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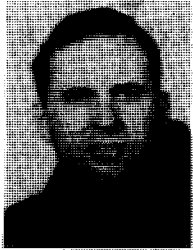
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COVER AND ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

The Cover and Illustrations for the June issue of THE CORD were drawn by Brother Robert Cunniff, O.F.M., who just completed his novitiate year for Holy Name Province.

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A Promise Founds an Obligation

"GONE ARE THE DAYS when a Guardian can tell anyone to go to morning prayers." "All I am allowed to do in my role as superior is to hand out money." These not altogether untypical remarks indicate the rather sorry state to which obedience has been reduced in too many communities. Not only has the thrust for maximum self-determination on the part of many "liberated" male and female religious minimized our ranks, but it has caused no little demoralization among those who still feel that we have acted sensibly in giving up something by taking a vow of obedience. The worldly "operator" now appears as the most religious of all, and the conscientious appear either foolish or Tridentine. And human nature cries out, "Why swim against the tide?" Or, "Better I join the ranks of the free spirits before I'm all worn out in doing the work they won't do because it's not to their liking."

Granted the far from perfect character of the document on religious life, it does affirm the value of the vow of obedience as one of the charisms of religious life. And observance of the vow means the surrender of the privilege of building your own future, and acceptance of responsibilities determined by the religious superior. Independence in acting is precisely what we give up, and it is most difficult to do. (The old joke about the bottom of our three knots standing for obedience, since it's the hardest to reach, has plenty of truth in it!) The nonsense that suggests obedience impedes self-fulfillment or growth is revealed as such by its fruits: egress and unhappiness. The irresponsible granting of freedom (and religious superiors have

granted freedom clearly out of line with the aims and objectives of religious life—a practice apparently unparalleled in any other surviving institution: political, religious or social) has not helped its "beneficiaries" grow in religious life; it has only aggravated their basic discontent and set the stage for their departure.

"Going back" is a naughty phrase nowadays—and if it connotes the passive, uncritical, unfortunate copping-out which spawned so many alcoholics in our ranks, then it ought to remain naughty. But "going back" to our sources, to the spirit of our founder, to the spirit of the gospel, is what Vatican II has been begging us to do. And Francis, like Christ, was "obedient unto death." Witness his anguish over Hugolino's accommodations in the rule and Elias' "losing it." Francis was stubborn, it is true, in getting his superiors to see things his way. But we must not overlook the fact that he knew himself to be under God's direction. What he never did was to draw an equation between what he wanted and what God wanted for him, as some religious are doing today. Nor is it recorded that Francis ever threatened a superior. "I'll do my good elsewhere if I can't do it here the way I want" is hardly "carrying a cross" or "denying oneself," and it isn't a surrender of anything. An apostolate extorted by such blackmail, spoken or unspoken, is not an exercise, but a travesty, of obedience.

A promise founds an obligation—any three-year-old knows that. How is it, then, that so many 23's and 33's and 43's and 53's can fail to see that promising a life "in obedience" means the responsibility of openness to direction in religious life all of the time, and the surrender of one's own wants and preferences some of the time? It is by invitation that we have made the promise, and our response makes sense only in the light of real belief in Him to whom we have promised. But it does make sense, and neither bad example nor fuzzy thinking ought to lead us to forget what we have offered and pledged to the Lord.

J. Julian Davis

MONTHLY CONFERENCE

But I Have Called You, Friends (John 15:15)

Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C.

V

In our last conference on friendship, we reflected at some length on communication, in its various expressions and on its different levels. We considered that real openness of mind which is not only not incompatible with strong convictions but should be a distinctive mark of persons of firm convictions. Strong, clear thinkers are never persons with closed minds. Then—remember?—we talked of “loners” in the community, and discovered that they are really outside community and “in” it only by way of physical locatedness. And we concluded that a real community where there is genuine communication and not just verbal exchange is a seed-bed of honesty

where we discover in an unique manner what is good about ourselves and what is not so good.

Now, we need both the approval of our sisters and the revelation that they give us, usually unconsciously and simply by our dealings with them, of our own shortcomings. Remember that approval is necessary, dear sisters, in order to bear disapproval. We said that before, and I remind you often enough at chapter that it is so important that a sister feel approved in her community. Even the superior who has the grace to correct will certainly effect no good in a person by saying the equivalent of, “Dear Sister, there is nothing right about you; everything is

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wrong. You might have some good qualities, but so far they have escaped me.” You know that nobody is going to feel buoyed up by that to make a great new surge toward sanctity. But it is not only the superior who can paralyze a sister in this way. Our companions also could give us the impression that there really isn’t much to us. And this could not help affecting the healthy self-esteem that we need, that ego strength of which I have spoken to you before.

Never allow yourself to build up this false illusion that you don’t need other people. I warned you that this could be a particular hazard for the youngest religious in the community because it can be made to seem like an authentic spiritual goal: that the more I live with this “God and I” relationship, then the more perfect I am, the more holy I am. I called it a heresy, but sometimes it does not deserve so striking a tag. It is often enough mere triviality and sheer superficiality.

What do we mean when we say “God and I”? God is the Creator of all, Lover of all, the seat of all benevolence. That is a beautiful word, benevolence. You can see that the Latin root is clearly exposed in it: *bene* and *volo*, I wish well. God wishes well to all; and, therefore, if I am going to enter into a true God-and-I relationship, I must imme-

diately accept the responsibility for all that are God’s. If no one else really matters to me, if I am detached from everyone, it can be a case of my simply never having thought through what I am saying, that I am merely mouthing a word pattern whose profundity I have never perceived. The true understanding of God-and-I reveals to me that I enter into the interests of God, of the love of God which is universal. And this is at the very heart of the contemplative life. I assume responsibility for everybody else in the world. As the Scriptures tell us, this is first expressed to those of my own household.

Our dear Father Treinen said to me, in those few moments I had with him in the parlor before you came rattling in with your benches and guitars, that he had been working with some sisters of the active apostolate on their Constitutions in which they had this phrase: “Let us show love to all, but most especially to those who are in our employ.” Now, they were evidently trying to correct a wrong from the past; but Father Treinen said to the committee head: “Good God, woman!—you’ve got the ‘especially’ in the wrong place. We must show love to all, especially to those of our own community.” He said that if this is so, it will radiate out. And he is so right. If you have an intense

love for the sisters of your own community, you are not going to be harsh toward the people you employ. If I really love you, I am not going to descend on the plumber like a virago. I have reminded you dozens of times that we are to the world, we are to the Church exactly what we are to one another, no more and no less. And if there is no real charity, no true bond of friendship and love in the community, there is no community. So, what is there to contribute to the community of the Church, to the community of the world?

Friendship depends on union and communion. Therefore, as concerns religious communities, if there is not union in essentials, there is no community. Now, I don't mean at all that everybody has to think alike; in fact, I mean quite the opposite. Just recently I had what I consider a very rewarding experience. One of the community sisters came to talk over with me a point on which I feel quite strongly but which is certainly not of the essence of our life. She didn't feel the same way. We talked about it at some length. Well, it isn't important what the point was. The thing that I consider important is that she felt perfectly free to come and say what she thought. If she felt that she could not tell me her real feelings on the point,

I think that this would be a very sad state of affairs in religious life.

