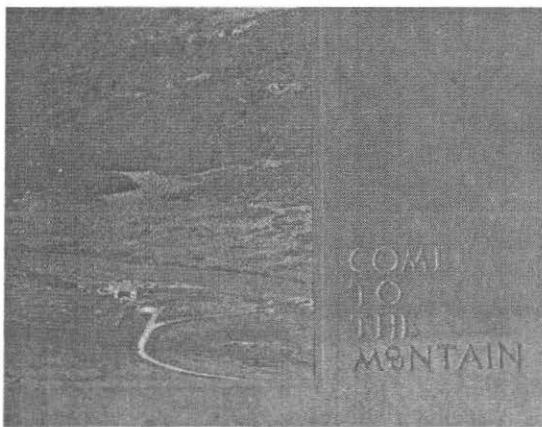


A Merton Pamphlet in Multiple Versions: From *Come to the Mountain* to *Cistercian Life*

By John King

I had thought that Thomas Merton's pamphlet *Cistercian Life* was out of print that spring day of my trip to the west coast. Most book dealers would have agreed with that idea. On most checklists about the availability of Merton books, that is how it has been listed for the past five years. However, there have been two events in the last four years that have changed that assertion. The first event was the discovery of a version published by Our Lady of Guadalupe Monastery in Oregon, copies of which were still being sold at their bookstore in the Spring of 2000. The most recent was the decision at Our Lady of Holy Spirit to re-publish the pamphlet as a product of their monastery. The back of the pamphlet credits Thomas Merton as author. These finds sent me back to my collection notes. It turns out that this particular pamphlet has many variations since it was first produced as *Come to the Mountain* at the Trappist monastery of St. Benedict in Snowmass, Colorado.

Thomas Merton wrote the content which was printed as both *Come to the Mountain* and *Cistercian Life*. What has changed in the different printings is the cover color and imagery, the pictures inside the pamphlet and, in some cases, the inclusion of an additional section (not written by Merton) that describes the individual monastery producing that particular edition.



with brown cardstock covers and large, glued-down picture of the monastery.

Come to the Mountain is the first form of the pamphlet to be produced. In Merton's journal *Dancing in the Water of Life*, he describes the preparation of the pamphlet.¹ He was not happy with his work but finally got it done in May of 1964. It had been requested by the monks of St. Benedict's Monastery at Snowmass, CO and was published by them later in 1964.

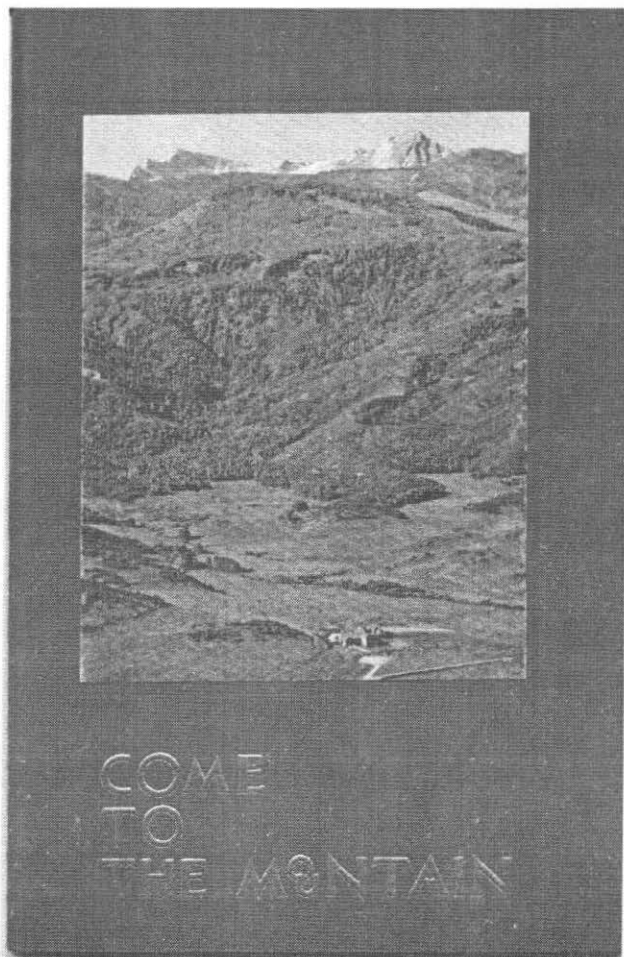
There are two versions issued by Snowmass. The 1964 version is an oblong pamphlet



