of salvation, and the collect prayer likewise responds to the new day as a gift of God.

With this, the community processes into the chapter room, where it reassembles "not so much as a choir but as a family" (198), first to hear the martyrology, the announcement of the saints to be commemorated on the following day, a way of recognizing and celebrating not only the particular saints mentioned but the sanctification of time itself. The prayers that follow are oriented principally to requesting help for the day to come, so that "His splendor will shine in our works, without our necessarily seeing or experiencing it" (203).

"*The Morning Chapter properly so-called*" (206) follows immediately on the last of the prayers of prime, with chapter talks by the abbot and sermons on feast days by other priests in the community. Merton admonishes the novices to regard the abbot's teaching "with the eyes of faith and receive it in a supernatural spirit" rather than taking "too human and exterior a view of his talks and teaching" (209), advice he was not always able to carry out himself.<sup>52</sup> He notes that after a certain period "we may be-

52. For critical comments on the abbot's chapter talks, see *Search for Solitude*, 244-45 [1/2/59], 310 [7/26/59], 312-13 [7/30/59]; Thomas Merton, *Turning*

come quite familiar with many of his themes, and feel that we are not getting ‘anything new’” (209) (an observation more applicable to himself than to his audience, of course), but concludes by reminding “those who are tempted to be bored with the apparent foolishness and simplicity of the doctrines preached in chapter” (!) of St. Paul’s words to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:17-24) that the “foolishness” of the Cross of Christ is wiser than the wisdom of men (210). This is followed by a “parenthesis” on preaching which of course would have no direct application to the novices (except the few who were already ordained when they entered) for some years to come, but expresses Merton’s own principles for sermons:<sup>53</sup> “be short and to the point” (210)—trying to hold the audience’s attention beyond twenty or twenty-five minutes is futile; speak in a “lively, interesting manner,” with a seasoning of humor but not a full course of it; don’t try to convince those unlikely to agree with you; focus on the Word of God and common doctrine, not idiosyncratic opinions; “avoid what is lofty and obscure, or fantastic and exaggerated; avoid old wives’ tales and far-fetched stories of wonders and revelations that tend to make the truth doubtful rather than more persuasive” (211). The fact that Merton mentions these principles, particularly the last, suggests that such topics were not unknown among his confreres! As a kind of appendix to this discussion of chapter talks and sermons Merton raises the issue of whether there is, or should be, an “official spirituality to which everyone in the house has some obligation to conform” (211). He is adamant that such a thing does not and should not exist: “To treat spirituality

---

*Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960–1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 80 [12/27/60]; *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 144 [9/12/64], 205–206 [2/16/65].

53. For Merton’s appreciation of the preaching of Fr. John of the Cross (Wasserman), whom he calls “one of the few men in this monastery who has anything to say in a sermon,” see *Conjectures*, 142–43; in the original of this passage, a journal entry for March 30 (Palm Sunday), 1958, he had called Fr. John of the Cross (who subsequently left the community) “really the only one here who has anything to say” (*Search for Solitude*, 186).

as something official and obligatory is to kill it at the root" (211). His subsequent comments suggest that not all members of the community would agree with this assessment, and that there could be a tendency to evaluate and judge others according to how closely they conformed to what an individual or group considered to be the proper standard. While Merton recognizes that a particular house may have its own unique spirit, largely conveyed by the abbot, and that certain qualities characteristic of early Cistercian life, "austerity, simplicity, humility, poverty, love of solitude" (212) are of perennial value, he insists that the Cistercian "spirit" is simply the authentic monastic spirit, that can take many legitimate forms, and that it is the demand for "absolute conformity" that is actually "contrary to the spirit of our Order" as it threatens to stifle the action of the Holy Spirit in individual lives (213). Aside from a final explanation of what the expression to "speak of our Order" (213) means—basically to "speak of the way we are keeping our rule" (215), though it also includes news about other houses, recent deaths, etc.—these significant and characteristic reflections on what authentic Cistercian spirituality should mean bring to a close the discussion of the chapter proper. The remaining pages (215–50) focus exclusively and exhaustively on the chapter of faults, a topic of limited interest today but obviously one that needed to be carefully and sympathetically explained to the original audience, who would have found the custom among the most demanding adjustments to be made in the transition from secular to monastic life.

After surveying the historical background for the chapter of faults in the desert fathers, the *Rule* (where only self-accusations are mentioned), the institutionalization of the procedure, including proclamations of others, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the exaggerated and hyper-dramatized imposition of penances at La Trappe by de Rancé in the seventeenth century (and at Gethsemani in the late 1800s by Dom Benedict Berger), Merton takes considerable pains to point out the quite circumscribed nature of the chapter of faults in modern Cistercian practice. Not only is it "no longer thought healthy to make use of exaggerated

and artificial humiliations" (219); it is recognized that when misused, the chapter of faults "can do much harm" to both proclaimed and proclaimer, who "may be sinning against charity or justice and actively harming his brother's soul" (219–20). He makes clear that the chapter is neither a court of law nor a place for debating the rules nor an opportunity for analyzing others' supposed moral or spiritual defects. Its focus is not on real or imagined sins, but on infractions of rules and usages, which may involve no moral culpability at all. It is a vehicle for "keeping regularity and order in the community," a "purely external" function but "by no means a mere formality" (223); it also "provide[s] an ascetic exercise" both "on the part of the one *proclaiming* himself or another and on the part of the one *proclaimed*" (224). The irregularities to be proclaimed are violations of the *Constitutions* (quite rare), of the *Rule* (not uncommon) or of the *Usages* (most frequent)—but it is generally a question of exterior faults, deficiencies of observance (Merton references the proper manner of bowing, though his list of irregularities in relation to the Benedictine *Rule* includes more serious lapses): it is not the role of the proclaimer to pass moral judgement on the one proclaimed, but simply to call attention to a failure of some sort in outward behavior (which may involve an ethical lapse as well, but that is a concern for a superior or a confessor).

Having clarified the matter of the chapter, Merton goes on to take up the manner, the proper procedures for making and taking proclamations, both the actual rituals involved and the appropriate spirit: on the part of the proclaimer, charity, empathy and a maturity of love that excludes "harsh, bitter accusations; exaggerated wording; language that implies contempt or destructive criticism" (232) as well as all mockery or ridicule; on the part of the one proclaimed, humility and attentiveness, lack of resentment and gratitude even when the proclamation may seem tendentious or made with less than pure motives. Merton concludes on a note of irritation with those agitating to abolish the practice: "Let us accept the chapter of faults as it is, with its imperfections, and be content. The Lord will bless this attitude, much more than

the attitude of those who are so eager to change everything that soon they will leave nothing whatever of the Cistercian life intact" (239).

