

## OUR MONTHLY CONFERENCE

### *The Good Ground of the Word of God*

Lent is almost upon us. The Church has already changed her vestments from white and green to somber violet, to warn us to prepare for the renewal of Lent; and in the first Sundays of this month her Masses will turn our thoughts toward that deepening of the Christian life, the Christ-life within us, which is the true purpose and goal of this holy season. That our life here below is a contest, a race for the prize, is the burden of Septuagesima: a prize that is given us, the Gospel shows, only because of the goodness of God and not for any merit of ours. Only God, through His human agents, has sown in us the seed of His word which we must accept on faith, the foundation of our Christian life (Sexagesima). Christ alone can give us new sight, the vision of faith, which will lead us through the Passion of Christ to the consummation in charity (Quinquagesima). One should study and meditate on these Sunday Masses, as a preparation for Lent, to begin now to make the soul good ground for the word of God that will be sown so liberally in the liturgy of Lent.

In particular, Religious should find in the season of Lent itself a time of grace in which to deepen and renew their religious vocation, their religious fervor. We have already left the world by accepting the Franciscan way of life. Hence, says Saint Francis, "we have nothing else to do but to be solicitous to follow the will of the Lord and to please Him." But it is striking that he immediately proceeds to warn us: "Let us take great care that we be not ground by the wayside, or ground that is stony or full of thorns," thus indicating that despite our vocation, our profession, we may yet be poor ground for the word of God that comes to us constantly throughout our religious life. Here Saint Clare can teach us a much-needed lesson.

### *The Good Ground*

To use her only simile, Francis was the gardener and Clare and her Order the little plants he had set in the garden of the Lord and watered with his prayers, nourished with his instructions and protected by his

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care. She became an exquisite flower of ineffable fragrance (says Saint Bonaventure)—but only because she had been good ground that had received with a right and good heart the word of Gospel-perfection and held it fast, to bring forth fruit a hundred-fold. Since the Lent of 1211, that gardener of Christ had been at his work directing Clare, speaking to her of the good Jesus, implanting in her a great desire for the nuptials of the Lamb. And in the Lent of 1212 he judged the time had come for her to bring forth the first fruits of the word she had received, to show to the world by her flight to the cloister the Gospel-seed he had sown.

What had made her such good ground for the word of God? Certainly, to judge from the witnesses at her canonization and the subsequent Legend of Celano, everything that was in her by nature and by grace. All who had known her in maidenhood spoke of the nobility of her nature, the holiness of her life within her father's house. After forty-two years they still vividly remembered the fragrance of Christ diffused throughout Assisi by the eighteen year old daughter of Favorone and Ortolana. She was noble by nature and race, but more noble by grace. Little wonder that the Blessed Francis, who would never call her by name, was wont when speaking to her or of her to salute her as *Christiana*, true Christian woman.

This was Clare, the good ground of the Gospel-word. Nature and supernature worked together to make her of right and good heart to hear the invitation of Christ and bring forth much fruit.

It is a dictum of theology that grace does not destroy nature but supposes and perfects it. This had been borne out in the vocation of Saint Francis. For every good quality, every natural virtue, every natural longing that he possessed had been made use of by the Spirit of God in calling him to the Gospel-life. His charm and nobility, his chivalrous ideals, his natural courtesy, his magnanimity and sympathy for all men: in short his whole romantic temperament had been part of the good ground in which was sown a new life. So also in Clare. Her natural good traits, her gentle and gay heart, her benignity and mildness, her strength of will, all combined with the supernatural graces and virtues God had wrought in her to furnish the well-prepared soil into which, through His gardener Saint Francis, the Spirit was to put new seed.

Plainly, we sometimes tend to forget the place of the natural in the supernatural life of grace. We may misinterpret the Gospel parable and think that the natural, one's own temperament, talents of intellect

strength of will are so many stones that can dry up the ground and cause the seed to wither away, or so many thorns that might choke off the fruit of grace. As a result, we adopt an asceticism that is at odds with good theology and Franciscan tradition. Or, as educators and directors, we might think that all candidates for the Order, novices, clerics, must be forced into one and the same mold or cut precisely to the same pattern, without regard for the traits and talents of the individual. The Franciscan tradition is rather to make supernatural use of the natural—a new note perhaps (in the thirteenth century) in the history of asceticism.

### *Clearing The Ground*

This is indeed one of the paradoxes of the Franciscan way, that, while it considers human means as nothing in comparison with the divine, natural virtues as naught when contrasted with the supernatural, it will yet use those natural good qualities which the world considers its own.

Before these can be used, however, in the service of God—to follow the parable—very often many stones must be removed and thorns cleared away and burned. But given this eradication, the ground itself is still good. In other words, the natural is not abandoned or despised or forgotten, but purged and cleansed, revaluated and elevated by grace, and thus made good ground for our vocation. Or, to change the analogy, the natural must undergo a purification in what we might call the crucible of poverty of spirit. There the dross of self is purged away, all self-love, self-glory, self-seeking. What remains is the pure essence of the natural gift of God which can and must be used in the following of Christ.

This is not an easy process, but it is absolutely necessary. Let no one imagine that Franciscanism advocates simply "being one's self" beneath the habit and cowl. Saint Francis would be the first to decry such a thought! Our greatest enemy is within: our body, our fallen nature, poor Brother Ass, and we must keep that enemy under chains. Yet, neither does Saint Francis deny the natural gifts of God or their place in the service of God.

Suppose that a Franciscan is gay and joyous by nature, or strong of will, of gifted intellectuality. Are these gifts of God, for such indeed they are, to be eradicated as so many impediments to our growth in Christ? No; yet neither are they to be retained "as is". They must

undergo purification and elevation and then can be used as aids, and sometimes powerful aids, in the spiritual life.