It shows a great lack of capacity for friendship and for spiritual growth as well as great psychic immaturity, if I am not able to bear opposite opinions. As concerns religious life, you have to have agreement on essentials. I am not contradicting what I just said! If we do not agree on essentials and if we do not have real love for one another, then we are not a community; we are a hoax, we are phoney, we have nothing to build on. However, given these things, given a common goal, a real unity on all that is essential, and, above all, a real love for one another, then we have the beginnings of the maturity that can afford to disagree on other things and is, in fact, enriched by differences.

You see what an impoverishment it would be if we all felt and thought the same on everything. Suppose every sister here had the same favorite author, everyone had the same favorite poem, the same favorite piece of music. To agree to live in community does not mean that everyone has to have the same favorite color. These are ridiculous examples, of course; but there has been in some areas in the past a community "ideal" achieved by taking the person and pushing her into this "community form." Everyone was to come out the

same little figure with sweet little buttons, like the cookies we make for St. Nicholas' day. Perhaps life would be a lot simpler that way, but certainly not as interesting. And I'm glad that I haven't noticed it around here. I certainly know you one from the other, and I do not discover—thank God—two of any one kind.

Now, whereas in the past there may have been a lack of friendship, a lack of communication, a lack of desire to let the individual be herself, we presently have the other extreme mentioned before—an attack upon individuality in an entirely different way than pushing for uniformity. We are talking a great deal about the individual and at the same time denying her in many areas, like privacy. Interestingly, there has come out a long screed in the United States Congressional Record against sensitivity sessions. A strange place to find the denouncement, isn't it? A lengthy address was made by a congressman, and then there was a charter address condemning this procedure as brainwashing and detailing what harm it is doing. Someone mailed it to us, and I shall have it read at table.

We are to be available to one another. This is essential to religious friendship; but we are not to invade one another. No one has this right. A superior has not



a right to invade a sister's interior privacy, and certainly sister and sister have not the right to invade each other. "What are you thinking?" "What is your prayer about?" "What is God saying to you?" I know that some communities are energetically engaged in this type of interchange now, thinking that it is a good thing; but I tell you, dear sisters, it is a very bad thing and has very bad results because this is not the way God created human nature to be.

God himself respects the privacy of the person. And what she is enabled by love, because she is loved and approved, and what she *wishes* to reveal of herself is a beautiful thing. Out of this can come warm spontaneous sharings, spontaneous prayer at times, and deep interpersonal relationships; but these things grow, and they come naturally. They cannot be forced, they cannot be mechanized, and they cannot, above all, be made artificial.

We spoke of discovering our-

selves better in community than in isolation. We want to remember that this is a normal process, a natural unfolding. Sometimes we see the opposite stance taken. We have perhaps never talked so much about being a human person as today, as though this were the tremendous revelation in our times. Well, I always figured I was one anyway, even though it seems to be a generally new discovery today. I don't know what we were supposed to have been before this—perhaps thwarted human beings, yes, perhaps warped human beings; but you just can't get away from the fact that we have been human beings right along. What we want to be concerned with is the growth of the human person, not establishing her as a fact. She's there, that's all. And concerned with unfolding, not invasion. With understanding, not analysis and dissection.

There is a great furore in some quarters of the institutional church these days about domineering superiors who prevent religious from being human beings. I am not at all sure how you could do that, though I am likewise convinced that you can assuredly stamp out expressions of humanness if you want to put your mind to anything like that. But, to return to the point of these "domineering superiors," may they become extinct! I am not for them; I am on the op-

position, too. However, I am surprised to note how this very real evil seems almost never to be pursued to its root cause. Who is the domineering superior? She is a very insecure person who is unsure of her own authority, and especially, unable to accept it. And so she must domineer. She is really governed by personal fear. First of all, she does not believe in the grace of office which gives her the ability to guide and lead other people if she keeps her own channels uncluttered so that God can get through. This type of person must domineer because she is unable to explain, to guide, to listen, to relate to other persons. So, far from being a strong person that we have to temper, this is a very weak person on whom we must have compassion. Many of the things that are being said and written now about abuses of the past are quite right, dear sisters; but they are often enough not traced to root causes.

All this relates to friendship, you see. If we are to help a human being (and superiors belong in that category, too, however surprising this idea may seem to some), we have to be a friend to her. You have never been squashed as some young religious have been (or, if you think you have been, you seem to be remarkably resilient!), but remember what I am saying. Dom-

ineering superiors or non-superiors need a lot of compassion, for they are very weak and very needy. We have to respond to a need where we find it and in whatever guise we find it. And we want to respond according to what the other needs, not according to what we have decided she ought to need.

When we were listening to the commentary on the Book of Job yesterday, I was struck by how many of those thoughts of Job and his trials applied to what we have been talking about in regard to friendship, about how we get to know one another so that we can be friends to one another, and how we establish and maintain this relationship in the cloister. One thought that struck me with particular impact was how the three friends of Job blinded themselves as to how they could really help him, by making snap judgments. Remember how they really came with love, how they really came with charity, how they came as true friends of Job.

Anyone who has the least stirrings of poetry in her soul, and certainly every contemplative has, cannot help being moved by the poetic way this is expressed in the Book of Job. When his friends saw how great his sufferings were, they sat seven days and nights beside him, uttering not a word. Well, now, let's stop right there for a

moment. How can we have a "problem" about the idea of friendship with one another in a silent cloister? These men saw the suffering of their friend, and the best expression of their compassionate friendship was that they sat seven days and seven nights and said not a word to him. So deep was the communication of their sympathy for him in his plight that they had the delicacy to realize that there were no words for it, that words would only have demeaned what they wanted to convey to him. So, maybe any supposed problem about friendship in a life of silence isn't as big as we thought it was. But that is just a ramification of the thought.

The main thought that I was running down there is that they came with a good intention. Then, however, they took it upon themselves to analyze Job's troubles; and they made a snap judgment from which they could not be budged. They *decided* what was wrong with Job; and from that point on, once they closed themselves off from the reality of the situation which was part of God's mystery, they reduced their friendship to analysis of their friend whom they were no longer able even to see. Gradually the three men who had come with such love, and had put themselves out to come from afar, changed into a debate team to refute and castigate Job.

They had brought the sacrifice of love, setting down their business and travelling from a distance because somebody needed them. Yes, they had come with sacrifice which is an essential ingredient of friendship. They came also with delicacy, saying not a word for seven days and seven nights. And that is another requirement of friendship: sensitiveness and refinement of spirit. They came all prepared, but once they reduced this friendship to a cold analysis of their friend in his situation, they closed themselves off from the mystery of their friend and the mystery of God working in their friend. Then they could not go forward. From that excellent beginning they had made, they became in the end cruelly uncharitable toward Job. Sympathizing friends ended up as the severest of judges. First they made the snap judgment, then they analyzed the situation and convinced themselves that they understood what had happened, that they understood Job, that they had penetrated the mystery of Job in his situation. From there, friendship progressively declined.

They analyze him. And Job does not want to be analyzed. He resists their analysis, and so they progress to another form of aggression which is to blame him. They are going to teach

him. Yet, they have not the office of teacher, nor have they the office of judge. They usurp both to themselves. Then, when Job, understandably enough, resists their usurpations, they begin really to censure their friend. From being coldly analytic, they "progress" to being vitriolic. In the end, they become semi-hysterical in their accusations against Job. They not only make rash judgments, but absolutely baseless judgments, telling him how he turned away widows and such—things that they knew he had never done. They had regressed to a stage where they could really pour out invective on their "friend."