The section on public penances that follows strikes somewhat the same note: "It is possible that the early Trappist reformers exaggerated the importance of public penances, but it is equally likely that we underestimate them" (239). The purpose of these penances, according to Merton, is threefold: to correct the erring brother and so bring healing to him personally, to make reparation for the fault and restore balance and order to the community, and to serve as a reminder to others of the seriousness of faults in relation both to God and to one's fellow monks. The ideal is to see such penances as acts of worship, though Merton acknowledges that "At the present time one feels that they are simply done with the maximum possible good humor. One tries to be a good sport about the whole thing; that is all. Well, that is something, but it isn't very much" (241). He goes on to describe the various penances as found both in the *Rule* and in the *Usages*, from temporary exclusion from common life for grave faults to various forms of kneeling and prostration in public, some no longer possible at Gethsemani because of crowded conditions, but described anyway. This leads into the brief final comments on the use of the discipline, which can be, but seldom is, imposed as a public penance, but is normally a brief "quasi-liturgical" weekly practice, "the only instrument of penance whose use is formally prescribed in our Order" (249). Recognizing that the custom is "a medieval practice, remote from the early spirit of the liturgy," and that it "has its limitations," Merton nevertheless advises the novices that "there is no point in making a big fuss over them. The simplest and most obvious thing to do is to take the penance as it is given to us, in a spirit of humility, mortification and faith" (249). The fact that the *Observances* conferences end with this exhaustive catalogue of penances, rather than with reflections on vespers, compline, and "early to bed," is in one sense accidental and unintended, but as Merton's closing comments point out, it does serve as a salutary reminder to new

members of the community “not to take rules lightly and not to disregard the importance of religious observance,” while his final sentence puts the emphasis where it belongs when he says that “a spirit of sanity and love” rather than “fear of being caught and punished” (250) must be the true motive for authentic monastic observance.

While the conferences as delivered end here, an appendix entitled “Spiritual Direction in the Monastic Setting” (251–78), not an “observance” per se but certainly part of the customary practice of monastic life, has been added to the mimeographed version of the notes distributed to the students at the conclusion of the course. Not addressed to novices, it may have been included less for them than for formation directors in other houses of the Order who also received copies. With a history of its own that will be discussed below, the appendix is a clearly organized essay consisting of a preface and five parts.

Following the brief preface, which points out that the role of a spiritual director is not to solve all one’s problems or to make all one’s decisions, but to provide wise guidance that will enhance rather than limit authentic spiritual freedom, the first main section, “*The Life-Giving Action of Jesus in His Church*” (255–58), articulates a broad spiritual and theological framework for direction. Here Merton emphasizes that the grace of Christ is mediated “through the Church and through His visible representatives” (256), requiring submission to authority, not as “a mere arbitrary exercise of human power” (256) but as an agency of freedom, a “liberation from slavery” that “opens the way for us to attain perfection by the free gift of ourselves in love” (256). The Spirit works in the Church through human instruments, both hierarchical and charismatic, as well as directly by interior spiritual transformation.

In this context, he then turns in the second section to the role of “*The Spiritual Director*” (258–61); he puts forth a quite “high” doctrine of the director, stating that “*The spiritual Father is in the place of God to the soul, . . . is, in all truth, Jesus for the faithful Christian. He is a ‘sacrament,’ a ‘mystery’ of Christ, in whom the Holy Spirit acts in a very special manner for our sanctification*”

(258–59). He points out that while the director is generally freely chosen, in the context of religious formation the responsibility for spiritual direction of candidates is canonically vested in the novice master, who has both “a *juridical* function to help them decide their vocation, to select or reject them, to form them for their religious life” (259–60) and “a *charismatic* function” (260) to guide their spiritual development. While acknowledging that the master is “human and fallible, and can easily be mistaken” (261), Merton affirms that faith in the working of God’s grace through the agency of the master can transcend these limitations and allow the master to be an instrument of authentic spiritual formation and growth.

In section three, “*The Spiritual Father in Monastic Tradition*” (261–66), Merton focuses on the difference between a spiritual director who “simply guides and teaches, according to an externally codified rule, or according to spiritual books” (261), and genuine spiritual fatherhood as understood and practiced in monastic tradition, the role of the *abba* who “makes us sons of God by imparting to us his own life, his own spirit—this is a real participation in the divine paternity” (261). Through love, prayer, discernment, patience and meekness joined with firmness, the father forms spiritual sons, but this is possible only to the extent that the father is himself spiritual, guided by the Holy Spirit not only in his dealings with the directee but in his own life with God.

The fourth and longest section, on “*The Nature and Efficacy of Spiritual Direction*” (267–72), emphasizes that true direction goes beyond guiding the subject away from sin, or general commentary on the spiritual life, or exhortations to virtue, or warnings against hidden tendencies or weaknesses—none of which focuses on the uniqueness of the person being directed. Genuine direction involves manifestation of conscience, “the revelation of one’s inmost tendencies . . . with a view to guidance and support in striving for perfection” (270). It requires on the director’s part an empathetic identification with a “person’s interests and inmost strivings” (271) joined with “an objective quality” that can see both the limitations and the potential of the directee in a way that he himself does not (272). Such a perspective is possible only through “charity

and paternal affection" that "can give a real inner knowledge of souls" and enables the director to "see that soul through the eyes of Jesus Christ and love him with the heart of Christ" (272).

Such a relationship requires on the part of the directee a complete "Openness," the focus of the final section of the essay (272–78). "One must know how to manifest one's inner self, and be able to do so with a certain amount of freedom" (272). This involves the revelation not only of one's sins, temptations and struggles but "All the movements of our soul" (273), without any prejudgement of which are good and which are evil. Such openness requires a high degree of trust in the spiritual Father, but above all in God who has appointed him as guide. Honesty of this sort is an aspect of the surrender of one's own will, the "complete self-renunciation" that is essential to "true monastic perfection" (276–77). This humility is a liberation, "freedom from all care, . . . because this docility to the representative of God opens the way for the unimpeded action of the Holy Spirit in the soul, and it is the Spirit Who sanctifies, guides and forms the soul, rather than the spiritual Father, who is merely an instrument and mediator" (277). Such a result is in turn possible only to the extent that the Father himself "strive[s] to be holy and to be a man of prayer" (278). If he does so, and the disciple has the faith to look past the inevitable imperfections of the master and see the action of God's Spirit in him, then "God will surely give great graces through the action of the spiritual Father, graces which the Father himself will scarcely realize, of which perhaps he will know nothing at all. . . . Everything depends upon the faith of the son and of the Father, permitting God to work in them" (278).

Thus Merton tries to adapt the teaching of spiritual paternity, particularly characteristic of the desert fathers, whom he cites repeatedly in this last section, to contemporary monastic formation, in which he himself was so directly involved. The extent to which he was able to put these principles into practice he himself would certainly not presume to judge, but the essay provides clear evidence of his engagement with this dimension of his own vocation, drawing upon his experience as master of students

(1951–1955) and reflecting his early years as master of novices. As such it is a valuable document, though its rather idealized and “entirely supernatural” (278) conception of the spiritual director and his role should not be taken as Merton’s “last word” on the subject.<sup>54</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

The *Monastic Observances* conferences are extant in two versions: the mimeographed copy put together for distribution to the novices in the class and also made available to other houses of the Order, which is found in Volume 15 of Merton’s “Collected Essays,” the 24-volume bound set of published and unpublished materials assembled at the Abbey of Gethsemani and available both there and at the Thomas Merton Center of Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY; and Merton’s own typescript, with extensive handwritten additions, which he had in front of him as he lectured, now in the archives of the Bellarmine Merton Center. The first is a text of 159 numbered pages, headed “OUR MONASTIC OBSERVANCES”, preceded by an unnumbered table of contents page headed “MONASTIC OBSERVANCES”, and fol-

