

## FRANCISCAN BRIEFS

PRINCIPLES AND PARADOXES OF THE MILITANT LIFE. St. Joseph Piat, O.F.M., transl. by James Meyer, O.F.M. Chicago: The Franciscan Press. 1953 Pp. 195. \$2.75.

For every Franciscan Tertiary with an apostolic turn of mind, this book was a tremendous appeal. It gives the answer to how and when to plunge into apostolate, as well as to what is required of the would-be apostle by way of spiritual and intellectual equipment.

Coming from France, where so much is being done by the "workmen-priests," this little volume is vibrant with the spirit that is driving the priests of France to go among the sheep that have been so long without a shepherd. That spirit, as preached by Father Stephane Joseph, is not only challenging to our lethargy but is also contagious. No one can read this book thoughtfully without being stirred to a deeper spiritual life, a more fruitful piety and a greater activity among those who are in need.

As a veteran of the Franciscan Home Mission Band, Father Stephane writes with a background of rich experience in Paris and in the Department de la Mayenne. His experiences much like those described in Abbe Michonneau's *Revolution in the Parish* and other recent books dealing with religion in France. He presents problems, however, that are not exclusively French but universal; they are the problems that every serious Catholic meets with in daily contacts—social injustice, bigotry, ignorance, prejudice—all the evils that afflict the body and mind and soul of modern man. Clearly and unequivocally—slangily even—he states the case; then, none the less, he states the remedy. Basically, as we all admit, the remedy for the world's ills is simply the sanctification of believing Catholics. Once Christians have learned to live like Christians, to give Christianity a chance to function as Christ intended it should, then we can hope for peace in the world but not before.

Besides stressing the need for the spiritual formation of the apostle, the book also gives practical guidance for militant Catholic action in every field of endeavor. With insight and humor he discusses all the angles, from how to keep happily militant to tactful methods of dispensing soup to the neighbor in need. Though militantly Catholic to tactful methods of dispensing soup to the neighbor in need. He divides the book into five parts: I. The Call to the Militant; II. The Militant's Spirituality; III. The Militant's Program of Life and His Training; IV. The Militant's Spirit and Method of the Apostolate; V. Christian Social Action; and concludes with a beautiful summary chapter entitled: To Christ the Victory.

Although intended primarily for laymen, clergy and religious can gain much information from Father Stephane Joseph's book, and also much material for their own thoroughly searching self-examination.

Father James Meyer's translation happily preserves much of the author's originality and virile style. The Franciscan Herald Press is to be congratulated on publishing one of the most valuable books in their long series of very valuable Franciscan materials.

# the CORD

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*Cum permissu superiorum.*

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## OUR MONTHLY CONFERENCE

*Come, My Spouse, come, thou shalt be crowned* (Cant. 4, 8)

Anyone who has had the privilege of attending the deathbed of a good Christian parent carries away tender memories of a deathbed Christ, a lesson in living as well as in dying. At the deathbed of Saint Clare, in the month of August 1253, the friars present, Brother Angelo, Juniper, felt as though they were assisting anew at the transitus of their Seraphic Father. Once again they read the Passion of Our Lord, and perhaps sang the Canticle of Creatures to welcome Sister Death who would do no harm to Sister Clare. The Ladies, who had experienced daily the holiness and patience of the Mother in her long illness, who had come to regard her as close to Our Lady in sanctity and were the grateful recipients of her unending kindness and love, were now pierced with the sword of overwhelming sorrow. Yet despite their grief, all knew that Christ was coming to call her to the palace of His heavenly kingdom. Now His voice was sounding in her ear: *Veni, sponsa mea, et coronaberis!* (Cant. 4, 8).

Then the hand of the Lord came upon one of the Sisters, she was privileged to see what the others knew in their hearts: the true meaning of Clare's vocation and indeed of their own vocation: the consecration of their lives wrought by holy virginity. For all fell to pondering the great holiness of her Mother and the happiness and glory that were to be her reward, Sister Benvenuta suddenly beheld white-robed virgins led by the Virgin of virgins enter the lowly cell and cover the dying Saint with a mantle of wondrous beauty. For twenty-nine years, Benvenuta had witnessed the vision of the Lady Clare, and she knew that the vision betokened the reward of her consecrated life.

That life Clare herself had unconsciously revealed in her letters to the Blessed Agnes, letters no one can read without recognizing

therein a mirror of her blessed soul, without discovering the role of her consecrated virginity in the nuptials of the Lamb, without feeling the burning love of her heart for "that blessed Bridegroom whom love made Man."

*Return, O Sulamitess, that we may behold thee!*

Like the servants of David, Francis of Assisi had sought out for his Lord the young virgin Clare, and found in her a soul that was pure, prudent, and wise, full of love and given to contemplation. She had rejoiced and warmed the Heart of the King, as Saint Bonaventure says of Agnes the Martyr, because she was overflowing in the abundance of her love.

Now such a soul, continues Saint Bonaventure (whose sermon provides our key to the doctrine of the nuptials of the Lamb), such a soul, virginal and holy of life, united to God by contemplation and mystical union, the Spouse calls to Himself, addressing her now as sister, again as daughter, again as His bride and spouse, or sometimes as His beloved. She cannot be His beloved, the delight of His Sacred Heart, unless she is sister and daughter and spouse. The sister of Christ, because she is like Him in her innocence; the daughter, because she is so prompt and wholehearted in her obedience; the spouse and bride because she cleaves to Him forever. Thus graced with virtue and possessed of surpassing beauty in heart, mind, and will, she is most beloved of the King of Love.

It is not this our Sister Clare, who matched her name with the brilliance of her virtues, whose whole life was offered to Christ that glorious night of Palm Sunday, whose whole heart thenceforth was set on the pursuit of that perfection which leads to the heavenly bridal chamber of the Beloved; who saw herself, as reflected in her words to Blessed Agnes, as daughter and handmaid of the Eternal King, sister and spouse of the Lamb, lover and beloved of the Son of the Most High Father? What did these glorious titles mean for her? What do they imply for every soul that belongs to Christ, especially for those vowed to God in holy virginity and chastity? Is it not

in this, above all, that Clare was placed as "an example and mirror... for our Sisters whom God has called to" the Franciscan "way of life"?

Her very life, as Pope Alexander IV was to say, was for others a school of instruction and doctrine. In this book of life the others learned, and others now may learn, the rule of life; in this mirror of life, others may behold the path of their own life. In her shining light, the practice and love of chastity were increased in the world; the state of virginity restored to life and given its due honor. Clare was a most wise virgin, who knew that virginity alone was not sufficient without the oil of charity in her lamp. Only virginity embraced out of love for the Spouse has meaning, for that love alone leads the virgin to think about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and spirit (1 Cor. 7, 34). Virginity, purity, chastity thus make for one-mindedness, undividedness, if they have charity as their motive and flame; for the spouse of the Word, says St. Bernard, must cleave to the Beloved with all her power, live by Him, be ruled by Him. Such will be her conformity, imitation, union, that He will call her His sister and daughter, spouse and beloved.