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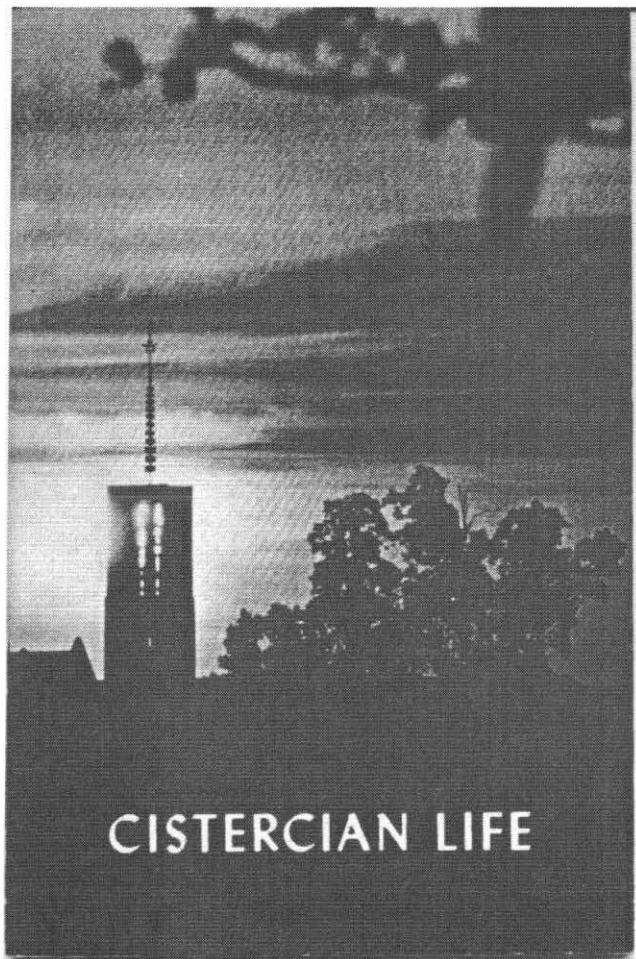
All of the pictures in this printing are of the Snowmass monastery and the work and life of the monks. The content consists solely of the five chapters written by Merton: I. Monastic Renunciation; II. The Contemplative Community; III. Observance and Change; IV. The Way of Silence; V. Vocation.



A second version was published after the issuance of two documents in 1969, "Declaration of the General Chapter of 1969 on the Cistercian Life," and "Unity and Pluralism – A Statute of the General Chapter of 1969," included in this new edition. There is also a new section (VI) entitled: "St. Benedict's Monastery Today." There are also pictures from other Trappist monasteries of both men and women. This pamphlet is half the size of the original issue, although the same kind and color of cardstock is used for the cover. The glued-down cover picture of the monastery is on the cover, but it is about 25% smaller and is taken from a slightly different angle.

All of the copies produced at other monasteries are basically this same size. None returned to the larger format of the original pamphlet, although the most recent version (2001 at Conyers) is slightly larger than all the versions modeled on the next variation.

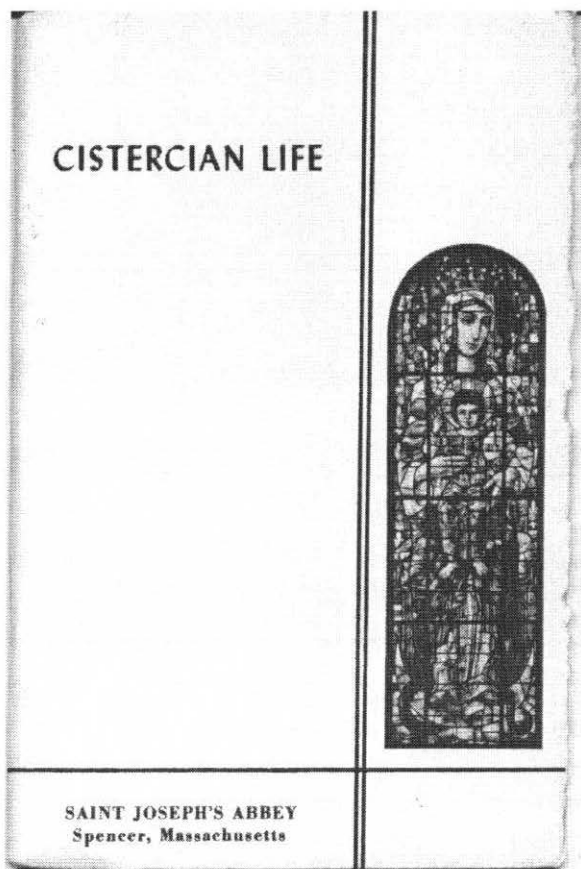
A third version of the pamphlet appeared in 1973, after Merton's death. The Trappist monastery of St. Joseph at Spencer, MA changed the title to *Cistercian Life* or *Thomas Merton on Cistercian Life*, put on a different cover and changed section six to include material concerning life at their monastery. Indeed, they used several covers on the pamphlet. One common version is a tan and brown card stock with a picture of the abbey buildings at Spencer. Less common are the black and gray cover with the silhouette of the monastic bell tower at Conyers and the orange card stock with a picture of a monastic building.