54. On this topic see Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1960), 3–42; *Introduction to Christian Mysticism*, 251–332; Thomas Merton, “Spiritual Direction,” *The Merton Seasonal*, 32.1 (Spring 2007), 3–17; and especially Merton’s later essay “The Spiritual Father in the Desert Tradition,” first published in 1968 (*Contemplation in a World of Action*, 269–93), which echoes in its title the third section of the appendix here. See also Merton’s statement on the eve of his departure for Asia: “The real essence of monasticism is the handing down from master to disciple of an uncommunicable experience. That is to say, an experience that cannot be communicated in terms of philosophy, that cannot be communicated in words. It can only be communicated on the deepest possible level. And this . . . to me is the most important thing. This is the only thing in which I am really interested. There is nothing else that seems to me to have the same kind of primary importance” (Thomas Merton, *Preview of the Asian Journey*, ed. Walter H. Capps [New York: Crossroad, 1989], 34–35). Patrick Bludworth emphasizes the continuing importance of this issue for Merton in his essay “Desert Fathers and Asian Masters: Thomas Merton’s Outlaw Lineage,” *The Merton Annual*, 17 (2004), 166–94.

lowed by a separately numbered twenty-page appendix headed "SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN THE MONASTIC SETTING", preceded by its own unnumbered contents page headed "APPENDIX / Contents of: SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN THE MONASTIC SETTING." The second is a text of 120 pages, all but one of which is typed,<sup>55</sup> headed "OUR MONASTIC OBSERVANCES." The typescript is numbered beginning on page 2 (the page number regularly preceded by "Observances") and running through page 117; the discrepancy in the total number of pages is due to the insertion of page 4a (on the Gethsemani church as a minor basilica), a mispagination in which page 63 is initially typed 62 then altered by hand to the correct page number, but is then followed by a second page also numbered 63 but not altered, nor are the page numbers that follow; and the final two pages of the typescript both numbered 117. Handwritten additions and alterations are found both on the typed pages and on the otherwise blank facing pages. This typescript includes neither a table of contents page nor the appendix on spiritual direction.

Merton's typescript, with its handwritten changes, serves as the copy text for the present edition of *Monastic Observances*. Since the mimeographed version was copied from this typescript, it has no independent authority as a witness to the text, except for the table of contents page, found only there, and the appendix, to be discussed below. All Merton's alterations in the copy text, including both handwritten changes and on-line corrections made in the process of typing (i.e. cancelling a word or phrase and immediately substituting another) are listed in Appendix A, Textual Notes. Thus the interested reader is enabled to distinguish between the preliminary draft of Merton's notes and the revisions made before the conferences were actually delivered. A handful of these additions and alterations that are not incorporated into the mimeographed version, presumably because they were added by Merton after the typist had reached that point in the text, but

55. Page 28 (62–65 of this edition), Merton's commentary on the Invitatory Psalm (94[95]).

before Merton himself had commented on the material in class (since there is no indication that he later revised the notes in anticipation of presenting the *Observances* conferences a second time), are grouped in a separate section following the initial list. Errors, whether of omission or of mistranscription, in the mimeographed version of the text are not recorded since they have no independent authority vis-à-vis the copy text.

The appendix on “Spiritual Direction in the Monastic Setting” is also extant in two other forms, each entitled “SPIRITUAL DIRECTION”: a 26-page typescript and a 36-page typescript, both part of the collection at the Bellarmine Thomas Merton Center; the text in these two versions is virtually identical (the discrepancy in the number of pages being due mainly to the difference in font—elite vs. pica—of the two typescripts), but is considerably different from that found in the *Monastic Observances* mimeograph. Also extant in the Merton Center archives are two sheets of reader’s suggestions, apparently from an unidentified prospective publisher, commenting on three essays by Merton: the second of these is “The Neurotic Personality in the Monastic Life,”<sup>56</sup> written some time before Merton’s encounter with the psychiatrist Gregory Zilboorg at St. John’s University in July 1956, since in his journal for July 29, 1956 Merton notes that Zilboorg severely criticized the article and that he had “engineered” Merton’s attendance at the workshop “partly because of the danger of the article being published and partly because he had sensed my own difficulties.”<sup>57</sup> The third, entitled “Your Will and Your Vocation,”<sup>58</sup> is dated November 1955. The first is “Spiritual Direction,” and the page references of the reader’s suggestions make clear that the 36-page typescript is being commented on. The three essays, and quite possibly others (the reader’s comments only cover part of the third essay and presumably were continued on a subse-

56. Published in *The Merton Annual*, 4 (1991), 3–19, edited with an introductory note by Patrick Hart, ocsa.

57. *Search for Solitude*, 58–59.

58. Published in *The Merton Seasonal*, 34.2 (Summer 2009), 3–11.

quent page or pages, no longer extant, that may have included observations on additional pieces as well), had apparently been collected by Merton in view of possible publication, some time after November 1955, when "Your Will and Your Vocation" was written, but probably before July 1956, since it is unlikely that Merton would have continued to contemplate publication of "The Neurotic Personality in the Monastic Life" after Zilboorg's hostile critique of the essay. Thus the original version of the "Spiritual Direction" essay was probably written some time between October 1955, when Merton became novice master, and the summer of 1956. The "Spiritual Direction in the Monastic Setting" version, found in the *Monastic Observances* mimeograph, clearly represents a revision of this original text; it includes a new "Preface" dated 1958, and is extensively rewritten, resulting in a text that eliminates certain rather extended digressions (on the identity of the "Father" in the Prologue to the Benedictine *Rule* and on the psychological meaning of "transference") and one that gives to the topic a greater sense of flexibility, presumably due to Merton's more extensive experience in direction and increased maturity as developed during the time separating the two versions. Thus the copy text for this appendix is the version found in the *Monastic Observances* mimeograph, and all differences between this and the earlier version are also listed in Appendix A.

All substantive additions made to the text, in order to turn elliptical or fragmentary statements into complete sentences, are included in braces, as are the few emendations incorporated directly into the text, so that the reader can always determine exactly what Merton himself wrote. No effort is made to reproduce Merton's rather inconsistent punctuation, paragraphing, abbreviations and typographical features; a standardized format for these features is established that in the judgement of the editor best represents a synthesis of Merton's own practice and contemporary usage: e.g., all Latin passages are italicized unless specific parts of a longer passage are underlined by Merton, in which case the underlined section of the passage is in roman type; all other passages underlined by Merton are italicized;

words in upper case in the text are printed in small caps; periods and commas are uniformly included within quotation marks; patterns of abbreviation and capitalization, very inconsistent in the copy text, are regularized. All references to primary and secondary sources are cited in the notes. Untranslated Latin passages in the original text are left in Latin but translated by the editor in the notes. Scriptural citations are taken from the Douai-Rheims-Challoner version of the Bible, the edition Merton himself regularly used, as it is a translation of the Latin Vulgate used in the liturgical offices.<sup>59</sup> All identified errors in Merton's text are noted and if possible corrected. All instances where subsequent research and expanded knowledge affect Merton's accuracy are discussed in the notes. A list of suggestions for further reading is included as Appendix B, consisting of other sources in Merton's published works where the topics of this volume are discussed.

