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# the CORD

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# Good Morning, Good People!

May the Lord give you peace!

If there is a single word which adequately describes the Franciscan school of spirituality, that word is probably "evangelical". It was in the gospel that our holy Founder beheld the vision of the form of life that he and his disciples should live; all the various elements which comprise the Seraphic vocation can be reduced ultimately to observance of the holy gospel.

To make himself as much like Jesus as possible — this was Francis' ideal. "He wished," writes Cajetan Esser, "to follow not merely the footsteps of the Apostles, not simply to live again the life of the early Church, but to follow and to imitate as literally and as completely as possible the life of Jesus upon earth" (*The Marrow of the Gospel*, p. 111).

It must have been of great importance to Francis, then, to know quite thoroughly the four Gospels and the things recorded there about Christ. We can be certain that in his reading of the sacred pages, and in his meditation on what he found there, not one of our Lord's syllables or gestures escaped his notice. Every detail narrated by the Evangelists must have been precious to the Poverello.

In responding to the Franciscan vocation, each of us has committed himself to become a mirror of Jesus Christ. It must be our primary and incessant occupation to become Christlike, down to the last minute detail. It will not be enough for us to have that general attitude which is the mind of Christ. We must teach ourselves to speak as He spoke, to act as He acted. Our every word and deed must reflect Jesus to those about us.

In order that we may even begin to honor this commitment of ours, it will be necessary that we get to know Christ intimately. This will be accomplished mostly by prayer. But the knowledge of Jesus acquired by our prayer will be authentic to the extent that we have become, like our Seraphic Father, lovers of the gospel.

*The Editors*

# Brother of the Little Way

*Jeremiah Crosby, O.F.M. Cap.*

There is no doubt that the form of spirituality known as The Little Way furnishes us moderns with a path to holiness that is tried and true. Pope Pius IX, who canonized Saint Therese of Lisieux in 1934, declared that the littleness which was so characteristic of her sanctity could be adopted profitably by people in any walk of life.

In the very year that the Little Flower was declared a saint, this same pontiff canonized a contemporary of hers who, like her, had walked the small path to holiness. Within the confines of the Capuchin friary at Altoetting in Bavaria, Saint Conrad of Parzham had lived his own Little Way in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi.

## *Secret of Sanctity*

It is not often that a saint gives us the secret of his sanctity in his own words. Saint

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*Frater Jeremiah, of Marathon, Wisc., has contributed articles to THE CORD and to other periodicals. He recounts here the life of Saint Conrad of Parzham, whose feast we celebrate on April 21.*

Therese did us this favor; so did Conrad of Parzham. Although his complete writings do not equal even this article in length, we can find in them his life's ideal, an ideal which in its simplicity is both timely and dynamic.

"My life," he wrote, "consists chiefly in loving and suffering, in admiring and adoring the unspeakable love of God for us poor creatures. I am always most intimately united with my loving God. Even amidst my many duties, I am intimately united with Him. I speak to Him confidentially, as a child with its father. I lay before Him my needs, my desires, and whatever gives me the greatest concern. Then I implore Him to grant me some grace, but always with childlike confidence. If I have committed a fault, I humbly beg Him to pardon me, and promise to be a real good child. The means which I use to exercise myself in humility and meekness is none other than the cross. This is my book. A single look at the cross teaches me what I must do on any occasion. Thereby I learn patience, humility,

meekness, and the cross becomes sweet and light."

From this passage we must conclude that Conrad's sanctity consisted in cultivating a union with God by means of deep interior recollection and a lively, humble faith in His fatherly providence. It is true that Conrad had a natural inclination toward the interior life. Yet, it is also true that he learned early in life that one can grow in union with God only if the awareness of that union also grows in one's mind and is expressed in one's actions. We need only to look at his life in order to see how he lived this ideal, and how he expressed it daily in his patience and meekness toward others.

### *The Beginning*

When, in 1849, he came to the friary of Saint Ann in Altoetting to enter the Capuchin Order, John Birndorfer was thirty years old. Ever since his spiritual conversion eleven years prior to that time, this naturally introspective young man had grown more reserved and retiring. His mother, whom he used to refer to as "my first novice mistress," had stressed from his earliest years the important role which God should play in his life. After his spiritual conversion,

through years of almost daily Mass and weekly spiritual direction, the grace of God led him to the door of this famous Capuchin friary.

Shortly after his arrival, John was invested as a tertiary and given the name Conrad. He was assigned as assistant porter to receive the many pilgrims — as many as three hundred thousand annually — who came to the shrine of Our Lady there.

During the first few months, Conrad discovered that community life was quite different from the life of quiet solitude to which he had grown accustomed. As he said, "I found it rather hard to live together with so many others, for I was very shy; but when I became better acquainted, matters improved."

Matters did indeed improve; soon the young tertiary had fallen in love with his new life and work. It was not long, however, before he was asked to leave Altoettingen to be infirmarian for a sick priest in another town. "I cannot conceal the fact that I find it hard to leave this place of heavenly favors," he wrote home at that time; "I acknowledge it sincerely; the time spent here seemed so short that I can hardly believe a year and nine months have already gone since

I came here. But obedience calls me to another place, and I must obey ... Pray for me, so that I may attain my ideal and become a true son of Saint Francis and may live and die as one."

After serving as a candidate for two years, he was sent to the brothers' novitiate, where he was invested with the holy habit on September 17, 1851. As a novice he was afflicted several times with rather serious illness. But this did not deter him from steadily cultivating the spirit of recollection under the guidance of Father Stanislaus, a learned and holy novice master.

### *The "Resolutions"*

Before his profession on October 4, 1852, Conrad showed to what an extent he valued his interior life, when he composed his *Resolutions*. Because they, together with his love for the Mass, formed the groundwork for his simple spiritual life, we shall quote here a few of the points which he set down:

"Resolutions taken with great deliberation and full confidence in the assistance of Jesus and Mary to help me keep them:

"I will strive earnestly to form the habit of always placing myself in the presence of

God and of often asking myself: 'Would I do this or that if my confessor or my superior were observing me, and especially in the presence of God and my guardian angel?'

"I will often ask myself when crosses and pain come to me: 'Conrad, why are you here?'

"I will earnestly strive to preserve brotherly love in myself and in others. I will be careful never to utter a word against charity. I will bear patiently with the faults, defects, and weaknesses of others and — as far as possible — I will cover them with the mantle of charity whenever there is no obligation to reveal them to one who has the power to correct them.

"I will carefully observe silence as much as possible. I will always be sparing of words in conversation, and thereby avoid many faults and be able to converse the better with God."

