

Redeeming Holy Leisure: Leclercq, Merton and *Otia Monastica*

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Introduction

The origins of *otia sancta* (sacred or holy leisure) go back to Classical Antiquity.¹ The Desert Fathers and Mothers, and later, the early monastic founders such as St Augustine, St Basil of Caesarea and St Benedict, embraced *otia sancta*, often without explicitly mentioning it, as the foundation upon which monastic life flourished. *Otia sancta* was transformed into *otia monastica*. The *fuga mundi*, the flight from the world, the search for solitariness and silence (*quies*), time spent in private and communal prayer free from distractions (*vacatio*) sacred reading (*lectio divina*), contemplation, coming together for the Sabbath (*sabbatum*), were indispensable elements of this unique kind of leisure. But for many, even for those living in monasteries, the contemporary experience of leisure is a far more mundane affair, often divorced from its spiritual and religious foundations. The history of Christian monasticism has witnessed many reforms, frequently associated with attempting to bring monastic observance back into line with their founders' original vision. Two such reformers were Jean Leclercq and Thomas Merton. This paper attempts to map out their common interest in *otia monastica*.

Different Lives under a Common Rule

The friendship between Thomas Merton (1916-1968) and the Benedictine monk and scholar Jean Leclercq (1911-1993) is well documented, especially in their exchange of letters. Dating from 1950 to 1968 these were later published in *Survival and Prophecy*.² Leclercq and Merton were both monks following the *Rule of Benedict* (RB) but in different ways.³ Leclercq was a Benedictine monk of Clervaux, Luxembourg. Merton, in contrast, a monk of an enclosed and much stricter observance in the reformed Trappist monastery of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, USA. Br. Patrick Hart

(1925-2019), a contemporary of Merton's at Gethsemani and a prolific editor of Merton's literary output, describes these collection of letters as a microcosm of the history of monastic renewal in the mid-twentieth century. Quoting Bernard McGinn (b. 1937) on the book jacket of the American Edition of *Survival and Prophecy*, Hart adds, 'when the history of twentieth century monasticism comes to be written, it is hard not to think that two monks will dominate the story: Thomas Merton and Jean Leclercq.'⁴

What brought these two monks together? The initial contact was made through a shared interest in the writings of the Cistercian Fathers especially Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). The Abbey of Gethsemani possessed a number of manuscripts in its vault some of which Leclercq was anxious to get copies. Merton writing to Leclercq on April 22, 1950 informs him that a microfilm of St Bernard's sermons is on its way. Subsequent correspondence gives the reader an insight into a range of shared common interests: in addition to the Cistercian fathers, monastic spirituality and its relationship between Western Christian monasticism and Eastern religions, the nature of contemplation and the tensions between the contemplative and the active life, ecumenical dialogue, non-Christian forms of monasticism. Both men, born in the wake of the destruction of the First World War, lived through the 1960's and Vatican II.

It was the writings of these two monks, the exchange of correspondence, interspersed with several face to face meetings, (mainly at Gethsemani), that brought them closer together.⁵ As the letters between the two monks testify, over the years, Leclercq formed an enduring relationship with Merton. It was Leclercq who extended to Merton the fateful invitation to the Inter-Monastic Conference in Bangkok in December 1968 where Merton, at the age of 53, was tragically and accidentally electrocuted. Merton had been a Trappist monk for only twenty-seven years.

Leclercq: Scholar and Teacher

As Leclercq's autobiographical memoir reveals, after initial formation, he spent a great deal of his time outside his monastery engaged in studying, researching, writing and teaching. In his foreword to *Survival and Prophecy*, Abbot Rembert Weakland (b.1927) comments:

Jean Leclercq went to everybody and every place on the globe; everyone came to Thomas Merton at Gethsemani. Yet from the letters it is clear that the two men were following similar paths and had similar aspirations for the future of monasticism.⁶

While the influence of Benedictine monasticism, in all its different offerings, had started to decline in Europe and North America, throughout Africa, South America, India, Asia and the Far East it had started to increase. Thus Leclercq's research and teaching involved extensive travelling, not only

through Europe and North America, but to all five continents where the monastic orders were growing and in need of some encouragement backed up by academic expertise — in his memoirs Leclercq reports that he visited fifty-five countries.⁷ In other monastic houses this amount of travelling may have seemed excessive but it enabled Leclercq to experience a wide range of cultures especially when he visited India, Asia, Africa and South America. His memoirs and letters provide us with a comprehensive overview of how monasticism was developing during the twentieth century, especially in the developing world. Through the talks and lectures he gave to newly established monastic communities Leclercq was able to share his encyclopaedic knowledge of monastic sources. They also provide a glimpse into the links between other Christian monasteries (for instance the Anglican, Episcopalian and ecumenical communities) and, just as important, non-Christian monasticism, especially those found in the Buddhist and Hindu religions.