### *My Sister, My Daughter*

Every soul in grace, but especially the virginal soul, states St. Seraphic Doctor, is the *Sister of Christ* because she shows a familiarity to Him through the conformity which holy innocence effects. Has not the Beloved Himself proclaimed that whoever does the will of His Father in heaven is His brother and sister and mother (Mt. 12, 50)? But the virginal soul by her purity of heart, goodness of conscience, and faith unfeigned, reveals that she has accepted within her the laws of God. Above all, she has in love, which is the fulfillment of the Law, kept her heart for God alone.

Thus did Sister Clare admit only the Beloved into her soul, and warn Blessed Agnes to let none turn her heart from Him to whom she had surrendered herself. Her firmness of faith set a wall about that soul, to keep all out save her God and to protect her from

treasure from the enemy. May we not see a marvelous faith too in her embrace of virginity in poverty, for it was only by faith that she could know that poverty would help, not hinder, her consecration to God? Would that the Lamb might find in our souls, too, such innocence that He would enter through the door of a good conscience, crying: *Open to Me, My sister* (Cant. 5, 2), and find within such a likeness to Himself that He would delight to call them sisters!

"Hasten with swift pace and light step and feet unshumbling," Clare had begged Agnes, "so that even thy steps stir up no dust, securely, joyously, promptly, and prudently on the path of happiness." Thus herself quick to walk the paths of God, Clare merited by the promptness of her obedience to be called the *Daughter of the King: How beautiful are thy steps, O daughter of the prince!* (Cant. 7, 1), in heeding the call of thy Beloved to forget thy people and the house of thy father. In ready answer, she had left behind the attractions of the world, her people, for contempt of the world pleased her more than its honors; she had abandoned the riches of her father's house, for greater than all wealth was poverty to her who had chosen to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth; she has fled all fleshly interests or affection for her family, as a poor virgin to embrace the Poor Christ.

In this had the Son of God obeyed His Father, that He became humble, poor, despised and afflicted. Looking upon Him who, though more beautiful than the sons of men, had become for her salvation the lowest of men, considering and contemplating Him, Clare was filled with a desire to imitate Him, to suffer with Him and to die to the world with Him on the Cross of sorrow. Therefore, despising earthly things and the momentary joys and deceptive glories of men and answering the will of God, Clare became truly the daughter of the Most High King and true Sister of the obedient Lamb of God. Such is the fear of the Lord that walketh with chosen women (Ecclus. 1, 16), and that wisdom which bringeth immortality (cf. Wisd. 8, 17).

Were we wise like our Sister Clare, instead of searching too often after the wisdom that is of earth, we would yield ourselves to

that true wisdom which makes those who use it friends of God and their souls sisters of Christ and daughters of the King. Our hearts would be undivided in our desire to do always and only the things that please Him.

### *My Spouse, My Beloved*

Above all did Clare seek that union with Christ which made Him Spouse and Beloved. From their first meeting, that loyal brother man of Christ, the Blessed Francis, had manifested to her the sweetness of the nuptials of the Lamb; and as she had given her consent, a glimpse of the joys of heaven had been opened to her that led her to strive by virtue to be worthy of the espousals of the Great One. The little plant of the Seraphic Father, growing within the cloister of San Damiano, soon became to her Spouse a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up, whose plants were a paradise (Cant. 4, 12). Her holy virginity in body, guarded like a garden enclosed, and virginal purity in mind, which like a fountain of living water gave her soul on God alone, brought forth that fruit of holiness which made her the good odor of Christ and merited her close and indivisible union with her Beloved.

Until the day of eternity broke and the shadows of earth returned, she lived as much as possible in the love and delight of her Spouse and inspired others to holy rivalry in the life of union with Christ. To Agnes of Prague she held up Agnes the Martyr, to whom Clare seems to have had great devotion, as a model to emulate in marriage with the Lamb. "Love Him in complete surrender who has given Himself up entirely for thy love. . . Happy the soul to whom God has given to attain this life with Christ, to cleave with all one's heart to Him whose beauty all the heavenly hosts behold forever, whose love inflames our love, whose contemplation is our refreshment, whose graciousness is our delight, whose gentleness fills us to overflow, whose remembrance gives sweet light. . ."

Daily, as she exhorted Agnes, she herself looked into the mirror of Christ to find her delights in her Bridegroom as He in turn found delight in her as His Beloved. *Ego dilecto meo, et ad me conversus*

*eius*: I to my Beloved, and my Beloved to me (Cant. 7, 10; 6, 2). She sought Him "in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall." The Rock is Christ, as Saint Bonaventure suggests, and the clefts His sacred wounds and His Passion, in which Clare so often found her joy and over which she often wept as she fed her mind unceasingly on the delights of the Crucified. In reward, her Beloved bestowed on her a "blessed sleep," an ecstasy of the Passion through one Good Friday. Once, too, her Beloved appeared to her as a little Child to delight her as she listened to the sermon of Friar Philip, while in prayer she found such fire of love that her face would shine with more than wonted radiance as she returned from the altar of her God. Would that we too were as God-centered, as Christ-centered, as undivided in heart and mind as our Sister Clare!

But let us go back to her death-bed. The Friars and the Sisters are lost in a contemplation that is a mixture of joy and grief. They are to lose their Mother, the greatest flower of the spirit of Francis; but they know that she will go quickly to the bridal chamber of her Beloved. The Mother of God had come to prepare her:

Put away the penance and the sorrow  
And claim the crown of those who love My Son.

*(Candle in Umbria).*

The Bridegroom Himself was soon to call her: "Behold my Beloved speaketh to me: Arise, make haste, My love, My dove, My beautiful one, and come! For the winter is now past, the rain is over and gone" (*Capitulum*, from Cant. 2, 10-11).

Blessed indeed is that going forth from the vale of misery, for it is her entry into a blessed life. Farewell, most beloved Mother, unto the throne of the glory of the great God. Include us, O glorious Virgin Clare, in thy most holy prayers, that by their help we may merit the mercy of Jesus Christ to live here below in a manner worthy of thy example, that together with thee we may merit the everlasting vision and enter into eternal union with Christ thy Beloved. Amen.

Detroit, Michigan

Fr. Ignatius Brady, O. F. M.

## VITA MUTATUR, NON TOLLITUR

*It is truly meet and just, right and availing unto salvation, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O holy Lord, Father almighty and everlasting God; through Christ our Lord. In Whom the hope of a blessed resurrection hath shone upon us, that those whom the certainty of dying afflicteth, may be consoled by the promise of future immortality. For unto Thee, O faithful, O Lord, life is changed, not taken away: and the abode of this earthly sojourn being dissolved, an eternal dwelling is prepared in heaven. . . (Preface of the Mass for the Dead).*

The Preface, like the color of the Mass vestments, gives tone or character to the day and its significance in the calendar of the year. Though Saint Cyprian aptly styles the Preface the *Canticum Excellentiae*, that is, the most excellent of all the canticles and hymns, that Mother Church invites her children to sing, it may also strike a mournful note if the mood or temper of the day should call for it.

