



Nothing Dearer than Christ
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Monastic Voice

New Seeds of Contemplation by Thomas Merton, Fr
Louis Merton *ocso*

Nothing could be more alien to contemplation than the **cogito ergo sum** of Descartes. "I think, therefore I am." This is the declaration of an alienated being, in exile from his own spiritual depths, compelled to seek some comfort in a proof for his own existence(!) based on the observation that he "thinks." If his thought is necessary as a medium through which he arrives at the concept of his existence, then he is in fact only moving further away from his true being. He is reducing himself to a concept. He is making it impossible for himself to

experience, directly and immediately, the mystery of his own being. At the same time, by also reducing God to a concept, he makes it impossible for himself to have any intuition of the divine and he proves that the "thing" exists. He convinces himself: "I am therefore some thing." And then he goes on to convince himself that God, the infinite, the transcendent, is also a "thing," an "object," like other finite and limited objects of our thought !

Contemplation, on the contrary, is the experiential grasp of reality as subjective, not so much "mine" (which would signify "belonging to the external self") but "myself" in existential mystery. Contemplation does not arrive at reality after a process of deduction, but by an intuitive awakening in which our free and personal reality becomes fully alive to its own existential depths, which open out into the mystery of God. For the contemplative there is no **cogito** ("I think") and no **ergo** ("therefore") but only **SUM, I AM**. Not in the sense of a futile assertion of our individuality as ultimately real, but in the humble realization of our mysterious being as persons in whom God dwells, with infinite sweetness and inalienable power.

FROM THE OBLATEMASTER'S DESK:-

Thomas Merton--Fr. Louis--must be one of the best-known and most popular writers on monastic life and contemplation in the English speaking world in modern times. One of his most popular works "Seeds of Contemplation" and revised as "New Seeds of Contemplation" is as it promises a no assumptions seed

bed for cultivating that contemplative depth to our lives. Merton noted for his readable style and well qualified in English literature and language and as a writer on matters monastic, spiritual, and mystical as well as lived-out Christianity would not have claimed to be a philosopher in the academic sense. Does it not come as a surprise then that not far into "New Seeds of Contemplation" we come across the paragraphs quoted above on the "philosophy" of the Frenchman, René Descartes at the very outset of his method of inquiry. All of us have heard of this **cogito ergo sum** of Descartes, "I think, therefore I am," but have all of us identified it as unerringly as Fr. Louis as a wrong move? This one wrong move, as simple as a conjuror's sleight of hand "The quickness of the hand deceives the eye!" in one false move, virtually unobserved, sets in train the whole alienation of post-modern man, alienated from himself, glorying in the tinsels and pomps and fireworks of planes and nuclear reactors that do not feed man's soul far less his body.

The error is so simple, moving from the certain to the uncertain, from direct, living being, the first and most immediate certain to the indirect encounter with the other uncertain. It is going out of the temple of my being which is rooted in God's Being (the ground of our being) and locking the door behind me so that post-modern man must live on the glittering surface of reality and even the surface of his own life. This is a recipe for psychological disorder, alienation, depression, denial--exchanging wonder and mystery and prayer & God and

my own life too for number-crunching and the glittering mess of pottage of a computer for the Divine music of contemplation. Descartes was and is a good mathematician and perhaps he should have left it at that. "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

And so it is that many of us as yet barely coming out of "lockdown" and in a sense "locked in"(physically in the confines of our dwellings) but at the same time countless millions around the globe are suffering depression and worse through an anti-heritage of being "locked-out" of the very temple of their own being, their own life, and thus with a "road up" sign at the heart of the perceived vacuum of their being (where in fact their own being is hidden together with the pathway to Being the Being of God.

So we thank Thomas Merton for at the very outset of his book pointing us away from the cul-de-sac of disaster that both he and St Augustine had found after many tribulations to the charity that begins at home in the temple of my own being, rooted in Being, God---"Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would have not been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You

breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace." Contemplation.