Although Leclercq frequently alluded to *otia monastica* he does not seem to have been attracted to the enclosed and stricter contemplative life espoused by other monastics, such as the Trappist Thomas Merton, where the monastic routine was far more geared to the *otia* of contemplative life. Although Leclercq spent most of his professed monastic life either studying in Italy or France, travelling, and teaching or lecturing internationally, his superiors recognised that this was where his strengths lay.

In the inter-war years the lives of Leclercq and Merton had taken different paths. From an early age Leclercq had always wanted to become a monk, whereas Merton's calling to the monastic life came much later. As documented in their respective autobiographical writings Leclercq's path to the monastery was far more conventional. Brought up in a stable Catholic family, as a teenager he followed the usual secondary lycée education. Then, at the age of 17, he joined the monastery of *Saint Maurice* at Clervaux in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. After his monastic and priestly formation the academically gifted Leclercq moved onto postgraduate studies spending time at some of the most prestigious academic institutions in Rome and France. These included the international Benedictine university in Rome, Sant'Anselmo, and in France the Sorbonne, Institut Catholique, Collège de France and L'École des Hautes-Études where Leclercq came into contact with many eminent Catholic scholars. Writing in his memoirs Leclercq mentions that the teaching of Anselm Stoltz (1900-1942)⁸ and Erik Peterson (1890-1960)⁹ were of great influence during his formative years as a young student at Sant'Anselmo. Over a period of thirty years, one of Leclercq's crowning achievements was the critical edition of the works of Bernard of Clairvaux. But, the latter represents only a small part of his vast literary output. One recent comprehensive bibliography of his work

compiled in 1995 by Michael Martin runs to eighty-eight pages and is based on five earlier bibliographies.¹⁰ Leclercq had extensive experience as a historical researcher under the guidance of a number of eminent scholars.¹¹ This was to impact on the way that Leclercq systematised his research into the deeper meaning of the focus of this article, *otia monastica*. As he wrote in his memoirs:

He (Peterson) and Fr. Stoltz drew our attention to the importance of words and the history of their meanings. This concern never left me, and it appeared in my two volumes¹² in the *Studia Anselmiana* dedicated to the monastic vocabulary of the Middle Ages.¹³

Leclercq understood the importance of going back to original documents and critical texts, and devoted a great deal of his academic research to examining, in great detail, the origins and development of monastic practices and concepts such as contemplation and *otia monastica*.¹⁴ The second volume, focusing on *otia monastica*, was a sequel to an earlier work *Études sur le Vocabulaire Monastique du Moyen Âge* in which Leclercq examined the nature of the contemplative life in the early monastic tradition.¹⁵ This sequel, *Otia Monastica: Études sur le Vocabulaire de la Contemplation au Moyen Âge* explores the relevant influences and texts connected with *otia monastica*.¹⁶ In addition to the term *otia* Leclercq's methodology focuses on a detailed and systematic linguistic analysis of other key terms associated with *otia* such as *quies*, *vacatio* and *sabbatum* in Patristic and medieval texts. Each of these contributed to a deeper understanding of *otia monastica*. Further helping us to understand the spiritual and psychological nature of *otia monastica* Leclercq highlights the dangers of a fifth category *acedia*.¹⁷

In the early Christian monastic tradition this vice of *acedia* was not only associated with idleness but with too much talking and malicious gossip also.¹⁸ Evagrius Pontus (c. 346-399) was the first Christian monk to write extensively on *acedia*.¹⁹ His importance lies not only in the content of his writing but also in the fact that he had a significant influence on Cassian (c.360-c.435). Furthermore, Evagrius provides an important link between Eastern and Western thought because he transmitted in his writings many of Origen's central ideas which in turn had been shaped by the pagan Greek philosophers, especially Plato.