\* \* \* \* \*

In conclusion I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have made this volume possible:

- to the Trustees of the Merton Legacy Trust, Peggy Fox, Anne McCormick and Mary Somerville, for permission to publish the *Monastic Observances* conferences;
- to the late Robert E. Daggy, former director of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine College (now University), Louis-

59. See the comments of Chrysogonus Waddell, ocsa, in the Introduction to the first of numerous selections from Merton's monastic conferences published in the journal he edited, *Liturgy O.C.S.O.*: "As regards the biblical translations, for the purposes of his conferences, Fr. Louis always used the Douay-Challoner version, translated from the Latin Vulgate. He remained faithful to this older translation even long after other modern translations based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts had become almost everywhere standard. This preference was based in part on the fidelity of the Douay-Challoner translation to the Latin texts which were still those of the pre-Vatican II liturgy; and in part it was based simply on the fact that the literary diction of this older translation spoke more to the soul of Merton the poet and literary critic" ("Notes by Thomas Merton for Novitiate Conferences," *Liturgy O.C.S.O.* 24.1 [1990], 41–42).

ville, KY, for first alerting me to the project of editing Merton's monastic conferences, and for his encouragement in this and other efforts in Merton studies;

- to Brother Patrick Hart, ocsso, the founding editor of the Monastic Wisdom series, for facilitating my research visits to the library at the Abbey of Gethsemani and for his friendship and guidance in the publication of this series of volumes of Thomas Merton's monastic conferences, as he passes on his editorial responsibilities and begins a well-earned period of *otium monasticum*;
- to Father James Conner, ocsso, for many years Thomas Merton's undermaster of novices at the Abbey of Gethsemani, for graciously accepting an invitation to provide the Preface for this volume;
- to Paul M. Pearson, director and archivist of the Merton Center, and Mark C. Meade, assistant archivist, for their gracious hospitality and valued assistance during my research visits to the Center;
- to Colleen Stiller, production manager at Liturgical Press, for guiding this and previous volumes of Merton's conferences through the publication process with grace and efficiency;
- to the Gannon University Research Committee, which provided a grant that allowed me to pursue research on this project at the Merton Center, the Abbey of Gethsemani, and various libraries;
- to Mary Beth Earll of the interlibrary loan department of the Nash Library, Gannon University, for once again providing invaluable assistance by locating and procuring various obscure volumes;
- to library staff of the Hesburgh Library of the University of Notre Dame, especially Sara Weber, and the Institute of Cistercian Studies Collection at the Waldo Library, Western Michigan University, especially Neil Chase, for assistance in locating important materials in their collections;
- again and always to my wife Suzanne and our children for their continual love, support and encouragement in this and other projects.



# MONASTIC OBSERVANCES



## CONTENTS

Introduction: General Principles	{5}
The Regular Places	{7}
The Regular Exercises	
The Manner of Announcing Them	{30}
The Exercises Themselves	
The Night Vigils	{38}
The Ceremonies Observed in Choir	{45}
In General	{48}
Behavior in Church	{52}
Rank in Choir	{55}
Vigils (continued)	{57}
Morning Meditation	{75}
Lauds (Matins)	{92}
Private Masses & Communion	{104}
<i>Lectio Divina</i>	{149}
<i>Lectio</i> & Silence	{155}
Mixt or Frustulum	{183}
Intervals (brief periods between two exercises)	{187}
Prime	{189}
Chapter	{198}
Chapter of Faults	{215}
Public Penances	{239}

End of Part I



## OUR MONASTIC OBSERVANCES

It is important from the beginning to understand what we are doing, in all the observances and practices which we carry out from morning to night. The whole life in large measure {is} made up of these things—they can help or hinder our search for perfection. Everything depends on *how* we carry them out. Our observances are an integral part in our monastic *life*. They must *live*. {They must be} part of a living organism. They must *help us to live*, help our life of charity in the Spirit. {They must assist our} growth as children of God, {the} formation of Christ in us. {They are the} exact opposite of mere mechanical routine, which diminishes and lessens life {and} obscures the image of Christ in us, degenerates into formalism, gradually stifles the free breath of the Spirit {and} kills the spiritual life. {A} wrong understanding and practice of observances leads to {the} wreck of {our} vocation.

A few general principles: we have come here to live—to live in Christ, by charity, in the Holy Spirit, {and} to grow in the works of love—love for God: *prayer*, liturgical and private—{to} enter into the prayer life of the Church (liturgical gestures and rites—liturgical *action*); *fraternal union*, above all Eucharistic—then, in the whole monastic day (work, etc.), cooperation, helping one another to grow in Christ, {through} mercy, forbearance, prayer, instruction and correction (example). The observances are the visible expression and the outward aid to all this—they are supposed to help us, form us, guide us, show us the way. But we must get below the surface, beyond the letter, and while carrying out the letter properly, penetrate to the full spirit. Thus through

our observances, which in many cases are sacramentals, we penetrate to Christ Himself as the Head of the Church, living in the midst of us: "There hath stood one in your midst whom you know not. . . ."1 "Truly this is the house of God and I knew it not. . . ."2

Our observances have two aspects:

a) for the one learning, there is the exterior, which requires devoted application and docility;

b) for the one who has learned, there is the interior—the spirit shining through—received in gratitude and praise, leading to contemplation in the spirit of wisdom and understanding.

Hence we can see the obvious pitfalls to avoid:

a) Thinking that perfection consists in exterior observance for its own sake, with its by-products: observing others; {a} critical spirit; scrupulosity; discord and factions (read St. James on {a} worldly spirit<sup>3</sup>);

b) Going to {the} other extreme and neglecting the exterior altogether: sloppiness, laziness, sensuality; lack of zeal; {this} could greatly harm {the} spirit of faith and diminish the fervor of our charity; {it} ends in {a} loss of vocation;

c) Subjectivism: trying to put our own interpretation on everything, instead of seeking to see what the Church and the monastic tradition have to teach us by these things; {this} ends in eccentricities, vain observance, false spiritualities, fake mysticism;

d) Aestheticism and traditionalism: exaggerated respect for the old as such; "artiness" {that is a} disguised form of snobbery.

1. John 1:26.

2. Gen. 28:16, 17 (conflated).

3. "Whence do wars and quarrels come among you? Is it not from this, from your passions, which wage war in your members? You covet and do not have; you kill and envy, and cannot obtain. You quarrel and wrangle, and you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it upon your passions. Adulterers, do you not know that the friendship of this world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of this world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:1-4).

## I. THE MONASTERY: THE REGULAR PLACES

We can begin our study of the monastic observances by looking at the monastery itself (*Usages*, Bk. VII<sup>4</sup>). Everything about the regular, traditional plan of the monastery has a meaning and a purpose. We should try to understand the meaning of the monastic plan, not necessarily in order to cling slavishly to the letter of the *Usages* on this point, but in order to see why the regular places exist, what they are for, and see whether or not we are failing to achieve any of the purposes for which they were instituted. Seldom, if ever, does one find a monastery that corresponds exactly in every detail to the plan laid down in the *Usages*. This plan is a pattern to which one will conform, in each case, with certain changes and adaptations which make it possible to achieve the end intended in each particular situation.