Books and Media

New Seeds of Contemplation (1949) is one of Thomas Merton's most widely read and best-loved books. Christians and non-Christians alike have joined in praising it as a notable successor in the meditative tradition of St. John of the Cross, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and the medieval mystics. *New Seeds of Contemplation* seeks to awaken the dormant inner depths of the spirit so long neglected by post-modern Western man, to nurture a deeply contemplative and mystical dimension in our lives. For Merton, "Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, because men are not prepared to receive them: for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the soil of freedom, spontaneity and love

"ISBN 9780860122937 £8.00--or more or less, new or old. The oblate master may have a copy! (or at least one of Fr. Louis' other 50 books)

PLUSCARDEN BENEDICTINES--We give thanks to outgoing editor Fr. Benedict and thank him for all his work and we welcome Br. Cyprian Bampton as the new editor. All enquiries about the magazine that so many of you enjoy to him. £10 is a suggested subscription donation. For inclusion on the mailing list write Br. Cyprian Bampton OSB at the Abbey address -- **similarly subscriptions and changes of address to him, Br. Cyprian.**The magazine gives you the news of the Abbey-- like the death of Baxter the cat-- this, the Oblate Letter-- just gives a little thought from the Oblatemaster and some bulletin and prayer points nothing more. Both are quarterly, usually the third month of each quarter.

PLUSCARDEN LIVE STREAMING--go to our website and you will find a drop-down list leading you to it. Please forgive me for having allowed the advent of our live streaming to salve my conscience about not "Zooming" or "Skyping" or conferencing!--So far! See though below re Wednesday the 19th May.

Br. Michael is in charge of the live streaming.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR THOSE AWAITING A CHANCE TO COME TO MASS HERE AT THE ABBEY OR TO BOOK INTO THE GUESTHOUSES

1. **"BOOKING INTO MASS"--CONTACT BR MICHAEL**

2. ***Pluscarden Oblate Events 2021***

residential bookings:-

guestmaster.pluscarden@gmail.com for bookings for summer!

The Pluscarden website is the primary source for day to day information:

www.pluscardenabbey.org

SUMMER OBLATE RETREAT THISYEAR 2021NOW ONE WEEK LATER NB

6TH – 9TH AUGUST 2021

NOW CANON LUKE SMITH, OBLATE.

guestmaster.pluscarden@gmail.com for bookings

or write guestmaster Fr. Giles OSB

UK Oblates Team--announcements

confirming the following change to the schedule

11th National Retreat. Monday-Wednesday, 17th-19th May 2021 – Belmont Abbey:*This event is is cancelled.*

Our Own Bishop Richard Moth has agreed to lead a UKOT team retreat/reflection day online on Wednesday, 19th May.(see UKOT website to enter)

PRAYER INTENTIONS Abbot Anselm's intentions. Bishop Hugh's & Bishop Richard Moth's(Oblate) intentions. All virus sufferers living and dead and those supporting them. RIP Albert Paterson and Margaret Rawcliffe, Oblates both. For Canon Luke Smith(Oblate) Spiritual director Wonnersh & for Fr. Stuart Chalmers (Oblate) spiritual director of the Scots College in Spain &. For Prior Bede & For Fr. Ambrose Flavell in charge of the Shetlands.; vocations to St Mary's and St. Scholastica's, Petersham, U.S.A and Kristo Buase Priory. Joe Bagley, Robert Cantafio and his mother Margharita both occasionally hospitalised(Aberdeen and Italy),and John McKinlay, Jane Coll's granddaughter Natasha Gunn Fr.Francis Wilson(any news **still** welcomed by Oblatemaster), Mrs Anne Morgan, Janet Boyd Moss, Connie Reid, Mary Frances McGregor and her daughter Ruth. Please pray for the health of Fr. Matthew, Br. Cyprian, Br Finbar, Rev. Christopher Mayo, Rev. Angus Macleod(news and address welcome, for Gillian Cockwill's Mother, for Gail & Tony Schmitz. For Siobhan Gilmour's husband, for Mrs. Allie Brien, Margaret Johnston's mother, for Gitte Mackay, Martin Farrelly, Leonora Duson, and her daughter, and Margaret Rawcliffe, Joe Barrett, Maureen Woodhead& her Sister Doreen, Bob Barr, Brian Milne, Fiona Sellar, Johan(Joy) Baillie, Nick MaCrae. Martin MaCrae, Dr. David Paterson and his wife Angela, Jacqui Heath-Anderson and daughter Sally, Dr. Hester du Plessis, Poppy Sinclair, Ian & Frederick Brodie, for Pat Foster, Pam Woodhead, Carolyn, Marshall & Malcolm Boardman, and also for Eileen Kerr, Elizabeth MacKay, Peter and Brian Wynne, Susan Stephen, Cindy's husband, Danielle & her son