It is especially worthy of note here that these *Resolutions* proved to be more than the aspirations of an eager novice. Conrad had made them, as he says, "with great deliberation"; he remained remarkably faithful to them after he had left the confines of the novitiate and assumed the active work of the Franciscan brother.

*Crosses*

Soon after his profession, Conrad was appointed porter at Altoetting, the place he loved so much. Yet, this appointment brought two great crosses to Conrad. The first one was personal: the fear of his own insufficiencies and inclination to quiet and solitude. The other was social: the anger of the others in the friary because of his appointment to such an important task. There were those who accused the provincial superior, who was known to have a liking for Conrad, of partiality, injustice, and imprudence. Likewise, they accused Conrad of temerity and presumption. Even the guardian of the friary reflected the initial opposition of the community; one day during the chapter of faults he declared to all that "Brother Conrad must remember that he is kept here only out of pure charity." Conrad simply accepted these humiliations as coming from God's fatherly providence. As he once wrote, "... to those who love God, all things turn out for the best. No matter how wrong things may seem to go, in reality they are for our good." Soon things did turn out for the best. The peaceful way in which Conrad accepted his own limitations and the rebuffs of

the friars was instrumental in making him more secure in his post and in the affection of the community.

*Brother Porter*

For forty-one years Brother Conrad held the important post of the porter of the friary. His daily dedication to this work is truly an inspiration. How many of us must admit that too many of our days are a monotonous routine, lacking the motivation that springs from true interior union with God?

Conrad's day usually began before midnight, when he arose for matins. Since he usually retired at ten p. m. after a hard day, he was often too tired to hear the signal for rising. So he asked a confrere to wake him. Once in a while the brother would forget, and Conrad would oversleep. One morning after this happened, Conrad asked him, "Why didn't you get me up last night?" The brother answered, "Because I wanted to spare you, knowing that you had a very busy day yesterday and must have been very tired." "I beg of you, for God's sake," Conrad replied, "please get me up; I don't need to be spared."

After matins, he customarily withdrew to the crypt, where he spent the rest of the night

at prayer. When, at the age of seventy, he was forbidden to continue this practice, he obediently complied, and so returned to bed after matins had been recited. The luxury, however, was short lived. Some few days later, he volunteered to take over the job of an ailing brother — opening the friary doors at four a. m.

Brother Conrad usually served Mass at a side altar. He received Holy Communion daily, a rare practice in those days. After Mass he went to the door, where he worked from six until noon, taking care of pilgrims, the poor, and those seeking guidance.

He opened the unpretentious door of the friary as many as two-hundred times a day, always remaining kind, patient, and peaceful, interiorly recollected, and united with God. Continually fingering the chapel of the Immaculate Conception which he always carried, he would say to those who asked his advice about being recollected during work, "It is not necessary always to pray while at work, but it doesn't do any harm!" "Let us strive always to lead an interior life, a life hidden in God," he had once written; "If we are interiorly recollected, nothing will disturb us even in the performance of those external du-

ties which our state in life imposes on us."

Conrad truly lived these words. Through the years, the reputation of his union with God spread among those who frequented the shrine of Our Lady. However, as is so often the case, there were those who felt called to test him. It was one of Conrad's small pleasures in life to give to the poor children returning from school a daily ration of bread, which he always managed to serve up with a small portion of food for thought. One of these children later recalled that her mother would often say, "You must be very good so that you may not displease Brother Conrad, for he is a saint." "We children," she wrote, "decided to see for ourselves whether he really was a saint, and since we know a saint shouldn't get angry, we resolved to try his patience. Several of us went one after another to the monastery and rang the bell vehemently. When the brother appeared, we asked to talk to a certain priest whom we knew was away. He gave absolutely no sign of being annoyed. Instead, he just said very kindly to each of us: 'You cannot see him today, since he is not at home.'"

On other occasion, some of the young men of the neighborhood resolved to avenge

themselves after Conrad had chided them for their boisterousness. Like the little girls, they decided to come one by one to the friary, asking for their piece of rye bread. Each successive call was so timed that Conrad had to walk the entire distance of the cloister to answer it. When the twelfth boy had made his appearance, Conrad merely said, "I suppose, Louis, that you young rascals are out to tease me today, since you are coming one by one. But that does not matter, boys; I shall come again, even twenty times, as long as my feet will carry me." He was then seventy-three years old.

#### *Friend of the Needy*

At noon Conrad would join the community for dinner. Afterward, he would go immediately to the kitchen to gather up whatever was left over to distribute it to the poor. His superiors had given him a free hand in the distribution of alms, and although he always had a good supply of soup, bread, and beer for those who called, the kitchen always provided more. Should some of the friars gently chide him for his solicitude toward the needy, he would say something like, "Never worry about what you give to the poor; it will always come back

again," or, "I value more the Our Father that the poor say for us than the food and drink we give to them."

After dinner and his chores in the kitchen, Conrad would usually spend a half-hour in the friary garden, meditating on the Stations of the Cross. Then he would return to the door until seven in the evening.

Since he returned to the door around dinner time, or a little later, he was generally met by a rather large crowd of people waiting for their alms. Once, after most of the better food had been distributed, a beggar came to the door. Conrad explained that at this late hour there was little left. He brought a bowl of soup from the kitchen, however, and gave it to the poor man. On tasting it, the man threw the bowl at Conrad's feet and snarled, "You can eat that slop yourself." Calmly Conrad stooped down, picked up the pieces of the broken bowl, and said, "I see you don't like this kind of soup. I'll go and get you something else." To many, this incident would be the cause for a justified outburst of temper. For Conrad it was an opportunity to imitate Jesus, who had remained silent when humiliation and bitterness were inflicted upon Him.

Besides helping the poor who

were hungry for food, Conrad sought to satisfy those who hungered for spiritual nourishment. He had the faculty of penetrating beyond the faces of those who came to the door. Very often he saw their lives reflected in their eyes. His was a look mixed with love, compassion and knowledge — knowledge which at least once sent a wayward youth hurriedly into the confessional next door. To those who came to him with troubles, he would give all the help and advice he could. "Let us trust in God," he would say, "and everything will come out all right;" or "Let us pray with great confidence, and the good Lord will come to our assistance."

In all his associations with the people, he remained true to the *Resolutions* which he had written before his profession. He was especially careful to be reserved and brief in his speech, for he was convinced that "A person who talks too much can never arrive at a truly interior life." If he saw that a conversation was becoming needlessly long, he would usually cut it short, saying, "I must now ask to be excused, for I still have some prayers to say."