### *Bearing Good Fruit*

Once these natural gifts and capacities have undergone such purge, however, they form, together with the supernatural virtues, part of the good ground. They are no longer purely of the natural order but integrated into the higher life, taking on new vigor and new meaning.

Thus, the natural gaiety of Francis was transformed by grace into joy of spirit, which he called the most potent defence against the attack and tricks of the enemy. His natural love of the beautiful, which had faded and been almost lost in his early illness, now becomes a means of seeing God in all things. Clare's natural firmness of will becomes supernatural stubbornness in resisting the threats and physical violence of her kinsman who tried to drag her, and later her sister Agnes, away from their new life; it made her unafraid and trustful in God when the Saracens attacked San Damiano; and it helped her resist all attempts to deprive her of perfect poverty.

Such a change can and must take place in us also. If a strong will but offer itself up in the sacrifice of obedience and become as a corpse it can thereafter retain and exercise all the strength and firmness that belong to it by nature: for it takes a strong will to be a good unresisting corpse! Talent of intellect, if sought and exercised for itself, makes man proud and indocile; but if a man, says Francis, yield up his learning in poverty of spirit and offer himself naked to the arms of the Crucified, such a one will go forth to a true ministry of the Word—in pulpit or classroom—because he has got rid of that which would make him boast with pride.

Therefore, to be good ground that will bear much fruit, we must get rid of the rocks of self that would dry up the seed of God within us. We must get rid of the thorns, the selfish "cares and riches and pleasures" of a natural and unmortified life, our vices and sins, our pride and vain-glory, the wisdom of this world and the prudence of the flesh. At the same time the good qualities in everyone must be considered the gift of God and not passed over and denied in His service. But they must be purged of self and then returned to God. "And let us render back all good things to the Lord God most high and great, and acknowledge that all good

things belong to Him, and give thanks for all things to Him from whom all good things do come" (Rule I, c. 17).

If in true poverty of spirit we thus say *No* to self and creatures and in true Seraphic charity say *Yes* to God, the whole man will be good ground that will bear much fruit for God. We can blend the natural and the supernatural into the simple, integrated, unified way of the new man and under the pleasing showers of the grace of God produce the beautiful fruit of the true and ideal Franciscan. For the true child of Francis has the firmness of Clare, the loyalty of Bernard, the simplicity and purity of Leo, the courtesy and benignity of Angelo, the gracious mien and refinement of Masseo ("the gentleman of God," someone has called him), the contemplative mind of Giles, the constant prayerfulness of Rufino, the patience of Juniper, the bodily and spiritual strength of John de Lodi ("the Florentine boxer," Francis nicknamed him), the careful concern of Lucido, the magnanimity and gentleness of Francis himself (*Spec. Perf.* 85). The result will be a man or woman of virtue, devout toward God, pleasing to the Saints, gracious and attractive to all men: on such the Order and Saint Francis do rest! (I Cel., n. 102).

*Detroit, Mich.*

*Fr. Ignatius Brady, O. F. M.*

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Fervent persons are occasionally found who would wish to imitate the fastings and other austerities of the saints, but this is presumption, unless they are called thereto by God, and that this vocation has been well sounded and approved by legitimate authority. The general and safe maxim, in cases of austerities, is not to undertake anything extraordinary, without the consent of superiors and confessors. It is often found that those who solicit extraordinary penances, neglect those which are ordinary and common, and who, in mortifying their bodies, do not take sufficient pains to purify their hearts, to become humble, obedient, mild, and charitable.

*Candide Chalippe, O. F. M.*

## SOLI DEO GLORIA

Angela Merici was a destined soul. She was so sheltered and shown by grace that it is not only apparent to us in retrospect, but it was more appreciated by her contemporaries, that God had set her apart for a special work, that He meant to show the attractiveness of virtue to a world grown indifferent to it, to a world that despised piety. From the time of her birth until the moment of her death, her life is a study of the efficacy of divine grace, of grace corresponded with, of course.

This favored one was born on March 21, 1474, in a little town in Italy called Desenzano, not far distant from Brescia. She was most fortunate in her parents. Both her father, John Merici, and her mother were not only of noble extraction but, far more important, were of noble character. They were parents who took seriously the task given them by the Almighty of training for life and for heaven the children entrusted to them. Theirs was a happy home where the virtuous lives of the parents were reflected in the lives of the children. They realized fully that the most effective way to impress lessons of piety and of reverence for God's law on the minds and hearts of their children was in their own daily life and example, and they ordered their lives and their home accordingly. Every morning and every evening there was a family gathering for prayer followed by pious readings, sometimes from the Scriptures, again from the lives of the Saints, so that Angela had her lessons in sanctity quite early, when she should have had them, and from those best equipped to teach them to her.

Besides her parents, she was also blessed in her sister, with whom she had a complete congeniality of spirit; for between Angela and this older sister, who was her constant companion, there seemed to be a pleasant sort of rivalry. They vied with each other in the practice of virtue, in the choice of mortifications; while the other children of the town were eagerly joining in games and amusements, these two were busily erecting little oratories and arranging tiny altars where they prayed and imitated the ceremonies of the Church. The ordinary innocent pastimes of children held no attraction for them; theirs was a precocious inclination for the holy, and in all these practices, Angela, the younger, was the leader. It was Angela who possessed the childish charm and winsomeness that

and with her goodness, especially won the hearts and admiration of the townspeople. They called her a little saint, the holy maid of Desenzano.

When John Merici was overtaken by a painful disease and died very shortly after, at the early age of forty, the whole family seemed inconsolable. To Angela fell the task of comforting her brothers and sister, and especially her mother. However, not even the gentle compassion and passionate love of her saintly child could calm the widow's grief, and it was not long till she followed her loved husband.