In his *The Institutes* Cassian devotes a whole section to *acedia*.²⁰ Drawing on the example of the industriousness of the St Paul and the teaching of the Desert Fathers, Cassian describes in graphic detail the symptoms of *acedia* and the justification for rooting out this vice which, he says, is sometimes called the 'noonday demon' mentioned in Psalm 90 (91):²¹

Once this has seized possession and also disdainful and contemptuous of his brothers who live with him or at a slight distance, as being careless or unspiritual. Likewise it renders him slothful and immobile in face of all the work to be done within the walls of his dwelling. It does not allow him to stay still in his cell or to devote any effort to reading.²²

Then, the monk listless and hungry as if he had engaged in a long fast, looks for an opportunity to leave his cell, or for some other distraction:

Next he glances around anxiously here and there and sighs that none of the brothers is coming to see him. Constantly in and out of his cell, he looks at the sun as if it were too slow in setting. So filled is he with a kind of irrational confusion of mind, like a foul mist, and so disengaged and blank has he become to any spiritual activity that he thinks that no other remedy for such an attack can be found than the visit of a brother or the solace of sleep alone.²³

Quoting principally from St Paul's two *Letters to the Thessalonians*, Cassian wishes to highlight the dangers of acedia and the way in which it can lead the monk through idleness to spiritual bankruptcy.²⁴

The Rule of Benedict famously commences the chapter on the daily manual labour (RB 48:1) with the phrase, 'idleness is the enemy of the soul', which has its origins in the *Book of Sirach*: 'Put him to work in order that he may not be idle, for idleness teaches much evil' (Sir.33:28-29), and another phrase attributed to King Solomon in the *Book of Proverbs* (31:27): 'She does not eat the bread of idleness.' Later on, in the same chapter, the RB exhorts the seniors to be alert for apathetic brothers.

One or two seniors must surely be deputed to make the rounds of the monastery while the brothers are reading. Their duty is to see that no brother is so apathetic to waste time or engage in idle talk to the neglect of his reading, and so not only harm himself but distract others. (RB 48:17-18)

In addition to highlighting the dangers of idleness or *otiositas* and *acediosus* the RB warns monks in the opening lines of the Prologue against sloth (*desidia*), or more specifically the 'sloth of disobedience' (RB Prologue v.1). In each of the above instances the RB is following the tradition of Cassian, the *Regula Basilii* and the *Rule of the Master* in giving a negative interpretation of *otia*.

Leclercq's seminal work on monastic culture, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, was widely acclaimed beyond the cloister.²⁵ In this treatise, amongst other things, Leclercq promotes the idea of a monastic theology, (a prolongation of Patristic theology as he calls it), as opposed to a

Thomistic or Systematic theology:

The difference between scholastic theology and monastic theology corresponds to the differences between the two states of life: the state of the Christian life in the world and the state of the Christian life in the religious life. The latter was what was, in fact, until the end of the twelfth century, unanimously called the 'contemplative life'.²⁶

Another important work, published by Leclercq in 1955, was about the life and spiritual doctrine of the Camaldolese mystic and reformer Paul Giustiniani (1476-1528) who in 1520 founded the monastery of Montecorona in what is now Umbria, Italy.²⁷ Although Leclercq did not set out to deliberately write a treatise on *otia monastica* the spiritual doctrine of Giustiniani expounds a rule for an 'amiable solitary' which is built around the monastic understanding of leisure, the *otia negotiosissimum*, which St Bernard writes about.²⁸

Merton was particularly interested in the Camaldolese and for a while explored the possibility of transferring from Gethsemani to the Camaldolese monastery at Arezzo in Italy. (see Letter of April 27, 1955).²⁹ At Leclercq's request Merton wrote the preface to the earlier French edition of *Alone with God*. (*Seul avec Dieu: La Vie Eremetique*.)