#### *Man of Prayer*

During the day the holy friar spent much of his spare

time in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, or in the recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. His devotion to Jesus and His Blessed Mother sustained him in his association with the public, and gave him strength in his constant and growing suffering.

Although as a youth he had developed a robust constitution from his work on the family farm, as the years went on he was troubled with stomach ailments and arthritis. He once wrote, "I suffer constantly, but I am still able to perform my duties." Because the cross was his book, he looked upon his ill health as a blessing. He called sickness "a season of grace for your soul," and advised, "See that you make good use of it. Sickness can teach us much if we would only be disposed to learn."

Even more intense than physical sufferings were his spiritual trials. His desire to be united to God amounted almost to what we might term obsession. Almost every letter he wrote includes some sort of request for prayers on his behalf. In his youth he had joined several pious confraternities, and in his life as a Capuchin he made a sort of "prayer-pact" with others for the purpose of praying for each other. Yet, if we truly analyze

Conrad's life, we can see why he acted this way. He believed firmly what he once wrote, "God is good to us. He showers His graces on us out of pure love and mercy. What ingratitude it would be then, if we did not make good use of them, or if we went so far as to abuse them."

Conrad ultimately reached that stage in his spiritual development where he suffered not from the renunciation of his own will, but from the realization that he himself harbored so many inclinations which were not God's, and that many other people still cared so little for Him. "I am trying hard to love God truly," he wrote. "My one regret is that I love Him so little. I should like to be a seraph of love. I should like to call on all creatures to help me love my God. But I must stop. I am going too far . . . Love knows no bounds."

As the years of hard work wore on, Brother Conrad himself began to wear out. He grew gradually weaker from his increasing suffering, as well as more silent and recollected from his growing union with God. He developed by degrees into that figure which we see pictured so often — a white-haired, bearded Capuchin with a little chaplet wrapped around

his finger, gazing at the small cross he always held in his hands while he prayed.

#### *Death of a Saint*

For forty-one of his seventy-six years, Conrad had manifested the patience, humility, and peace which is born of union with God. On the morning of April 18, 1894, the brother was able for the last time to get to the chapel of Our Lady to serve the five o'clock Mass. After Mass he began his usual duties, but by nine o'clock he had to go to the cell of another brother for help. In the afternoon, he went to the superior and said simply, "Father Guardian, I can keep up no longer." He was immediately sent to bed.

On April 21 during night prayers, the door bell rang twice. Thinking that the substitute porter had not heard it, Brother Conrad struggled out of bed and got as far as the door of his cell to shout several times, "Brother Deodatus, Brother Deodatus!" A novice who happened to be near hurried to his side to see what was the matter. But Conrad could only mumble a few words as he collapsed into the novice's arms. The end had come.

The fathers and brothers hurried to his bedside and be-

gan the prayers for the dying. He was conscious, but unable to speak. As the *Angelus* began to ring, a peaceful smile broke over his face. Before the bell stopped, Conrad was standing face to face with the God he had known interiorly for so many years.

God regarded the lowliness of this servant of His who had kept so many things hidden in his heart as he went about fulfilling the divine will. God saw to it that within forty years Conrad would be given to the entire Church as a model of that simple way which can be the way of every Christian.

Today the Church points to Conrad of Parzham as she points to Therese of Lisieux, and tells us that even we in our times can become the saints which they became. The words of Conrad himself can best summarize all our efforts to become one with the God within us, to think of Him more and more while we perform our daily duties. "Our trust in God must be great," Conrad tells us, "and greater still our love for Him. . . . A great desire to give itself to God entirely is the characteristic of a soul that loves God sincerely."

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The Christ of Francis was the humble Saviour of men who "emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant." Francis, then, would become the Francis of Christ. This is the way, the truth, and the life of the Friars Minor! Our glory does not consist so much in our learned doctors, or in our eloquent preachers, or in our popular writers, but in our simple, humble, unworldly brethren, no matter how hidden their existence may be.

— Foley, O.F.M. Cap., *In the Spirit of Saint Francis*, p. 59

# Spirituality and the Interracial Apostolate

Roy M. Gasnick, O. F. M.

## I. The Cosmic Import of the Apostolate

We live in revolutionary times. All around us there is change — quick, worldwide, upheaving change. So little of yesterday has remained the same way, and today is already being changed into the new world of tomorrow. The whole world is in crisis, groaning in anticipation of a new civilization that seems ready to burst upon us at any moment.

The late Cardinal Suhard described the crisis well: "All agree that our times are an age of transition. The suffering which affects the whole world, the dangers which threaten its future, the strong currents which sweep over it are less the consequences of a catastrophe than the warning signs of an imminent new birth."

Fr. Roy, of the Province of the Most Holy Name, is a professor of English at Saint Bonaventure University. As Executive Moderator of the Third Order's Action for Interracial Understanding, he devotes a great deal of his time to filling speaking engagements and writing articles.

Mankind is undergoing cosmic labor pains; it seems as if Saint Paul's description of individual conversion is taking place on a universal level: the human race is putting off the old man and putting on the new.

What will this new man be like? That depends on the Christian conscience. If we continue our present hostile attitude to the world, saying in effect, "This civilization, these trends are secularistic and evil, hence we must not touch them lest they contaminate us," then the new man may well turn out to be the one-man united by force, the identity-less automaton predicted by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, and George Orwell in 1984.

On the other hand, if we see our role, (as the early Church always did), as one of entering into, permeating, subverting and supernaturalizing the secularistic tendencies of the civilization aborning, then indeed will the new man evolve in the terms in which Teilhard de Chardin described him: the

one-man united to his fellow men by love. Gone will be the I-THOU man of today, who tries to explain all of the universe in terms of himself — and predictably fails; born will be the THOU-I man, who finds the explanation of himself in terms of the rest of the universe, especially in terms of his fellow man.

In this context, the work of the interracial apostolate assumes cosmic proportions, because its long-range goal is to hasten the birth of the new man. We must see our role as witnesses and apostles for the dignity and unity of man. Anything less than that will relegate us to the level of those dogooders, social workers, and sociologists who are more interested in pragmatic solutions for the effects of discrimination than in the realistic eradication of its causes; they seek to eradicate racism as a social evil because it hurts society, rather than because it hurts a man; they use standards which perpetuate the I-THOU man of today without any inkling that the evil they are trying to cure can be cured only by the concept of the THOU-I man.

To convince a white man that his salvation may well depend upon his willingness to recognize the dignity of man in a Negro, to convince him that the

riddle of himself can be solved only in terms of other men, to convince him that the future of the human race depends upon his courage to choose to love rather than to be loved, is to strike a blow for the new man who will become "a new creature in Christ, his old life disappeared, everything become new about him." (II Cor. 5:17).