Now, dear sisters, I think that this is extremely important to reflect upon. How many snap judgments do we make, without even realizing it? As I said before, no one is perfectly understood by anyone but God. Each one of you is one of God's mysteries of love. I am one, too. And if we do not begin at that point, we shall all too likely begin at the point of analysis and proceed to dissection. Thence arise the snap judgments out of which can come appalling uncharitableness. These strictures which I do not hesitate to lay down against analysis and dissection do not apply at all to the "pursuing to the roots" of which I spoke earlier in this conference. You know, to want to understand

roots, we have to be "humus," "of the earth." That's right! Humus—humble. The humble friend tries to understand and to appreciate difficult plants from the root up, not from the microscope down. And to do this, she has to make herself small. The cool analyst makes herself large, at the expense of the one being analyzed. And she tends to pass over the whole notion of mystery in God's creative love.

The thought that we are perfectly understood by God at all times is so large a thought that I feel I come right up to it, have almost got hold of it, and then it gets too large for me to grasp. Think of it, dear sisters! At every moment, God knows exactly how you feel, exactly why you react the way you do, exactly how your emotional apparatus operates or fails to operate or operates poorly. He understands how things affect you, affect you perhaps in an entirely different way than they affect anyone else in the room or the monastery. He understands the things that are very difficult for you, though perhaps not difficult at all for other people. He understands how what may be extremely joy-giving to you is perhaps just a by-the-way matter to others. He knows what arouses your extreme enthusiasm, what tempts and tries you, all that is peculiar to you. Yes, this thought is so large that we can't quite take it

in: we are perfectly understood by God at all times, physically, emotionally, spiritually.

No one else *can* do this, and yet we are continually amazed that they don't. That others do not understand us perfectly never fails to take us somewhat by surprise. Nor can we quite understand why other persons are not *ourselves*. In a given situation, I react in one way and maybe another sister reacts differently and another manifests no reaction at all. "What's the matter with her?" I want to know. What I am really demanding is: "Why isn't she I? Why doesn't she react to joy as I do? Why isn't she as affected by this as I am? Why isn't she moved in the same way?" This is a real mystery to all of us, isn't it? The only solution is a great good humor. We have to recognize that we would all agree conceptually and in the abstract that, Heavens, no! I don't want everybody to be like myself! And, of course, we want diversity. Certainly we do not wish people put into a mold. And yet the surprised, "What's the matter with her?" A sister may show that she is impatient when to us it is clear that there is nothing to be impatient about. "Why isn't she I?" is what I am saying. And another sister may be excited about a particular bug she found outside, while this doesn't arouse my interest at all. "Why is she excited? Why isn't

she concerned with more significant things?" There is the snap judgment. To her, this is significant. (And it could be a highly significant black widow spider, you know.) It reduces again to: "Why isn't she I?"

Dear sisters, whenever we have a particular difficulty in understanding our sisters; or, to say it very honestly, a particular difficulty in liking certain persons, let us begin at that point: that this is my basic problem or trouble—that this particular person is so particularly not-I. Other sisters, on occasion, may be noticeably not-I—a deficit in them, of course!—but this sister seems to be on almost every occasion not-I. So we decide that we have a major problem, we think that we don't like this person and get distressed about it and mull it over in our hearts, worry that we are uncharitable, and then enter into all kinds of detailed analyses which make the situation worse. If only we would keep it at its basic level: I don't understand this sister, I particularly do not understand this particular sister. Now, what am I going to do about it?

First, I am going to admit goodhumoredly that she is more not-I than some other people are not-I, and that is my problem. Secondly, I decide that I am definitely not going to take this sister tenderly by the hand and say: "Let's sit down and talk

this over," when what I really mean is: "Now, you sit down and explain to me why you are the way you are." This is what I meant when I talked about aggressive understanding. The friends of Job became increasingly aggressive until they were downright ugly and vitriolic.

It is not good, dear sisters, to analyze other people. The way to understand others is to be open to them, and this requires a great deal of humility. Analysis is easy for the proud, understanding is not. And humility in this has to begin with the basic premise we have been talking about: that this sister or those sisters who may seem on more occasions to understand me best are still not-I; and it is never going to fail that sometimes even the most understanding sister will not understand me. This discovery may rock me a bit if I am not building on the basic premise that no one else but me is I, and no one but God understands me perfectly. How else shall we account for the fact that some of the classic friendships in history and poetry and the very Scriptures have not been without their misunderstandings? It is not God's plan that we should be perfectly understood by another human being. In fact, it could not be so. For that would entail being the other person or being the creator of the other person. And none of us can be God.

SOME MEDITATIVE REFLECTIONS

All Joy Be Yours

Sister Claire Marie Wick, O.S.F.

TODAY, LORD, THIS MOMENT, we set out to climb a lofty mountain of spiritual experience: to explore the heights of Joy, to reach the summit on which You, the Cause of our joy, are to be revealed to us by the brilliant sun of faith as you were when transfigured on the mountain-top before Peter, James, and John.

We are retreating from all that can disturb and distract us as we attempt to walk in Truth. With the Psalmist we say, "To You our heart speaks, You our glance seeks, Your presence, Lord, we seek. Hide not Your face from us, but tell us how to reach You, how to go out from ourselves and find the way to Your side. Many paths lead to this summit; but we want to choose one that seems shortest and surest so as to find You most surely."

There are travel directives in Your words in Scripture, Lord, which reveal paths that leap and dance for joy telling of the Good News about the friendship we can enjoy with You. We know full well before we start this trip of our life-journey up the summit to find You, that there will be conflicts: extremes of sufferings, problems commingling with our joys. But we are confident that our commitment will help us overcome these obstacles.

More than our own commitment and our own efforts to sustain that commitment, Lord, it is Your own Presence that makes all the difference. To follow your travel directions, to keep to the right path, we need not only abstract guidelines, but You Yourself with us. Love prompts us on this walk in truth to find You. So when You, Lord, and

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we are face to face as two realities, confronting each other, it remains for us to speak with one another—for us to cry out to You, the Other, and to leap across the abyss of our human soul's poverty to the fullness of Life—Joy's source on the mountaintop. This way that we have chosen to travel is meditation—peaceful and satisfying reflection on a Triangle—a sort of Trinity, in which You, others, and our own self form a "Little Trinity of Love." Meditation begins with You, the Cause of our joy and the conflicts you endured to give us this joy, and the commitments that can bring everyone back to the everlasting joy planned for us all. The meditation continues by turning to other human beings as subject—such as Your Mother, such as a little son today who becomes another Christ; we reflect on their joy, on the commitments they make which bring joy to themselves and to us. And finally, our thoughts come back to ourselves—to our own conflicts and to the commitments that we hope will bring us to Your joy.

Jesus, Cause of Our Joy

Setting our sights on the first plateau of our ascent up Mount Joy, we find You, Jesus, the Cause of our joy. We relax in this knowledge of Your actual presence within us this moment as You accompany us upwards in our climb to everlasting joy. We think of that joy to come, of Your indwelling which will flower into a Vision beatific beyond all description.

Three Persons, one God: the Most Holy Trinity within us, the Lord present in so personal a manner in each of us as Scripture attests, that it makes all the difference in our lives. This Presence is the vitalizing principle of our

souls—the very life of our life. And You, Lord, invite our confident belief in the effective reality of this Presence—You will come and make Your abode with us, You say, and we are temples of the Holy Spirit. But You also let us know that for this to be realized, we must habitually be aware of You within, we must court this relationship so it grows into knowing and loving You and Your will for each of us. We know we reach our ultimate height of joy through this search for the path to do Your will; we know it will bring us to the possession of all the Beauty—Glory, Joy, Peace, Love—that You Yourself forever are. But for this to be so, we must possess You now in this life-climb before we reach and enjoy You at the summit of our life.