The Camaldolese Order, to which Giustiniani belonged, is now part of the Benedictine family of monks and nuns. It was founded around 1012 by St Romuald (950-1025/27). Like the later Cistercians, it was a Benedictine reform. However, in contrast to the Cistercians, with its emphasis on community life, the Camaldolese sought to blend the coenobitic and eremitical life, the latter based on the model of the Desert Fathers. Although its provisions for solitude were not as demanding as those of the Carthusians, it made greater provision for solitude and contemplation than the regular coenobitic life of the Benedictines. This rule of life was loosely based on the Eastern monastic model of the *laura*.³⁰ Giustiniani eventually went on to establish a new eremitical congregation of his own.³¹

Quoting from the writings of Giustiniani, Leclercq links the concept of solitariness and leisure together:

The hermit in his solitude is free from all the ordinary occupations of other men. In this sense the solitary life is a life of leisure. Contrary to what one might think, however, it is a leisure full of work, the most laborious of leisures, *negotiosissimum otium*. It must be so: otherwise eremitic life would be worthless rather than useful.³²

He stresses the importance of keeping the balance of this work in favour of 'innumerable and endless' spiritual occupations. Again, quoting Giustiniani:

Those who have ever practiced the occupations of religious leisure imagine that a solitary is constantly overwhelmed by inactivity and

idleness, bored stiff, full of regrets, like a sleepy man, or an irrational animal that lets the time pass doing nothing. ... I declare that long years of experience have proved that the more I am solitary, the less I am idle. Only when I am not solitary am I inert, subject to boredom and regret. ... Is it idleness to read, to study, to compose, to write? Is it idleness to examine our conscience, to regulate the soul's affections, to recall our past life, to put in order carefully our present life, to provide prudently for the future?³³

In the introduction to Giustiniani's doctrine Leclercq describes Giustiniani's early life:

Study absorbed him for many years, first in his own city (Venice), then at the University of Padua, and finally on the island of Murano, where he sought a leisure free from distraction. As a humanist imbued with Stoic doctrine, he renounced the pleasures of the flesh and turned increasingly towards God. Without forgetting Seneca and Cicero, whose books led to his conversion, he nourished his soul on the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, the monastic writers of the Middle Ages, and the Great Scholastics.³⁴

It is worth noting that Leclercq uses the term 'leisure free from distraction'. It is also striking that Leclercq makes reference to the influence of Stoic doctrine and two pre-Christian writers, Seneca and Cicero. In spite of his close contact with Montecorona, Leclercq was never attracted to their way of life, especially their solitariness. At the invitation of its Abbot, Leclercq wrote the book on Giustiniani during a short sojourn at the monastery. He comments that he found the isolation of the hermitage so difficult he had to make weekly excursions to Rome to escape!

In the chapter on the occupations of the hermit Leclercq emphasises that the hermit, in his solitude, is free from all the ordinary occupations of other men. Going on to quote from the Giustiniani's monastic rule for Montecorona Leclercq continues:

All must keep busy at manual work during the proper and prescribed time for it. Then they must devote other definite hours to reading, prayer, and other spiritual exercises, so that the whole length of the day and night may seem short and insufficient. There should always be more to do than there is time for. Woe to him who begins to find the days too long.³⁵

From these short passages we start to discern how the concept of *otia monastica* manifests itself in the daily routine of a Montecorona monk. How does this holy leisure impact on the monk's daily round of work and prayer? Leclercq draws the attention of the reader to two different individual timetables for the hermit monk.

They are characterised by a perfect equilibrium between all the needs of the body and those of the spirit. With winning naturalness the author passes from the most concrete details to sublime considerations.³⁶

This reaffirmation of the importance of holy leisure and solitariness was part of their overall project for monastic renewal. In the view of both Leclercq and Merton the monastic life was in need of radical reform. It had become moribund and had lost sight of its foundational charism. Already, we are starting to see what *otia monastica* looks like, how it is organised and what impact its practice has on the daily monastic life. The challenge, as we ponder these authors, is to articulate what ways these and other texts we are considering might shape our understanding of leisure in the 21st century.

Merton: Contemplative and Radical

In contrast, Merton does not write expansively, in any explicit way, about *otia monastica* but he cared passionately about it. It was this perceived lack of *otia monastica* at Gethsemani that drove him to seek greater solitude and silence. First outside his monastery in either a Carthusian or Camaldoli setting and finally, with the permission of his Abbot, in a hermitage in the Abbey grounds.