Hence we need to know *why* we have these regular places and what purpose they serve:

1. The monastery. For St. Benedict, the monastery is first of all the *house of God, domus Dei*, the place of peace in which everything is ordered according to wisdom, and where in an atmosphere of love and faith the monk can work out his eternal salvation by a life of prayer and labor and virtue, in silence with his brethren. *Nemo perturbetur neque contristetur in domo Dei* (*Rule*, 31<sup>5</sup>). Peace in the house of God {is} insured by the fact that everything is done at the right time and in the right way so that no one is overburdened or distressed by the heedlessness or selfishness of any individual or group. Hence the monks in charge must be wise, for the house of God must be wisely ruled: *Domus Dei a sapientibus sapienter administratur* (*Rule*, 53<sup>6</sup>). Hence, {the} first

4. *Regulations of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance Published by the General Chapter of 1926* (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Sons, [1927]), 139–50 (nn. 282–305).

5. “so that no one may be troubled or vexed in the house of God” (*The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English*, ed. and trans. Justin McCann, OSB [London: Burns, Oates, 1952], 82/83).

6. “And let the house of God be administered by prudent men in a prudent manner” (McCann, 122/123, which reads “. . . sapientibus et sapienter . . .”).

principle {is}: everything in the monastery plan is *ordered wisely*, to prevent useless distraction, worries, cares, agitations, to help a life of prayer and simplicity, to cut down preoccupations and anxieties over material things or over anything at all, in order that the brethren may live together in peace and hear the voice of God. The Fathers compare it to the ark, a safe refuge in the deluge of this world (St. Ambrose<sup>7</sup>). The monastery itself, says Peter the Venerable, forms us by its silent instruction. *Ipsa [cella] sola eloquentius omnibus magistris tacendo te doceat* (Letter 20).<sup>8</sup> It is a refuge from the judgement of God; it is like Segor to which Lot fled from Sodom.<sup>9</sup> William of St. Thierry {says} the monastery is a paradise in which we prepare for heaven by doing the things that will be done in heaven: *Vacare Deo, frui Deo*.<sup>10</sup> It is the dwelling place of a FAMILY, says St. Basil.<sup>11</sup> The abbot represents the

7. See J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, 221 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1844–1865), vol. 14, col. 374CD (*De Noe et Arca*, 9.30, where the reference is to good living, not to monastic life in particular), vol. 15, col. 1587B (*Expositio Evangelii Sancti Lucae*, 2.92, where the reference is to the Church as a whole rather than to the monastery) (subsequently referred to as PL in text and notes).

8. “May the cell itself by its silence instruct you more eloquently than all teachers” (PL 189, col. 90C).

9. I.e. Zoar (Gen. 19:23); see Peter Damian, *De Perfectione Monachorum*, 7: “*Nimirum melius est quidem salvari animam in Segor, quam sulphureo in Sodomis igne consumi*” (“It is certainly better for the soul to be saved in Segor than to be consumed in the fire and brimstone of Sodom”) (PL 145, col. 302B).

10. “To make time for God, to enjoy God” (*Epistola ad Fratres de Monte Dei*, 1.4 [PL 184, col. 314A]).

11. This is not in fact an especially prominent image in Basil: but see *Short Rules* 190: “One who *is born of the Spirit* according to the voice of the Lord (cf. John 3:8) and has received *power to become a child of God* (cf. John 1:12), is ashamed of kinship according to the flesh and owns as his relatives those who are of the *household of faith* (cf. Gal. 6:10)” (Anna M. Silvis, *The Asketikon of St Basil the Great* [New York; Oxford University Press, 2005], 377); see also Philip Rousseau’s reference to Basil’s *Homily Exhorting to Holy Baptism*, in which the sacrament is seen as bringing about “the intimacy of those sharing a common household” (Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994], 179), although this statement is not directly or exclusively referring to monasticism.

heavenly Father; the brethren are sons living together in a unity of charity that transcends nature, forming as it were one son, in the bond of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the monastery is a place of unity in which men live together, mirroring on earth by their harmony and peace the internal peace and unity of the Three Divine Persons in One Nature.

2. The Regular Places in the *Usages*: Book VII of the *Usages* has eight chapters, dealing with the church, cloisters and chapter room, then with the scriptorium, the dormitory, refectory, kitchens and workroom, and finally the calefactory.<sup>12</sup> We must distinguish here what is essential from what is not essential. The church is the very *raison d'être* of the whole monastery. It is the true House of God, the place where we offer Him sacrifice and praise, where we meditate most often, where we recollect ourselves in silence with the Eucharistic Christ. The cloister is traditionally the heart of the family life in the monastery. In modern houses this center of balance has shifted. The chapter room {is} the center of the community as such. These three give us the very essence of the monastery. They fulfill essential functions. {The} refectory, dormitory {and} kitchen are also essential since the monk has a body as well as a soul. {The} scriptorium has become in modern times the real center of family life, replacing the chapter room and cloister. The calefactory<sup>13</sup> is generally obsolete.

The layout of the regular places: the *Usages* say nothing about the location of the church. Traditionally it is *oriented* and occupies either the north or south side of the monastic quadrangle. {For} the cloisters, the *Usages* prescribe:

a) One part to be devoted to the reading before compline. Here there should be a statue of Our Lady, *in the middle* (288);<sup>14</sup>

12. C. 1: "Church," 139–42 (nn. 282–87); c. 2: "Cloisters," 142–44 (nn. 288–91); c. 3: "Chapter Room," 144–45 (n. 292); c. 4: "Scriptorium," 145 (nn. 293–94); c. 5: "Dormitory," 146–48 (nn. 295–99); c. 6: "Refectory," 148–49 (nn. 300–302); c. 7: "Kitchens and Scullery," 149 (nn. 303–304); c. 8: "Calefactory," 150 (n. 305).

13. I.e. the warming room.

14. *Regulations*, 142–43.

b) On one wing of the cloisters we have the following places: chapter {room}, auditorium and calefactory, in that order.

Nothing else is said about the exact location of the regular places, but traditionally the refectory is on the opposite side of the quadrangle from the church, the dormitory of the religious is above the chapter room, etc. The west side of the quadrangle traditionally was reserved for the brothers and the cellarium,<sup>15</sup> but nothing is said about this in the *Usages*. Considering the *Usages* alone, a great deal of latitude would be allowed in monastic planning. N.B. when a monastery is planned, the plan has to be approved by the architectural commission of the General Chapter.

### 3. *The Church of the Monastery:*

a) *The Rule: Oratorium hoc sit quod dicitur*: a place of silence and prayer, where a monk not only joins his brethren in the solemn choral praise of God, but can also retire to pray in silence and solitude at any time (*Rule*, 52<sup>16</sup>). Everything prescribed in the *Ritual*<sup>17</sup> and *Usages* is supposed to further this one purpose of the church. Everything [is] intended to lift the mind and heart to God. It is the House of God (read Guardini, *Sacred Signs*, p. 39<sup>18</sup>).

15. I.e. the storeroom(s).

16. "Let the oratory be what its name implies" (McCann, 118/119).

17. *Rituale Cisterciense ex Libro Usuum Definitionibus Ordinis et Caeremoniali Episcoporum Collectum* (Westmalle, Belgium: Ex Typographia Ordinis, 1948).

18. Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs*, trans. Grace Branham (St. Louis: Pio Decimo Press, 1956), 39: "Notice how as you cross the threshold you unconsciously lift your head and your eyes, and how as you survey the great interior space of the church there also takes place in you an inward expansion and enlargement. Its great width and height have an analogy to infinity and eternity. A church is the similitude of the heavenly dwelling place of God. Mountains indeed are higher, the wide blue sky outside stretches immeasurably further. But whereas outside space is unconfined and formless, the portion of space set aside for the church has been formed, fashioned, designed at every point with God in view. The long pillared aisles, the width and solidity of the walls, the high arched and vaulted roof, bring home to us that this is God's house and the seat of his hidden presence."

In turn, we should behave in church with a reverence and modesty which make prayer easy for all others who happen to be there. Even {those} working in church should work with reverence and recollection, in {an} atmosphere of silence and peace. Everywhere God is present, but in a very special way in church.

b) Legislation of the Order: all the churches of the Order are dedicated to the Blessed Virgin (*Usages*, 282;<sup>19</sup> *Ritual*, I, III, 1;<sup>20</sup> *Instituta*, I, 1<sup>21</sup>—one of the oldest statutes of the Order). {The} importance of this {is that} in church we gather around the Virgin Mother (contrast {the} Benedictines, {who focus on} the Glorious Christ). All churches {are} constructed in the form of a cross “like our Mother Cîteaux.”<sup>22</sup> {This is the} traditional Gothic plan. (Explain the regular divisions of a Gothic church: nave, transepts, choir, ambulatory, apse, etc.)

c) Fourfold division of the Cistercian church (*Usages*, 283;<sup>23</sup> *Ritual*, I, III, 1 and 2, etc.<sup>24</sup>):

1. {The} *presbytery* {is} one or two steps above the rest of the church (*Rit.*<sup>25</sup>); {for the} *high altar*, one must be able to pass around the back; {the} high altar {is} one or two steps above the presbytery floor (*Rit.*<sup>26</sup>). {A} statue of {the} Blessed Virgin behind {the} high altar {is} prescribed only in {the} *Usages*,<sup>27</sup> not in {the} *Ritual*: why? {because of the} ancient Cistercian ban on all statues; {the}

19. *Regulations*, 139.

20. *Rituale*, 4.

21. This is the reference as given in the *Rituale*; it is in fact c. 18 of the *Instituta* of 1134 (*In Statutorum Annorum Precedentium Prima Collectio*) (Joseph Marie Canivez, ed., *Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis ab Anno 1116 ad Annum 1786*, 8 vols. [Louvain: Bureaux de la Revue, 1933–1941], 1.17).

22. *Regulations*, 139 (n. 283), which reads: “like that of our Mother, Cîteaux.”

23. *Regulations*, 139.

24. *Rituale*, 4.

25. *Rituale*, 4 (I, III, 2).

26. *Rituale*, 4 (I, III, 2).

27. *Regulations*, 139 (n. 283).

credence; tierce stalls {are} *infra gradum altaris* (*Rit.*<sup>28</sup>); {a} crucifix, six candlesticks and two “sanctus candlesticks” {are} prescribed in {the} *Usages* (283).<sup>29</sup> {The} *Ritual* (I, IV, 3) says sanctus candlesticks *possunt haberi*,<sup>30</sup> and refers to {the} General Chapter of 1463. {The} *Ritual* allowed a hanging ciborium.<sup>31</sup>

2. {The} *choir* {is equipped} with stalls, seats, and desks (called “forms”: *Rit.*<sup>32</sup>). The *Ritual* says the whole seat is called the *misericord*;<sup>33</sup> {the} *Usages* attach this title to the little seat on which we lean when bowed over.<sup>34</sup> {The} *novices’ choir*, {located} below the forms, {is} traditionally without forms, and with a bookstand out in the middle.

3. {The} *retrochoir*, separated from the choir by a *screen*, is the choir of the sick. {The} *jube*<sup>35</sup> {is} in the middle of the screen. The sick have a regular choir.

4. {The} *nave* {is} separated by another screen (*similiter separatur a retrochoro: Rit.*<sup>36</sup>). Choir stalls, etc., for {the} brothers, altars *de beata* and *pro defunctis*<sup>37</sup> {are located there}.

d) The lamps: {there are} “three principal lamps”:<sup>38</sup> 1—{above the} presbytery step; 2—{in the} choir; 3—{in the} nave ({the}

28. “below the level of the altar” (*Rituale*, 4 [I, III, 2], which reads: “*Infra vero . . .*”).

29. *Regulations*, 140 (n. 283), which reads: “a large candelabrum is placed on each side at the foot of the steps” (the term “sanctus candlestick” is not used).

30. “are permitted to be had” (*Rituale*, 6, which reads: “*possunt etiam* [also] *haberi*”).

31. *Rituale*, 5 (I, III, 8).

32. *Rituale*, 4 (I, III, 3).

33. *Rituale*, 4 (I, III, 3).

34. *Regulations*, 140 (n. 283)

35. I.e. the ambo or lectern.

36. “it is separated in the same way from the retrochoir” (*Rituale*, 4 [I, III, 5]).

37. “for the Blessed [Virgin Mary]; “for the dead” (i.e. the altars where daily Masses were celebrated in honor of Mary [and for the intentions of members of the Order and benefactors] and for the dead: see *Regulations*, 141 [n. 283], *Rituale*, 4 [I, III, 5]).

38. *Regulations*, 141 (n. 284).

brothers' choir) (or {the} infirm choir: *Rit.*<sup>39</sup>); two others {are} permitted before other altars (*propter conversos vel hospites: Rit.*<sup>40</sup>). {It is} evident that these lamps were originally for light, and not just votive lights.

e) Cleanliness (*Rit.*<sup>41</sup>): the church should be kept clean; nothing that does not befit the sanctity of the church should be found there; animals should not enter.

*Our church is a minor basilica:* what is that? {The} original meaning of the word {was} royal judgement hall. A basilica is a church which because of its *historical importance, its renown, or its splendor*, is singled out for special distinction by an indult of the Holy See or by immemorial custom. The dignity of the basilica is signalized usually in the title itself and what it implies, and the use of the decorative insignia of the umbrella and the bell, which are carried in all processions and remain in the sanctuary. *Major basilicas* are the four more important churches of Rome—St. Peter's, St. John Lateran, St. Paul's Outside the Walls, and St. Mary Major. Others hold that the churches of St. Francis and St. Mary of the Angels at Assisi are major basilicas. It would also seem *a fortiori* that the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem and of the Nativity at Bethlehem would be major basilicas, though canonists do not mention them. In any case, only a very ancient and universally important church would ever be considered a major basilica. There are numerous *minor basilicas*—for instance in places of pilgrimage: v.g. Lourdes, Lisieux. There have been other minor basilicas in our Order: v.g. Aiguebelle<sup>42</sup> and Orval<sup>43</sup> (though sentiment in the Order has not been favorable

39. *Rituale*, 5 (I, iv, 1).

40. "for the laybrothers and guests" (*Rituale*, 5 [I, iv, 1], which reads: ". . . conversos et . . .").

41. *Rituale*, 5 (I, iii, 6).