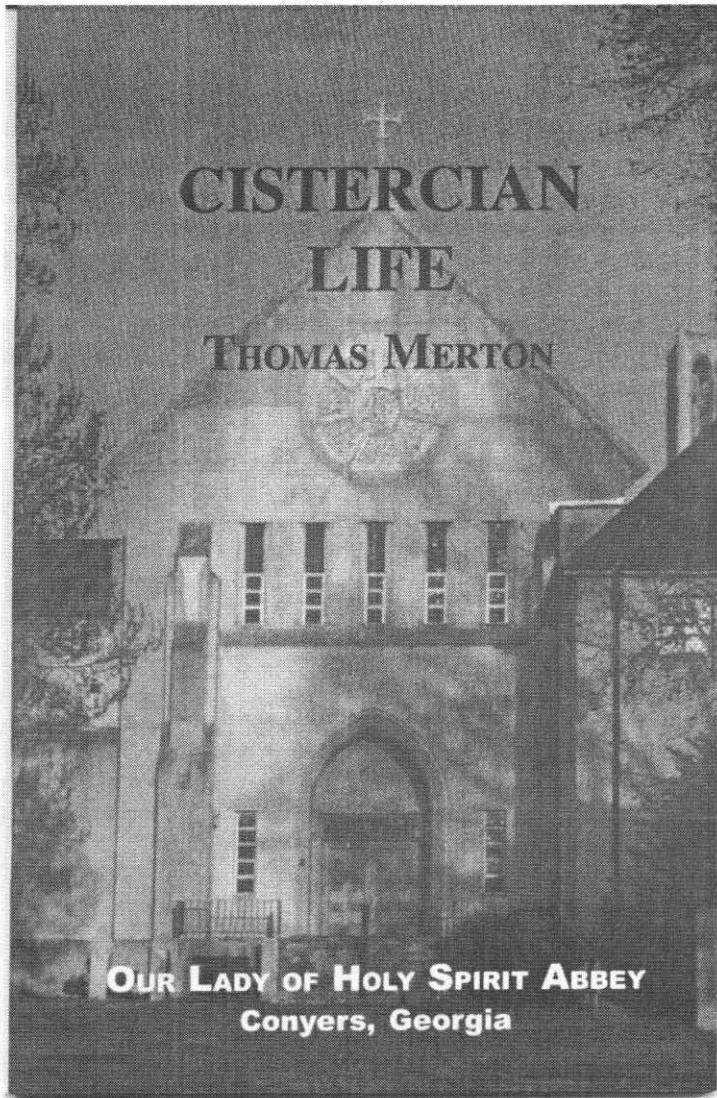
The orange cover has another small variation in the title: it is called *Thomas Merton on Cistercian Life*, while all the content is the same as the brown and black/gray ones.

Other monasteries have used the basic content as published at Spencer, with their own variations. Our Lady of Guadalupe actually has published two versions. The earlier one has a photograph of their monastery church while the later version has a drawing of the monastic layout in Oregon. They changed most of the pictures in the later version (even the original one of their chapel) and left out the section on their monastic experience. They changed the cover using a different card stock and design. This monastery has used the booklet as a resource for potential vocations. The monastery at Mepkin, SC used green card stock and a notice on the cover indicating that this pamphlet was distributed from Mepkin Abbey. The cover includes a picture of the monastic buildings as viewed from the area of the monastic church. They did not add a special section about their own monastery either.

All of the versions produced in the United States after the 1969 Snowmass editions have a cited publication date of 1974 (if they have one at all). One version from Spencer is an example of no date. It features a stained glass window from the monastic church on the cover. It is most likely the 1973 edition.



From discussions with the monks in Oregon, it is clear that at least their version should also carry a much later printing date instead of the 1974 date in the pamphlet.



In 2001 Our Lady of Holy Spirit Abbey (Conyers, GA) issued a version with the same text as previous pamphlets, but all the pictures are of that monastery in recent times. The cardstock cover is a full-color picture of the abbey church. There are a few small editing changes in the basic Merton text. This version does not have the “Declaration of the General Chapter of 1969 on Cistercian Life” or “Unity and Pluralism.”