As any student of Merton's life and writings will know he was the last person to have claimed to be a 'theologian' in the accepted academic sense. Yet, his secondary education in Europe especially those formative years in France at a French Lycée and then at Oakham School and Cambridge University in England, equipped Merton with several languages that enabled him to read fluently not only in English, but also in French and Latin. Merton did not squander this ability, and threw his net widely to embrace not just theology, but philosophy, history, biography and poetry.

In a deferential tone to Leclercq, although his senior by only four years, Merton was acutely aware of this lack of formal theological training. In a letter dated October 22, 1964 Merton writes to Leclercq to provide some feedback on a meeting of Trappist Abbots and Novice Masters which had gathered at Gethsemani earlier in the month.³⁷ In his role as novice master Merton had been invited to speak, and in his response to Leclercq he enclosed some notes he had made at the meeting suggesting that these might form a basis for an article in a forthcoming edition of the Cistercian journal *Collectanea Cisterciensia*.³⁸ This meeting of Abbots and Novice Masters had covered a range of topics including the balance between living in community and solitude including progression to the eremitical life. Merton comments:

I personally am as convinced as anyone of the importance of the cenobitic life, since without it normally there can be no basis for further solitude. The hermit will be the exception, the cenobite will be normal, and it is important, I think, to present the extension into solitude as a normal and legitimate prolongation of what begins in the cenobium, and temporary solitude as a dimension of the cenobitic life itself. Thus the rare case of the complete hermit will later on come to be accepted with less difficulty.³⁹

Finally, right at the end of the letter, there is a short two line 'thank you' note. Merton concludes:

Your *Otia* [Leclercq's new book 'Leisure'] came yesterday and I began it immediately. It is just what I am looking for. A splendid book.⁴⁰

Merton does not provide us with any elaborate exposition of *Otia*. However, the lack of it in his monastic life was an obvious concern. As he matured into the monastic life Merton yearned for more of this sacred monastic leisure. He struggled with the tensions between the active and the contemplative life and its relationship to his personal search for solitude.

For Merton, *otia monastica* was part of what it meant to be a monk. Sacred or holy leisure was implicit in the daily monastic routine. It was taken for granted and formed an indispensable foundation to his and every other monks' search for solitude which he continually refers to, not only the exchange of letters with Leclercq, but in many other places. Merton did not want to examine the origins of *otia monastica* so much, rather he wanted to experience it. The only times Merton seems to feel a need to write about *otia monastica* is when it is violated. The noise of machinery, agricultural equipment, the guns and hunting dogs of neighbouring farmers, is a constant irritant. He resents too the incursions of commercialisation in the monastery that had resulted in cheese production and other activities. Merton's approach and understanding of sacred leisure or *otia monastica* was different to that of Leclercq. Although each had chosen to live a life guided by the *RB* each emphasised the importance and experience of *otia monastica* in different ways. In short, Merton wanted to deepen his experience of sacred leisure whereas Leclercq wanted to write about it. Leclercq was more interested in its literary sources and development.

Conclusion

One of the classic twentieth century texts on leisure which Merton had obviously read was Josef Pieper's *Leisure the Basis of Culture* (1952). In December 1959, speaking of Pieper's seminal work Merton wrote:

One thing is sure - we do not in this monastery have any faith in the basic value of *otium sanctum* [sacred leisure]. We believe

only in the difficult and the unpleasant. That is why we, in practice, *hate* the contemplative life and destroy it with constant activity.⁴¹

The comment about the tensions between community life and living in solitude expressed a concern dear to Merton's heart. What was the role of the hermit in the context of monastic community? Was the call to a life of greater silence and solitude a natural progression from the coenobium? Certainly Merton and Leclercq thought it was. In less than eight years after his arrival at Gethsemani Merton was sharing with Leclercq his yearning for a more eremitical existence. In one of his earliest letters to Merton (July 29, 1950), Leclercq had written:

I quite understand your aspirations to the solitary life. I think there has always been an eremitical tradition in the Cistercian and Benedictine Orders.⁴²

In his book, *Blessed Simplicity*, Raimundo Panikkar asks if the monastic vocation is a universal archetype? He writes,

