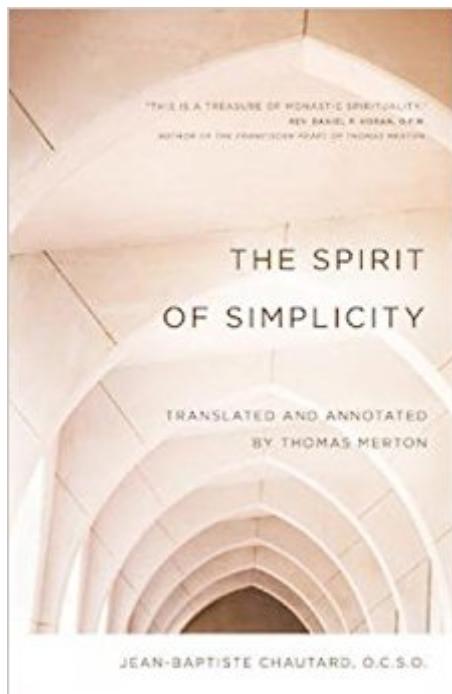


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The Spirit Of Simplicity



Synopsis

Few people have ever seen or heard of *The Spirit of Simplicity* : it has been hidden for almost seventy years after quietly being published by the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1948. Anonymously translated and annotated by a young monk named Thomas Merton, the book's author--who also is not mentioned by name in the original edition--is Jean-Baptiste Chautard, the famous French Cistercian whose only other book, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, has been a favorite of modern saints and popes, including Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Every generation struggles with the question of simplicity. In the history of our faith, there have been no more eloquent voices calling us back to simplicity than the monks of the Cistercian Order, from Bernard of Clairvaux to Chautard to Merton--all of whom contribute to this powerful book. Merton surrounds Chautard's text with his own remarks on simplicity, translations of classic texts by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and commentary that allows readers to pursue the themes of simplicity in their own lives. "Only a very inadequate idea of exterior simplicity can be arrived at if we do not trace it back to its true source: interior simplicity. Without this, our resolution to practice exterior simplicity would be without light, without love," Chautard wrote at the beginning of the book. He is writing to his fellow Cistercians, but he might as well be speaking to twenty-first century Christians. He goes on to lay out the best disciplines that a monk--or anyone--might practice to find the elusive simplicity, with quotations from St. Benedict, St. Bernard, and other pillars of monastic life and spirituality. A dozen photographs of Cistercian architecture illustrate how principles of simplicity are incorporated into Cistercian daily life. In Part 2, Merton opens up the teachings of St. Bernard, a great mystic and doctor of the Church, offering excerpts from St. Bernard's writings on the original simplicity in the Garden of Eden, the difficulty of intellectual simplicity, the simplicity of the will (obedience), and other kindred topics. Merton also offers personal reflections from the perspective of one who had recently exchanged an active life in pursuit of worldly things for the solitude of a monk.

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Customer Reviews

"This is a treasure of monastic spirituality that brings together the hearts, minds, and insights of two of the greatest Trappist authors of the modern era: Jean-Baptiste Chautard and Thomas Merton."

--Rev. Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M., Author of The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton "We need simplicity now more than ever. This lost classic of Trappist spirituality unites the voices of two of the great Catholic writers of the Twentieth century. It reveals how simplicity is an essential quality of a holy life. While written for monks, it is--like The Rule of Saint Benedict--filled with wisdom for all. Read it slowly and prayerfully."

--Carl McColman, Author of Befriending Silence "Jean-Baptiste Chautard and a young Thomas Merton flesh out the implications for a contemplative life centered on attending to the grace of simply recognizing the 'gaze of God' within all one's experiences. Abbot Elias Dietz places these classic essays in their context and provides contemporary resources for further study and practical application."

--Jonathan Montaldo, General editor of the Fons Vitae Thomas Merton Series "Well over a half-century old, The Spirit of Simplicity is a remarkably approachable text, and it is still able to serve its original purpose as an entryway into Cistercian spirituality. Together with selections from St. Bernard's works, it remains a kind of classic Cistercian Life 101."

--From the preface by Abbot Elias Dietz, O.C.S.O., The Abbey of Gethsemani

One of the leading Catholic figures at the turn of the twentieth century, Jean-Baptiste Chautard, O.C.S.O. (1858-1935), was a French Trappist abbot and religious writer. He was integral in the expansion of his Cistercian Order, even achieving the purchase of Citeaux Abbey in France, where Cistercianism began around 1100. Chautard was later responsible for new foundations in Belgium and Latin America. He is best known for his book, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, which has been translated into many languages. Several popes have recommended Chautard's work, including Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who cited it during his visit to Lourdes in 2008. Thomas Merton (1915-1968) is widely acclaimed as one of the most influential spiritual masters of the twentieth century. A Trappist monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky, he was a poet, social activist, and student of comparative religion. In 1949, he was ordained to the priesthood and given the name Father Louis. Merton wrote more than seventy books, mostly on spirituality, social justice, and a

quiet pacifism, as well as scores of essays and reviews, including his best-selling autobiography, The Seven Storey Mountain. Abbot Elias Dietz, O.C.S.O., is abbot of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky.

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