With the approach of the Month of November, our gaze turns to the "place of sleeping" where those who were near and dear to us are awaiting the call of Judgment. We need not wonder, therefore, if during this season our kindly Mother, Holy Church, should attire the multicolored raiment of her sacred Liturgy to our feelings, hopes, and prayers. How skillfully and lovingly she has acquitted herself in this delicate task is most graphically apparent in the Preface to the Requiem Mass.

But Mother Church does not lapse into sentimentality. Her brow is ever turned to the realms above even though she shares the grief of her children below. She wants them to remain strong in faith, steadfast in hope, and stable in charity, even though the tears stream down from their eyes while the flowers on the silent graves are still fresh and fragrant.

Hence the Preface of the Mass for the Dead begins with the

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four stalwart adjectives which like four mighty pillars sustain the faith and tradition of the ancient Church: *vere dignum et justum est, aequum et salutare*. Do we not all feel the power, the majesty, the solemnity of the sacred hour, when we join the chorus of the Church Triumphant and Militant in declaring that "it is truly meet and just, right and availing unto salvation, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O holy Lord, Father almighty and everlasting God"? This is where man rises to his true dignity; where he renders thanks to God in the highest, the almighty Creator of the entire universe, the true Father of the human race. In the holy Sacrifice which is shortly to follow, the same heavenly and eternal Father is about to reveal His power in the ineffable mystery which was anticipated in the little Upper Room and unveiled on Calvary's heights in view of all the world, in view of all creation invisible and visible. The eternal God never changes; but the precious Blood of His divine Son keeps streaming down the Cross daily, hourly, *from the rising of the sun to the going down*, for the Redemption of man.

Yes, His divine Son. The glorious anthem of thanksgiving seems to halt as He enters upon the scene: *per Christum Dominum nostrum* ("through Christ our Lord"). The melody changes from a majestic major into a mellow minor key. At the same time, a feeling of relief appears to dominate the atmosphere in the House of God; for, while the name of the Lord Almighty fills all hearts with holy awe and fear, the sweet name of Jesus changes, as if by a supernatural magic, all awe and fear into love and affection. A moment ago we stood like mountaineers on Alpine heights; now we are back in a peaceful valley, for Jesus is with us.

*In quo nobis spes beatæ resurrectionis effulsit* ("in Whom the hope of a blessed resurrection hath shone upon us"). O blessed hope, what a comfort and solace thou dost impart to the Catholic heart. Hope is our life and our joy; we are *rejoicing in hope*, exclaims Saint Paul (Rom. 12, 12), not like others *who have no hope* (I Thess. 4, 12); and *our hope does not disappoint* (Rom. 5, 5). Jesus is risen from the dead, and even so the hope of our resurrection envelops us with its serene and celestial light.

*Ut quos contristat certa moriendi conditio* ("that those who the certainty of dying afflicteth"). Death is inevitable for all, *for it is appointed unto men to die once* (Heb. 9, 27). This is a *certain conditio*, a certain event in human life. The Church is firm and adamant in this assertion. Her language is stern and stirring. There is no palliation or alleviation. She does not want to deceive her children. Death must be faced, even though the mere thought of it casts a gloom over our whole life from the cradle to the coffin. *Dies magis et amara valde*: the day of death will be bitter, whether it comes to us or bereaves us of those near and dear to us. This bitterness is wholesome for our souls, and the Church knows it. But listen to what follows.

*Eosdem consoletur futurae immortalitatis promissio* ("they may be consoled by the promise of future immortality"). What a magnificent line. The *certain moriendi conditio* is wafted by angelic hands to the serene heights of the *immortalitatis promissio*. Has the verb *consoletur* ever been put to a more sublime, a more uplifting use? In this exquisite parallel, the Church unfolds before us the superabundant grace, the unspeakable love, of our Divine Savior.

Then follows the most tender and loving line of all: *tuis enim fidelibus, Domine, vita mutatur, non tollitur* ("for unto Thy faithful, O Lord, life is changed, not taken away"). It sounds like the voice of a child who has discovered a great mystery and joyfully steps up to the Master to tell Him—as if He had not known it before—that for His devoted servants life is only changed, and not taken away. Truly, life is all that matters. To live is man's unconquerable ambition. And now, behold: the souls faithful to Jesus are sure to suffer only a change in their life, not its loss. The words, *vita mutatur, non tollitur*, are a synthesis of the entire body of our Christian Faith and Revelation. But how is this done?

*Et dissoluta terrestris hujus incolatus domo, aeterna in caelis habitatio comparatur* ("and the abode of this earthly sojourn being dissolved, an eternal dwelling is prepared in heaven"). Step by step the language of Mother Church becomes more intimate, more affectionate, more maternal. She now stands at the gate of our home

above and welcomes her children to the many mansions in her Father's house, which have been furnished and adorned by Jesus, her divine Spouse. Our earthly abode was only a temporary sojourn (*incolatus*); our heavenly dwelling (*habitatio*) shall be our possession for a happy, blissful, and unending eternity.

After this, the priest resumes the sacrosanct text of the holy mysteries as he bends down to say with the angelic choirs, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*. . . Before the Throne of the Triune God, the *alter Christus* renders solemn assurance to all the faithful departed that, even as their Redeemer died and rose again, also will rise again *they who are Christ's, who have believed* (I Cor. 15, 23).

The masterly composition of this Preface of the Mass for the Dead has a right to stand among the best and finest of the literatures of the world. But in the power of theological thought it rises above all that human lips have spoken or human pen has written, for it opens the flood-gates of divine mercy and gently radiates into every bereaved soul on earth "the hope of our blessed resurrection" (*In quo nobis spes beatae resurrectionis effulsit*).

*Christ the King Seminary Very Rev. Fr. Thomas Plassmann, O. F. M.*



You, O My daughter, are a light in the midst of darkness. I want your life to be a proof of My Religion, following the example of your Blessed Father Francis, who was the restorer of My Religion and of My Church.

*Christ to Margaret of Cori.*

## SAINT FRANCIS' PRAYER

The prayer of our holy Father Saint Francis might well be considered an overwhelming subject, for who can speak particularly of the union of the seraphic heart of Saint Francis with his beloved Lord? How aptly, in his book, *The Words of Saint Francis*, Father James expressed the saint's desire for that union, translating his prayer for love that he be "lapped up" in love until he die in love! We all know the simple definition of prayer; but what is prayer in the heart of the seraph of Assisi? One prayer of his is known to every Franciscan,—the very comprehensive aspiration, "My God and my All!" We do not know when he first uttered it. It may have been in his childhood, leading him on to an ever greater fulfillment of its words; or it may have been when God was inspiring Francis to leave all for Him.