There are other very interesting versions. In 1977, the Abbey of Timadeuc in France produced a French translation. This version is a square 96-page paperback product. It has stiff wrappers that show a color picture of Timadeuc as the central theme of the cover. The title on the cover is *Vie Cistercienne*, printed at the bottom of the wrapper in white block letters. The back cover has a small color picture of a monk in profile. The interior pictures are totally different from the American versions. They appear to be from French monasteries of both men and women. There is no captioning (as is also the case for the American printings) to indicate which picture is from which monastery. The last few

pages have an address list for all the Trappist and Trappistine monasteries in France as well as one Swiss, six Canadian and seven Belgian monasteries. The list is followed by a map showing the geographic distribution of the French, Belgian and Swiss abbeys. There is no indication of who the translator is. Merton is clearly indicated as the original writer and on page 93 several of his books that have been published in French are cited for further reading, a feature totally missing from the American printings. E-mail conversations with the librarian at Timadeuc indicates that the booklet is out of print in this

version. It does clearly indicate Merton's material as shown in the reproduction of page 45 from the pamphlet. The same e-mails confirmed what the sources of some of the pictures used in this version are: all are from French monasteries of men or women. There are several other versions of booklets in French with the title *La Vie Cistercienne*, but only the Timadeuc pamphlet is a translation of Merton's work.

There are five other translations of this pamphlet that are known to exist. Virtually no library other than the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University has copies. There are two Spanish products. The earliest is *Vida Contemplativa en la Trapa* which was published in 1977 by the Monasteria

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La vie cistercienne

*méditation sur le mystère de la
vie monastique.*

par Thomas Merton,

moine cistercien de l'Abbaye de Gethsémani, U.S.A.

(Traduit de l'américain)

Introduction

Les monastères contemplatifs ont coutume de faire paraître des brochures destinées à informer visiteurs et postulants du genre de vie que mènent les moines. Le présent texte est plus qu'un simple *guide du postulant*, plus aussi qu'une justification apologétique de la vie monastique. De tels livres abondent actuellement, et de toutes façons on a tendance à pousser trop loin l'apologie de la vie contemplative. Il est vrai qu'on doit des explications; il faut donc en donner. Le monastère est si radicalement différent du *monde*! Le monachisme

Nuestra Sra. de los Angeles in Azul, Argentina. The second version appeared in 1998 as a supplement to the journal *Cistercium* (#212); it has the title "Vida contemplativa en el cister." The Portuguese version appeared in 1984 under the title *Encontro com Cristo na Trapa*. It was translated from the English at the Monastery do Nova Mundo in Campo do Tenente, Brazil. A copy in Chinese predates the Portuguese version: in 1978, Lo Jo-yu translated Merton's pamphlet and published it in Hong Kong with Caritas publishers as *Hsi tu yin hsiu hui sheng*. Also before the Portuguese version, a translation in Korean appeared in 1983; it has a foreword by Dom John Eudes Bamberger and was published by Benedict Press in Waegwan, Korea. The bibliographic listing for that pamphlet is simply *Cistercian Life* since most library systems in the U.S. do not handle Korean lettering. One commonality of the translations is that the page-length varies considerably from translation to translation. The range for length is from 37 to 90 pages.

With the re-issue of the pamphlet in 2001 at Conyers, the staying power of Merton's words to convey a verbal image of life in a Trappist monastery from the five perspectives in the main chapters appears to be confirmed. People resonate to the clarity he delivers to the reader. Whether used as a vocation booklet or a means to deliver a solid image of contemplative life in the twenty-first century, we might expect to continue to see it reappear, clothed with new (even full-color) pictures but grounded in a old but vibrant discussion of Cistercian monastic life.

1. 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) 101-103.

Listing of Editions:

1. *Come to the Mountain*. Snowmass, CO: St. Benedict's Monastery, 1964 (pb).
2. *Come to the Mountain*. Snowmass, CO: St. Benedict's Monastery, 1969 (pb).
3. *Cistercian Life*. Spencer, MA: St. Joseph's Monastery, 1973 (pb) (several different covers).
4. *Thomas Merton on Cistercian Life*. Spencer, MA: St. Joseph's Monastery, 1974(?) (pb) (orange card stock cover).
5. *Cistercian Life*. Mepkin, SC: Mepkin Abbey, 1974(?) (pb).
6. *Cistercian Life*. Lafayette, OR: Our Lady of Guadalupe Monastery (later than 1974) (pb).
7. *Cistercian Life*. Conyers, GA: Our Lady of Holy Spirit Abbey, 2001 (pb).
8. *La Vie Cistercienne*. Timadeuc Abbey, 1977 (pb).
9. *Vida Contemplativa en la Trapa*. Azul, Argentina: 1977 (pb).
10. *Hsi tu yin hsiu hui sheng*. Hong Kong: Caritas, 1978 (pb).
11. *Cistercian Life*. Waegwan, Korea: Benedict Press, 1983 (pb).
12. *Encontro com Christo na Trapa*. Campo do Tenente, Brazil: 1984 (pb).
13. "Vida Contemplativa en el cister." *Cistercium* 212 (1998) supplement.