42. Cistercian abbey in southeastern France, founded in 1137.

43. Cistercian abbey in southern Belgium, originally founded in 1070 and affiliated with the Order of Cîteaux in 1132; it was shut down in the aftermath of the French Revolution and reestablished in 1926.

to attaching this kind of dignity to one of our churches). Before Gethsemani, the following churches were erected to this dignity in the U.S.: Our Lady of Victory, Lackawanna, NY (1926);<sup>44</sup> St. Mary, Minneapolis (1926);<sup>45</sup> St. Josaphat, Milwaukee (1929);<sup>46</sup> Baltimore Cathedral (1937);<sup>47</sup> Immaculate Conception, Conception, MO (1940).<sup>48</sup> Ours came in 1949. Since then there have been quite a few others, for instance, St. Vincent's, Latrobe.<sup>49</sup> The bull "*Inter vastam solitudinem*" of May 3, 1949, granted us this title (AAS [1949], 446<sup>50</sup>). It says in part: "The Abbey of Gethsemani stands in a vast solitude surrounded by forests, a wilderness which brings peace to the heart and raises the mind to the contemplation of divine things."<sup>51</sup> There follows a brief sketch of the history of the abbey, then a fulsome description of the monastery, {the} guest house, surrounded by "most fragrant gardens,"<sup>52</sup> the "ancient semi-gothic structure" with its "admirable fabric,"<sup>53</sup> pictures, and stained glass windows, the splendor of the offices, the retreats for clergy and laity, the great number of sacred relics, etc., etc. [It] names the various bishops who supported the petition, and grants the title with all annexed privileges.

44. Shrine built by Fr. Nelson Baker just south of Buffalo, NY, consecrated and named a minor basilica in 1926.

45. Co-cathedral of the Minneapolis/St. Paul Archdiocese, built between 1907 and 1915.

46. Parish and shrine, dedicated in 1901, staffed by Conventual Franciscans since 1910.

47. Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Baltimore's original cathedral, the first in America, built between 1806 and 1821.

48. Abbey church of the Benedictine community of Conception, dedicated in 1891.

49. Abbey church and parish of St. Vincent Archabbey, originally dedicated in 1836 and taken over by the Benedictines upon their arrival ten years later.

50. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 41 (1949), 446–48.

51. "*Inter vastam solitudinem animis afferentem pacem mentibusque caelestium rerum contemplationem, . . . nemore circumdata exstat . . .*" (AAS, 446).

52. "*fragrantissimis circumdata hortis*" (AAS, 446).

53. "*antiquae semigothicae structurae . . . fabrica, picturae, tabulae sunt admirandae*" (AAS, 446).

f) *The Sacristy (Usages, 285–286<sup>54</sup>)*: “The Sacristan shall conform to the customs of our Fathers, who recommend simplicity in our churches” (*Usages, 552<sup>55</sup>*). This is a very broad statement—so broad that it is often completely ignored. In general, it means simplicity in choice of vestments, vessels, ornaments, etc., plainness {through} avoidance of the showy, {the} peculiar, but above all, avoidance of vulgarity and bad taste. {There should be} “safe and suitable cupboards” (*Usages, 285<sup>56</sup>*). “It is well to put lavender or other fragrant plants into the cupboards . . . in order to keep them free from insects” (552<sup>57</sup>—today: DDT<sup>58</sup>). “The cupboards and drawers of the sacristy should be frequently opened in fine weather.”<sup>59</sup> In a word, {there is emphasis on the} importance of cleanliness, neatness, and a salubrious atmosphere in the sacristy. There should be a *piscina*.<sup>60</sup> There should be one or more *wash basins with running water*, “with towels”:<sup>61</sup> “three towels: one for the priest and sacred ministers before Mass, the second for the same after Mass, and the third for the other ministers” (*Usages, 552<sup>62</sup>*). {In} the crypt, stations of the cross {are} for seculars only.

g) *Liturgical Books—Sacred Objects*: {there should be} enough for all. {A} spirit of poverty {is} stressed by the *Usages* (286): “The religious { . . . } should have nothing *exclusively* for their use, such as a chalice, or missal, etc., so that they may not be tempted to regard these objects as their own property.”<sup>63</sup> Hence we have *only*

54. *Regulations, 141.*

55. *Regulations, 261.*

56. *Regulations, 141.*

57. *Regulations, 261.*

58. For Merton’s renunciation of DDT, see his letter of January 12, 1963 to Rachel Carson (Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, ed. William H. Shannon [New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994], 70–72).

59. *Regulations, 261.*

60. I.e. a sink “to receive water which has been blessed or has been used for ablutions” (*Regulations, 285* [n. 141]).

61. *Regulations, 141* (n. 285).

62. *Regulations, 262.*

63. *Regulations, 141*, which reads: “. . . chalice, a missal, . . .” and includes a clause between “religious” and “should”.

*albs* assigned to individuals, for obvious reasons—other things are given out at random; chalices and books are assigned to each altar and the priests change from week to week.

h) *Cemetery (Usages, 287<sup>64</sup>)*—{the} *Ritual* prescribes<sup>65</sup> that no one shall be buried in the churches except a king or a bishop. In the old days saints were buried in the churches, v.g. Sts. Bernard and Malachy at Clairvaux. Abbots {were buried} in the chapter room, brethren in the cemeteries. This rule was not too strictly followed in the past (cf. {the} *Menology, passim*<sup>66</sup>). The cemetery *may be* divided into three parts (*Usages, 287<sup>67</sup>*): priests, monks, brothers. Here there is no division. {The} only distinction {is that} priests {are} buried with their feet to {the} west, others with feet to {the} east (*Usages, 500<sup>68</sup>*). {The} cross being at the head, the priests have their cross at {the} west end of {the} grave, others at {the} east {end}. It is surrounded by a wall or quickset hedge (haie vive);<sup>69</sup> box or hawthorn, etc. is okay. Crosses {are} of wood or iron, “painted black or white,”<sup>70</sup> {with an} inscription bearing the name, rank and date (choir religious in Latin, brothers in English). {On} the sanctity of the cemetery, cf. {the} rite for blessing of {a} cemetery {in the} *Ritual*.<sup>71</sup> It is especially consecrated to God, as a place which speaks symbolically of the fact that *He is the keeper, the protection and the hope of all*. Here the bodies of the faithful *rest, waiting for the last day*. They await *the day when they shall be reunited* to their glorified souls. The cemetery is indeed a very im-

64. *Regulations, 141–42.*

65. *Rituale, 5 (I, III, 9).*

66. *Menologium Cisterciense a Monachis Ordinis Cisterciensis Strictioris Observantiae*, ed. Séraphin Lenssen, ocsa (Westmalle, Belgium: Ex Typographia Ordinis, 1952); this is a collection of brief biographical notices, arranged by date, of notable deceased members of the Order (a mimeographed English translation was produced at Gethsemani in 1955).

67. *Regulations, 142.*

68. *Regulations, 236.*

69. *Regulations, 142*, which does not use the French term.