The care of the two girls was undertaken by an uncle, a man of virtue and of wealth, who dearly loved his two nieces. Although his home at Salo, like their own at Desenzano, was a home where piety was the accepted thing, he, too, was inspired by the abstinences and austerities that the little girls practiced. In just a short time the lavish care with which they were surrounded in his home seemed to Angela to be so contrary to the lessons taught them by their parents that she decided they would run away from it all. One morning they went off to hear Mass at the parish church, as usual; but after the Holy Sacrifice was ended, instead of going back home, they hurried to a hermitage outside of town and there they hid, hoping their absence would be overlooked. They were going to pass their life in intimate union with God alone. Fortunately, in the case of the Almighty, good will is meritorious, for such a flight could not long escape their uncle's vigilance. He went to all the churches; he went to all the houses where he thought they might be. Then, recalling the many conversations he had overheard between the girls about trying to live a life apart from the rest of the world, he had the country outside the town searched thoroughly. Finally, after many inquiries and false leads, he found their retreat and brought the runaways back to Salo. He realized the solid piety upon which their desire was founded, and, far from preventing them in their quest for solitude, he allowed them to fix up a narrow cell for themselves in the most retired part of his house. Here, Angela and her sister lead a life so close to perfection for two children, the older scarcely fourteen, that the choice of God was evident, and His enveloping grace was easily discernible; He was appropriating them for Himself in a special manner, and that fact became more apparent as the days passed.

Then death took even this companion from Angela, this sister with whom she truly formed but one heart and soul. Yet, though her grief was painful to the extreme, though she felt crushed and alone, her

resignation left nothing to be desired. God willed it, and for Angela that was reason enough. But she was greatly concerned about the fact that her much-loved companion had died without having received the Holy Eucharist. Because theirs was an age in which the people were very ignorant in regard to the reception of the Eucharist, neither Angela nor her sister had as yet made their first Holy Communion.

To distract her from this grieving and preoccupation over the salvation of her sister, Angela's uncle sent her into the country to supervise his reapers. One day, while on the way through the estate, taking her lunch to the workers at noon, she happened to glance up and saw a strange cloud hovering over her way. As she was wondering at the sight, suddenly she beheld within it the Queen of Heaven surrounded by a multitude of angels and maidens among whom she recognized her sister of her heart, who urged her to persevere in the kind of life she was now living, promising Angela a share in the glory she herself was now enjoying. How this vision set her mind at ease; and how it fortified her in the path she had chosen!

Almost at once, Angela began to beg and entreat both her uncle and the parish priest to allow her to make her first Holy Communion. Finally, when she had just passed her thirteenth birthday, they acceded to her request, and she received, for the first time, the Bread of Life. Her ardor was indescribable. The yearning which had filled her soul since her most from infancy was so sated that she needed no earthly food for herself. Her soul's life was centered around the Tabernacle, and, in order that she might receive frequently without causing comment, she deemed it well to join some religious body. While attending one of the meetings of the Third Order of Saint Francis, she was so impressed by the piety and sincerity of its members, by the manner of life they lived, and by their love for the Eucharist, that she felt called to join them. This maid of thirteen was so well known for her piety, for the purity of her life, and for the practice of virtue, that the usual year of probation was shortened, and after only six months of a novitiate, she was permitted to pronounce her vows and take the name of Sister Angela.

Her director satisfied her zeal for frequent Communion and allowed her to receive daily. She thought solely now of establishing the kingdom of God in her heart which was truly dead to the world. She observed the simple vow of poverty so exactly that she would have nothing as her own. She had no furniture whatever in her cell. Her clothes, the very essence of modesty, covered a hair cloth which she always wore, day and night.

Angela fasted habitually, and in Lent ate only on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, and then only a little bread and a few chestnuts. In itself, it seems almost a miracle that, notwithstanding all this fasting, a growing child in her teens lived. This was the life she led as a Tertiary in her uncle's home until she was twenty. Then her uncle died. Another separation! Since the only relatives she had left in Salo were very distant ones, she decided to return to the Merician home in her native town. There, driven by the conviction that the most logical way to cure the almost general corruption of the age was the proper and religious education of the young, especially of the young girls who were to be the future mothers, she began gathering all the little girls in Desenzano to teach them the fundamentals of Christianity, hoping thus to lay the foundation for Christian homes. Angela was able to persuade four others of her Third Order friends to her conviction of the necessity of this work, and they joined her in her attempt to stem the tide of indifference which had crept into even the best of homes. It was a dark period in the history of the Church; a heavy cloud of spiritual darkness had begun to lower over the souls of men, but Angela and her little band of four were confident that theirs was the only way for them to pierce the cloud. They not only taught the children, but also used every opportunity for checking evil among the elders. And it was Angela who was definitely the soul of the project. She had long before won the admiration of the people by her piety; now, her charming gaiety, blended with the bit of shyness which forever remained an essential part of her make-up, won their minds and hearts, so that what she said to them impressed them the more for her way of saying it. She never hesitated to go out of her way to help others onto the path of virtue; her influence over even the rudest of men was remarkable, and to such a degree that she eventually won the esteem and respect of even the derelicts of society.