Osyp, Evelyn, Violet and Sheila, RIP Bernadette Harris, Alistair Macdonald and all the friends of the Abbey and for all Oblates, and for ALL the sick and those who care for them--and for our 3 sponsored seminarians. For vocations and all our novice and postulants, monks and Oblates and all our Oblates living and dead. All we have omitted or forgotten, living and dead.

Our three sponsored seminarians are all doing well. Their education has been disrupted with the global lockdowns that have been imposed. Uganda is now returning to normal and the seminarians have all returned to their formal studies. Please pray for them and for Sr Catherine, who does so much to keep everything running smoothly.

We have lost a further two Oblate contributors over the last 6 months, so we are always on the lookout for people wishing to contribute to this very worthwhile cause. For a donation of £10 per month you can play an important role in educating the Priests of the future.

(We are most grateful to Campbell Murdoch who has borne the heat of the day for these many years now and is now demitting office as coordinator and handing over as below-- Thank you Campbell!--Fr. Martin)

I am delighted to let you know that Oblate Penelope Coate will be taking over as the co-ordinator of the seminarian programme. Penelope and I will write to all of the current Oblate contributors over the coming

weeks with the details of the new bank account (you will need to cancel your current standing order and set-up a new one with Penelope).

Penelope Coate's contact details: penelopecoate@yahoo.com. 0794 9399592.

ALL THE CHAPTER'S ARE AT LEAST ON HOLD-- OR NO MOR--E DURING THE LOCKDOWN SO PLEASE MAKE USE OF THE CONTACT DETAILS BELOW TO FIND OUT HOW THINGS ARE PROGRESSING.>>>>▼▼▼▼OR-- Contact me(details at the head of every letter!) I can forward or:-

St Mungo's Chapter, Glasgow:-We meet on the second Saturday of each month at 2 p.m. Contact can be made via Peter Aitken. Tel. 0141 427 2084.

St Margaret's Chapter, Dunfermline meetings as announced. All details contact Deacon Pat Carrigan smcb_oblates@live.co.uk

St. Monica's Chapter for far North -- Thurso. Contact Jane Coll. "Scaraben", Westside, Dunnet, Thurso, Caithness, KY14 8YD. Phone 01847 851467(informal)-- and Orkney and Shetland by zoom I understand!

St. Peter's Chapter, Aberdeen --next 11th December. 7.00-8.00 pm each second Tuesday of each month, Church Hall, St Joseph's, 2 Tanfield Walk, Aberdeen &/or

contact Mr Robert Ian Johnston, 31, Tay Road, Mastrick,
ABERDEEN AB16 5LA

"St Andrew's Chapter" Pluscarden Abbey St Andrew's
Chapter on a Saturday! Saturday 2.00pm - 3.30pm St
Benedict's Guest House Men's Breakfast Room (next
door on left from Abbey Shop)-Contact Eileen
Fitzpatrick.

St Columba's Chapter in Dundee -- if interested please
contact Mrs. Georgina Quinn 2D, Church Street,
Broughty Ferry DUNDEE Fife DD5 1EZ"

Benedictine Prayer Circle-If interested some oblates
may like to know of John McKinlay's Benedictine Prayer
Circle, see Links on the UKOT website-----which now
numbers over 100!! email him.:

—John McKinlay jgim07@yahoo.co.uk

Mtt 28 1-10*Now after the Sabbath, toward
the dawn of the first day of the week,
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went
to see the tomb. And behold, there was a
great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord
descended from heaven and came and
rolled back the stone and sat on it. His
appearance was like lightning, and his
clothing white as snow. And for fear of*

him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.

Love and Blessings- in the Risen Christ from

Fr. Martin

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