Our vocation then is clear: we must become the heralds of the great King announcing the news of the mystery of Christ: "It was His (the Father's) loving design, centered in Christ, to give history its fulfillment by resuming everything in Him, all that is in heaven, and that is on earth, summed up in Him." (Eph. 1:10); we must become the *makers* of salvation history; we must become the agents of God in fulfilling the divine plan for all creation.

We who have set as our goal the proclamation of the dignity of man, are vitally necessary at this moment in history, at this moment when the whole world is undergoing a cosmic crisis in search for unity. We are needed now. Nothing must stand in the way of our vocation: neither the obstacles set by our detractors, nor even the greater obstacles of our human weaknesses.

## II. The Grace of Persecution

The interracial apostolate is not a "popular" cause; the widespread violent reactions of whites to Negro protests during recent months indicate that far too few of our countrymen understand the issues at stake, far too few of our co-religionists understand the motivation of our work. Hence there is persecution and there will be persecution.

Few of us will be asked, as Medgar Evers was, to perform the ultimate challenge of love, to lay down our lives for our fellow man. But we do know the lesser challenges (if there be such a thing) of love: the bombing of Our Lady of Good Harbor school in Louisiana; the physical threats against a Southern bishop while preaching against segregation; eggs thrown by Catholics at Third Order members in Boston; the neighbors who begin to disassociate themselves from us; the closed doors of parish rectories; the cautious "don't get too involved" injunctions from superiors; the malicious whispers of "radical", and "fellow traveler"; the priest spit upon because he was accompanying a five-year old girl to school in New Orleans. Indeed, Saint Paul's description seems to fit so well: "We are the world's

refuse; everybody thinks himself well rid of us." (II Cor. 4:13).

All this can be demoralizing and discouraging. But we must not miss these for the opportunities they are, opportunities to turn them into acts of love, into proofs of our love for the Christ we have pledged ourselves to serve. Indeed, we must come to realize that for the success of our apostolate, these persecutions are fundamental necessities, they are something we should desire. Saint Paul recognized this long ago: "I am well content with these humiliations of mine, with the insults, the hardships, the persecutions, the times of difficulty I undergo for Christ; when I am weakest, then I am strongest of all. (II Cor. 12:10).

Saint Francis is one of the few men in history who understood this principle, and significantly, he was one of the few men in history who was truly successful. For Francis, true happiness was not to be found in great accomplishments but rather in the ability to suffer persecution for the sake of the apostolate. In his famous parable on "Perfect Joy," he says, "Above all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ gives to His friends is that of conquering oneself and willingly enduring suffering, insults,

humiliations, and hardship for the love of God, as they are not ours but God's, as the Apostle says, 'What have you that you have not received from God?' But we can glory in the cross of tribulation because that is ours."

The parable of perfect joy comes as a concrete exemplification of the spiritual principle formulated by Saint Paul: "The suffering of Christ, it is true, overflows into our lives, but there is overflowing comfort, too, which Christ brings to us." (II Cor. 1:5).

Hence, one of the most important tests which faces our spiritual life, difficult as it may be, is to recognize persecution not as an evil but as a grace, a necessary grace for the success of the apostolate. We can, therefore, expect little earthly compensation. We will face indifference, we will face hostility, we will face opposition. Thank God for them! They are the stigmata which make us Christ-images: "If the world hates you, be sure that it hated Me before it learned to hate you. ... Do not forget what I told you, No servant can be greater than his master. They will persecute you just as they have persecuted Me. ... and they will treat you thus because you bear My name." (Jn. 15:18; 20-21).

In the face of persecution and hostility, we must remember that we are peacemakers. Retaliation cannot help our cause, it can only provoke anger, strengthen antipathy and make permanent the blindness to truth. St. Bonaventure offers us a good piece of advice marked by common sense: "When the water is quiet, a man sees his face clearly reflected; but when the water is rough, nothing is reflected. In the same way, when a man is angry, he cannot see truth."

Our reaction to those who hate, curse, and threaten us insultingly, however, must go much further than the mere negative one, that is, a mere non-retaliatory reaction; ours must be positive, a reaction that will test our faith to the utmost: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate and persecute you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who treat you insultingly" (Lk. 6:17-28).

Martin Luther King, certainly, has taken these words of Christ and made them a point of identification for his non-violent Southern Christian Leadership Movement. When Dr. King received the Saint Francis Peace Medal from the Third Order of Saint Francis in November, 1963, he restated Our Lord's teaching in terms

of the interracial apostolate: "So throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities after midnight hours, and drag us out on some wayside road and beat us and leave us half dead and we will still love you. Send your propaganda agents around the nation, and make it appear that we are not morally and culturally fit for integration and we will still love you. But be you assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. But we will not only win freedom for ourselves, we will so appeal to your heart and your conscience, that we will win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory."

To do this will take great courage; it will take great faith and love. But the difficulties we undergo are nothing in comparison to the gigantic thing we are doing for the world: "For it is not you who are speaking, but the spirit of your Father who speaks through you" (Jn. 16:3). What really counts, the only thing that counts, is that Christ has called us, has pressed his seal upon us and sent us forth:

"You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and I have appointed that you should bear fruit" (Jn. 15:16).

### III. The Need for Selflessness

Accepting persecution is the first hurdle we must clear if we are to make our interracial work a means for spiritual growth. There is another and more difficult one: our own human weaknesses. There are three great pitfalls here, each deriving from pride and egoism, which can not only hinder spiritual growth, but actually hasten spiritual decline.

1. *To lack the courage of total commitment.* This is the temptation which usually besets the man who feels deeply about suffering humanity, but yet fears the taunts and reaction of his associates, as well as the damage to his prestige his involvement in race relations may cause. Human respect, of course, is his weakness; when he must choose between THOU and I, he reluctantly chooses I. The danger here is that the failure to fulfill initial involvement will hasten spiritual decline, because, as our Lord Himself pointed out, "No man putting his hand to the plow and turning back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Since this is a temptation which at times will strike all of us, we must be prepared for it. And the only preparation which will help us is the virtue of humility. All too often in the spiritual life we beg God for the virtue of humility, and yet squirm at the least humiliation. Humility is built upon the acceptance of humiliation. It accepts the reduction of the capital I to a small i for the sake of the THOU. It realizes that allowing the I to be crossed out will produce a cross. And that is essential to the spiritual life.