One day she and the other four Tertiaries had gone for a walk in the country, and, as they came upon a little hermitage, they stopped to say their beads. When they had finished, her sisters decided to continue their walk into the country, while Angela wanted to stay and pray a while longer. The others had scarcely gone, when Angela became very conscious of the presence of God; she begged Him to let her know if this work of hers, this teaching the Christian way of life to the children, was pleasing to Him. Was it what He wanted of her? In His loving kindness, the Almighty heeded her prayer at once. Looking toward the heaven, she perceived, reaching up into the sky, a ladder upon whose rungs were seated alternately a group of virgins crowned with jeweled diadems,

and a group of harp-playing angels, filling the air with their melodies. "Angela, thou shalt not leave this world without founding a society of virgins like those that have just appeared to thee," were the words in which her Lord made the vision clear to Angela, and gave complete approval to the work in which she was then engaged. She, of course, was completely overawed at the revelation; but the thought of the magnanimity of God to her, coupled with her almost innate humility, guided her to acquiescence to Providence. She uttered her *fiat*; and, no sooner had she done so, than her companions returned, to be told of God's approval of their work, and, after a natural hesitancy, of the revelation concerning herself.

However, notwithstanding her blind confidence, both she and they realized the impossibility of such an establishment at the moment; yet they determined to spend the ensuing time in preparation for the foundation. They continued their work of teaching the young, and added classes for adults, who came in crowds; they visited the poor and the sick, often distributing to them the alms that were intended for themselves; they went into the workshops to give instructions to the workmen. It was Angela who was especially successful in these works; none had such success as she with men well versed in vice. Naturally, she was tempted to pride. All her life she fought against satisfaction in accomplishment. To prevent sentiments of self-love from gaining a foothold, she continuously kept before her mind, and repeated so frequently that it practically became a breath, "All for the glory of God."

So widespread did her reputation for holiness and zeal become that people came from all the surrounding country, even from Brescia, to consult her and to solicit her prayers; men felt themselves honored by just a few moment's conversation with her. She was their Saint; she was their pride. Since Angela was still living on alms, they used this as a pretext for inviting her to their homes for a meal. These invitations were not accepted indiscriminately, but only when she hoped to effect some good in a particular family; and her conversation in such an instance, though it invariably turned on the hideousness of sin and the attractiveness of virtue, was always so prudent and charming that it never wearied or embarrassed them.

Toward the end of 1516 Angela made the move to Brescia, impelled by what she considered a clear indication of the will of God. A wealthy and devout couple of Brescia, Signor Pentegoli and his wife, very dear friends of hers, lost within a very short time their two daughters, so

heiresses of their fortunes. Despite their piety, nothing could assuage the grief of the parents; and they seemed on a point of parting with life themselves, when in answer to their entreaty, Angela joined them at their home in Brescia. By her tender compassion and sympathy, by her gracious presence, by her conversation, she led them gradually to the resignation which until then they could not achieve. But the task of comforting did not divert her thoughts from the work given her—the subject of her vision. She prayed to have her mind freed from indecision; she was constantly torn between the desire to return to her Tertiary companions in Densenzano and the desire to fulfill her destiny, which she believed to be a foundation in Brescia. And before very long God let it be known to her that it was His plan that she should now think about establishing the congregation and that it was to be in Brescia, not in Densenzano.

After four months Angela left the home of the Pentegolis for an apartment provided by a retired merchant, Mark Anthony Romano, because she felt that its seclusion was better adapted to the fulfillment of her engagement with God. Here her life can best be described by the word angelic, and it was as an angel from heaven that she was regarded by all those with whom she came in contact, although any hint of this attitude to Angela only drove her to new and greater austerities; and the more she humbled herself, the more God displayed through her His glory and power. What a delightful instrument she must have proved, judging from the gifts! She was given an unusual understanding of the most difficult passages of the Scriptures; she was able to discuss with precision the most intricate points of both dogmatic and moral theology; without ever having studied Latin, she understood it perfectly and translated into Italian many of the official prayers of the Church. Hearing of her gifts, educated men flocked to her, to discuss with her their problems. Many consulted her about the surest means of salvation, and the advice she frequently gave them was "to do every day of your life, what you would wish to have done at the moment of your death."

In the year 1522, with Romano, who during these years acted as a sort of patron-chaperon, and some ladies who wished to accompany her, she made a pilgrimage to Mantua, to the tomb of Mother Hosanna Andreasy. Angela had known Mother Hosanna by reputation and, when reports of striking miracles reached her, she was anxious to show her veneration for the precious remains. What food for thought it must have been for the other pilgrims to watch the homage paid by a living saint to the lifeless body of another! On the journey back to Brescia, she accepted

the invitation of prince Aloysius Gonzaga to visit him at Solfarino, meeting at which virtue paid tribute to virtue. As a departure gift to show his esteem for Angela, the prince granted her the pardon of a criminal who had just been condemned to banishment.

For years, the desire of visiting the Holy Land had been growing in Angela. In the year 1524, after Romano, along with the Pentegoli had made all the necessary arrangements, they set out from Venice for the Holy Land. On the way, they put in on the Isle of Crete, where Angela hastened to the Cathedral. There, while praying before the crucifix, without any previous warning she was stricken with total blindness. Romano and the others considered it a sign that God did not wish her to visit the Holy Places, but not so Angela. She considered the affliction a punishment for her sins, but still she might at least touch with her hands and lips the places where the dear Lord had labored and suffered and her friends were too appreciative of her sanctity to prevent her. In Jerusalem, her visits to the places made sacred by Christ were so soul-satisfying that she would have dwelt there forever; she found it necessary to tear herself away to return to Brescia. On the return journey, they stopped again at the Cathedral in Crete; and, while praying before the same crucifix, she had her sight suddenly and marvelously restored. Upon arrival at Venice, the magistrates of the Republic attempted to persuade her to remain with them as a sort of general superintendent of all the charitable institutions of Venice; but Angela, knowing that Brescia was to be her field of action, persuaded Romano to depart that very night for the home-city. In these later years, as the time for her foundation drew closer, she seemed always to be avoiding the danger of being persuaded into other projects than the one assigned to her by Providence. Her mission was more than ever before her eyes. She had been commanded by God to found a society in Brescia, and not even His Holiness, Clement VII, could make her swerve from her purpose of carrying out that order—and his offer was enticing. It was in the year 1525, when she had come to Rome to gain the indulgences, that the Pope, having heard of her great holiness and her extraordinary success as a religious teacher of young girls, invited her to remain in Rome to take charge of the teaching institutions and of the hospitals of the city. When she explained to His Holiness, in the shy, gracious way that mirrored her humility, about the establishment for which she had been commissioned by God, the Sovereign Pontiff by divine inspiration understood that in Brescia lay the work for which she was destined, and he urged her to the execution of it. He blessed both Angela and her undertaking.