How can we find Your presence now? Lord, you made that possible by becoming one of us. Your birth to become human and take part in our life, was for our rebirth to become divine and, as other Christs, take part in the God-life. To support this union, to make it more intimate and real, You made Yourself available in bread and wine and the Last Supper. You made Yourself available in the substance of the Scripture words—You, the Word—in all the twos and threes that gather together in Your name. In all these ways You have established a special dwelling Presence within all of us; You have made Yourself accessible without appointment, without inconvenience or expense to us. To enjoy Your presence, O Cause of our joy, all we need to do is turn away from our outer selves and turn within, to our Christ-retreat, our invisible sanctuary in which we draw strength, comfort, guidance, companionship—joys unspeakable—from You the divine Companion awaiting us and all who come our way.

You can allure us away from all else, Lord; for look how appealingly, how heart-warmingly Your personality charmed the sin-loving Magdalene, the money-loving intellectual St. Luke, the illiterate St. Peter—lovable little children as well as all the unlovables in the multitudes You reached, all of whom left food, families, careers, to be with You and enjoy Your presence. We respond not only to Your magnetic charm, but to Your creativity as well, to all You have invented: science, technology, unlimited horizons and heaven, seasonal cycles, scintillating music, soul-ravishing art, virtues like unshakable faith, verdant hope and undying love—friends, relatives. All these things, all these people, we have from You. We know that if only You will to do so, You can capture our mind and hold it spell-bound—capture our heart till it throbs with delights—fascinate us with the fulfillment of all good desires.

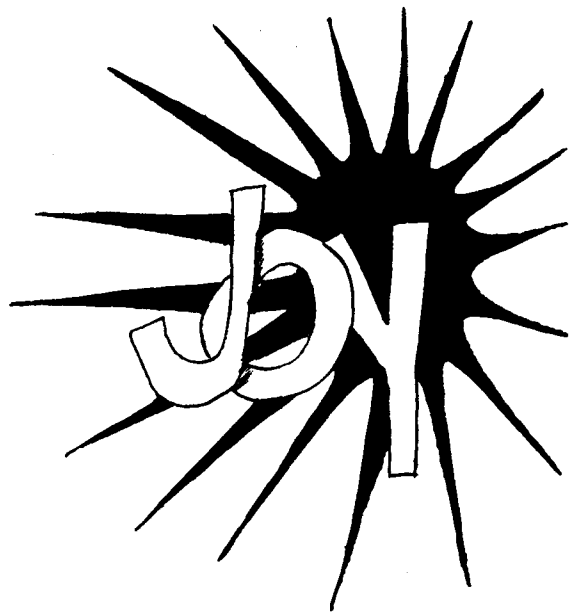
And as if You were not enough, Lord, Cause of our joy, You bring a rich store of gifts with You. First, the gift of life, with the mind, will, and memory that Bonaventure tells us so aptly mirror Your own divine Life with the Father and the Spirit. Then the redemption of this life, purchased with love stronger than death, through the greatest gift anyone can give—his life for a friend. And as You delivered the redemptive gift in the face of all the conflicts of suffering and sorrow in Your life, You continually poured out joy as at the wedding of Cana, the friendly visits at Bethany, the idyllic moments spent with little children, the ecstatic reassurance of those You visited after Your Resurrection. Even as You completed our gift of redemption, ascending into heaven, You assured us You would be with us always—even to the consummation of the world. You came so

that our joy might be full. And finally, Lord, we reflect on Your gift of everlasting life, whereby You promised us for a few conflicts endured here for love of You—for a genuine commitment to You—that You would in very truth unite us with You in such celestial joy as our eyes have not seen nor our ears heard, nor our mind conceived, in the new life You have won for us.

Other People: Channels of Joy

Mary and a little modern son. We have just been considering You, Lord, in whom all joy is ours: You, the cause of our joy, our helper in conflicts with our joys, and the support of our commitments that can restore our joys and preserve them eternally. Now our path travels to a second plateau on our climb to joy's summit, and we turn our attention to other people as channels of Your joy: to their concern with conflicts and to their commitments to You that brought You to them as joy's Presence. And with whom can we more fruitfully begin than with a Woman—the Woman You selected for Your own Mother—Mary. She walked in truth, her life was continuously commingled with sorrows and joys; and she, a Woman, can lead us women to You directly through reliving five of her outstanding Joys.

According to Scripture, Lord, You have various ways of making Your will known to creatures. On great occasions you seem to send one of Your angels. You sent Gabriel to Mary to humbly ask her, your creature, to be Your Mother. Mary's fiat made her the first in Luke's gospel story whose surrender was total and complete. Not to be outdone in generosity, Lord, You took her gift and sent it back to her inestimably magnified and enriched by Your indwelling Spirit. Your baby's body brought her joy and peace,



no matter what the cost of conflict, for she possessed You. We have Your word for it that we can conceive Your presence through the Holy Spirit every moment of our life—all we need to do is let You be reborn in us so that we “mother” Your will.

How beautiful, Lord, not just to seek our own private joy—even Your presence—just for ourselves, but to think of others! Mary, Your Mother, hurried to share her miracle of virginal motherhood with her cousin Elizabeth’s miracle of aged motherhood—to share You with her—and in this meeting You were magnified in her. Elizabeth identified Mary as Mother of her God; and Your presence caused such joy that both infants leaped for gladness, and Mary, a young little Jewish maiden so overwhelmed with joy that she could not contain it, burst forth with her poetic *Magnificat*. Each of us, Lord, can do this—can “magnify” You if we will take You, as Mary did, to everyone in need whom we

meet—if we will bear You with us always as we greet, serve, and love one another as Christ-bearers.

At a definite time and place in history, in the face of conflicts that must have caused Mary and Joseph great anguish, accompanied by the joyful songs of angels, You came through Mary to all of us. The details have captured the minds and hearts of our greatest artists, poets, musicians: the journey of hardship, no room at the inn, animals attending Your birthday party, angels revealing Your presence to shepherds lowly, a star bringing gentle wise men. This Incarnation, this Nativity, Lord, gave You to us not as a strange God but as one of us garbed in our flesh—approachable, reachable, lovable. Our Mother found You, Lord—Cause of our joy—through her will so wedded to Yours that she could bring heaven to earth and could keep heaven open and enable us to share its joys with You even while we remain here in exile.

No need, Lord, for Your Mother, the most blessed among women, to be “purified”. No need, either, for You to be “presented.” You who were begotten before the daystar. Yet it is not resentment, not sulky, reluctant compliance that we note at this temple-event, but joy! In this joy which we contemplate, we learn from Your Mother how to find You, share You, serve You, our God, with joy in little as well as great things. In a spirit of happy and festive celebration, Joseph, Mary, and You went up to the Temple and humbly complied with the Law of Moses. You didn’t have much, so You gave little—the gift of the poor, turtle-doves; but You gave cheerfully, and this obedience gave joy to the elderly Simeon seeing his God before he died, and to the aged Anna holding You and foretelling Your future. Lord, if we make a place for you inside—a temple to house Your presence—we can present You to those we know slightly, to those closer to us, and to those who have never had the joy of seeking and finding You in a temple within themselves. In each Christian encounter, if our will is to obey Yours, we always give YOU—joy—to others.