It must have been his gentle mother, the Lady Pica, who folded Francis' hands as a child and taught him to pray. Watching the tender piety of her growing son increase even in the midst of his boisterous, care-free days, no doubt she also fostered it, and prayed for him herself. She did not chide him when he spread the table with bread which he wanted to give to the poor. Surely more than anyone else did, she must have believed she saw in her young son the indications of a call to something higher than that for which his father destined him. After some years of a spendthrift, adventurous youth, when Francis was recovering from a serious illness, he felt the first stirrings of an extraordinary call, though not yet aware where it would lead him. We know that Francis prayed even in the company of his high spirited, singing companions who twitted him when he seemed lost in recollection during their revelry. Now he must leave these old companions, he knew; but he was still uncertain where the Holy Spirit was leading him, for the path stretching before him was untrodden and strange.

Unable to comprehend what had come over his son, Francis' irate father thought to bring him to his senses by imprisoning him in his own home. Can we doubt that Francis spent many hours during those idle days of imprisonment in prayer for Divine light and

guidance? We know that he became more and more deeply enamoured of God and the Lady Poverty. His mother brought him food during those days; perhaps she also tried to dissuade him from his seeming folly, as she, too, was suffering from the anger of Pietro Bernardone.

The climax came when, released from his prison, Francis at once returned to his unusual conduct of part-time beggar, part-time extravagant youth, giving away his father's substance and visiting churches. Pietro cited him before the civil court for misdemeanor; but Francis appealed to the Bishop of Assisi, considering himself an ecclesiastical "criminal" and desiring the Church's protection. Francis knew that he and his father had come to the parting of the ways, and who can say how much prayer went into making of his decision? Not easily will a helpless youth deliberately turn away from his wealthy father to go out penniless and alone into the world. The fatal day came; and Pietro Bernardone stood before the bishop with his son, Francis making no plea of innocence when he was accused. Would the bishop understand and allow him to pursue his divinely inspired way? What, really, would have been more natural than for the bishop to send Francis back home with his father, telling him to obey and to cause his parents no further grief? But the bishop, we know, under divine inspiration, espoused Francis' cause, leaving the irate Pietro to himself. Surely, the words, "Our Father Who art in Heaven," never sounded more triumphantly and lovingly in the Heart of God than when they came from the lips of this youth, standing divested before his father, with the episcopal robes folded about his naked limbs! Pietro gathered up those rich garments and fled to his home. Sadly the Lady Pica must have regarded them, all that remained to her of the son she loved so dearly.

With this scene, Pietro and his wife disappear into oblivion. They could not have been very old, and one wonders if they lived to see the triumph of this son of theirs twenty years later. What a pity that historians have told us nothing more of the parents of him who more closely of all the saints resembled the Redeemer of the world. We cannot doubt that his mother must have often been among the crowds who listened to Francis when he preached and all Assisi

flocked to hear him. And what of Pietro? Let us not be too hard on him. After all, it was his hard-earned money that Francis was squandering, and how was the older man to know what this unpredictable son of his would do next? He had gone far enough in disgracing the family name! Pietro had no book in which to read how the Franciscan movement would be approved by the Church, or know the path to which the actions of his son would reach in their maturity.

Francis left the bishop's house alone. He was alone in the street, dressed in pilgrim's garb, a staff in his hand. His was now the absolute pilgrim poverty to which he had aspired. We can see him, his face turned to the blue Umbrian sky, repeating in an ecstasy of joy, "Our Father Who art in Heaven!" What a trumpet call these words were, resounding jubilantly in Heaven; for here was the beginning of a new era in the Church's history. Can we doubt that he added to the list of all times, "My God and my All!"

Soon we see Francis kneeling before the crucifix in the church of San Damiano, praying for further light and guidance. We can be sure his life's work was not spread before him like a panorama. It must have been in answer to a fervent prayer that God's Word was manifested to him, that he suddenly heard the words spoken to him from the crucifix: "Go, Francis, and repair My house which is in need of repair; for the temple of God which thou seest is falling into ruin." Saint Damien's was in need of repair, and Francis could see that. So Francis gathered stones, and set about making the necessary repairs with his own hands. One wonders how he could do it, unskilled, not very robust, but he must have succeeded, for he would not have attempted to do the same to Our Lady of the Angels chapel and to San Pietro. It was at this time, working on the scaffolding at Saint Damien's, that he called to the people passing by, asking them to come and help him rebuild San Damiano, and speaking prophetically of Clare and her daughters who would one day be there as the nucleus of the Second Order of Saint Francis. But he had not even his own first followers. And for the present he understood only that our Lord wanted him, with his own hands, to repair these dilapidated churches. How could he, a mere stripling in his twenties, have thought that our Divine Redeemer was asking him to repair the Church, the Bride of Christ? She stood in torn

tattered robes, and our crucified Lord asked Francis to mend them. Only after years of prayer, days and nights spent in union with God in forlorn churches and forests, did he come to the full realization of what was asked of him. Once sure of his real mission, he did not hesitate to tell his brethren when, angered at some of the bishops who would not let the Friars preach in their cities, they wished to secure a grant from the Sovereign Pontiff himself to preach everywhere, that they did not know their true calling. He told them boldly that he wanted to convert the bishops! Audacious words, these; but Francis did not waver, knowing now what manner of repair the Church needed! Some time before making this declaration, when he was uncertain of his vocation, feeling by nature drawn to the contemplative state rather than to the active apostolate he had sent to Clare and Brother Masseo, humbly begging their prayers for divine light for himself. When the answer of these two contemplatives came, Francis accepted it as coming from God, and knew that his mission was not only to preach to the poor, but to bring back to apostolic living and to true zeal the princes of the Church whose example of worldliness was retarding the growth of holiness among the common people. Now, he knew, he and his brotherhood were called to heal the wounds from which the Bride of Christ was languishing.

The first account we have of that aspiration so dear to Francis and all his children, "My God and my All!" is in the house of Bernard of Quintavalle who had invited Francis to spend the night with him. It would seem that Bernard wished to discover for himself whether Francis was all he had been told. Accordingly, Francis was assigned to a large, luxurious room in the house; and his host concealed himself in the folds of the drapes. Francis refused to sleep in the magnificent bedroom, but did not hesitate to pray there. From his hiding-place Bernard watched Francis, holding his breath when he first heard the burning words, "My God and my All!"—Who art Thou and what am I! Did he hear no others? But what words could that seraphic heart have uttered which could express more? Between intervals of silence and burning love, he heard again and again that all-embracing prayer, while Francis' soul reached out in a steady liquid flame, never quite touching the heights to which it aspired, and falling back again on the helpless, ardent words: "My God and my All!"



Bernard no longer doubted the holiness of his guest, for he had seen him in prayer.

One might wonder whether Francis' heart ever knew the depths of desolation which we feel when our hearts of flesh are unresponsive to every incentive to love and devotion. We are inclined to think that our holy Father Saint Francis' spirit was always aglow, passing in a breathless endeavor to be united with God. Francis would never have been able to define his own state of prayer or to analyze it. Such definitions of our interior state as "the dark night of the senses" which the great doctor, Saint John of the Cross, used to analyze our helpless stages on the road to higher prayer, Francis might not have understood. But we have proof that his seraphic heart well knew the weight of interior temptation and desolation. Did he not rush out into the night, divest himself of his garments and roll in the snow and briars until his wounded body, bleeding and torn, ceased its demands for the lawful pleasures of the Sacrament of Matrimony? This is a temptation which many souls striving for holiness must battle, when they would rise instead to higher prayer. Temptations and desolation are the usual companions of those striving for prayer of closer union with God; and it is a consolation to recall that the great heart of Francis also suffered such human weakness.

What is contemplative prayer, and what the state of contemplation? When Francis went singing along the highway soon after his conversion, calling himself the herald of the great King, his heart was in contemplative prayer and his soul in a state of contemplation. His conversation with the Lady Clare, when Saint Mary of Angels seemed afire, was contemplative prayer.

Let us also consider that double petition made in prayer to the Crucified Savior, when his love became so daring that he asked God to grant him to bear in his own body, so far as possible the sufferings and agony of Christ's Passion, and added the second petition that he might also feel in his heart the overwhelming love of the God who died for mankind in His sacred Passion. Francis knew what he was asking. He knew, too, that if the first petition were granted, he must accept the granting of the second or die. He wanted to share the sufferings of Jesus in a most realistic manner, but he knew that for this he must

have a new kind of love. He was not ignorant of the fact that the flame of love must sear and burn our hearts before it can consume them. To what heights had that flame of love risen in the seraphic heart of Francis, that he dared long for the sufferings of the God-man in His Crucifixion? Yet he calmly made his petition, the very thought of which makes our poor hearts quake. When the hour came and the Seraph's dart pierced the flesh of Francis, imprinting on his body the marks of Christ's Passion, what was his prayer then? We cannot speak of Francis' state of prayer in the granting of that second petition. Our stammering words are meaningless sounds when we attempt to speak of his prayer made with a love so like that of our Suffering Savior filling Francis' heart. The Church has instituted a feast commemorating the granting of that first petition. Of the second we seldom make mention. But we do know that the embrace of Christ with the frail, broken body of Francis was so intense, that it gave him the knowledge that he was confirmed in grace. His wordless prayer at that time could not but be a swift mounting of the flame of love from the heart of Francis, straining to make itself but one heart with Christ. To speak of the prayer of Francis at that moment would only desecrate it.

No definition of Francis' prayer is better, to my mind, than the words which Saint Paul spoke of himself when he said: *For me to live is Christ!* Surely that would have been our holy Father Francis' answer, and the words can hardly be applied to any one more aptly than to the Seraph of Assisi. *Mihi enim vivere Christus est.* When we ponder this short sentence, are we not convinced that living Christ, our life being the life of Christ, is indeed contemplation, rising to greater heights in proportion as our life is truly more and more Christ's own life in us, as our holy Father Francis' was? His life was indeed a flame rising ever higher until it reached that fullness of union where his soul, his body, his love were indeed Christ's and no more his own. How truly could our seraphic Father have added to his *Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi*, the words: *Mihi enim vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum.*

Poor Clare Monastery  
Roswell, New Mexico

Mother M. Immaculata, P.C., Abbess

## THE PERFECT LIFE

(Chapters VII and VIII of the *De Perfectione Vitae* ad S.  
Saint Bonaventure)

### *The Perfect Love of God*

According as the Lord has inspired me, I have taught the preceding pages, O handmaid of God, how you should train your soul so that you may be able to ascend step by step, as it were, to advance from virtue to virtue. Now in this seventh chapter I mainly to speak of the form of the virtues, that is, charity, which leads a man to perfection. For the mortification of vices, for attainment in grace, for the attainment of the highest perfection of virtues, nothing can be called better, nothing can be thought more useful, than charity. This is why Prosper, in his book *The contemplative Life*, says that "charity is the life of the virtues, the death of the vices," and *as wax melts in the presence of the fire so do we perish in the presence of charity*. Indeed, charity is of such power that it alone closes hell, it alone opens heaven, it alone grants the gift of salvation, it alone makes one lovable to God. Charity is of such power that among the virtues it alone is called the virtue, and he who has it is rich and wealthy and blessed, but he who has it not is poor and beggarly and piteous. It is because of this that the Gloss comments as follows on that passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, *If I have not charity*: "Notice how great charity is; for if it is absent, the others are present to no purpose; if it is present, all the others are there; he who begins to have it will have the Holy Spirit." As Saint Augustine says that "if a virtue leads us to the life of blessedness, I should maintain emphatically that there is no virtue but the greatest love of God." Since, then, charity is a virtue of that kind it should be urged in preference to all the virtues in the aggregate, and not any kind of charity, but that alone whereby God is loved above all things and one's neighbor loved because of God.

## THE PERFECT LIFE

How you should love your Creator, your Spouse Himself teaches you in the Gospel where He says: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind*. Notice with diligent care, most beloved handmaid of Jesus Christ, what kind of love your beloved Jesus demands of you. In very truth, your most loving Jesus wishes you to give your whole heart to the love of Him, your whole soul, your whole mind, to such an extent that in your whole heart, in your whole soul, in your whole mind absolutely no one possesses any part with Him. What, then, will you do in order surely to love the Lord thy God with a whole heart? Listen to what Saint John Chrysostom teaches you: "To love God with a whole heart means that your heart does not tend to the love of anything more than of God, that you do not take a greater pleasure in the beauty of the world than in God, not in honors, not in parents. For, if the love of your heart is occupied in any of these things, then you do not love with a whole heart." I entreat you, O handmaid of Christ, do not be deceived in love. Certainly, if you love anything that you do not love in God or because of God, then you do not love with a whole heart. In this connection Saint Augustine says: "Lord, too little does any one love Thee, who loves some other thing together with Thee." Now, if you have love for anything, and out of its enjoyment you do not progress in the love of God, you do not then love with a whole heart; and, if you love anything, and in defence to this love you neglect those things you owe to Christ, you do not then love with a whole heart. Therefore, love the Lord thy God with your whole heart.

The Lord Jesus Christ must be loved not only with a whole heart but also with a whole soul. How is He loved with a whole soul? Listen to what Saint Augustine teaches you: "To love God with a whole soul is to love Him with a whole will without variance." You surely love with a whole soul when without question you freely do what you know the Lord God wills, not what you will, not what the world counsels, not what the flesh suggests. You surely love God with a whole soul when for love of Jesus Christ you willingly expose your soul to death if necessity demands. If you should be negligent in any of these things, you do not then love with a whole soul. There-

fore, love the Lord thy God with your whole soul; that is, conform your will to the divine will in all things.