At this time, the whole country had been invaded by the military forces of the Emperor Charles V, which shortly after her return were reported to be advancing on Brescia. Angela became alarmed and fled with the Pentegoli and Romano to Cremona. It was quite a blow for our Saint to endure, for she thought that progress had been made toward a speedy establishment of her institute. Saint Ursula had already appeared to her to encourage her; Angela took this as an indication of the Saint's interest and resolved to give the name of Ursula to the religious congregation. However, at Cremona she yielded to the force of circumstances and gave herself over completely to a life of prayer and penance. She seemed to forget herself in her eagerness to further love for God among men. The rigor of her abstinences and labors was so strenuous to a body already weakened by other mortifications that her life was imperiled. She was seized with a fever so malignant that the physician simply abandoned her to her pain. Holy Viaticum had been given her, and, just as she seemed to be drawing her last breath, she suddenly rose up, miraculously restored to health, and sent the Signora Pentegoli for her clothes so that they might set off at once to the Holy Hill of Verallo, a much revered place of pilgrimage in Upper Italy. Here she poured forth her soul in tears and ardent supplication, beseeching God to give peace to Italy and to His Church. It is believed that Our Lord appeared to her in person, giving the desired answer to her prayer, for very shortly peace was finally achieved between the Empire, the Republic of Venice, and the Duke of Milan. Her stay at Cremona had lasted three years, and, just as soon as hostilities ceased, Angela hastened back to Brescia, to lead an even more solitary life than before. Renouncing the generous hospitality of Romano, she moved to a house near the Church of the Cistercian monks in the parish of Saint Clement. Here, she attended Mass daily and one day during the Holy Sacrifice she was publicly rapt in ecstasy, her body remaining raised from the floor for quite some time. Those who were present told those who were not; and, when it happened a second time in another Church, the whole town was talking about the miraculous happenings; but public interest and astonishment were really aroused when it became known that the spirit of God possessed her—that she was vouchsafed the knowledge of future things, that she was able to penetrate the hidden secrets of the human heart. Their Angela was truly a chosen soul!

She had now passed the age of sixty and, in spite of her desire of extending God's glory, was still holding back, prevented possibly by her deep-rooted humility. Finally her director advised her to submit to the orders of heaven. A noble lady, Isabella de Prata, gave Angela a house

near the Church of Saint Afra to be used for her work. While praying one night in her Oratory there, she was visited by an angelic messenger who chided her for her delay in carrying out God's designs; and immediately after, the Divine Master Himself stood before her and upbraided her for her lack of courage. She could put it off no longer. This twofold vision forced Angela to hasten the inauguration of the institute in the year 1535. On November 25, Angela, with the twelve young girls that she had chosen and trained, having assisted at Mass at Saint Afra's and received the Holy Eucharist, proceeded to their own Oratory, and there, in the presence of the proper authorities, the solemn formalities required for the canonical institution of the Order were carried out. On the same morning fifteen others asked to be admitted, so that in all twenty-eight maidens celebrated their divine espousals. Angela organized them after the fashion of the Third Order. They remained in their own homes and went out to their labors from there, ready for every spiritual and corporal work of mercy. Angela was their superior and directed them up until her death five years later.

It is recorded that, early in January 1540, Angela had special warning from God of the day and hour of her approaching death. She was ill and suffering intensely; as the time drew near, she told the Sisters that she was soon going to leave them, and appointed the Sister who was to succeed her as their superior. She asked for Holy Viaticum; and, as she received It, the Sisters kneeling around saw her absorbed in a transport of love. Yet, mother that she was, she knew that they would have parting words from her, and she gave them. She urged them to the love and practice of virtue, to the faithful observance of the rule, to a spirit of poverty, to a joyful love and holy fear of God. To the end, it was the spirit of the Third Order that she strove to instill. Then she asked her weeping daughters to clothe her in her habit of the Third Order of Saint Francis, and from that moment her thoughts were but for heaven. She suffered violent convulsions; her features became almost unrecognizable; every nerve in her body quivered; yet her soul preserved the same tranquility. Then it all seemed to pass; her features grew calm but animated as by an interior light; and finally, with a countenance suffused with joy, she broke forth in the words of the dying Christ: *Into Thy Hands I commend my spirit*. Then, her blessed spirit went peacefully to the heavenly place prepared for it, for this earthly angel who breathed but for God. It was the night of the twenty-seventh of January, 1540.

The mourning in Brescia was general; the whole city talked of their grief; disputes arose over the resting place for her remains, which were placed temporarily in a crypt of Saint Afra's. There she was laid out and exposed for the veneration of the people for thirty days, and during the whole time there was no sign of corruption in the body which retained the appearance of a living body with perfect flexibility in every limb. For three consecutive nights, there was an extraordinary light observed in midair, hovering over the subterranean chapel where the body lay. Everybody saw it, and everybody accepted its origin and significance. They called her Blessed. Finally, the diocesan court decided that the body of Angela should be interred in the crypt of Saint Afra's, and the funeral was solemnized the following day by the parish priests.