Cardinal Merry del Val, in his "Litany of Humility," has offered a program for the man who would fail in the interracial apostolate because of human respect. His emphasis, it should be noted, is not on the deliverance from humiliation, but on the deliverance from the *fear* of humiliation:

Deliver me Jesus:  
 From the fear of being humiliated,  
 From the fear of being despised,  
 From the fear of suffering rebukes,  
 From the fear of being calumniated,  
 From the fear of being forgotten,  
 From the fear of being ridiculed,  
 From the fear of being wronged,

From the fear of being suspected ...

2. *To lose the spirit of obedience.* This is one of our great dangers. Each day we are made painfully aware of suffering humanity: a prostrate Negro woman with the knee of a policeman on her neck; a Negro youth being torn at by a police dog; a Negro priest having Catholics refuse to receive Communion from him; wretched living conditions in a ghetto; full-grown men unable to get jobs; despairing youths wasting away from alcohol, narcotics, and sex. We see all this and are appalled that those in authority are sometimes blind to this suffering and fail to see the need for our doing something for suffering man.

It is all too easy to fall into the temptation that the needs of our fellow man exempt us from the bonds of obedience, that God's will must be done in spite of the indifference of superiors. It sounds so rational, but it is really a rationalization. If God's will is going to be done (and it will be done), then it will never be done outside the normal line of authority and obedience. If we truly seek spiritual growth by serving suffering humanity, then we cannot rely on deceit and disobedience; such a reliance is

natural way out. Our way must be supernatural: "We to rely on the Holy Spirit, unaffected love, on the of our message, on the er of God" (II Cor. 6:6-7). this is the only way out. aliel, a member of the ish Sanhedrin, was wise gh to point this out for analyzing the newly born stian Church, he judged: this is man's design or man's ertaking, it will be over- wn: if it is God's, you will e no power to overthrow (Acts 5:38-39).

To use the interracial stolate for our own glorifi- on. This is, without a doubt, greatest danger we face, ause it turns our whole rk upside down and blurs focus on the goals God ex- ts us to fulfill. The man o uses the interracial apos- ate to enhance his own pres- e is no longer a witness for e proclamation of the digni- of man, is no longer a heal- of suffering humanity. He a betrayer of his fellowman ause instead of serving m as he was called to do, is using them to serve him. d what is so particularly dan- ous here is that not only l his egoism snuff out his n spiritual life, but he will o damage the interracial ostolate itself.

Too many a local opportunist has made a name for himself by calling for an unnecessary boycott, by stirring up an unwanted demonstration, or by making a startling and unfounded statement. But at what price? The alienation of the people who could help us and the hardening of too many racists and discriminators.

Indeed, T. S. Eliot's memorable lines from *Murder in the Cathedral* apply so perfectly here: "The last temptation is the greatest treason, to do the right thing for the wrong reason." For the sake of our own spiritual growth then, as well as for the health of the interracial apostolate, we must be ever on guard against this "last temptation," all the more so because it is so subtle a temptation, one into which we can fall so easily because we find attention drawn to ourselves a pleasing sensation. Here again, the "Litany of Humility" can be a safeguard against this temptation:

Deliver me Jesus:

- From the desire of being es- teemed,
- From the desire of being loved,
- From the desire of being ex- tolled,
- From the desire of being hon- oured,
- From the desire of being prais- ed,

- From the desire of being pre- ferred,
- From the desire of being con- sulted,
- From the desire of being ap- proved. . .

to see and understand our role as Christians: that we are heralds of the mystery of Christ proclaiming the dignity and unity of man; that we are seeking to grow in our love for God through our love for our neighbor; that we must have the courage to withstand per-secution and humiliation for the name of Christ; that we must have the humility to re- cognize ourselves for what we are; that we must be selfless, disregarding ourselves when faced with suffering humanity; that we must trust in the plans of God and not in our own devices; that we must not let ourselves get in the way of the work of Christ.

#### IV. The Making of a Saint

Saints are not made in a day; they are not made in a month; they are not made in a year. Even in the era of "Instant" products, there is yet no "instant sainthood." To become a saint, to become a Christ- image, will always remain a lifetime job.

Yet, since the interracial apostolate plunges us into the very heart of the Christian experience, it would seem that it can be one of the fastest roads to sanctity. It forces us

This is the program for holi-ness which flows from the in- terracial apostolate.

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Can't you see, Brother, that to evangelize a man is to say to him: "You — yes, you too are loved by God in the Lord Jesus." And you must not only tell him so, but you must really believe it, and not only believe it, but conduct yourself with this man in such a way that he can feel and discover that there is something within himself that is being redeemed, something more majestic and noble than he had ever dreamed. . . . This will be possible only if you offer him your friendship, a true friendship, unbiased and without condescension, a friendship rooted in profound confidence and esteem.

# Blessings of a Nun

Sister M. Petrone, F. S. P. A.

A nun counts her blessings, and not her woes. She rises early, and with joy in her heart says, "Good morning, God." She is blessed with the privilege of meditation, a speaking to God, and a daily rallying of her spiritual forces for the duties of the day. Rich blessings are hers as she daily participates in the renewal of Christ's sacrifice and comes close to Jesus in Holy Communion. Weekly, Christ's redeeming power is increased in her through the sacrament of penance. Through her spiritual reading she receives the blessings of noble thoughts emanating from gifted authors of all times who conspire to mold her to Christ-likeness. All her spiritual exercises exert their influence to bring her the blessings of holiness, so that she may more effectively attract souls to Christ.

The nun, like every other woman without exception, is under obligation of conscience not to remain aloof; she must go into action in her own way, and join in stemming the tide which threatens to engulf the world. She realizes that as a woman she is born to be a *mother* in the role of spiritual motherhood. She is in agony of spirit until Christ be born again in the hearts and souls of others.

In sharing the same home with Christ, she has the blessings consequent upon physical proximity to Him.

She strives daily for a necessary idealism plus a liberal admixture of realism which will bring her the blessings of accepting others as they are, and not as she would like them to be.

The nun as a teacher is privileged to mold the pliable heart and receptive soul of youth, and by her good example make them ever more Christ-conscious. The nun in the hospital has the dramatic opportunity to snatch souls from the brink of an unhappy eternity, and by her gentle care to teach the sick to sanctify their pains. The nun, wherever she may be or whatever her duty, can by her prayers and sacrifices effect the conversion of sinners.

The sincere nun has the radiant peace, joy, and blessings of being constantly in love with the Author of all, Who has promised her a hundredfold in this life and life eternal.

# Spirituality for the Space Age:

## The Secular Institute

Nance Karlin

Life today, with its astronauts, astrojets, missiles, space flights, moon shots, and a general "out-of-this-world" consciousness, makes one dizzy with its rapid progress and change. Who would have thought, a scant ten years ago, that the phrase "to fly to the moon" would today express a very real possibility?