70. *Regulations, 142.*

71. *Rituale, 354–63 (VIII, x).*

portant part of the community, and those in the cemetery still form part of the community; indeed they are definitively “the community”—members with an eternal stability that will never be broken. Hence {there should be} great reverence and love for the cemetery and for those whose bodies rest there. The cemetery should remind us not only of the fact that we must one day die, but primarily and above all that our bodies will one day be reunited with our souls in glory, if we are faithful to our vocation. The cemetery is a place of rest—in what sense? First, {it is} protected against the evil spirits. It is guarded by its own guardian angel. Then {it is} a place where bodies rest in hope, then a place which symbolizes Christ Himself, the protection and “rest” of the faithful. Some prayers from the *Ritual* for the blessing of a cemetery:

Lord God, shepherd of eternal glory, light and honor of wisdom, guardian and strength of prudence, health of the sick, strength of the healthy, consolation of the sorrowful, life of the just, glory of the humble, we earnestly beseech Thee that this cemetery of Thy faithful servants may be protected by Thee from every defilement of evil and attack of the spirits of darkness. We beg Thee to purify and bless it, and to grant without ceasing perseverance in truth [*sinceritatem perpetuam*] to the bodies of those who come to this place, and that those who have received the sacrament of baptism and have persevered in the Catholic faith until the end of their lives and in the course of time have ended their days and commended their bodies to rest in this cemetery, may receive the everlasting reward of heavenly joy, both in body and soul, when the angels sound their trumpets. Through Christ Our Lord . . .<sup>72</sup>

Lord Jesus Christ, Who didst form the human body from earth to repair the gaps in the ranks of the angels and Who hast assumed this very body to Thyself for our Redemption, who dost cause the body to return to dust by reason of man’s sin, and Who wilt raise it again from dust

72. *Rituale*, 357–58 (Merton’s translation).

unto immortality, we beg Thee to consecrate this plot of ground for burial by the blessing which flows from the mystery of Thine own burial. And we beg Thee to grant that those who have been buried together with Thee in baptism, and who by nature of the flesh are here to be buried together, may in the hope of Thy Resurrection rest in the mercy of Thy Redemption . . .<sup>73</sup>

How much theology {there is} in this wonderful prayer. All these truths are present in the sacred ground of the cemetery, and we should not cease to learn them from it.

*Visiting the cemetery:* N.B. {the} indulgences {that are given}: seven years for a visit to the cemetery any day of the year, applicable only to the poor souls, {under the} condition {of} prayer, even mental, for the dead; during the octave of All Souls, for the same {exercise, there is a} plenary indulgence each day, under the usual conditions. {Visiting the cemetery is} a good daily practice, but especially on Sundays or {on a} day of recollection:

a) to pray for the dead, especially those we ourselves have known. True piety, an essential virtue of the monk, renews the eternal bond that binds us to our brethren, a certain spiritual affection which is a great grace {and} aids in compunction; while we pray for them, we may also believe that they pray for us, especially since so many are saints high in heaven.

b) {it} makes us think of the mercy of God, of the mystery of our vocation, to walk among these quiet graves among the wooded hills of our solitude. How many have come from far to end here by mysterious ways, led by God's Providence. {There is} humility {in} realizing that our ways are not God's ways, and how many of us, if left to ourselves, would have ended anywhere but in a monastery.

c) {it reminds us of our} hope of eternal reward and the final coming of the Kingdom {and gives us} strength to continue on

73. *Rituale*, 358 (Merton's translation).

the way of our own vocation, {fostering} “preparation for death” in hope rather than in shuddering.

The cemetery is indeed important to a Trappist, but not in the sense of the popular legend of digging a bit out of the grave each day, etc. {In} *our cemetery*, the big cement cross {marks} the mingled remains of the founders—*abbates in pace*<sup>74</sup>—some of the monks and brothers. Our Blessed Mother presides over the cemetery. {Note} the silence of summer evenings in the cemetery. *Pax Domini . . .*<sup>75</sup>

*The Cloisters* {are} the center of the monastic family life, the normal place of reading and meditative prayer (with the church). The cloister is ideally an open arched walk around the four sides of an enclosed garden. All the main regular places are normally supposed to open on to the cloister. It corresponds to the patio in the houses of Mediterranean lands. To understand the cloister we must think of those dwellings. They present a bare and austere front to the outside, almost without windows. Once inside the house, all is different—there are flowers, fountains, statues, rooms opening out into the central court, etc. {This is} the atrium of the ancient Romans. The cloister with its “préau” or “garth” should normally then be a place of (1) silence; (2) light; (3) peace; (4) shelter; (5) delight ({an} enclosed garden<sup>76</sup>). {According to} St. Peter Damian, “the cloister on all four sides turns inward and away from the world, that the very location should show you that you must turn away from the noise and manners of the world.”<sup>77</sup> Historically, the cloister in ancient Benedictine monasteries was divided up for various purposes. One wing, usually the north, along the church, was the reading place of the monks. Another was for the novices, another for students. The west wing

74. “fathers [resting] in peace”.

75. “Peace of the Lord [be always with you]” (*Missale Cisterciense* [Westmalle: Ex Typographia Ordinis Cist. Strict. Obs., 1951], 228; *Missale Romanum*, 28<sup>th</sup> ed. [Turonibus: Sumptibus et Typis Mame, 1952], 358).

76. Song of Songs 4:12.

77. *De Perfecta Monachi Informatione*, 10 (PL 145, col. 729C).

was for material business. The monk was known as a *claustralis*—one who lived in the cloister. For a *claustralis* to return to the world was for a dweller in heaven to fall into hell (Peter of Blois).<sup>78</sup> “*Nulla vita fidelior, nulla simplicior, nulla felicio, quam eorum, qui humiliter in claustris degunt, abjectione sua gaudentes*” (John of Salisbury).<sup>79</sup> *The Usages* (288<sup>80</sup>) prescribe a statue of Our Lady in the part of the cloister where the compline reading takes place (normally the part along the church). Our Lady presides over the community. The statue is a material sign of the fact. But the very nature of the cloister itself, as a garden enclosed, reminds us that Our Lady surrounds us with her own silence and peace and brings forth Christ in our souls as we read quietly in the cloister. The cloister itself is a symbol of Our Lady, Mediatrix of all grace. Hence the importance of a real cloister. However, the spirit of the cloister pervades our scriptoriums and gardens. *To preserve silence in a special way* (*Usages*, {290}<sup>81</sup>), we do not speak in the cloister (*Usages*, 328<sup>82</sup>). The cloister should be regarded as sacred. A special permission of the abbot is required before an outsider can enter the cloister. The doors which lead from the guest house or any other outside place to the cloister must be kept shut, or even locked if necessary. There must be no door through which an outsider can freely enter into the inside of the monastery. This goes also for the gardens. If guests are to be taken through, (a) we must NOT bring them in when the community is at *lectio*; (b) we must NOT speak to them there, any more than we do in church, chapter or refectory (*Usages*, 328<sup>83</sup>). In order to keep the cloister quiet and peaceful, great attention should be paid to

78. *Epistola* 142 (PL 207, col. 426C).

79. “There is no life more faithful, more simple, more happy, than that of those who humbly dwell in the cloister, rejoicing in their own lowliness” (*Poly-craticus*, Bk. 7, c. 21 [PL 199, col. 695D], which reads: “. . . *qui in claustris fideliter degunt, et humiliter abjectione . . .*”).

80. *Regulations*, 142.

81. *Regulations*, 143 (typescript reads: “*Usages*, 289”).

82. *Regulations*, 159.

83. *Regulations*, 159.