Her home town of Desenzano was the first to adopt her as patron; the City Council built a Chapel in her honor on the Merician estate and placed the town under her protection. It was Clement XIII who beatified Angela in 1761 and Pius VII who canonized her in 1807, thus putting the official stamp of the Church on a life that can best be characterized by her motto, *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Pittsburgh, Pa.

Sr. Maura, O. S. F.

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In the prayer of the Church, faith in the Trinity and the gravitation of love towards this great mystery is a continual, living reality, never obscured, never forgotten. If souls desire to find the real path of prayer as sons of God, they have only to follow the majestic course of the Church's prayer. They will reach the depths of the Spirit who animates the Church and they will rest amid the eternal flowers of the heavenly Father in the ineffable society of the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Luis Colomer, O. F. M.



## THE ORDO CARITATIS OF DUNS SCOTUS

It is not an exaggeration to say that the tragic disruptions and wars among nations, the evils that threaten home and society, the misfortune of the individual, are in large measure the results of offenses against love. Nothing in the world today is more talked about than love, yet nothing is so little understood or so grossly abused. If something has gone wrong with love in modern living, it is because we have lost our compass—the knowledge of the true nature of love and of its order.

The importance of love in the life of every man is simply beyond question. It is the motive (though perhaps the unconscious motive) of all our acts; it is the end toward which we strive and the attainment of which we call happiness. Trouble begins when appetitive motives are mistaken for love instead of being recognized for what they are. Perhaps I love others more or less for what I can get out of them; perhaps I love God for His gifts rather than for Himself. It is no easy problem to distinguish genuine love from spurious, just as it is not easy to distinguish pure gold from base metal intermixed with it. And what of "oblique love", or self-centered egoism under the label of love, involving the disequilibrium of sin? Then disorderly love turns to hate.

Genuine love is priceless. However, it is not to be confused with supernatural charity. The latter, by making us participate in the very life of God Who is love itself, the Source of all love, does not destroy but transforms the former, as it shapes our eternal destiny.

No one, it would seem, has spread more light on this great problem of love than has Blessed John Duns Scotus. With extraordinary vision, discrimination, and depth, Scotus has succeeded perfectly in setting forth the dignity and order of love.

The basis of love, says Scotus, is the integrity of nature: "*naturaliter manent integra*." This means that despite the handicap of original sin, we are so constituted by the Creator as to be morally able to reach the heights of heroic self-sacrifice for God and for neighbor. The integrity of human nature was also the favorite theme of Saint Leo the Great, who uttered this stern warning: "*Non sit vilis homo homini nec in quoquam despiciatur illa natura quam rerum Conditor suam fecit* (Let not man be vile

man, nor that nature which the Creator made His own be despised in any respect)."

But, at the same time, God demands that our natural capacity for loving be supernaturally ordered; it is, therefore, of vital importance that we acquire the right notion of love.

To begin with, Scotus inexorably separates love from its satellites, concupiscence and delectation. Love is not cut out on the human pattern, but on the divine; for the source of all love is God alone. But God is a pure spirit and absolute perfection; love, therefore, is a thing of the spirit, an act of perfection, whereas concupiscence is a passion and as such is imperfect. Nor has love anything to do with the instinct which inevitably governs animal life, because love is essentially free and for this reason bears a specifically moral character which is clearly seen if we consider not the object willed (*volitum*) but the object that ought to be willed (*volendum*). Love must also be distinguished from delectation. The ecstatic pleasures which merely serve to intensify and reward love are non-essentials. Supernaturally, the saints reveal heroic charity (love of God) amidst the most excruciating trials. Saint John of the Cross, an authority on spiritual love, writes: "If in some way the will can comprehend God and be united to Him, this cannot be by feelings but by love only—for the operation of the will is very different from sentiment."

What, then, is love? Scotus describes love as the noblest act of the spirit, the operation of an essentially intelligent free will, prompted by the highest sense of justice. And since God is the Singular Being, the Personal God, the end of love can never be a vague universal good, but must be this or that particular good which, equally with love itself, is particular, concrete, alive, and personal. It is not by chance that Scotus chooses to call love *fruitio* (enjoyment), a term combining the notion of delight and of finality. "*Frui nihil dicit nisi actum inhaerendi objecto propter se* (To enjoy means nothing else than the act of adhering to an object for its own sake)." In modern terminology, this amounts to saying that love is an objective, disinterested will to promote the good of the beloved for his own sake and to be happy over it. "To give others the very best of yourselves," our Lord once explained to a Poor Clare, "happy if they claim it as their own to adorn themselves therewith—such is love." In reference to God, our love retains the same essentials. God is loved for Himself—*propter se ipsum*. "Let love cease to be love," says Charmot, "if it is not the answer of the heart to the perfection of another being."

Therefore, the keynote of love is liberality. Averse to any form of egoistic dominancy, essentially free, love, being the most formal justice, is the most creative liberality. Indeed, it is this theme of creative liberality that pervades the eternal designs of God. If love knows jealousy, it can be but the jealousy of zeal. This is especially true in the spiritual life of union with God. Then, according to the Scriptures, *love is strong as death, jealousy as hard as hell* (Cant. 8, 6).

At its highest perfection, genuine love is a practical ecstasy, a sort of voluntary tidal flux and reflux of selflessness and otherness. By selflessness, love banishes egoism, leaving the soul in the nakedness of its poverty and humility, even to the point of emptiness. It was this selflessness that Christ meant when He taught that the grain of wheat falling into the ground must die in order to bring forth much fruit (Jo. 12, 14-25). By otherness, the lover immerses himself in the beloved, so to speak, and comes to fathom the perfections of the beloved, reaching thereby, with ecstatic delight or ecstatic pain, the goal of love—union.

Since God is love and the Source whence all love flows, the selflessness and otherness of love characterized by liberality, without imperfection, must constitute God's very life, perfection, and happiness. Scotus states this in several daring steps.