Love your Spouse the Lord Jesus not only with a whole heart, not only with a whole soul, but also with a whole mind. How do you love Him with a whole mind? Listen to what Saint Augustine teaches you: "To love God with a whole mind is to love Him in every memory without forgetfulness."

### Final Perseverance

After one has encompassed the beginning of all virtues does not as yet appear illustrious in God's sight unless perseverance therein is present, the consummation of all the virtues; because man, wholly mortal, however perfect he may be, is to be praised in his life unless he first brings that good which he has begun to attain to a happy end. For perseverance is the end and the "consummation" of the virtues, that which fosters merit, the advocate for reward. Hence Saint Bernard says: "Take away perseverance, and neither devotedness nor kindness wins grace, nor does fortitude effect praise. It would matter little if man had been religious, had been pious and humble, had been devoted and continent, loved God and possessed the rest of the virtues, unless perseverance were present. Though all the virtues run, perseverance alone receives the prize because not he who begins but *he who has persevered to the end shall be saved*. This is why John Chrysostom says: "What use are you to that flower, only to waste away gradually?" as though he would receive absolutely no use.

Therefore, most beloved Virgin of Christ, if you have some virtues arising from good works—nay, because you have many virtues—persevere in them, advance in them, fight Christ's campaign steadfastly in them until death, so that, when the last day and end of your life comes, there may be given to you as your pay and the reward of your labor the crown of glory and of honor. This is what Jesus Christ, your only Beloved, said when He addressed you in the Apocalypse: *Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of*

This crown is nothing else than eternal life's reward, to whose attainment the desire of all Christians should be inflamed. It is so great that absolutely no one can form an estimation of it, as Saint Gregory says, so extensive that no one is able to reckon it, and finally, so continuous and lasting that it can never be terminated and ended. To this reward, to this crown, your Beloved Spouse Jesus Christ invites you in the words of the Canticle of Canticles, *Come from Libanus, my spouse, my beloved, come from Libanus, come, thou shalt be crowned*. Arise, then, beloved of God, bride of Jesus Christ, dove of the eternal King, come, hasten to the nuptials of the Son of God, because the whole celestial court awaits you, because all is prepared.

For there is readied a resplendent servant and a distinguished one to minister to you; exquisite and delectable food to refresh you; a delightful and most friendly fellowship to rejoice with you. Arise, therefore, and hasten quickly to the nuptials, since there is prepared there a resplendent servant to minister to you. This servant is none other than the angelic host, indeed the very Son of the eternal God, just as He described Himself when He said in the Gospel: *Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, and will make them recline at table, and will come and serve them*. How great a glory will it then be for the poor and the forlorn, when they have the Son of God and the Most High King to minister to them, and the whole assembly of the multitude of the heavenly kingdom!

And there is prepared exquisite and delectable food to refresh you. The Son of God Himself has set the table with His Own Hands, as He spoke of Himself in the Gospel when He said: *I appoint to you a kingdom, even as my Father has appointed to me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom*. How sweet and delicious is that food which God in His sweetness has provided for His poor. How blessed is he who in the kingdom of the heavens will eat of that bread that was baked by the fire of the Holy Spirit in the oven of the virginal womb! *If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever*. With this food, with this bread, does that celestial King feed and refresh His elect at His table, as the Book of Wisdom says: *Thou didst feed thy people with the food of angels, and gavest them bread from heaven prepared without labor; having in it all that is delicious*

and the sweetness of every taste...and serving every man's will. Behold, this is the repast of the divine table.

In addition, there is prepared there a delightful and most friendly fellowship to rejoice with you. For Jesus will be there with the Father and the Holy Spirit; Mary will be there with the flower-laden host of virgins; the apostles, martyrs, and confessors will be there and the celestial army of all the elect. Piteous indeed is he who will not be joined to that most illustrious of companies; a desire that is utterly dead has he who has no desire to be united with this group.

But you, most distinguished handmaid of Christ, I know of your surety that you desire Christ; I know that you are striving with your abilities for this one purpose: how you may be joined to the companionship and the embraces of the eternal King. And "now, in far as you are able, incite your heart and your soul and lift up your understanding and consider. For, if each and every good is a delight, think in all earnestness what a delight that good will be that contains the joy of all good; if created life is good, how good is creature life; if fashioned salvation is joyous, how joyous is the salvation that fashions all salvation? What will he who enjoys this good possess and what will he not possess? He will certainly have what he wishes and will not have whatever he does not wish. Indeed, there will be such a perfection of body and soul that *eye has not seen nor ear heard nor does the heart of man know* its like. Why, then, O handmaid of God, do you wander through many things, looking for the wealth of your soul and your body? Love one Good in which is all good, and that suffices; desire the unalloyed Good that is all good, and it is enough.

"What you love is there, Sister; there is what you desire, fortunate virgin. What do you love, Sister; what do you desire, fortunate virgin? Whatever you love is there, whatever you desire. If beauty delights you, *the just will shine forth like the sun*. If long and healthful life gives you pleasure, health-giving eternity is there, because *the just shall live forever*, and the salvation of the just is eternal. If fulfillment delights you, *they will be satisfied when the glory of God appears*. If rapture delights you, *their senses will*

*be ravished with the treasures of thy house*. If sweet melodies give you pleasure, the choirs of angels are singing there together, praising God without end. If friendship gives you pleasure, there the saints will love God more than themselves, and one another as themselves, and God will love them more than they love themselves. If unanimity gives you pleasure, among all of them there will be one will because in them there will be no will but the will of God. If honor and riches delight you, God *will set* His good and faithful servants and handmaidens *over many*; in truth, *they shall be called sons and daughters of God*, and such they will be. Where God will be, there also will they be, *heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ*.

"What kind of joy is that and how great, where there is so great a good of this kind? Certainly, Lord Jesus, *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man* in this life how much Thy Blessed will love Thee and rejoice in Thee in that blessed life." As much as one loves God here, so will he joy in God there. Therefore, have a great love for God here, so that you may have great joy there; let the love of God grow in you, so that there you may possess the joy of God in its fullness. "On this let your mind meditate, of this let your tongue speak, let your heart hold it in its love, your mouth discourse concerning it, your soul hunger for it, your flesh thirst for it, your whole being desire it, until you enter into the joy of your God," until you come into the bridal-chamber of your beloved Spouse, Who together with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Christ the King Seminary Fr. Columban Duffy, O.F.M. (trans.)



Those who love Me must imitate Me by weeping, not over their own trials but over My people. They must weep over their own sins, over My bitter Passion which I endured for them, and over sinners who doom themselves by offending Me. Never has the world had more need of tears.

Christ to Margaret of Cortina

## AN EXPLANATION OF THE RULE OF THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR (XIX)

### Chapter VII: Nature and Manner of Work

The present chapter represents an addition that has nothing to it in the Rule of Leo X though it does have an analogue in of both the First and Second Order of Saint Francis. Consequently we have another instance here where the Holy See has remedied a defect in the earlier Rule by incorporating a section that might have come from the hand of Francis himself. Not only does it seem to breathe his spirit but its very wording at times echoes his own and written exhortations.