Days of anguish gave way to ecstatic joy when at last Mary and Joseph found You there in the Temple, about Your heavenly Father’s business. Like them, Lord, we sometimes lose sight of You. We get pulled away by activities as they did when returning home from the Presentation ceremony. We get distracted by concerns of the day; and not until trouble comes do we realize You are missing—we have not with us a Cause for joy. Then like them we engage in an anguished search for You; maybe, in our case, the search takes longer than their three days. But what matter, if like them we find You in the temple of our interior? What joy, then, in hearing Your wisdom—Your answers—Your guidance from within ourselves as they heard all these things physically during

Your instruction of the learned men in the Temple! And indeed! You seem obedient to our call just as You were to theirs; and when You come with us it is we, now, who grow in *Your* strength, grace, and wisdom.

These reflections on You as Cause of Mary’s and Joseph’s joy, concern biblical times, Lord. What about a “now” person: a contemporary son of Your heavenly Father? Surely each of us can without difficulty discern contemporary equivalents, re-enactments, of these timeless yet stubbornly historical events. Here, in this hospital only days ago, we all vividly recall the young brother and sister involved in an accident—she more seriously injured than the lad. In this emergency a doctor was located, and it was discovered that the little sister needed a blood transfusion immediately. The boy was typed and found to have the same blood as she; and hastily the transfusion (with rather crude and makeshift equipment—all that was available) was begun. There hadn’t been a moment’s hesitation when the boy was asked to give blood to his sister; his answer was (with a big gulp) an immediate yes, and in the hurry no one explained to him the procedure. As he lay there contributing his life-blood to his sister, the doctor smiled reassuringly and said, “She’s going to be all right, Sonny. She’ll make it thanks to you.” Then, with a broad smile, the boy said, “That’s great, Doc, but when do I croak?” It was only then that those at the scene realized that a heroic little boy of today would, like Jesus, have cheerfully offered to give his life that another—his sister—might enjoy living completely and fully.

Life in Christ’s Joy

Through You, Jesus, God has now become in very truth our Father. Our sins have been washed away. If we want You and heaven, we are assured the

fulfillment of that desire as our secure possession. No one, then, has a better right to be joyful than we, Your trusting brothers and sisters. Uniting our will and our life with Yours, we have a clear title to one of those mansions atop the Mount of Joy.

To be other Christs, sons and daughters in the Son, to be sure, we have to have and overcome conflicts. But we have divine assurance of comfort in sorrow, strength in sickness, solace in bereavement, help in distress, and ultimate triumph in the midst of any calamity. This promise is signed and sealed in Your Blood, Jesus: a promise that assures us of pardon, peace, power, nearness and dearness of Your presence—and the unspeakable joy that flows from all this—in every scene of our life.

Our life can, then, be emptied of gloom and sadness, and it can be filled with high and holy gladness. What music would there be if all the keys on the organ or piano were white? It takes both black and white keys to make music, and it is the same way with the themes of our life. Lord, at birth You gave us a small capacity for joy—for containing You—like parenthesis marks. Then every step of our way, every movement, every moment, every drop of the cup of water we give, every note of every hymn we sing for Your honor and glory, increases this capacity for joy—love, peace, You. As the parentheses spread further apart, Lord, and we accept You ever more fully, we also accept the conflicts which inevitably accompany Your cruciform presence. We may have physical personal, social evils to bear, which would overcome us if we knew little or nothing about You.

We may be deprived of friends, relatives, property, pleasures. We may be visited with natural sorrow and grief, even despair and depression. But where our real treasure is—atop the Mount of Joy—there is our heart also. You, Lord,

are our treasure of joy; and from this treasure is measured out sufficient joy to give us comfort. Why else would Paul—a man of great sufferings—insist as he did, "Rejoice, again I say rejoice always!" Our joys will exist only in proportion to our closeness to You, Jesus, and to our willingness to accept anything You send our way. You said, "I will turn your sorrow to joy," and we believe You. When we see pain and grief as coming from You for our own good; when we see that we were never expected to bear them completely on our own, then we find all converted through proper motivation to genuine joy of mind and heart. You promise that there can be no lasting opposition between supernatural joy and the sufferings to which we resign ourselves. Sin is the only joy-killer. Sin—wrong-doing—gives temporary, illusory enjoyment, and then lasting pain and suffering in guilt.

Right-doing, on the contrary, may cause us some temporary pain and suffering; but then follows real joy. What is the Cause of our joy? Is it unbelief? No, for the infidel Voltaire wrote, "I wish I had never been born." Is it pleasure? No, for Lord Byron, the man of self-indulgence, wrote, "The worm, the chancre, and grief are mine alone." Is it money? No, for Jay Gould, the millionaire, dying said, "I suppose I am the most miserable of men." Is it position or fame? No, for Lord Bacon—field had both and wrote, "Youth is a mistake, manhood a struggle, old age a regret." Is it military glory? No, for Alexander the Great conquered the world and wept, "There are no more worlds to conquer."

Where is lasting joy found? In You, Jesus, alone—in Your presence. Even when You seem hidden, Lord, and perhaps then most of all, You are with us. For You promised that we would see You again, that our heart should rejoice, and that our joy no man could take from us.

Cloudlight

Behold the floating tapestry—
The windswept wardrobe of the sky—
The clouds in endless travesty
That stalk upon the stage on high.

Streaks that stretch far as eye can see
Bespeak free space and ecstasy;
While opaque lobes that loom and brood
Connote close room and somber mood.

The frozen puff-balls, all in air,
Arrest and stall the sight to stare;
And driving drifts of fleeting fleece
Awaken to work—give no peace.

The fickle fogs that rack and wind—
The fecund prospect clouds afford
Reflect the fancies of mankind,
Project the genius of the Lord.

Robert J. Waywood, O.F.M.

The Charisms of Sexuality

Megan McKenna

THE LOVE OF THE FATHER and the Son unite them in a Spirit. It can be the same way with human persons, too: Love can produce something that can change and transform others. That, to me, is life—Christian life.

We need not only a new vocabulary, but new forms as well, in which to express our Christian life. Every Christian is to live out totally his relationship to Christ. The forms or modes in the past have been institutionalized along with the Church, and the attitudes and the functions have become confused. A person is not married, or single, or religious—he is a Christian.

What does that mean today? A Christian is the ecstatic element in the world—the wastefulness of something that doesn't have to be, but is because of love. A Christian is the visible sign of this love and the meeting ground of men with their God. And each Christian has his own way of saying "I love you" and reminding the earth of God.

The commitment to one individual and the commitment to the service of the Church are different expressions of the same love. Marriage is a sustained sexual relationship as well as a sacramental contract. Celibacy is a life that remains open to

all men and expressions, including the sexual one. Both ways of living are signs and symbols of different aspects of the one love—the union between Christ and his Church, and God and man. Both are in one respect meant to be permanent. God's love does not change—only our response to it does.

Celibacy by its nature is meant for only a few. It is a gift that is given for the community more than for the individual. A realistic decision to accept this gift can be made only after sufficient knowledge of the consequences and ramifications has been acquired and fully realized. Celibacy is demanding and universal in its love-expression, just as the sustained sexual relation is demanding and individual in its expression. Both reflect the position of a man in relation to his God—response and gift-giving—in different stances. The responsibilities and the problems, therefore, as well as the expression itself, will be unique in each case.

Neither of these signs should be so institutionalized that the function overrides the service and sign-value itself, so that one becomes overburdened and the other sterile and oppressive.