"*Dico igitur sic: primo Deus diligit Se* (Therefore I say that God loves Himself first of all)." Because God is Infinite Being, Intelligence, and Free Will, He loves Himself; and, because there can be no mutation in the immutable God, by this operative act of knowing and loving Himself, in the singleness of His love, He lacks nothing in Himself to diminish His happiness. God is perfectly happy, *perfectus beatus*. In this His essential life consists: "In the first instant of origin, the Father loves Himself with an essential, not a notional, love (*In primo instanti originis pater diligit Se dilectione essentiali; sed non notionali*)."<sup>1</sup> Scotus teaches us here that the trinitarian life of God consisting in the production of the Divine Persons is, as it were, commanded by the superabundant love of His essential life: "*ex plenitudine perfectionis ipsius producentis* (from the fullness of perfection of the producing principle itself)." In this love and happiness consists the life of God quite apart from that love that the Father gives to the Son in the Holy Spirit. Overflowing as love is, in reference to God it is liberality itself. God could not be the absolutely perfect agent and not act out of liberality-love, or superabundant perfection. Liberality-love, therefore, is the clue to plurality in God's unity. Moreover, the absolutely perfect God cannot be perfected, nor obtain anything

in return by producing the Divine Persons. *Non expectans retributionem*. And, although love in God is a natural necessary act because God is infinitely loveable, yet it is a free voluntary act because love is of the will, which is essentially free. "There is no non-voluntary there, and so the generation of the Son is not non-voluntary (*Nihil est ibi involuntarium et ideo generatio Filii non est involuntaria*)."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, God could not possibly beget His Son if He did not love Himself and also love to beget the Son. God, therefore, communicates His essence and happiness to the Divine Persons out of sheer liberality-love. The three Divine Persons are thus rightly referred to as the "Subsistent Altruism of God" in the unity of circumincession.

Duns Scotus now turns his attention toward liberality-love as it overflows and embraces external contingent beings, and deciphers *the mystery which has been hidden for ages and generations* (Col. 1, 26).

"*Secundo, diligit Se aliis, et iste amor castus* (Secondly, He loves Himself in others, and this love is chaste)." Because love is gloriously free, God can be expected to perform an unexpected merciful folly. Because love is creative, He can and does create. Because love is liberal, He can and does share His divine life and happiness with His creatures. Because love is creative, He can and does create. Because love is liberal, jective and disinterested, not adding one cubit to His intrinsic glory, yet adding to His extrinsic glory the happiness and glory of His creatures.

"*Tertio, vult Se diligi ab alio qui potest Eum summe diligere* (Thirdly, He wills Himself to be loved by another who can love Him in the highest degree)." God, Who knows that love is ruled by equality, knows also the unfathomable abyss that yawns between Him and His creatures created *ex nihilo*; so the infinite Wisdom chooses to be supremely loved by One Who alone can span the abyss: the God-Man, Christ. There is something of a challenge here on God's part, and, since love is a conquest, the Incarnate Son of God is the victor. Now it becomes apparent that Duns Scotus does away with the tricky design which holds that the Incarnation was decided upon to repair the sin of Adam. With Sacred Scripture to support him, he proclaims the Primacy and Kingship of Christ as first, meritorious, and final Cause of men and angels. *The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways; I was set up from eternity* (Prov. 8, 22-23). In His public prayer after the Last Supper, Jesus asserted this truth: *Father, . . . in order that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me, because thou has loved me before the creation of the world. . .* (Jo. 17, 24). From Saint Paul's epistles to the Colossians and to the He-

brews, we learn that all things were created for Christ Who is the Head of the Body, the Church, because in Him it has well pleased the Father that all His fullness should dwell.

Jesus Christ's response to God's liberality-love is complete. The glorification of His Father comes foremost in His life. Simultaneously with the Virgin's loving fiat, Jesus glorifies His Father in the womb of His mother. *Behold, I come. . . that I should do thy will, O my God* (Ps. 39, 8-9). The Gospel relates how love of His Father was indeed Christ's chief business throughout His earthly life until He gasped out His consummation on the cross: *Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit* (Lk. 23, 46).

"Quarto, Deus praevidit unionem illius naturae quae debet Eum summe diligere (fourthly, God foresees a union of that nature which must love Him in the highest degree)." Christ fully responds to God's love-challenge by a like return of love; but in virtue of our incorporation into the Mystical Body we share in this response. God chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight in love (Eph. 1, 4). Accordingly, Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren (Ro. 8, 29). Indeed, we are so closely incorporated into Christ, so intimately associated with Him, that our Lord Himself compares this union to that of branches and vine. *I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he bears much fruit* (Jo. 15, 5).

May one dare speak of identification? Yes; and in more than a moral sense. When sanctifying grace takes possession of the soul in Baptism, says Scotus, the soul is espoused by God. "In Baptism, a kind of spiritual marriage is contracted, because the soul is espoused by God (*In baptismo contrahitur quoddam matrimonium spirituale, quia anima desponsatur Deo*). It is as if the seal of Christ marks it out for His own. *You are Christ's and Christ is God's* (1 Cor. 3, 23). Then, when the soul, united to the will of God, partakes of the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ in Holy Communion, a gradual transformation takes place and identification is effected. *I live because of the Father, and he who eats me, he also shall live because of me* (Jo. 6, 58). Consequently, inasmuch as we are Christ, in God's sight we are loveable.