In the midst of all this change there stands, today as always, a clear, bright, and un-failing light which illumines the path of man's life on earth. This is the Catholic Church, that steady, unchanging beacon for the journey into space which must be made by every man without exception: the journey back to his Creator. No matter how far on earth men may roam, no matter how deep

into it they penetrate, how high above it they soar, the Church, good mother that she is, keeps pace with the progress of her children in order to fulfill her God-given mission of bringing all men to God.

Each century has its own needs. The history of the Church is witness to the fact that in each succeeding age the Holy Spirit inspires the means whereby a perpetual incarnation of Christ in society is mystically effected. The Church is unchanging in her truth, but adjustable in her approach to life. This is clearly evidenced by Vatican Council II. Just a few years ago, who would have thought it possible to live an approved consecrated religious life outside a community and without a religious garb? Today it is being done in Secular Institutes.

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*Nance Karlin is the nom de plume of a Missionary of the Kingship of Christ. The author here describes a rather recent development in the expression of our Seraphic spirituality. While Secular Institutes are not exclusively Franciscan, the present article points up the adaptability of the Poverello's spirit to this mode of Christian living.*

### Papal Approval

Although the idea of the Secular Institute originated in the latter part of the eighteenth century, this mode of life was not accorded full recog-

nition and approval until February 2, 1947, when Pope Pius XII issued the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*. In this document the Holy Father wrote: "Therefore, by this present letter we approve the general statute of Secular Institutes which the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office has carefully examined concerning all that falls within its competence and which the Congregation of Religious has drawn up and revised, at Our command and under Our direction. In virtue of Our Apostolic Authority we declare, decree and enact as follows (there follows the special law governing these institutes); further, we appoint the Congregation of Religious for the execution of this law as set forth in the decree above, and we grant it all the faculties necessary and expedient for the purpose."

Article I of the Special Law Governing Secular Institutes determines precisely which groups within the Church are to be called Secular Institutes: "Clerical or lay associations whose members, in order to attain to Christian perfection and the full exercise of the apostolate, make profession of practising the evangelical counsels in the world, receive the special name of Institutes or Secular Institutes, in order to

be clearly distinguished from other general associations of the faithful (*Code of Canon Law* Book II, Part III). These Institutes are subject to the laws of this Apostolic Constitution".

This same document describes the purpose of these associations, which were first established in the first half of the nineteenth century and are now called Secular Institutes: "Their purpose was to practise faithfully in the world the evangelical counsels, and to undertake with greater freedom the duties of charity which owing to the evils of the times, were made difficult for, or were entirely forbidden to, the religious orders."

#### *Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ*

One of the Secular Institutes in the Church is called Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ. The first to receive approval in Italy, this group traces its origin to 1919 when, under the direction of Father Agostino Gemelli, O. F. M., twelve young women — Franciscan tertiaries — consecrated their lives to God in the choir of Saint Clare in the Church of San Damiano at Assisi. At that time, the Holy See had not yet authorized Constitutions for as-

sociations of the faithful who bound themselves by vows for a life of perfection. Pope Benedict XV himself had suggested that those who wished to consecrate themselves to God in the world join established Third Orders. These first twelve — including a teacher, a writer, an office worker, women of wealth, and women of moderate means—promised God that day at San Damiano to live in perfect chastity. At the same time, they dedicated themselves to the apostolate, and to those forms of modern activity suitable for promoting and spreading the Kingdom of God.

Even though the little group grew slowly, it received vocal approval from Pius XI, who urged the members to reach out to all parts of Italy. The many trials to which the association was subjected during the following years, especially the difficulties engendered by World War II, served only to strengthen its members. During this time, the Missionaries had the opportunity of proving their worth in various fields of the apostolate by bringing their authentically Christian attitude to bear on their social, business, political, and religious activities.

In 1945, two years before issuing the *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, Pope Pius XII approved

the group's statutes for a period of five years; then, in 1948 the Institute received from the Holy See the Decree of Praise; final and definitive approbation came in 1953. As an institute of pontifical right, privileged to branch out anywhere in the world, it is now established in Italy, the United States, Canada, France, England, Japan, Korea, Australia, South America, and elsewhere.

#### *Form of Life*

Possessing all the features which are common to Secular Institutes in general, the institute of the Missionaries is also clearly marked with the distinctive sign of Franciscan spirituality. Its aim is to bring together and spiritually unite women who live and pursue their respective professions in the world, while striving wholly for Christian perfection. There are two principle objectives: the first is the sanctification of the members in evangelical perfection; the second is the cultivation of apostolic zeal in promoting the lay apostolate and Catholic Action according to the mind of the Holy Father and the local bishops.

Missionaries of the Kingship live in a genuine canonical state of perfection by reason of their vows to observe the

evangelical counsels. In a very real sense it can be said that they are in the world, but are not of the world. Wearing no distinctive dress or distinguishing mark of any kind, these women dedicate themselves to God by a vow of chastity and promises of poverty, obedience, and the apostolate. Yet, they continue to live in the environment of home and family.

### *Evangelical Counsels*

By reason of her vow of chastity, a member of the institute not only foregoes marriage, but also assumes the responsibility of setting an example in Christian dress and behavior. She dresses modestly, neatly, and in good taste; while discouraging unbecoming and offensive conversations and jokes, she retains a sense of humor and a happy disposition; although she repulses unlawful advances and undue familiarity, she remains friendly and helpful to all.

In a world largely intent on glutting itself with material wealth and temporal pleasures, the Missionary, in accordance with her promise of poverty, lives a life of simple desires. Serene in her particular circumstances, she accepts gratefully what God gives her, never asking for more, and using

what belongs to her for the benefit of others. Her outward appearance does not change by reason of this promise; she continues to dress in a style befitting her circumstances. The promise of poverty does demand certain limitations in the use of money for personal expenditures; these limitations are established by mutual agreement between the individual Missionary and her superiors. Practically, her spending is regulated by a rather unique means: although a Missionary retains dominion and use of whatever she possesses or may acquire, whether by her work, inheritance, gift, or other legitimate means, she is also obliged to present for the approval of her superiors an annual budget within whose limits she promises to live.

The Missionary's promise of obedience requires submission to her superiors, whenever they command in virtue of this promise and within the limits of the Constitution and the Rule of Life. Her observance of the virtue of obedience sets an example which is sorely needed today. It involves submission to lawful authority in a willing and cheerful manner — to civil laws and regulations, to the daily requirements of work, to one's moral obligations, to family and

neighbor, to the gentle but firm guidance of Holy Mother Church, and, above all, to the regulations imposed by her Rule of Life.

