

In Chapter 2 of *Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton has a very clear view of nature as intended by God and nature, invested in human beings, as only a step on the way: in nature on its own, imperfection and perfection are one and the same; in human beings it's something we have to work at or with – something we have to transcend. This is both our tragedy and our glory.

*A tree gives glory to God first of all by being a tree...the more a tree is like itself, the more it is like Him. If it tried to be something else which it was never intended to be, it would be less like God, and therefore it would give him less glory...*

*With us it is different. God leaves us free to be whatever we like. We can be ourselves or not, as we please. But the problem is this: since God alone possesses the secret of my identity, He alone can make me who I am..*

The beauty of today's gospel passage about Nathaniel, (also known as Benjamin, or so we suppose) is that he is more receptive to the truth of who he is in God because he is a person without deceit. This doesn't mean he has already reached perfection, become the person, that is, who he is meant to be, who God intends, but that he is more open to this possibility because he is prepared to state what he sees and thinks without sugaring the pill; without, one might say, the political correctness which so bedevils and distorts our language today – ironically playing into the very deceit which veils reality and makes true identity so difficult to achieve. He says it as it is - and what a prejudiced man he is! This is exactly the material for holiness, but only if his openness carries him all the way to God, that is, to following Christ wherever that might lead. He is himself, but what he is to be, is known only to God.

Br John Mayhead  
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour