

OUR MONTHLY CONFERENCE

The Love of God

A man of no religious belief, passing a Catholic church one day, noticed an inscription over the main entrance. Out of curiosity, he walked up to the door to read what was written there. He stood for a long time, staring in deep amazement at the words carved in the stone. Then slowly he turned and walked away. So great was the impression which those words made upon him that he immediately took instructions and became a Catholic. The inscription he saw was: "God is love."

Throughout this month of June we are often reminded of that astounding truth—God is love—by the frequent references which are made to the Sacred Heart devotion. For the whole purpose of this devotion is to bring us to a realization of the boundless love of God for us and of our obligation of loving Him in return. What better subject for our conference could we choose than the mutual exchange of love between God and ourselves?

During one of His apparitions to Saint Margaret Mary, our Blessed Savior appeared to His Sacred Heart and said: "Behold this heart which has loved men and women." There is a poignancy about those words which is touching. They seem to indicate, at one and the same time, our Lord's ardent longing to have us know His great love for us and our utter inability to grasp its full import. These words are strongly reminiscent of another revelation made to Saint Catherine of Genoa in which God said to her: "Oh, if you only knew how I love a soul! That will be the last thing you will learn in this world; for to understand it I must kill you." Therefore, to try to plumb the depths of God's love for us is to be attempting the impossible. Still, we can get an adequate, and an inspiring, picture of that love by meditating on its qualities which God Himself has made known to us.

In the first place, it is an *eternal* love. Whenever we hear that word "eternal", we begin to reel. We try to imagine a span of time stretching back and back through never-beginning ages of long ago, when this world did not exist, when angels had not as yet been created, when nothing or nobody was, but only God. And yet, no matter how expansive we made our idea of eternity, no matter how far back we push the horizons with which our limited minds inevitably deal, we shall not be able to find a single moment when God was not loving us, when He was not caressing us with His love. Each one of us, in every true sense, make his own these words of Holy Scripture: *The*

Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before he made anything the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was. The depths were not as yet, and I was conceived: neither had the fountains of waters as yet sprung out. The mountains with their huge bulk had not been established: before the hills I was brought forth. He had not yet made the earth, nor the rivers, nor the poles of the world. When he prepared the heaven, I was present (Prov. 8, 22-27). Yes, throughout all of eternity's timeless eons I was present in the mind and heart of God. He had decided upon my creation. He had planned every detail of my life with a view to its final consummation in the endless embrace of love in heaven. The very thought of it all overwhelmed me. And yet we know that it is absolutely true, for God has said: *I have loved you with an everlasting love* (Jer. 31, 3). What a revelation that is! What value does it not impart to us puny creatures!

But that is not all. By the very fact that God's love for us is eternal, it is likewise *unchangeable*. Our poor, weak, human love is so fickle. Today we are enthused about a thing and tomorrow we are indifferent to it. Now we are in God's service and before long we are quite listless. How different, on the other hand, is divine love. It is ever the same, more steadfast than an image in changeless bronze or chiseled in unyielding granite. Whether our hearts are warm with love for Him, or whether they are cold with the frost of unconcern, His response is always and only an abiding love. For He is our devoted Father in heaven who makes his sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust (Mt. 5, 45). Perhaps we have played the unhappy part of the Prodigal Son. If so, we have known not only the patience and forbearance of our heavenly Father, but also His eagerness to have us return, His welcome when we came back, and His generous restoration of our squandered heritage. Perhaps we have wandered far from His protecting arms, or perhaps we have experienced the anxious pursuit of the Good Shepherd after His lost sheep, to see His genuine joy upon finding it. Maybe we have even seared the lips with a traitor's kiss, and in return were called God's friends. Only a love could be strong enough to weather such treatment, to remain constant in the face of denial, desertion, and betrayal. The enduring love of a mother for her child has often been honored in verse and song. And rightly so, for it knows no limits and counts no costs. And yet God says of this love: *Can a woman forget her infant so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she forget, yet will not I forget thee* (Isa. 49, 15). In moments of sorrowful reflection when our past infidelities loom large and foreboding before us, it is the

of this changeless love of God that means so much to us, that gives us renewed courage and hope.

Another quality that makes God's love for us so attractive is that it is infinite. And because it is infinite, it is big enough to embrace each one of us individually. There is no such thing as a parceling out of divine love in order that every one of the millions of human beings may have a share in it. Just as the sun can be mirrored, whole and entire, in every tiny pool of water found by the side of a road, so God's love can be cradled, in its undivided completeness, in every created heart. God, therefore, can be and is totally preoccupied with each individual without in the least minimizing His loving attention to any one in particular. Each one of us can lay claim on God's entire love, can look upon God as his own personal Beloved, without prejudice to a like claim and right on the part of his neighbor. And since God's infinite love is able to embrace each one of us individually, it can specialize in the attention required by our individual needs. There are no two of us alike. From our finger tips to the innermost recesses of our souls we differ in a host of ways; so much so, that we are often a mystery to one another, and at times even to ourselves. But we are no mystery to God. He knows us perfectly, and modifies His loving designs to fit our peculiar make-up exactly. *As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame* (Ps. 102, 13-14). Yes, He knows the amount of strength and endurance each one of us has, and He measures our trials and crosses accordingly. He knows our individual talents and limitations, and He expects no more from us than we are capable of giving. He is the only Master Who will unfailingly reward honest effort and genuine good will in lieu of results. He knows the fears that at times grip our souls, and His loving Heart is ever ready with the precise grace to meet the situation. In these and countless other ways God's love takes into consideration our particular needs, and it is mighty consoling to know that there is always One Who understands us so thoroughly and can help us so surely.

When we reflect on these qualities of God's love—eternal, changeless, infinite—it is hard to make ourselves realize that such a tremendous love really exists, and especially that it is manifested to us insignificant creatures. With holy awe we ask God in astonishment: *What is a man that thou shouldst magnify him? Or why doest thou set thy heart upon him?* (Job 7, 17). The answer to that question, of course, is that God loves us only to have us love Him in return. So eager is He to have our love that He commands us to love Him: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with*

thy whole mind (Mt. 22, 37). Speaking of this command, Saint Augustine says: "Thou dost command us to love Thee, O God? Should we not rather consider our highest privilege to do so?" Indeed, it is a rare privilege to live for no other purpose than to love, and to be loved by, God. We should strive to make ourselves like unto the love with which He loves us. His love for us is eternal; ours should be enduring. His love is changeless; ours should be constant. His love is infinite; ours should be whole and undivided, and for Him alone. And perhaps our love for God is far removed from this ideal. How often we hear in spirit the plaintive cry of our Father Francis, "Love is not loved," and it seems his words are spoken directly to us? How often we think of the command of the Sacred Heart that what pains Him most is the ingratitude and coldness of hearts consecrated to Him; and with a sort of guilty uneasiness we ask the question, "Do You mean me, Lord?" How often we recall, with some awe akin to fear, the statement of Saint Paul, *If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema* (1 Cor. 16, 22)? There is no doubt about it: our love for God could be stronger and more unselfish, and our ambition should be to make it so. But how can we increase the love of God in our hearts?

A very effective help to this end is to learn to know God better. Saint John tells us: *He who does not love does not know God* (1 Jo. 4, 8). Once we come to know God, our hearts will go out to Him spontaneously, since it is natural to the heart to become enthusiastic and devoted whenever it encounters beauty and amiability. Hence, it would be worth our effort to meditate frequently on the perfections of God as portrayed in good spiritual treatises and especially in Holy Scripture. Likewise, after the example of Saint Francis, we would do well to keep ourselves alert to the beauty of God in creatures, the works of His hands. In this regard, Saint Bonaventure says of our holy Father: "In all things Saint Francis beheld Him Who is most fair, and by His footsteps in created things he found his way to his Beloved, making a ladder of all things to ascend to Him Who is to be desired in them all." And of another holy soul it is recorded that, as he walked through the fields and meadows, he would playfully say: "Be silent, be silent, lovely flowers. I know what you wish to say to me. You wish to say that I should love God Who created you for me." Would that all hearts too had ears to catch the voice of every creature exhorting us to love God. Through them God is ever pleading: *My son, give me thy heart* (Prov. 23,

Another means whereby we can increase our love for God is the frequent making of acts of love. God tells us in Holy Scripture: *I love them that love me* (Prov. 8, 17). And it logically follows from those words that the more we

love God, the more He will love us. Now, at the time of our baptism we were given the ability to love God in a supernatural way. But that ability will not develop of itself. We must cultivate it and help it to grow by exercising it in acts of love. It is a good policy, therefore, to have one or the other loving ejaculation which appeals to us, and to use it often and thoughtfully during the day. We know that this was the practice of Saint Francis himself. He would spend long hours simply repeating from the depths of his heart "My God and my All." It was his way of telling God what he thought of Him and how much he loved Him. Certainly those hours of spiritual love-making helped to win for him the title of "Seraph of Assisi." And we can be sure that a like practice on our part will do much to fill our hearts with God's love.

Finally, the best and surest method of growing in the love of God is to beg Him to increase it. After all, the love of God is a gift, the most precious gift God can give to us. And He willingly bestows it on those who show themselves anxious to have it. The words which our Lord addressed to the Samaritan woman refer especially to this love, and, hence, they are meant for us too: *If thou didst know the gift of God . . . thou wouldst have asked it of Him* (Jo. 4, 10). Joyce Kilmer, the celebrated poet who was killed in the First World War, once sent a letter from the battlefield to his wife, and in it he said: "My dear wife, help me to love God. If I love Him, that is all that counts. I received faith by praying for it. I hope to receive love the same way." We also can confidently hope to receive God's love if we but ask for it perseveringly, for, as Saint Augustine says so beautifully: "God thirsts to be thirsted for (*Deus sitit sitiri*)."

The theme of this conference has been the mutual exchange of love between God and ourselves. Let us try to realize the importance of that relationship. Really, it is the heart of the spiritual life, the essence of perfection. Father Liagre, C. S. Sp., in his book *A Retreat with St. Therese*, develops this point very well. The following is a modified version of his explanation. God longs to give himself to us. But since He is love, He can give Himself only by causing us to love Him. Therefore, He instills into our souls a desire to love Him. If we correspond with that desire, He satisfies it with the gift of His love. And because God is an infinitely loveable Being, we do not rest satisfied then but experience new desires, stronger desires, to love Him still more, which in turn are satisfied if we co-operate with the graces thus vouchsafed to us. Thus there is an alternate succession of desire and fulfillment, referred to in Holy Scripture in the words: *I to my beloved, and his turning is towards me* (Cant. 7, 10). In God it is the desire to be loved, in us it is the desire to love. And in these two desires,

each craving the other, is found the whole story of the relationship between God and ourselves, from the first stirrings of grace to the heights of sanctity and the everlasting union of heaven.

From this explanation it follows that our highest ambition should be to understand the great love God has for us and to requite that love. Each duty, each occasion to practice fraternal charity, each chance to make a sacrifice may be viewed as an offering of love to us on God's part. And if we generously embrace these opportunities, it means we are offering God our love in return. In this way God constantly solicits our love and we can continually give Him that love, and thus, from day to day, draw ever closer to Him and make ever greater progress in perfection. If God is Love, then we must love like Him—all love, in the sense that we view everything as a chance to love Him. In this light we can understand the significance of the statement: "Love, and love alone, that counts in the spiritual life."

Westmont, Illinois.

Fr. Herman Doerr, O.S.A.



Do the best you can to become, with the grace of God, a true and perfect Friar Minor, and when you appear to have attained that ideal state, if you are ever privileged to come so far, then say in the sincerity of your heart: *servi sumus*.

Junipero Serra, O.S.A.

FRANCISCAN MEEKNESS

An important ingredient in the happiness and joy of Saint Francis and the first Friars was the virtue of meekness. They surely were happy because they had given up all their possessions and had put their trust in the goodness and freedom of God. But what kind of joy could they have had if they had not been meek—and humble of heart?

Ever since the day Christ asked His listeners to learn of Him because He was meek and humble of heart, meekness and humility have been linked together in a wonderful fashion. Humility rests on knowledge—a knowledge of what God is, in contrast to what we are. Every day offers us many occasions to exercise the virtue of humility. Sometimes others point out our faults and it is humility that prompts us to realize our unexaggerated and true worth. If our pet ideas and projects are opposed by others, humility will again help us to realize that merely because a project or an idea is our own does not give it more importance in the eyes of God. But how we react to these conflicts caused by our pride and pettiness necessarily calls to mind the virtue of meekness. If we were ideal religious, every time someone exposed our pride we would continue to love our "offender" as much as we did before. Our God-centered love of neighbor would have left no room for any self-centered anger to rise up within us. From this we can see that the virtue of meekness can rightly be defined as an outward showing of an interior attitude of kindness and charity in the time of opposition and conflict.

The answer to the question, "Am I practising the virtue of meekness?", is found in the words of Christ. With wonderful exactness He said, *By their faults you shall know them*. The fellow citizens of Saint Francis unwittingly used these words of Christ to judge whether Saint Francis and his early followers were meek and humble of heart. If a rainy season allowed, the Assisians blotched the Friars with mud. Others had their fun by tearing the habit right off the Friars' backs. But the reaction of the Friars is much more worthy of note. The *Three Companions* (39) says, "They did not ask for what had been taken. But if any, moved by pity, wished to restore what had been taken, they received it back willingly . . . but, as they had been admonished by Francis, they bore these things patiently and patiently, nor were they sad, nor did they speak evil of those who ill-treated them."

What sanctity, what humility, and what meekness these first Friars have shown us. What else but sanctity or God-centeredness could have prompted them

to act the way they did. If they had been constantly on the watch with a doubt to see that their rights, opinions, or ideas were not rejected or tampered with, the podesta of Assisi might have had a brawl on his hands. Wouldn't we have been quick to fight back? But these first Franciscans had learned from Peter and from Saint Francis himself that the rights, opinions, and ideas of a Franciscan have no more importance than they do in the eyes of God. Saint Francis had taught them that peevishness is so easily directed toward the "sinner" who has attacked our pride, rather than to a possible sin of violating one of the rights or gifts God has given them. We too have our own rights, opinions, and ideas and they have a right to be protected and fostered—but according to the instructions God has given. *Blessed are the meek and humble of heart, He*. Therefore God expects us to realize that it is He Who has given us these rights. We are to be humble enough to readily admit that the opinion of someone else might be better than our own. Whenever anyone is in opposition to what we say, or think, God asks us to react with meekness of heart—with an interior attitude of love and kindness.

Those that live and associate with us give us so many occasions to follow Christ's admonition to be meek of heart. How often it is each day that our associates "step on our toes" and squeeze out just a little of our pride. But our reaction to this is sometimes a far cry from the meekness of the first Franciscans. Perhaps we are busy hugging a new book and nursing our love for peace and quiet. Then someone slips in and asks help with a problem. In no time our peace is running off a questionnaire. "A problem?—so early in the day?—so late in the dinner time?—at this time of night? I am not going to budge until I finish this book. What? you still bothered with that?" How close it would have been to the Franciscan meekness if an interior attitude of love and kindness had urged us to say, "Why sure. Glad to. Here, have a chair". But no, we give the person a quick sharp answer and feel that we have a right to feel the way we do. We do not lose our self-control by showing all our feelings externally. But we still are not meek. We lack that interior attitude of love and kindness. Meekness surely includes self-control, but it includes much more. To control angry feelings is *striving* after meekness and this is very good, but it is not the actual possession of a meek and humble heart. Meekness always excludes the deliberate self-centered anger bubbling up within us.

In our endeavor to follow the meekness of Christ and Saint Francis, the conduct of those around us plays an important part. Whether the conduct of a fellow religious is good or bad, it can be a great help towards acquiring meekness.

The good conduct of a fellow religious inspires us to imitate his goodness and charity. Bad conduct tries our virtues and exercises our meekness and gives it deeper roots. But if we are a religious who is "sensitive", only the good conduct of others will leave our virtues intact. Our sensitiveness will urge us to battle with any opposition to our sensitivities. During such a battle, we not only have self-centered anger bubbling up within us, but our anger flows out into words and actions.

A sensitive religious is agreeable only to those who are in sympathy with his likes, whims, and fancies. People who annoy him, and thereby could help his striving after meekness, are avoided. A sensitive religious easily becomes disgruntled and unhappy because he thinks the main obstacles to his happiness are his associates and environment, whereas the fault lies in himself. More particularly, it often lies in the "pet virtues" that a religious is trying to cultivate.

Some religious are all out for manners; others for cleanliness, punctuality, or silence. As for silence, no one will deny the value of prescribed silence for discipline, recollection of the soul, and for the work of the mind. But to blind one's scale of values with an over emphasis on silence always attacks the meekness that Christ and Saint Francis have asked of us.

To have my happiness completely hinged on silence means that I will frequently be unhappy. And when I am unhappy and peevish because of any noise, it doesn't take long to show these noisemakers that I lack an interior attitude of kindness and charity. By my pouncing on them I will show that my zeal for silence is not as holy as I would like to think. My peevishness will likewise show that I have a mere craving for a natural peace of mind—a passionate desire to have everything running smoothly. The healthy temperament and vitality of others will have little consideration in my standards. I want silence, I say, and I am going to get it. I may get the silence I want, but the motive for wanting silence and the way I go about getting it postpones my full possession of meekness.

Maybe it is bad manners that often riles our peace of mind. Of course everyone appreciates good manners—our giving to another the love and respect due to the God-given gifts he has. But when we demand respect for ourselves with no thought that it is primarily our God-given gifts and virtues that demand respect, we indulge in self-assertion, the opposite of meekness. We lose the essential element of meekness—the interior attitude of kindness and charity. Now anxious we are to exalt ourselves and not God's gifts, to overestimate our

value and our powers, to believe that all we have is ours and is *for* and ourselves.

When we react to bad manners with a scowl or cutting remark, sometimes so sure that we are then just being enthusiastic for due respect the gifts we see in ourselves. We forget that a bad-mannered person has from God too and that they are to be respected as such. Just because our aim is directed toward something good, something supernatural, does not mean our motives are supernatural. Nor, above all, does a supernatural aim insure our interior attitude of kindness and charity. Our goals and attitudes are quite separate and distinct.

Pet peeves and other forms of self-assertion can so easily strangle meekness in our heart. Furthermore, they set up blocks so that meekness scarcely returns. Of course we cannot expect to eliminate pet peeves and self-assertion over night. It takes time and plenty of it. But all these difficulties have to be solved and wiped away before we reach heaven. If they are eliminated here on earth, they will have to be burned out in purgatory. There is no place for pet peeves, selfishness, and the fifty-seven other varieties of self-assertion.

Heaven is the true home for the meek because Christ has told us so. He said, *Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land*, the land of heaven. As Christ made heaven possible for us by meekly suffering and dying on the cross, so we will actually gain heaven by our meekness in times of suffering and opposition. This is one of the ways that Saint Francis and some of his Friars followed to gain the heavenly reward and glory they received. Suffering and opposition from others brought them closer and closer to God until they finally saw God face to face! Are we willing to follow the same God-way of meekness?

Oldenburg, Indiana

Fr. Duane Stenzel, O.S.A.



A very common failing amongst men is to adopt one extreme in an endeavor to avoid another, and sometimes not to perceive that the danger into which they fall is greater than that which they had sought to flee from.

Candide Chalippe, O.S.A.

AN EXPLANATION OF THE RULE OF THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR (VI)

The Fifth Article

TEXT: *At the end of the time of probation, let those who are found fit be admitted to profession.*

Short though the wording of this article is, it contains a number of points for consideration if we view it in the light of the prescriptions of Canon Law.

At the end of the time of probation

Canon 555 (par. 2) requires that the novice "make the novitiate for one continuous year." Canonists point out that the novitiate year is not complete until after midnight of the anniversary day of the reception into the novitiate. Consequently, if a novice received the habit on June 1, he or she could not make profession until June 2 of the following year. Since the year is to be taken according to the calendar, leap year simply prolongs the novitiate an additional day.

Canon 556 indicates when the continuity of the novitiate year is interrupted, when it is merely suspended, and when it is left canonically unaffected. The novitiate is interrupted and "must be made over, if (1) the novice after being dismissed by the superior has actually left the house; (2) if without the permission of the superior he leaves the house with the intention of not returning, or (3) if for any reason—even with the permission of the superior—he has remained outside the house of the novitiate for over thirty days, consecutive or otherwise, even though with the intention of returning." (par. 1)

A novice who has been dismissed, justly or unjustly by a competent superior, breaks the novitiate as soon as he actually leaves the house. Even if the superior were to readmit him the same day, the continuity of the year of probation is destroyed, and another full year would be required. In the case where the novice departs without the permission of the superiors with no intention of returning, the novitiate is broken the moment he leaves the cloister provided his intention not to return can be proved in the external forum, for instance, by his words to fellow novices or others, by his actions such as packing all his belongings, or under other circumstances. Let us suppose, however, that a novice left the house informally with the secret intention of not returning, planning, let us say, to write back for his belongings. If such a novice should regret his fault and return promptly, commentators on the Code point out that he could continue his novitiate.

Regarding the reckoning of the days required to break the novitiate, that if a novice spends at least part of the day in the novitiate he is not considered to be absent for a canonical day. Thus, a person who leaves the novitiate Monday morning and returns late Sunday evening is considered to have been absent only five days. Note also that the novitiate is interrupted only when a thirty days absence is complete. Consequently, if the novice wishes to begin a new canonical year, he must begin computing the time from the day he returns after the novitiate has been canonically interrupted. Let us suppose, for example, that a novice was absent at one time for 17 days. Several months later he returns away for an additional 14 days, making a total of 31 days. He could not begin his new novitiate year as beginning after the first absence, but must compute the new time of probation from the day of his return after the second interruption.

"If the novice has remained outside the precincts of the novitiate for more than fifteen days but not over thirty days, consecutive or otherwise, either with the permission of the superior or through force of circumstances, but under the authority of the superior, it is necessary and sufficient for the validity of the novitiate to supply the days spent outside the novitiate. If the entire period of absence is more than fifteen days, the superior may prescribe that those days be supplied, but this is not necessary for the validity of the novitiate." (Can. 556, par. 3)

This canon goes on to state that "Superiors must not grant permission for a novice to remain outside the precincts of the novitiate except for just and grave reasons" (par. 3). Some congregations have the custom of sending the novices away to a villa or country house with the novice master for a period of vacation. Congregations consider the change in air and needed rest as sufficient motive for such practice. Since the villa cannot be considered a canonically erected house of the novitiate, such a vacation could not be prolonged beyond fifteen days without delaying the profession of the novices. *A fortiori*, sickness or a surgical operation requiring hospitalization, calamities such as flood, fire, and so on, would be sufficient reason for remaining outside the novitiate. Similarly, as the last paragraph of this canon states, "the transfer by the superiors of a novice to another novitiate of the same institute, does not interrupt the novitiate." All these provisions, however, presuppose that the absence from the novitiate, or the journey between novitiates, does not exceed fifteen or thirty days. Otherwise it will be subject to the prescriptions mentioned above.

The requirement of the Code that "the habit prescribed for the novices by the constitutions be worn throughout the whole period of the novitiate,"

in special circumstances determine otherwise" (Can. 557) is regarded as directive, and not as affecting the validity of the novitiate.

Religious institutes that distinguish officially between two classes of members, such as clerics and lay brothers, or choir sisters and lay sisters, should note that the novitiate made for one class is not valid for the other" (Can. 558). Since the tasks expected of each class in such institutes differ considerably, we can understand why a person may have a vocation for one state and not for the other. Both the aspirant and the religious superior have a right to test the vocation of the state of the candidate's choice during the year of probation. To determine whether such class distinctions exist, however, the constitutions should be consulted. If the latter are not sufficiently explicit on the matter, the novices are all considered as belonging to the same class.

As a more proximate preparation for profession, novices are required to make a will disposing of whatever they actually possess or may subsequently possess, as they see fit (Can. 569). Once the religious is professed, this will cannot be altered except with the permission of the Holy See unless the need is urgent, in which case the major superior, or, if he cannot be reached in time, the local superior, may give permission for the change (Can. 583). As Canon Law recognizes the validity of such a will even of minors, the parents and guardians would have to respect the will of a professed religious who died while still a minor.

Since the simple vow of poverty deprives the religious of the independent use of his property, its revenue, and its administration, but does not deprive him of the actual ownership itself or of the right to acquire personal property in the future, Canon Law requires that the novices who have property must cede the administration thereof to whomsoever they wish (either to the religious institute or to someone outside) for the period they are in simple vows (Can. 569). If the novices have no property at the time there is no need to bother with making this cession, for they can make it later notwithstanding their profession, should they acquire property at some future date.

Those found fit should be admitted to profession

Religious profession, though inseparably connected with the public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience according to the present legislation of the Church, is not simply identical with pronouncing one's vows. The vows are promises made directly to God, whereas the profession is a bilateral contract between the individual and the religious community, whereby the former agrees

to live according to the rule and constitution of the institute under the direction of legitimate superiors and the community agrees to accept the aspirant as a professed member with all the rights that this entails.

Since profession is a bilateral contract entered into freely and knowingly by both parties, we can understand the wisdom of the Church's legislation which declares that "the novice is free to leave the religious institute and the superior, chapter, according to the constitutions, may dismiss the novice for any cause without obligation on their part to inform the novice of the reasons for the dismissal" (Can. 571, par. 1). It is wise to record the reasons for dismissal, however, in case the novice should complain of an unjust treatment, or decide to enter another community.

"When the year of the novitiate is completed," the canon continues, "the novice, if judged qualified, shall be admitted to profession; if judged otherwise, he must be dismissed. If there is any doubt as to his fitness for profession, the major superiors may prolong the time of the novitiate, but not for more than twelve months" (par. 2). Since the higher superiors ordinarily have no direct contact with the novices, we can understand why Can. 563 requires that the superior submit a report to the chapter or higher superior concerning the fitness of each of the novices so that the latter may be in a position to decide on the fitness for admission.

According to present legislation, "in every order of men or women, in every congregation which has perpetual vows, the novice must take temporary vows for three years, or for a longer period if he will not yet be twenty-one years of age after the three years of temporary vows. These vows must be taken in the house of the novitiate. If the constitutions demand yearly profession instead of vows every three years, these constitutions are to be followed. The superior may prolong the period of temporary vows by making the novice again take temporary vows, but the prolongation may not extend beyond three years" (Can. 574). According to the canonists, the condition that the profession should be made in the novitiate house is regarded as directory and would not affect the validity of the profession.

For a valid profession, Canon Law requires: (1) that the one to be professed has reached the legitimate age (at least 16 years for temporary profession and 21 years for perpetual or solemn profession); (2) that he be admitted to profession by the legitimate superior determined by the constitutions; (3) that a valid novitiate has preceded according to the requirements of Canon 555; (4)

that the profession must not be based on violence, grave fear or deceit; (5) that the profession be explicit or expressed in formal terms; (6) and that it be made into the hands of the superior authorized by the constitutions, or his delegate. (Can. 572, par. 1).

For the validity of the profession of perpetual vows, whether simple or solemn, it is also required that the simple, temporary profession has preceded, as explained above. (Can. 572, par. 2).

If a religious with perpetual vows transfers to another institute with the authorization of the Holy See, he is required to make a novitiate in the new institute after which he is to make, not temporary, but perpetual profession. The time of probation may be prolonged before admitting such a religious to profession but not beyond an additional year.

It should be noted that the vote of the council or chapter, according to the constitutions of the respective institute, is deliberative or decisive for the first temporary profession, but only consultive for the perpetual profession (Can. 575, par. 2). Consequently, if a superior were to admit a novice to first profession against the majority vote of the council or chapter, the profession would be invalid.

In the case of a perpetually professed religious who has transferred to the novitiate of another institute and consequently must either make perpetual profession or return to his original organization, the vote of the chapter or council is also decisive, according to the Commission for the Interpretation of the Code.

In making the religious profession the rite prescribed by the constitutions is to be observed. The act of profession is to be drawn up in writing and signed by the professed and at least by the superior or delegate who has received the profession. This document should be kept in the archives (Can. 576).

When temporary vows have expired, the new profession should be made on the anniversary day. While perpetual profession may not be anticipated without a special indult from the Sacred Congregation for Religious, Canon Law reserves to the superiors the faculty of anticipating the renewal of temporary vows for just reason as early as a month before the anniversary day.

Pope Pius XI renewed the privilege permitting a novice in danger of death to make profession even before the termination of the novitiate. The Sacred Congregation explains the conditions for such a profession: (1) the novice must

have begun the novitiate according to Canon Law; (2) the novice master, major or local superiors, or their delegates may receive the profession; (3) the formula of profession must be the same as that ordinarily used at the beginning of the novitiate, omitting any expression that indicates the duration of the profession; (4) the effect of these vows is to insure for the novice all the indulgences, graces, and spiritual favors gained by the professed who die in the institute of the society. In addition a plenary indulgence in the form of a Jubilee indulgence is granted; (5) the profession has no other canonical effect. Consequently, if the novice recovers, he or she can leave the community or be dismissed like any other novice. If such a one finishes the novitiate and is accepted he or she can make profession like the others. On the other hand, if the novice dies, the institute does not acquire any right to his property or dowry.

St. Bonaventure University

Fr. Allan Wolter, O.S.B.



Thanks be to God, I want for nothing but the prayers of many, that the Divine Majesty may deign to grant me pardon for my many and great sins, and enable me to become a worthy minister of the Holy Gospel.

Junipero Serra, O.S.B.

THE CHAPEL OF BESTOWAL

(Chapter III of Saint Bonaventure's *Vitis Mystica*, "De Circumfossione Vitis")

Now the vine is trenched round. By this trenching is understood a scheming guile, as though he who was plotting to deceive some one by treachery were digging a pitfall; whence the lament cries, *They dug a pit before my face*. For no artifice could be hidden from Him Who is equipped with eyes both before and behind, Who regards both the past and the future as the present. Let us show by an example something of these pitfalls. *They brought*, says the Gospel, *to the Lord Jesus a woman caught in adultery*, and said that *in the Law Moses commanded to stone such persons*. What, therefore, dost thou say? You perceive the pitfalls for the true Vine, with which the malicious husbandmen trenched round our blessed Vine, the most sweet Lord Jesus, not in order to make Him blossom, but rather to make Him wither. But in very truth their intention yielded to the contrary result; the trenching was done too well, so that the Vine dropped the dew of mercy amongst us.

However, it would be too long a story to enumerate all the pitfalls dug for Him by the malicious husbandmen who strove to interpret falsely all of His Works and deeds. But where they observed that the trenching in no way harmed the Vine but that the diggers themselves fell into their own traps, they no longer schemed to trench the Vine but to uproot it, that at least like other plants it might die. With this end in view they tore holes not only in the hands but also in the feet; in addition, with the lance of their savagery they bored the side and ripped into the recesses of that most Sacred Heart, which long since had been pierced by the lance of love. *Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast wounded my heart!* O Jesus, beloved above all, Thy bride, Thy sister, Thy loved one has wounded Thy Heart! What need was there for Thy enemies to wound Thee more? What are you after, you enemies of Christ? If a wound is already stabbed into the Heart of my dearest Jesus—nay, because He is wounded—why do you inflict a second wound? Are you unknowing that a heart touched by one wound is dying and in some measure unfeeling? The Heart of my dearest Lord Jesus is dead because it was wounded. The wound of love o'erpowered the Heart of Jesus the Bridegroom, love's death mastered it. How shall another death enter? *Strong as death is love*, truly stronger than death. The first death, love for the many dead, cannot be cast forth from the heart's home that it conquered for itself through an unconquerable wound. If two equally powerful men battle together, one inside the home, the other outside, does anyone doubt that the one on the inside holds the victory? See how great

is the strength of the love that conquers the home of the heart and kills the love's wound; and not only in the Lord Jesus but also in His servants. So ago the Heart of the Lord Jesus died, of Him Who *faced death at every moment for our sake, reckoned no better than a sheep marked down for the slaughter*. But bodily death drew near and conquered for a time—to be conquered.

But because we have once come to the Heart of the sweetest Lord Jesus, *it is good for us to be here*, let us not easily be torn away from Him of whom it is written that *the men who swerve from Thee will be names written in the earth*. What then will be the fate of those who approach Thee? The Scriptures tell us we shall draw near to Thee and *be glad and rejoice in Thee, remembering Thy Heart. Behold, how good and pleasant it is to dwell in this Heart!* A rich treasure, a priceless pearl, is Thy Heart, good Jesus, which we find in the ploughshare of Thy Body. Who is there who could cast this pearl aside? Nay, rather, give all pearls, barter all my thoughts and loves, and acquire for myself this pearl, *casting the burden of my thoughts* into the Heart of the good Jesus, *it will without deceit sustain me*.

Before this Temple, before this Holy of Holies, before this Ark of the Covenant, I shall bow down and sing in praise of God's name in David's words, *I have found my Heart to pray my God*. For my part I have found the Heart of my King and Lord, my Brother and Friend, the Heart of the most good Jesus. Shall I not pray then? Assuredly, I shall pray without failing. For my Heart is even my heart. I say it boldly. If—indeed because—my head is my head, how can what belongs to my head not be mine? As my eyes are truly my eyes, how can what belongs to my eyes not be mine? As my heart is even my heart, how can what belongs to my heart not be mine? All is well with me, then, for, behold, I have one Heart with Jesus. And no wonder; because *there was one heart in all the company of believers*. Therefore, most sweet Jesus, having found this Heart of Thine and mine, *I shall pray Thee, my God*. Draw my prayers in this Chapel of Bestowal; yes, draw my whole being into Thy Heart. Although the deformity of my sins shackles me, none the less—since Thy Heart is enlarged and dilated by an ineffable love and *Thou, Who alone can cleanse what was born of tainted stock—none the less, O Beauteous One of all, wash me clean, cleaner yet, from my guilt, purify me from my sin*, that, purified through Thee, I may draw near to Thee, the Pure One, and deserve to *dwell in Thy Heart all the days of my life, to see and do Thy will*.

His side was pierced to open for us an entrance into it; His Heart was wounded to afford us a dwelling in that Vine, delivered from outer truth, as was wounded, none the less, that we might see in the visible wound love's

ground, for he who loves ardently is wounded by love. How can this ardor be better revealed than that He should permit not only the Body but also the Heart itself to be wounded by the lance? Then the carnal wound displays the wound of the spirit, and this the text previously mentioned would imply when it speaks of a double wounding: *Thou hast wounded my heart . . . thou hast wounded my heart*. The cause of each wound is the sister herself and the spouse, although the Bridegroom had clearly said that "that hast wounded me by the seal of love for thee, and I am wounded also by the soldier's lance." Who would permit his heart to be wounded on a friend's behalf unless he had first received love's wound for that friend? This is why He says, *Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast wounded my heart!* But why "sister" and "spouse"? Could not the tenderness of the loving Bridegroom be sufficiently shown by the use of the term, "sister", only, or of the term, "spouse"? And again, why "spouse" and not "wife", since neither the Church nor any faithful soul ceases from begetting daily to Christ her Bridegroom the offspring of good works? I shall answer in a few words. Brides are usually loved more ardently, since the marriage has taken place but recently, than afterwards, when in the course of time love itself becomes tranquil. Therefore, in order to intimate the abundance of His love that does not lessen as time goes on, our Bridegroom calls His loved one a bride, for that His love is ever new.

But because brides are also loved carnally, and in order that you may not savor anything carnal in the love of our Bridegroom, He calls His bride "sister", because sisters are not now cherished with a carnal love. It is for this reason that He says, *Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my bride*, as though to say: "I love thee deeply as a bride, chastely as a sister; on account of thee My Heart has been wounded." Who would not love this Heart so wounded? Who would not return the love of a Heart so loving? Who would not embrace a Heart so chaste? A soul, wounded by a return love, that cries, *I have been wounded with love*, will love this wounded Heart. A soul that says, *Tell my beloved that I languish with love*, will return the love of this loving Bridegroom. Then, while we remain in the flesh, let us return the love of the Lover as much as we can; let us embrace our wounded Bridegroom Whose *hands and feet, side and Heart, the wicked husbandmen have dug*; let us pray that He will vouchsafe to fetter our heart, till now so hard and impenitent, with the bond of His charity and wound it with the lance of His love. Amen.

Christ the King Seminary

Fr. Columban Duffy, O. F. M. (trans.)

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

According to Saint Bonaventure

Man is by nature a social being; consequently, it would be unnatural to be really indifferent about our reputation. Our good name is a spiritual value—protected by the natural law, and we are morally obliged to cooperate with the natural law in protecting it. For a religious to say and mean: "I don't care what others think of me," he would have to lack understanding of the value of his reputation, or he would have to be devoid of self-respect. It is one thing to endure misunderstanding, to be judged and condemned for God's sake, but it is an entirely different thing to be callous about our reputation simply because self-respect has become a non-functioning element in our spiritual makeup. No man is free deliberately to sacrifice his good name; nor can any man ever be dispensed from the obligation to live so as to be respected by others. After all, the command of our Blessed Lord is still binding: *Let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to the Father in heaven* (Matth. 5, 16). But this is where the concupiscence of vanity may enter in—we are not righteously *only* to be respected by men. Here again the example of Christ is clear: we must seek not our own honor but the honor of our Father in heaven. Lest the honor and praise of men become the motivating force behind our activity, Saint Bonaventure advises us to ask:

AM I DESIROUS OF HUMAN PRAISE AND HONOR?

How strong in our poor human heart is the desire to be known and respected, and what ridiculous forms this desire sometimes assumes in striving for realization. Even our "humility" aims to make the headlines. We are all inclined to smile at the publicity seeker as the victim of a rather pathetic human impulse, yet how few of us are able to recognize this same impulse when it becomes the driving power behind our own activity. We have had occasion to examine the purity of our motives and intentions in general; now we shall fix our attention on the particular motive of false ambition. First, ask ourselves: Do I try to be a good religious—at least exteriorly—because I want to be respected by others? Am I more concerned about what people think of me than about what God thinks of me? Do I perhaps regulate my conduct so as to win the approval of my superiors, or to gain their confidence, secure positions and offices? Do I feel that the higher I rate in the estimation of my superiors the better I can manipulate monastic policies to my own advantage and glory? Do I pray and work as well when no one notices me as when I

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Am I under observation? Do I forget that the eye of God is always upon me, and that even if no one else sees me, I must do all things as perfectly as possible as to please Him? There are some religious who soon lose interest in, or deliberately avoid, work that is hidden and unrecognized and unappreciated by others. Am I of their number?

An excellent test of the purity of our intention is our attitude when faced with a difficult task or probable failure. In such situations, do I place myself, my talents and abilities, simply at the service of God, putting forth my best efforts yet leaving the outcome entirely in His hands? Or does fear of failure cramp and cripple my efforts? Am I the kind of religious who never makes a mistake because he never does anything? Do I refuse to undertake projects or to accept certain assignments or offices for which I have talent and to which obedience calls me, because I dread the shame of possible ill-success? Am I willing to work and even to make great sacrifices as long as I have approval and praise and cooperation, but do I refuse to go on in the face of opposition? Does the least breath of criticism, the slightest threat of failure, cause me to default? If I do not receive the praise and recognition I feel is justly due me, do I consider myself abused, unappreciated, perhaps shelved? And do I, as a consequence, refuse to accept any further assignments, or do I go on working, but badly and grudgingly? Am I wise and humble enough to welcome criticism? Can I bear to hear the truth about my work, my actions, my personality? Can I appreciate a pointed joke at my own expense, and take profit from it? Finally, do I accept failure with humble equanimity, with nothing deeper than a natural and normal regret, and with the conviction that God has permitted this outcome for His own good reasons? Do I fight against the bitterness of defeat not only in matters of exterior activity but in matters of the moral and spiritual orders as well? Can I take failure with the humble resignation of the Psalmist: *It is good, O Lord, that thou hast humiliated me?*

If failure is painful, success unnoticed and unpraised can sometimes be even more painful. Obviously, the religious who expects a citation for every miserable little performance hardly deserves sympathy when that citation is not forthcoming. But, let us ask ourselves: When I know I have done something really worthwhile, am I unduly insistent upon recognition? How do I feel when my very best efforts are completely ignored or taken for granted? Does it hurt so much to have my work pass unnoticed that I cannot go on with it? Suppose I have spent hours preparing an unusually good meal for the community and no one seems even aware of it; or suppose after months or years of strenuous mental

effort I have completed a difficult course of study with high honors, and one word of congratulation is offered me. Does my reaction indicate that I labored for human praise or for the love of God? It is not a bad sign if indifference of our fellow-religious should hurt us, for we are human and a desire for recognition is natural. But if we allow the hurt to go so deep as to assume such proportions that we are thrown off-balance emotionally and become incapable of going on with our work, that, indeed, is a very bad sign. In effect, we say to ourselves: "Why should I go on with it? Nobody cares." And when we say, "Nobody cares", we betray the sad fact that whether God cares is of no importance to us. A true Franciscan is unperturbed by the indifference of men; in fact, he rather rejoices in it, for he is mindful that when he had done all that he ought to do, he is still an unprofitable servant.

It is human to feel hurt when our best achievements pass unnoticed. When our charity is accepted without thanks the hurt goes even deeper. Christ Himself complained about the ingratitude of men because it pained His Heart. Gratitude arises from humility and reverence; it is the recompense we naturally expect for a favor done to another. But, supernaturally, we expect neither gratitude nor acknowledgement nor any kind of human reward for even the greatest work of charity. A careful reading of the Sermon on the Mount will convince us that the true follower of Christ looks for no recognition in this world and seeks no human recognition. There is perhaps no better test of the purity of our intention than our reaction to ingratitude. How do we feel, for example, when, after having helped a confrere at the cost of great personal sacrifice, I receive no word of thanks, I can perceive no indication of gratitude? Do I give way to disillusionment, cynicism, or bitterness? How do I act toward those whom I have befriended not only fail to show gratitude but even rebuff me or forget they ever knew me? Persons who bite the hand that feeds them are unfortunately no uncommon phenomena. But persons who continue to hold out their hand in spite of the bites are rare indeed. In the last analysis, however, this is precisely what is demanded of a true Franciscan. For the Lord, as Francis will want above all to be a true child of God *Who makes his sun rise on the good and evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust* (Matthew 23:38). Can I honestly say, then, that my reaction to ingratitude is Christian and Franciscan?

At this point we should do well to examine our works of charity in the light of Saint Augustine warns us, and Bonaventure agrees, that works of charity are potentially dangerous in that we may be led to seek recognition for performance.

Our Blessed Lord tells us not to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing, and His scathing condemnation of the charity of the Pharisees is applicable to our own charity if it is motivated by self-love. Let us then ask ourselves: Do I sound a trumpet before and after every good deed? Do I publicize my works of charity, keep calling attention to them, try to keep them the main topic of conversation? When my name or the name of my institute is omitted from official reports, or when statistics fail to show the actual extent of my charitable activity, do I feel unfairly treated? Do I suffer from an exaggerated ambition to compete with others, to outdo them in charity, merely for the sake of winning a reputation for myself or my institute? What, for instance, is my aim in studying or in preparing myself for charitable activities in professional fields? Am I less interested in the knowledge to be acquired, in the techniques and skills to be used in helping others, than in the marks I earn, or in the degrees and titles I secure? Do I cherish a fondness for degrees and titles because they add luster to my institute or satisfy requirements, rather than because they indicate—or should indicate—an efficient personnel capable of doing great service to the poor of Christ? In the midst of my works of charity, no matter how professional the level, do I always keep close to the spirit of our Seraphic Father?

Our talents and skills have been given us by God to be used in His service; they have definitely not been given us as a means to cover ourselves with glory. Some of the following questions may help us to check on this point. Do I habitually make a display of my talents and efficiency in an effort to wring praises from others? Do I perhaps resort to tall tales about how I accomplished remarkable feats under the most trying and adverse circumstances? Or do I, like a child telling its mother what happened in school, inform my hearers how much my work has been admired, how much my talents have been praised? Do I jealously nurse every little compliment that may come my way, gloat over it, brag about it, enlarge upon it? Do I suppose deprecatory remarks about myself to force others to praise me or to admire my "humility"? Obviously, conduct of this kind would make our religious life a mere caricature of the Franciscan ideal.

Hypocrisy is another point that calls for attention here. Our Lord was always mild and tolerant toward human weakness, but He was merciless in His condemnation of hypocrisy. The same is true of our Seraphic Father, whose mind was the mind of Christ. He himself strove ever to be the same within and without, and urged his brothers to do likewise. Yet here we must be careful not to fall into error. We should be guilty of hypocrisy if, like the Pharisees, we are to exhibit piety and humble submission and delicacy of conscience and all

the religious virtues, while interiorly we were quite the opposite. Then be whited sepulchres indeed, fair to behold but full of rottenness. On the other hand, a fanatical insistence upon unvarnished honesty and no matter how devastating, always and everywhere, would also be a virtue. We are religious, and as such we are bound to avoid scandalizing serious people. There are times when common sense dictates that truth be concealed, especially in a question of scandal or injury to reputations. Honesty, too, may be the gentle cloak of charity. We are not guilty of hypocrisy, for even when we observe the exterior forms of religious behavior expected of us, interiorly we are in a turmoil, or suffering from dryness and disgust, or struggling to control an exuberance of spirit that longs to kick over the traces. The one thing necessary is purity of intention. If we observe the outward form of devotion to God and not to impress others, contrary interior dispositions do not make us hypocrites. It may help us to avoid scrupulosity on this point if we remember that in religious education we first learn or acquire the exterior form, and then advance toward spiritual maturity we are to fill that exterior form with the life of God. But never are we free to adopt false attitudes to be seen and praised.

Ultimately, what do we need of human praise? Of what positions of authority, titles and degrees and honors? If they fall to us, it is for our good and good; but let us keep in mind that if we have gained all the honors of the world, we have gained nothing in the eyes of God excepting a greater responsibility and a severer judgment. "For so much is a man, as he is in the eyes of God and no more."

St. Bonaventure University

Fr. Philotheus Boehner



Those who are to come here as ministers should not imagine that they are here for any other purpose than to put up with hardships for the love of God and the salvation of souls. But to a willing heart all is sweet, *amanti suave est*.

Junipero Serra,