Man is human—that strange admixture of flesh, blood, and spirit. Obvious as this pleonasm is in meaning, it really is worth focussing our attention on and

contemplating, because so many of us still try to live as if flesh and blood were one self-contained realm, and spirit another. Our technology and know-how has advanced to the point where control of biological and scientific means are at our disposal to begin to develop a new mode of existence. The freedom from want that implies freedom to live on another level lies before us; but as we slowly attain to the newly free life on the level of thought, experience, and will, we forget only to our own peril that our mind and will is grounded in the material. The needed healthy effort to probe this material dimension with both confidence and reverence is one of the deepest human needs of our time.

Admittedly the freedom from overriding disease and oppression that implies the freedom to explore the unplumbed depths of relationships and our own sexuality as man and woman is just opening up; but we must confidently take up the challenge extended by this freedom. Our old concepts of man, woman, and sexuality are no longer sufficiently expressed for today's Christian—for his fully human development and for his commitment to a love-relationship. Man should not choose a form of living for the function it entails, but for the expression it enables him to give to his own

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deepest self in relation to his God.

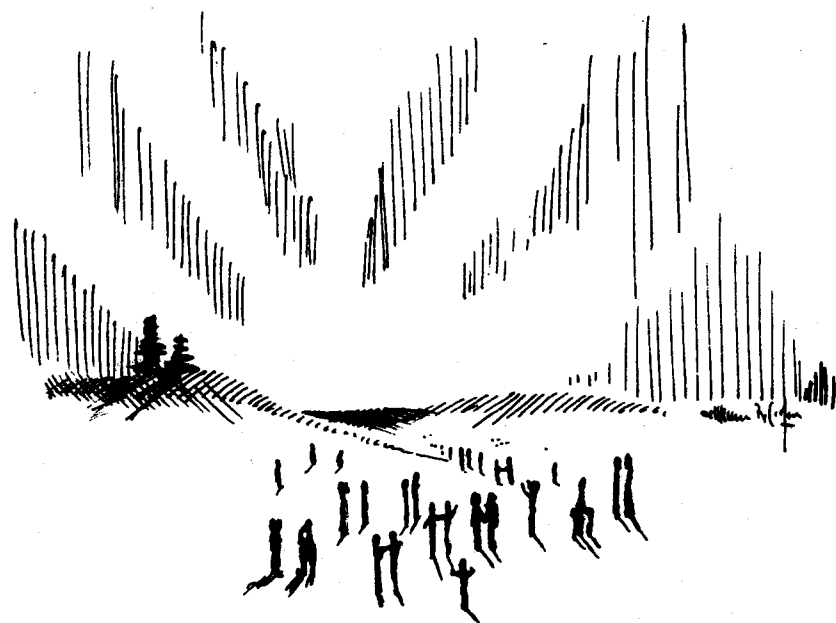
The individual must, in fact, stand in "opposition" to God and challenge Him if he is to be a human being (consider the case of Job, and recall the penetrating Augustinian insight which has become a part of classical trinitarian theology: the person is constituted as such by a relation of opposition). Only by such a confronting and opposition, properly understood, can man see God precisely as "other"—distinct from himself—and come to realize that he himself exists only in virtue of a relation to this "other." Man has to experience other people as persons and experience love with them before he can begin to live out his relationship with God.

Jesus is the perfect embodiment of divinity and humanity, and man is most fully human when he resembles Jesus in his expression of love. Equally well known is the fact that Jesus chose to live a celibate life—one that left him completely free to interact with all the men and women he met on an ever deepening level which demanded awareness and transformation. The future of Christian life is going to revolve on this fact of transformation: either with one individual or with many. Both modalities entail the vulnerability of receiving and the pride and generosity of giving; the

basis for any relationship is to "love as I have loved you"—and that can mean many things to many different people, but unless it is lived as an absolute response, then it is only sham and pretense and not a life-giving, sustained commitment to Christian life.

Celibacy is an attitude and a stance, and not a function. It is, therefore, a completely different, separate question from that of the priesthood in the sense that it does not imply the other automatically. Celibacy enables a person to more fully and freely devote his life to service (in this area it does have bearing on the priesthood), but apart from this celibacy is a sign and has value as such on that level too. It is permanent, unexplainable, and wordless testimony to the absurd love of God for men and the promise and the prophecy of eventual transformation and union with God.

There are two kinds of celibacy today—one imposed by circumstances, and one chosen for the sake of the kingdom. Only those who can realistically cope with the latter should choose to live this way. To an individual a special gift can be given—the ability to translate the idea and the concept of the kingdom into a love relationship that is all encompassing in a distinct life style. It does not have to be practiced for one to be an in-



tegral Christian—but it has that note of supererogation. It is both a gracing gift and a willed act on the part of an individual. It is the manner that is unique in expression, not the expression itself. The availability, the vulnerability, the openness calls attention to the radicalness of the Gospel. The choice of one necessarily excludes the living of the other love-relationship. The idea of sacrifice, dying, and transformation in the constant availability to others is in complementary opposition to availability and openness to only one person. It is a positive acceptance that speaks faith in both worlds: the one that is, and the one that is coming upon us.

In the marriage relationship, the giving of self, the increasing awareness of self and others, are seen in relation to one individual. In celibacy, the giving of self and the awareness of oneself as an individual are seen in relation to the coming of the kingdom—laying down your life for all men, for God's sake. Marriage in some ways more closely symbolizes the oneness of the Church, and celibacy more closely symbolizes the universality of the Church. Both are specifically human and Christian values, and neither can exist in a vacuum. The two complement each other. Marriage and celibacy, man and woman, soul and body, man and God—all exist in relation and in-

teraction with others. From a Christian point of view, in either marriage or celibacy, there is no meaning unless a value is given to it; and this value is given by means of a mature decision in an individual's life.

Celibacy is revolutionary. It is a protest against the apparent norms of conduct, and it symbolizes the unexplained aspects of God's love. Perhaps the union of sign and value in this form of life is so confusing because what it is symbolizing is not easy to comprehend. It is a radical absolute, this constant living out of the one-to-one relation of God to man, and it knows no bounds. It is charism for the Church, and it can't be enforced. It can only be given and taken as a gift. It is the concrete way of waiting with anticipation for the kingdom, and it is meant to be a continuous distraction and a reminder that there is much more to life than "just this." The symbol value depends largely, today, on the specific individual's living out of his belief. If his life is not one of radical love, a sign of contradiction, then he is neither celibate nor Christian.

The priest, by his function, is to untie men from their differences and separations and give them back to God. He is the spokesman and meeting ground for the community and God, and for that reason celibacy has a special affinity for the priest-

hood. But to deny the priesthood to a married man is in fact to imply that there is only one expression of love-giving in the Church. There can be no expression of love that is not spontaneous and maturely chosen; and if the nature of the priesthood is understood there will be no need to worry about celibacy dying out. To opt for celibacy is to implement a choice in more potent and meaningful terms—for an individual. Celibacy is needed today even more than in the past because our cultures are no longer specifically "Christian" ones, and the reminder is even more strikingly apparent, therefore, when it occurs in our society. There is a religious imperative for a priest to remain celibate, not a legal one. It is not necessary to the full function of a servant, a priest, that he be celibate.

But how is celibacy lived out in today's world? How is marriage lived out in today's world? It seems to me that both questions bring up the problematic of sexuality and identity—of man's understanding of himself as well as his particular stance towards other men and towards God.