The three articles that comprise this chapter are marked by such continuity of thought that it is well to treat them as a unit for the purposes of exposition and comment. The first (art. 19) emphasizes the general obligation of a Franciscan to shun idleness and to busy himself with the things that concern the service of God and man. The second (art. 21) specifies to some extent the tasks expected of the religious, while the third and last (art. 22) stresses in particular the interior supernatural motive that should vitalize such actions and transform them literally into a labor of love for the Mystical Body of Christ. Their wording runs as follows: **TEXT:** *Article Twenty. Those who, inspired by the grace of the Holy Ghost, have dedicated themselves to the service of God, should avoid idleness, and give their efforts faithfully and devoutly to the divine praises or the various works of piety and charity (cf. Rule of the II Order, ch. VII).*

*Article Twenty-One. The religious should, therefore, carry out with their duties for the love of God, and perform what their superiors require of them, to the best of their ability, devoutly and faithfully, as has been said. Nor should they refuse to perform the humble tasks that may be imposed on them; on the contrary, following*

*footsteps of their Seraphic Father, they should perform them more willingly than other tasks.*

*Article Twenty-Two. Let all things be done in charity, and let the holy love of God so animate the sentiments of the religious in doing their work that they may labor only for His honor and glory, and fulfill the admonition of Saint Paul the Apostle: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10, 31).*

The opening words, *inspired by the grace of the Holy Ghost*, give Tertiary religious a brief but emphatic reminder of the source of their holy vocation and all that it implies. *You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you*, Christ says to them as to his first religious, adding, *and have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain* (Jo. 15, 16). Should not Christ's parable of the barren fig tree be as stern a reminder to those who have squandered what Francis calls "the grace of working" as it was for God's chosen people who squandered the grace of their divine election? *Cut it down, therefore; why does it still encumber the ground?* (Lk. 13, 7).

As religious, Franciscan Tertiaries *have dedicated themselves to the service of God*. The Latin text of the Rule reads, *servitio Dei se manciparunt*, indicating that this dedication is not simply a part-time service, but rather a total and unlimited giving of oneself to another person. The *mancipia*, as applied to men or women, indicated that they had been sold, either by themselves or another, into the service of a master as bondsmen or even slaves. Their contract, consequently, was not for so many hours of labor each day; day and night they belonged to another and were at his service. So too we might say that in a deeper and spiritual sense religious by their holy profession have obligated themselves to serve God night and day. If the parable of the unprofitable servant (Mt. 25, 19ff) applies to the faithful in general, a fortiori it would seem to hold for the *mancipia Dei*.

*Should avoid idleness.* . . The Latin reads *otium fugiant*, that is to say, they should flee from idleness as from an enemy or some

threatening danger. Francis himself expressed as much in the rule he gave his Friars. "Let all brothers apply themselves with diligence to some good works, for it is written: 'Be always busy in good work that the devil may find thee occupied'; and again: 'Idle is the enemy of the soul.' Therefore, the servants of God ought to continue in prayer or in some other good work."

Not only are they idle who do nothing but also those who employ themselves with useless matters and time-consuming hobbies for the purpose of needed recreation or other justifiable means but as an excuse to keep from doing what they should be doing. Real work is never easy, and in the present order it still has the character of penance, a punishment for sin (Gen. 3, 17). The danger therefore, is always present that a religious may turn away to other tasks, occupations, hobbies, and the like, using these as a pretext to keep from doing real earnest work.

To such idle religious, the words of Celano apply: "Pardon me, holy Father (Francis), to cry out to thee in heaven over those who should be thine. Many to whom the exercise of virtue is repugnant, wish to rest before ever working, and thus prove themselves sons of Lucifer and not of Francis. . . They work more with their mouths than with their hands; they become hostile to superiors and punish them. . . At home they would be obliged to live by the sweat of their brow, and now they live without work and thrive on the sweat of the poor. Strange prudence, for though they do nothing yet they always seem occupied. They never miss the time to work. Should I, esteemed Father, regard these monsters as worthy of glory? No, not even of thy habit. Thou hast ever taught during thy short and fleeting life, to acquire a treasure of merits, so that we would not be forced to go begging in the world to come" (*Leg. secundum* 162).

As the book of Proverbs puts it: *He that followeth idleness shall be filled with poverty* (28, 19)—not only poverty in a material sense but even more in a spiritual sense, for such religious shall want grace. Cursed by Christ in the language used to the barren fig tree: *No fruit ever come from thee henceforward forever* (Mt. 21, 19).

their souls shall wither up. How much wisdom there is in the observation of Ecclesiasticus (33, 29): *Idleness hath taught much evil.*

*They shall give their efforts to the divine praises. . .* Three types of activity are specified by the Rule. The first place is justly assigned to the *divine praises*. This embraces the divine office, the public and official praise of God, as well as participation in other religious services, prayers, etc., prescribed by the Constitutions and ordinances of the particular religious congregation or institute. While this applies primarily to community exercises (which enjoy a special prerogative because of the words of Christ, *Where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there I am in the midst of them*: (Mt. 18, 10), it does not exclude private devotions, provided of course that these do not represent encroachments on time that should be legitimately and according to the will of the superior devoted to other tasks.

We might wonder at first blush why this reference to the divine praises is introduced in this section of the Rule devoted to fraternal charity and the Tertiary's activities in the service of his fellowmen, rather than in that portion of the Rule which defines his relation to God. We must remember that even contemplation according to the Franciscan conception can never be a purely personal or individual matter. As a member of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Franciscan religious cannot worship God without by that very fact helping his fellowmen. So keenly aware of this active aspect of contemplation was Saint Clare that she could write to Blessed Agnes of Prague, a contemplative like herself, "To use the words of the Apostle *in their proper sense*, I hold thee to be a *co-worker of God Himself* (I Cor. 3, 9) and a support for the frail and failing members of His glorious Body." In the truest sense of the term, time spent in these *officia* and especially in reciting the office or the *opus Dei*, can be called working and laboring in the service of mankind. This thought should be an incentive to perform these divine praises with greater care and devotion.

In the second place, the Rule mentions *works of piety* (Latin: *religiositas*). Under this designation fall all those tasks that are

associated with religious or community life, such as work in the sacristy, garden, kitchen, laundry, sewing room, or tailor shop, and so on. All these works in the service of the religious institute, of spiritual mother, should be recognized for what they are—a labor of love for those who belong to us in Christ by spiritual family ties.