### *Other Obligations*

Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ are found in a great variety of professions and occupations. The institute's typical member may be a clerk, a secretary, a nurse, a member of the armed forces, a teacher, a housekeeper, or almost anything else that one may imagine. Whatever her work may be, this is the Missionary's primary field of the apostolate, this is where she concentrates the first fruits of her own striving for holiness. In addition to this, she participates in some form of Catholic Action as fully as her circumstances permit. Here again, as in the case of her occupation, the member of the institute has a wide choice. With the consent of her superiors, the Missionary may devote herself to any activity and service of a religious and social nature, as long as these are compatible with her professional duties. Practically speaking, her choice will be directed frequently by her personal inclination, talent, and environment.

The Secular Institute which we are here describing has a

Constitution and a Rule of Life which are peculiar and proper to itself. The former sets down the general norms of the institute; the latter describes the particular application of that law to each member. It is in the Constitution that one finds the keystone on which the entire structure of the dedicated life in the world depends: those who would pursue this form of life are required to devote at least two hours a day to practices of piety. The daily practices include Holy Mass and Communion, a specified period of meditation, the rosary, the Franciscan tertiary's Office of the twelve Paters, Aves, and Glorias, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, spiritual reading, the examination of conscience, and, of course, morning and evening prayers. None of these activities is performed in common; each member carries them out at a time most compatible with her particular circumstances.

The weekly spiritual exercises comprise sacramental confession, the Stations of the Cross, and an act of special devotion to the Blessed Mother. Each month the members make a day of recollection, which includes a holy hour. Finally, the Missionary is required to make an annual retreat for one week, and to engage in a prescribed

course of study. The monthly day of recollection and the annual retreat are generally made in common.

### *The Typical Missionary*

Ir order to see more clearly what this form of spirituality entails, let's observe the life of an average Missionary.

Mary, a secretary in an insurance firm, lives at home with her parents and a younger brother and sister. While avoiding extremes in her clothing and hair-style, she dresses in a becoming and fashionable manner. Her appearance is that of an ordinary office worker. She is a member of her office bowling team, an officer in the credit union, and an enthusiastic participant in the occasional outings which the office sponsors. Although she is not generally regarded as an outstanding leader, her colleagues respect her as an efficient, cheerful, dependable worker. Her more perceptive associates are aware of the good influence which she quietly exerts upon them: her calm good sense has allayed many an office storm, and not a few of the other girls have been inspired, almost unconsciously, by her general demeanor.

Mary participates in the activities of one of the organi-

zations in her parish, attends a work-related evening class in the local high school, and is a member of the local fraternity of the Third Order Secular of Saint Francis.

She enjoys living with her family. Without compromising her consecration to God, she performs all the normal tasks that one does as a member of a family. She assists her parents in the same way any daughter would. She is thoughtful of her sister and brother; the youngsters are especially appreciative of the small treats which she occasionally provides for them. Since she handles her own financial affairs, keeping a budget raises no problems.

Of course Mary is teased or questioned occasionally about the mystery of "not marrying." An attractive girl, she has gradually grown accustomed to this sort of thing. Remarks of this nature are laughed off or answered, as the occasion demands, and she has discovered that, in the face of her obvious interior peace and the contentment of a useful, busy life, they eventually cease.

Since the prayer life of the individual member of the Missionaries is adapted to her own particular circumstances, Mary has worked out her own schedule. She spends one week of

her annual vacation in making a retreat; with quiet persistence she has also arranged for a day of recollection each month. Her spiritual exercises for each day are fulfilled somewhat as follows: having assisted at Holy Mass in the morning, she recites part of the office, and may even do some spiritual reading, on the bus which takes her to work. The office routine leaves no room, of course, for formal prayer; but, because of her complete dedication, Mary performs her work in a deeply prayerful spirit. After work, there is a visit to the church around the corner from the office, where she makes her meditation. The bus ride home gives her the time to recite the rosary and more of the divine office. Just before retiring, she takes time to complete the office, examine her conscience, and engage in night prayer.

### *Formation of a Missionary*

As we have pointed out above, members of a Secular Institute do not live the common life. In the light of this feature, it may be asked whether they receive any special training for their vocation. Yes, they do.

Prior to training, however, there are, of course, certain qualifications prerequisite to

acceptance into the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ. The candidate's health must permit her to undertake the personal and apostolic duties involved in this state of life. She must be emotionally well balanced, of good morals, and between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five. There must be some degree of flexibility in her family ties, so that she may freely fulfill these duties; she must enjoy sufficient economic independence to ensure self-support; she must possess enough intellectual capability and cultural training to acquire a position in an environment favorable to the exercise of the apostolate. Finally, if she is not already a Franciscan tertiary, the candidate for the Missionaries must have the intention of becoming one.

Because she is "in the world but not of the world," a Missionary must be possessed of a great deal of moral and spiritual balance, and a character tempered to meet the interior and exterior difficulties inherent in this form of life. She also needs a very solid formation to a life of intense piety. During the first six months after her acceptance, a candidate receives careful and intensive instruction in the Rule and the Constitutions of the institute. She then spends two years in

a systematic study of how she may most effectively apply the evangelical counsels and the Missionaries' way of life to her own situation and circumstances. Moreover, the Missionary is encouraged to continue her studies privately, in order to keep abreast of the annual course of study in Christian doctrine and other sacred sciences. Her spiritual and cultural formation never ends; she strives to promote it constantly through spiritual reading, advice from her confessor, conferences with her superior, and the guidance of her spiritual director.

#### *The Challenge . . .*

This, then, is the life of the Missionary of the Kingship of Christ. Glamorous? Spectacular? Not at all! But it does seem to be eminently suited to our own times — a state of life which corresponds admirably to the needs of our day, a form of spirituality well-fitted to the space age. It is a fact that today, while man is conquering outer space, he is at the same time putting more and more space between himself and God. Filled with the pride of technological successes, many modern men deny the existence of God, or at least deny Him the role that He should play in

human affairs. They surround themselves with work, like-thinking friends, and amusements, hoping thus to find happiness in this world with no thought of the world to come. They live in a spiritual void, comfortably divorced from the influence of religion. Members of Secular Institutes can break through this shell of temporalities with which men isolate themselves from true reality. They can meet twentieth-century man on his own grounds, in the same office, laboratory, hospital, barracks. They share his problems, speak his language, think his thoughts. Having come to his side in order to experience his point of view, they try, by their example, mortification, and prayer, to lead him gradually out of his vacuum and into rich friendship with God.