What is love first of all, in its most primordial sense? It is God giving himself to another. When human love is seen in this light, the love-relationship of two people giving themselves

to each other has all kinds of sacramental possibilities. In marriage this rhythm of giving and receiving is beaten out through the course of a lifetime. In coitus it's gathered all together and given in a moment, celebrated and proclaimed, much like a Mass that is a moment's sacrifice that is repeated continually in time. Marriage, as well as the individual moments of intercourse, is dependent upon this constant giving and receiving of the other person. It is the stance of a man and woman who stand in opposition to each other and who repeatedly come together and are reconciled, forgiven, and made whole—who are known and know. Intercourse is not escape from reality—something to do when there's the time—it is immersion in reality, celebration of it—of life with its moments of joy and honor and its moments of tiredness and tears—but always with another. It is a moment of surrender and gift. "God gave his only Son up to the world" is what it symbolizes—not just to the two individuals but to everyone. This is Christian marriage with all its unrealized possibilities.

What is celibacy? Practically, it is the state of living alone, just as marriage is living with another. But celibacy has another dimension just as the sacrament of marriage has one. The quote from Ecclesiastes that says

"There is a time for embracing and a time to refrain from embracing" is a good way to describe the celibate. He loves and gives of himself to all, but also knows how to let go—he loves without security. God loves every man but leaves each free to choose to love in return or not to love. It's a no-questions-asked love, and this is the sign value of a celibate's life. He loves and gives of himself relentlessly, but he also takes of other people's love that is given to him. He must stand agape at the world. Agape: the stance of God towards the earth and men is revealed in the man who stands with his mouth open before the earth and men. He is always amazed, brought up short and in the position to take another person into himself. For this reason he lives alone—in order to be able to absorb all these people without losing his own personhood and roots.

What is sexuality? It is the dual conflict and reconciliation of the male and female principles in a person. Its opposite is neutrality. It is the expression and particular stance of one person towards himself and others revealed in the conglomerate mixture of bodily functions, culture, intelligence, and environment. It is the communication of personhood and exists in any way of life: marriage, celibacy, single life, youth, etc. It grows and

changes and is transformed just as a person progresses in education, self-knowledge, age, spirituality. In fact, it is very closely tied into all of these processes.

Sexuality, like any communication, has both content and form of expression. The content is always the same—selfhood, love—but we haven't even begun to experiment with or master the forms of expression. Revealing yourself to another person is always hard—like standing on a diving board and getting ready to let go—or the feel before you get your feet wet in the ocean. Most people, Christians among them, are uncomfortable when the question of sexuality is raised, and that is because most of us are uncomfortable with ourselves as persons. Before you say something, you have to know what it is that you want to reveal. Only then can you start to think about how to say it well. Since most of us are not natural at languages, we have trouble learning to communicate well in this area. And to a Christian this should be of utmost priority, because his life is a communication—an expression of love—which is the most difficult idea and feeling to get across well.

The choice of marriage or celibacy should take this question of an individual's sexuality into consideration. "How can I best give myself to others?" "How can

I best express the God-man relationship?" should be the basis for decision-making in choosing a concrete way of living. A man does not choose a way of living to find himself or to learn who he is. He chooses an expression of life that reveals who he is already and what he is becoming. The choice of marriage or celibacy presupposes that a man is already well on the way to being himself in his integrity.

Celibacy is a gift of the Spirit, one that is given not only for the individual but for the community too. And people need that testimony of crazy wordless unexplainable love so much these days. But they need the spontaneous comfortable giving of one man and one woman, too. The Church and the world desperately need people that opt to stay in and serve the people of God unstintingly. With a decision to live in celibacy or in marriage—with either one—comes the need to reaffirm that decision continuously, again and again, with an ever-growing maturity. This means a reaffirmation in relation to new circumstances and new relationships. Both these ways of life are a constant becoming of death and resurrection. Both are man-God stances, and when they are really lived in the depth of their Christian meaning, the earth knows beyond a doubt that it "hasn't seen anything yet."

Variations on a Theme:

"For I claim that love is built to last forever" (Psalm 89)

- I. Persevering water
Roading the waste of rock
With delicate domination, trickling tons
Of granite to forever-ed passways,
Love is.
- II. Built to outlast
The window is the cheek
Pressed hard against it.
Eye outlives the road
It watches for reward of tears that
He is.
- III. Forever smiles
the flower at the wind
Ousting it into death
Of perfume rising
From shredded petals' triumph when the wind all
Spent is.
- IV. Long sprawls the sphinx
In pyramids to dust doomed
Point of the frail desire of spirit turns
Straight onto Love that summons piercing, drenching
With ever-and-forever tide the little
Pyramided day-on-day thing
Love is.

Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C.

BOOKS RECEIVED

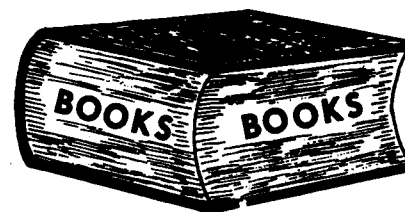
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Living Our Future: Francis of Assisi and the Church Tomorrow. By Mario von Galli, S. J. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972. Pp. 239. Cloth, \$6.95.

Reviewed by Father Julian A. Davies, O.F.M., Head of the Philosophy Department at Siena College and Associate Editor of this Review.

Mario von Galli tells us the beautiful color photos of Umbria which are interspersed throughout the book were a genuine source of his inspiration to write a life of Saint Francis. In a work of but six chapters he has been able to capture a good deal of the spirit of Francis: childlikeness, an immediacy of approach to the gospel resulting in a love of Poverty because Jesus was poor, that gallant quality of *cortesia*—noblesse, the spirit of peace, the loyalty to Rome.

He sees Francis as paradoxical, being the troubadour of the Lord,

but at the same time, the man weeping over Christ's sufferings throughout the Land. And he sees the spirit of the Order that Francis founded—a spirit of brotherhood, where authority is not paternal, but serving; an organization where rules are minimal, because it is structured on love—as particularly relevant to our own day, and a model that other religious orders might base themselves on. Von Galli sees much of Vatican II in Franciscanism—awareness of poverty in the world, a spirit of freedom and joy.

In some of the drafts of the document on the Church and in a long speech of Cardinal Lercaro, the author finds an echo of the Franciscan message which focusses on poverty not only as alienation from goods, but as detachment from structures, methods, theological systems, etc. In my judgment he forces the comparison and blows out of proportion both the impact of Vatican II and Saint Francis in line with his own laudable social concern. To describe the sacraments as "necessary evils" (p. 169—perhaps the translators are to blame) is enormously unfortunate, and the demands made on bishops are unrealistic. (Saint Pauls are never going to be commonplace!) Yet von Galli has correctly perceived that the Franciscan revolution was successful by

changing men's hearts rather than their structures.

Everyone in the Franciscan family can profit from this book—some, even from the pictures alone. The chronology of Francis' life matched up against contemporary events, and the excellent bibliography make this a fine resource book as well as a devotional work. Future editions will, I trust, take care of the too numerous misprints; and the author himself would help the work by thinking over his contrast between Francis as theocentric and the Christocentricity that Francis allegedly avoided (pp. 90f.), and by reconsidering his demythologization of the Wolf of Gubbio story.

Pray to Live: Thomas Merton, A Contemplative Critic. By Henri J. M. Nouwen. Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers, 1972. Pp. vii-157. Paper, \$2.95.