In the third place are the *various works of charity*, which include all those activities of Tertiary Religious that are performed immediately and directly as a service to others, such as teaching, nursing, missionary work, and so on. The word *charity* emphasizes what the dominant motive behind such service should be. The work of a religious order, especially of a Franciscan order, should never be evaluated in terms of material recompense or regarded simply as a source of livelihood. As Francis put it in his Testament, the purpose of our work should never simply be "to receive the price of labor", the dominant motive in the world today. In our mercenary and mechanistic age with its flair for standardization and organization, charity, there is a danger that in the field of education or even such truly Franciscan work as caring for the sick and the poor, religion may become so enmeshed in the administrative aspects of the work as to lose sight of the Franciscan motive of personal service. Nothing so warms the heart or breaks down prejudice so quickly as a genuine personal interest in another's welfare. And who more than a religious has more reason to be genuinely interested in the actual or potential members of the Mystical Christ? As one layman pointed out, in Catholic hospitals there is a golden opportunity for an apostolate against religious bigotry and for all that Catholicism stands for. What a world of good could be done if hospital communities would release one or two personable sisters from all duties except that of making the rounds of each and every patient's room, greeting them with a warm welcome born of true Christian friendliness, manifesting a sympathetic concern in them as human beings and not simply as interesting medical cases or just another patient. "smothering them with kindness", as it were, not in any obviously offensive way, but with the artless simplicity of Francis whose Christ-like love for all those in need constantly prompted him to serve others "above and beyond the call of duty." Such practice of work

is fast becoming the lost art of Christian charity might well be the first step to bringing such souls, Catholic or non-Catholic, closer to Christ. Perhaps all religious institutes engaged in the works of charity might do well to devote more consideration to what is known today as public relations.

*And perform whatever their superiors require of them...*

These words of article 21 indicate specifically what almost goes without saying, that religious are not simply to flee idleness but to busy themselves with the work assigned by their superior and not with that of their own choosing. On the other hand, superiors have a corresponding obligation to discern the talents and capabilities of their subjects and assign them suitable work in as far as this can be reasonably done. It is not only inferiors but also superiors who can waste or misuse the talents that God gives a religious community or Order in the person of its subjects. On the other hand, if superiors through imprudence, lack of foresight, and so on, assign tasks beyond the physical strength or mental capacity of their subjects, the latter are not obliged to the impossible but, as the wording of the Rule puts it, they should carry out their work *to the best of their ability*.

*Nor should they refuse to perform the humbler tasks...*

Once more the Rule alludes to the example of Francis, who wished that his brethren accept the humbler tasks in preference to others. In his Rule of 1221 he wrote: "Let the brothers in whatever place they may be among others to serve or to work, not be chamberlains, nor cellarers, nor overseers in the houses of those whom they serve, and let them not accept any employment which might cause scandal or be injurious to the soul, but let them be inferior and subject to all who work in the house." Recognizing the difference in intrinsic value of various kinds of work, even as Paul did in speaking of the functions of the various members of the Mystical Body, Francis at the same time realized also that *if one member glories, all the members rejoice with it* (I Cor, 12, 26). But other things being equal Francis preferred the humbler tasks, perhaps, because of humility.

and his desire to keep peace, but perhaps also because he understood so well that to serve Christ is to rule and that the more he employed himself taking the form of a servant, the closer he drew to the Father that he loved.

In the United States, however, we are apt to miss the significance of this article of the Rule. Raised in a democratic atmosphere where every worker in theory at least is a potential leader and the equal of any of his fellows, we can hardly appreciate the attitude towards menial tasks that exists in countries where distinctions are still strong between the nobility or land owners and the common working classes.

#### *Faithfully and devoutly...*

These words, used twice in this chapter, indicate the manner in which the work of a religious should be performed. Work done *faithfully* is done at the right time, in the right way, with due concern and care. Slovenly work is characteristic of the mediocre person. Not that one should work for the eyes of men, but rather for the eyes of God. Here perhaps the example of medieval craftsmen is appropriate. In the darkened corners and sheltered nooks of the great cathedrals we discover exquisitely sculptured figures that the casual visitor or pious pilgrim were never intended to see, for these men were working for God and their work was in truth a prayer. If the Tertiary Religious try to sanctify their daily tasks by a similar intention then indeed their work will be done *devoutly* as well as *faithfully* and, as Francis put it, "in banishing idleness, the enemy of the soul, they (will) not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things must be subservient" (*Rule of the Third Order*, chap. 5).

#### *Let all things be done in charity...*

But the best guarantee that their work will be done both *faithfully* and *devoutly* is found in the final article of this chapter. *Let all things be done in charity* (1 Cor. 16, 14). Once more the Rule

calls the fundamental truth that the heart of Christian, religious, and Franciscan perfection is the practice of the dual law of love or charity. By this norm all the activities of the Tertiary Religious are measured.

And this brings us to a final observation that concerns the positive value of work in a truly Christian conception of the universe. Though invested with a penitential character because of the fall of Adam, work is not exclusively a punishment. Equated with human activity, it is meant to bring man closer to God and to his fellowman. For the latter was to continue the unfinished work of creation, subduing the earth and dominating it through the instrumentality of intelligent hands. It almost seemed as though God wished man to feel something of His own divine thrill on creation's morn when looking at the work of His hands, *He saw that it was good* (Gen. 1). But more than that, in working with the "playthings of divine wisdom", man would learn not only to admire the artisan in God but to love in return the Creator whose *delights were to be with the children of men* (Prov. 8, 31).

As we read the account of the Three Companions, we wonder if Francis did not experience something of this primitive and unspoiled joy when in struggling with the heavy stones and bending his back beneath the mortar board he rebuilt the church of San Damiano. What else could explain the relish with which he set himself to this backbreaking work, or the happiness in his heart that would not be repressed but caused him to burst forth in the love songs of France, and prompted him to invite passerbys to share his thrill in working for God.

But in the divine plan, work had another purpose—to knit man closer to his fellowman. Working with others creates a bond of unity that endures long after the work itself is finished. And where his work is a genuine service, as it should be, man's labor will always be the most practical and concrete way of manifesting his love and concern for others.

Sin, however, has marred the beauty of this plan of God. Work is no longer the thing of pure joy that it might have been. But what



is more, it often drives one away from God and provokes discord and jealousy among men. For this reason, the words of the concluding article, *let all things be done in charity*, reminds us that not only should a supernatural motive transform all that we do, but in our work we strive to avoid the strife and discontent that marked the conduct of the Corinthians and caused Paul first to pen these words. Francis intended that his children be apostles of peace, not of conflict. For this reason, especially, he desired that his first followers in putting themselves in the service of others shun all positions of distinction that might arouse envy or dissension. Nevertheless, the nature being what it is, it is not always possible for a religious man to avoid provoking opposition to his good works. For that reason the Rule goes on to point out that human likes and dislikes should not deter us from doing the work of God. *If I were still trying to please men*, wrote Paul (1 Cor. 1, 10), *I should not be the servant of men*. Like Paul's, ours should be a supernatural motive so that in whatever we do we labor only for His honor and glory.

St. Bonaventure University

Fr. Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M.



As I am the Creator of all that lives and as I preserve what I have made, I wish and command you to love and reverence all creatures for love's sake. Me, judging and despising none of them in your heart, and showing neither disgust nor displeasure toward any one, no matter who it is.

Christ to Margaret of Cortina

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