The monk is an expression of an archetype which is a constitutive dimension of human life. This archetype is a unique quality of each person, which at one needs and shuns institutionalisation.⁴³

I would suggest that we all have a monastic vocation irrespective of our state in life. By drawing our attention to the importance of *otia monastica* both Merton and Leclercq in different ways open up the importance of 'the monk within' and of making time for sacred leisure in our life. This has manifested itself through an increased interest not only in Merton's writings but more widely in the search for some form of contemplative practice including such practices as Christian mindfulness.⁴⁴ Merton and Leclercq's interest in Eastern Religions and inter-monastic dialogue in the 1960's opened up to the lay reader sources for greater discovery. One wonders what kind of legacy an ongoing partnership between Leclercq and Merton might have produced for the troubled times of our twenty-first century if Merton's life had not been so tragically cut short?

Notes

1. The importance of leisure can be traced back to the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. This was later taken up by Roman philosophers such as Cicero and Seneca. These classical authors were part of the cultural milieu in which the Early Church grew. Many of their texts could be found in the monastic libraries. In spite of their classical origins references to holy leisure anticipate the Christian contemplative life. Whereas work, especially manual labour was

- the preserve of servants and slaves the early Christian Fathers were anxious to make servile work not only respectable but an integral part of daily Christian living.
2. Jean Leclercq, and Thomas Merton, *Survival or Prophecy?* (Collegeville, Minnesota, USA: Cistercian Publications, 2008).
 3. Monasteries and convents following the Rule of Benedict (RB) are usually part of a congregation which have their own constitutions. These constitutions interpret the RB according to each congregation's traditions and current needs. The constitutions of the *Trappists* or the *Order of Cistercians of Strict Observance* (OCSO) date from the 17th century reform at the mother house of *La Trappe*, (hence Trappist) in France, led by Abbot de Rancé (1626-1700).
 4. William H Shannon, Christine M Bochen, and Patrick F O'Connell, eds., *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 460
 5. Leclercq, and Merton. Jean Leclercq made several visits to Gethsemani Abbey. See also Thomas Merton, *School of Charity: Thomas Merton's Letters*, ed. Patrick O.C.S.O Hart (New York, USA: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990).
 6. *Survival or Prophecy?*, p. ix.
 7. *Survival or Prophecy?*, p. 109. Jean Leclercq, *Memoirs: From Grace to Grace* (Petersham, Massachusetts, USA: St Bede's Publications, 2000).
 8. Fr Anselm Stoltz OSB (1900-1942) was a German Benedictine monk, scholar and spiritual director. He drew heavily on Patristic sources. His *Doctrine of Spiritual Perfection* has recently been translated into English (2013). He died prematurely at the age of 42 from a disease contracted whilst hearing the confessions of soldiers in the trenches during WW II.
 9. Erik Petersen (1890-1960) was a historian of ancient religions but lost his university chair in Germany when he converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism in 1930. He had to leave Germany and found refuge on the Aventine near Sant'Anselmo. He became a professor at the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology.
 10. See in E Rozanne Elder, ed., *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Studies in Honor of Jean Leclercq* (Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA - Spencer, Massachusetts, USA: Cistercian Publications, 1995).(1995) pp.415-498
 11. For instance Etienne Gilson (1894-1978) and Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) whose lectures he attended in Rome and Paris.
 12. Jean Leclercq, *Etudes sur le vocabulaire monastique du moyen age*, vol. XLVIII, *Studia Anselmiana* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S.Anselmi, 1961), Jean Leclercq, *Otia Monastica: Études sur le Vocabulaire de la Contemplation au Moyen Âge*, *Studia Anselmiana* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S Anselmi, 1963).
 13. Leclercq, *Memoirs: From Grace to Grace*, p. 33.
 14. Leclercq, *Otia Monastica: Études sur le Vocabulaire de la Contemplation au Moyen Âge*.
 15. Leclercq, *Etudes sur le vocabulaire monastique du moyen age*.
 16. Leclercq, *Otia Monastica: Études sur le Vocabulaire de la Contemplation au Moyen Âge*.
 17. The term *acedia* can be found several times in the Greek LXX, for instance in Psalm 119:28, where it is translated as 'sorrow' or in Isaiah 61:3 where it is translated as 'faint spirit'. Later, its meaning was modified to convey sadness, spiritual torpor and sloth as in the Third Vision of *The Shepherd Hermas*, 'For, like elderly men who have no hope of renewing their strength, and expect nothing but their last sleep, so you, weakened by worldly occupations, have given yourselves up to sloth, and have not cast your cares upon the Lord. Your spirit therefore is broken, and you have grown old in your sorrows of a wretched mind it makes a person horrified at where he is, disgusted with his cell.'
 18. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (ODCC) describes *acedia* as a state of restlessness and inability to either work or pray. It was more commonly applied to monks and hermits but in its general use it described a state of listlessness or torpor, of not caring or not being concerned with one's position or condition in the world leading to an inability to discharge one's duties in life. In some cases it is linked to depression.
 19. Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger O.C.S.O (Kentucky, USA: Cistercian Publications, 1972).
 20. John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsey O.P., *Ancient Christian Writers*, ed. Dennis D McManus, Walter Burghardt, and John Dillon (New York, U.S.A.: The Paulist Press, 2000), pp. 219-234.
 21. Oppressed by the fierce heat of the desert the monk was the more vulnerable to *acedia*. 'You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, nor the plague that stalks in the darkness, nor the scourge that lays wastes at noon.' (Psalm 90:6)
 22. Cassian, Book X, II.1, p. 219.
 23. Cassian, Book X, II.3, p. 220.
 24. For example, 'But we urge you beloved to do so more and more, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we have directed you.' I Thes. 4:10; 'Nor did we eat anyone's bread for free.' (II Thes. 3:8a)
 25. This book was originally published (in French) in 1957 as *L'Amour des lettres et de désir de Dieu: Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du moyen âge*.
 26. Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: a Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi, Third ed. (New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 1982), p. 228. See also n.22 on p. 229.
 27. Jean Leclercq, *Alone with God*, trans. Elizabeth McCabe (Bloomington, Ohio, USA: Ercam Editions, 2008). Thomas Merton, increasingly dissatisfied by life at Gethsemani was attracted by the greater solitude that the eremitical dimension of the Camaldolese way of life offered. At Leclercq's request Merton wrote the preface to the French edition of *Alone with God*. Merton also explored the possibility of transferring to a Carthusian monastery.
 28. Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: a Study of Monastic Culture*, p. 67.
 29. *Survival or Prophecy?*, pp. 44-47.
 30. A *laura* or *lavra* was a colony of individual dwellings inhabited by hermits or anchorites subject to a single abbot. The oldest were found in Palestine in the

fourth century. Under the influence of Eastern Greek monks these were later replicated in Southern Italy.

31. The Camaldolese Hermits of the Congregation of Monte Corona, to give them their formal title, still have communities in Italy, Spain, Poland, South America and the USA. Unlike the Camaldolese they (Coronese) are not part of the Benedictine Confederation.
32. Leclercq, *Alone with God*, p. 62.
33. *Alone with God*, p. 64.
34. *Alone with God*, p. 11.
35. *Alone with God*, p. 62.
36. *Alone with God*, p. 62.
37. *Survival or Prophecy*, p. 89.
38. *Collectanea Cisterciensia*, is a French language journal, founded in 1933 at the instigation of the Trappist Order. It is devoted to contemporary issues relating to monastic spirituality especially those in the Cistercian tradition.
39. In less than a year after writing this letter (August 20, 1965), Merton had received permission from his Abbot, James Fox, to live as a hermit.
40. *Survival or Prophecy*, p. 89.
41. Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's True Life (1952-1960)*, ed. Lawrence S Cunningham, vol. 3 (San Francisco: Harper Collins E Books, 2007), p. 356.
42. Leclercq, and Merton.p.13 Here Leclercq is referring particularly to the *Rule of Benedict* Chapter 1, *The Four Kinds of Monks*. After living the trials of the monastery Benedict envisioned that some monks might legitimately be called to the life of a hermit.
43. Raimundo Panikkar, *Blessed simplicity: the monk as universal archetype* (New York, USA: Seabury Press, 1982), p. 11.
44. See for instance Peter Tyler, *Christian Mindfulness: Theology and Practice* (London: SCM, 2018), Ch.5 Thomas Merton 'Mindful clarity of heart', pp. 92-122.

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