#### *. . . And the Response*

Contrary to the inference commonly drawn from the name of her institute, the Missionary of the Kingship of Christ does not go off to foreign lands to convert the heathen. Her vocation thus lacks the lure of travel and adventure; for the most part, it is also void of the consolations of spectacular results. For her there is no publicity, no glam-

our, no mass conversions; she foregoes even the deference and respect accorded a religious habit. Completely unrecognized (even her family does not know she is a Missionary), she remains in her own environment, pursues an apparently ordinary routine, and quietly but persistently works to convert the pagan world which is, in a very real sense, her own. In complete anonymity, except to the ecclesiastical authorities who have a right to know, she lives her hidden, dedicated life.

The reason for keeping her vocation a strict secret is precisely to make its apostolate more effective; the ordinary nature of her life enables her to meet the world on its own terms. Would a public school-board, for instance, today hire or retain a teacher known to be living the evangelical counsels? Would a stenographer at the next desk be inclined to seek or accept advice about the attention of that interesting (but married) man in the office, from a girl who has taken a vow of chastity?

As Jesus shrouded the glory of His divinity so that He might approach more closely the men whose nature He had assumed, the Missionary hides her dedication to God beneath the sacrament of normalcy in order to attract souls to her

Father. At her place of work, on the subway train, in her recreation, the Missionary is "just one of the crowd." But the ordinary manner of her existence is the very thing that enables her to suffuse the atmosphere through which she passes with the good perfume of Christ.

The writer may be permitted the insertion here of an incidental observation. Although, as we have pointed out, the secular institute is not an exclusively Franciscan form of life, it occurs to us that its apostolate as we have just described it possesses a particular Seraphic quality. This unobtrusive permeation of the natural with the supernatural, this ordering of nature to the purpose of grace, is very definitely characteristic of the Franciscan school of theology.

A Missionary of the Kingship of Christ is clearly aware of and deeply concerned for the problems of modern life. While living in their midst, she seeks to solve them by the only means which are truly effective: personal and apostolic sanctity. By means of mortification and detachment born of a deep spirit of prayer, she strives for personal holiness in her chosen way of life. Through word, work, and example, she

attempts to hasten the return of society to Christ the King.

Membership in a secular institute is truly a special vocation with requirements all its own. It is by no means a life of compromise, a sort of halfway state between world and cloister. It is a vocation

wonderfully adapted to the peculiar needs of our times. It has the approval of the Church, which guarantees that it is pleasing to God as a form of life for those souls whom He has called to higher perfection and to an apostolate in the world.

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The Holy Ghost, who unceasingly re-creates and renews the face of the earth, daily made desolate and stained by many and great evils, has called to Himself by a great and special grace, many beloved sons and daughters whom with great affection We bless in the Lord, so that gathered together and organized in Secular Institutes, they may be for this dark world which has lost its savour, a world to which they do not belong and in which by divine dispensation they must nevertheless remain, the salt, the light, and the leaven: the incorruptible salt which, renewed by the effect of vocation, does not grow savourless; the light which shines amid the darkness of the world and is not put out; the leaven, small in quantity yet ever active, which always and everywhere at work, mingled with all grades of society, from the highest to the lowest, strives by word, example, and in every way to reach and permeate them each and all, until the whole mass is transformed and wholly leavened in Christ.

— Pope Pius XII, *Motu Proprio Primo Feliciter*

## Who Are You?

*Sister M. Thaddine, O.S.F.*

Just who are you anyway, Sister? Where do you come from? This isn't a quiz to embarrass you. It shouldn't, Sister, because truly you're wonderful. Just think, you are an individual. One couldn't possibly divide you up into small pieces and still have you. You're really *one* — a unit. Something that is different and separate from every other individual. Sure enough, you sisters may dress alike, walk alike maybe, or even look alike; but you're not alike. That's the wonder of it all, Sister. You, yes you, are a special product of these times. In your body and intellect are all the wonders which existed in your parents; traits, colors, shapes, contributed by all those people in the ancient family tree, not only on your mother's side of the family but also on your father's side; and even beyond that, their mothers and their fathers, back through the ages. You ought to come up

with something pretty wonderful, don't you think so, Sister?

But that's not all. You've inherited a great many things about you from your superb ancestry; but believe it or not, you've acquired a few traits of your own. Without realizing it, your environment, your friends, your school teachers, your reading habits, good or bad, your nationality, your health — all these things have contributed to the structure of you — your body, your emotions, your personality: the *you* which you are today. Almighty God surely was generous to you, dear Sister, because it was He who made the *you* you are today possible. He placed you in the environment most suitable for you. He gave you appetites and passions according to the strength and weaknesses of your temple — the temple designed by your ancestry to which He added light. And then, to harness these appetites and passions, God gave you a brilliant intellect so that you could choose rightly and see in His illuminative light the directive for your own free will.

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*This is the second of six Essays for Religious Sisters appearing every other month in this volume of THE CORD.*

Do you ever thank Him for this intellect, dear Sister? You ought to. It led you to His door.

And so what does all this mean now, to you, my dear Sister? What do these words say and suggest to you? Only this, dear friend, and ponder them well. It means that when that big iron convent gate slammed behind you, shutting out (as you thought) the world when it clanged shut, you carried this self-same world along into the convent with you. It hid itself in your appetites, it sneaked in with your passions, it disguised itself as part of the good and wholesomeness of you, and got in somehow even though you didn't see it. You were too much in love with giving, too much in love with ambition and the great things you'd do for God and His Blessed Mother, and too greatly blinded by His tremendous consolations and His divine love, that love which He gives to those who are still too young and feeble to share in the weight of His cross.

And now that the tremendous ecstasy of that love of consolation with which your divine Spouse embraced you has cleared away, and you see His cross and His bleeding wounds, Sister, are you frightened? Will you too go away?

Oh, my dearest sister in

Christ, know you now that you are a fragile vessel, that your concupiscences will taunt and harass you, that your appetites and passions will overwhelm you, that you will fall time and time again, and get dust on your clean soul; but know also that in your weakness strength will be found in the cleansing brush of penance and the daily refreshment of Holy Communion. So take heart, friend. God is with you.

And see all those sisters around you? They too are experiencing these same fears, joys, and sorrows. They too, to the extent of their strength of will, are throttling the appetites and passions, are practicing virtue or are falling in the dust. Your sisters need you, dear Sister. They need you to help them in their weaknesses, just as you need them for their strengths. So, again, take heart, friend. You are still a human being, but very special and chosen one whom God loves and will protect and be with forever.

*Your Thought For Now:*  
Where there is unity and love, there is God. Even though you still must fight the battle to the finish, with your appetites and passions, your sisters share in the same conflict. Together with God, you must surely win!

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