Reviewed by Brother Roberto O. Gonzalez, O.F.M., a first year theological student for Holy Name Province.

"What is peace? . . . justice? . . . love? . . . Are we ready for this? And especially, 'What is my place in the middle of this chaotic and noisy world?'" (p. 39). Merton's questions are cited by Nouwen in *Pray to Live*, as he seeks to unravel the "richly diverse and very productive life" of Merton, the one man by whom he has been most "inspired in recent years." Moreover, these are the questions we explore with the author in this short but comprehensive introduction to the life and thought of Thomas Merton.

The first part, "For Instruction," of this two-part book, opens by presenting the most important biographical facts about Merton and

then proceeds to take a close look at "the various signs" which led Merton to the silence of Gethsemani—signs, of course, that "do not give an explanation of his call, but are only symptoms of it." These were three: books, people, and events. Among the books Nouwen stresses Etienne Gilson's *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* and Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means*; and he also mentions Hemingway, Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Evelyn Waugh and considers John of the Cross, Therese of Lisieux, and Ignatius of Loyola. All of these Merton discovered "in literature and experimented with their ideas." The people included Mark Van Doren and Daniel Walsh, both professors of Merton while he attended Columbia; Dr. Bramachari, the Indian monk who told him that "there are many beautiful mystical works written by the Christians. You should read St. Augustine's *Confessions* and *The Imitation of Christ* . . ."; and Robert Lax, an intimate friend of Merton whose name is familiar to readers of *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Among the events that "formed the context in which he read the books and met the people, supported his vague premonitions and quickened his personal decision," World War II was influential especially on his *My Argument with the Gestapo*.

Until the time of this decision, Merton's answer to his question "Where is my place in the world?" had been, "In solitude." Nouwen points out, however, that Merton's becoming a Trappist had not truly settled but merely transformed the question into another, more difficult one: "What is my place in solitude?" This question, in its profound subtlety and complexity, preoccupies the mind of Nouwen throughout the remaining chapters of Part I.

Nouwen is quick to show that Merton's answer emerged from his long and painful struggle to conquer solitude and silence. This intense struggle is of the utmost importance in understanding Merton's concept of monasticism and his mysticism and is, above all, what brought Merton to his greatest discoveries about the desert, poverty, and compassion.

Nouwen treats these discoveries with great perceptiveness. He records Merton's insistence that although "solitude can be sought and found in the routine of the simple world, in which man can be alone in his heart, 'this desert is not necessarily a geographical one. It is a solitude of heart in which created joys are consumed and reborn in God'" (p. 44). In commenting on Merton's poverty Nouwen observes that "by his writing he made himself and his most inner feelings and thoughts a public possession. In this way his fame had made him spiritually poor. But this same poverty made the world around him appear in a new way. It seems as if everything belonged to him just when there was nothing left to him which he could call his 'private property,' . . . The beauty of creation made him poor and wealthy at the same time and gave him peace and happiness" (p. 45). Nouwen lays most important stress on compassion. In 1951 when Merton became the spiritual director for the novices, "he discovered that something great had happened to him. The silence and solitude had buried themselves so deeply in his heart that he was in the position to take on a very deep and intimate relation with other persons. Perhaps most moving in *The Sign of Jonas* is the development of compassion in solitude. In silence Merton discovered humanity once

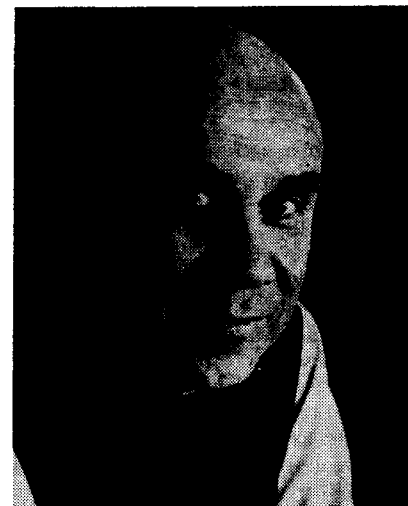


Photo: John Howard Griffin

again. The new name for the desert in which he saw many of his self-constructed ambitions destroyed was: compassion. He learned there to love his brothers, not for what they say but for what they are. He saw now, with amazement, the quietude and solitude that lived in them. Now he wanted only to be a man among people, a member of humanity—no more, no less ridiculous than himself" (pp. 46-47).

Nouwen's treatment of Merton's compassion is, I believe, his best and most enduring contribution to a thorough understanding of Merton's "commitment to a contemplative critique of himself and his world." His comments, of which the following example is typical, are most incisive: "Perhaps Merton's most important discovery was the discovery of his fellowman at the depths of his own solitude. He experienced a new solidarity in the depths of his silence and he seemed to find there, where he was most alone, the basis of community. In silence his mockery became generosity, his self-conceit be-

came solidarity, 'God alone' became 'together with all men.' In silence Merton discovered that being a monk is preeminently a social calling" (pp. 50-51).

The observations are most pertinent and are amply supported by Nouwen in his fourth chapter, "Unmasking the Illusion." From the vantage point of Merton's transformed experience, Nouwen discusses Merton's relation to society as this is found, e.g., in his writings against racism, war, etc., and in his commitment to nonviolence. He pointedly emphasizes Merton's piercing to the core of nonviolence: "Nonviolence stands or falls according to the vision of evil. If evil is seen only as an irreversible, clearly visible and sharply outlined tumor, then there is only one possibility: cut it out. And then violence is necessary. But when evil is reversible and can be turned into good through forgiveness, then nonviolence is a possibility. Since Merton had experienced in his own life that forgiveness is possible through Christ, nonviolence became then not only a possibility, but even a prerequisite for being a Christian" (p. 65).

The fifth and final chapter of Part I deals with Merton's "Discovery of the East." Nouwen explores primarily, here, the deep influence upon Merton of Chuang Tzu ("one of the greatest Taoists during the flowering of Chinese philosophy, from 550 to 250 B.C."). He uncovers beautifully the fine thread which led Merton from "nonviolence to non-action," that path which "he saw as a way out of our estrangement from God," and he concludes the chapter by considering Merton's concept of the self. "To the extent that we deemphasize our 'self,'" Nouwen observes with great acuity, "the need

to understand God in verbal formulas and linguistic constructions also disappears. Merton hoped that whenever the Christian has the courage to renounce this concern with self he would also find the actual meaning of the Christian experience of God.... Just as the black must bring the white to conversion, so must the East make the West Christian again. With this conviction Merton went to the East" (pp. 85-86).

The second part, "For Meditation," of this book is an attempt to substantiate by pertinent selections from Merton's own writings the points made in the previous part as well as to provide the reader with stimulating material by Merton himself for personal meditation. As one reads the work reflectively one grows to appreciate it in itself as a wonderful meditation by the author who warmly shares it with us.

In the Preface to this excellent book, John Eudes Bamberger, O.C.S.O., Merton's friend and one time physician, has written of *Pray to Live* with high praise and approval. His closing words are striking enough, I believe, to serve as a conclusion for this review: "Whatever may be said about Merton, if it will be said truly, it must present his vision and his work as the fruit of the knowledge of God bought with a faith come alive through contemplation. Restoration of right order and peace in the world was for Merton the fruit of the vision of God arrived at through deep prayer. Henri Nouwen has seen Merton in this perspective and his book clearly reveals some of the concrete, practical consequences of this way of experiencing life. In reading this book one can meet, for a brief moment, the living spirit of Merton. It is a refreshing encounter."