Christ, of course, was predestined impassible and glorious. Nevertheless, *ex liberalitate* He freely chose in passible flesh to suffer His ignominious Passion and Crucifixion in order to grant us participation in God's

life, by Him, through Him, and in Him, *Who for the joy set before him, endured a cross* (Heb. 12, 2). Heaven being now open to us by the superabundant merits of our Savior, we sinners, though members of Christ, must do our share. The warning is pertinent: *He who does not carry his cross and follow me, cannot be my disciple* (Lk. 14, 27). Therefore, we are called upon to *fill up what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ* (Col. 1, 24). There is no escape. *Aut vitis, aut ignis!* The reason for this is one of condescension; for, as Scotus points out, the Passion of Christ does not take away our guilt, but it is the meritorious cause of our forgiveness: "*Passio Christi non delet culpam nostram nisi ut causa meritoria*." Intelligent and free willed members of Christ, we too, thanks to Him, are challenged to the conquest of love!

It is a fact that love, whether natural or supernatural, unquestionably holds the primacy; for experience proves that whereas error does not in itself defile the conscience of men, sin always does. Hence the quality and degree of our love is highly important. Not everyone, in regard to love, stands in the highest degree of perfection. As the lover gives less or more or all of himself, the degree of his love is indicated correspondingly. On supernatural grounds, the Pauline plea cannot be reversed: *If I deliver my body to be burned, yet do not have charity, it profits me nothing* (1 Cor. 13, 3).

But what if, ignoring the true nature of love and its order, we conceive of it as sentiment, passionate desire, sexual gratification, narcissism, or the like? To reach the goal of eternal bliss, we must first be able to detect within ourselves the real motives of our actions, thoughts, desires, likes and dislikes, even—or rather especially—the most secret ones. Yet, it is quite obvious that the surest means of attaining a true judgment of our motives is proper knowledge of what love really is. When one is aware, at least in abstracto, that love is the noblest act of an essentially free will, and not a passion nor a sentiment, and that the sexual union is only a carnal expression of love, it becomes less arduous, not to say less hopeless, to ascend the heights of liberality-love. For the same reason, the gross misconceptions which confuse orthodox mysticism with erotic hedonism in mystic guise are clearly untenable in the light of Scotus' *ordo caritatis*, so perfectly in harmony with the teachings of the Gospel. In the words of Christ Himself: *That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the spirit is spirit* (Jo. 3, 6). Then again, souls who might be tempted in the life of prayer to prefer "the consolations of God to the God of consolation" and who, when thwarted in their greedy desire,

choose mediocrity, need but remember that the *propter se ipsum* of selflessness and otherness alone can lighten the burden that weighs them down.

Christ calls us all to the love challenge: *I have come to cast fire on the earth and what will I but that it be kindled?* (Lk. 12, 49). The first condition to our catching fire is to break with our narrow conceptions of divine things by faithful cooperation with grace. "The heart must be rent open," said Our Lord to a Poor Clare, "so that My love may penetrate it, if you are to get a glimpse of the destiny you are called to; otherwise, you remain a closed garden with feelings and thoughts of your own within your own narrow horizon." More sensitive to human dignity than any of us, Christ requests our free response to the gift of His love. "My child, give Me thy heart." Because love depends on the will which is essentially free, God needs our gracious pleasure in this affair, for indeed there is something that may perhaps never be His—the hell-fire of hate proves it—something indispensable to love: our own free willing consent.

When the selflessness of mystical death is rewarded in the dawn of mystical life, then it is that the otherness of charity-love gradually sets the heart aflame. Our Lord's own words: *Greater love than this no man has, that one lay down his life for his friends* (Jo. 15, 13), are then understood with a heretofore unknown savor, as the soul ardently desires to carry them into effect. This is matured charity-love experienced by the heroes of divine love—the saints and martyrs. In our own measure of grace, we also are called to the same achievement.

Unicity is the characteristic quality of theological charity-love. Scotus declares this in the final step: "*Habitus caritatis fit unus* (The virtue of charity makes for oneness)." "God alone," says Scotus, "is the first one loved, and loved directly for Himself, *propter se ipsum*." Reflexively, we also love self and neighbor through love of God; and this love increases as our love of God grows more intense, the two loves being now inseparable, and through both of which the soul adheres to the Infinite Good Who is God." Little Therese meant this when she wrote; "Because I loved God *solely*, my heart gradually expanded to the point of loving my dear ones with a tenderness incomparably deeper than had I concentrated my heart upon a selfish and fruitless affection."

The force with which this mightiest of all powers, when set in order, results in unicity is that which Christ spoke of: *That all may be one even*

as Thou, Father, in Me and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us (Jo. 17, 21-23). Now the theological virtue of hope, although a legitimate desire for one's eternal happiness, finds its sustenance in charity-love. Set in order, hope becomes a thirst for God's glory: "Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done!" Its wings are those of a burning seraph. Faith also partakes of the spiritual love-banquet; touched by the flame of love, it yields the most perfect trust and self-surrender to the Beloved.

The *Ordo caritatis* of Duns Scotus is a charter of love in which we learn that at its source in the Triune God, in Christ and in His members, the sole motivation of love is liberality.

Trois Rivières, Que.

Beraud de Saint-Maurice

### On Reading Saint Peter Alcantara's "Prayer for Love"

No weary journey must I make  
This wondrous silent night  
Throughout the world in search of Thee,  
O Rose of Love, my Heart's Delight;  
Nor yet attain to heaven above  
To breathe Thee in, O Fragrance Sweet,  
O Rose of Love.

O Rose of Love, Thou art within.  
Spouse emblossomed, honeyed, sweet!  
Adoringly I sing Thy Name again, again  
With each heart beat,  
With every breath I breathe.

Ravish me and hold my spirit fast,  
Hide me in Thyself, O God most dear,  
And let me know at last  
My rest in here,  
Beloved, Beloved, Beloved.

Detroit, Michigan

Sister M. Charlita, I. H. M.

*Books On or Exemplifying Franciscan Spirituality*

- Perantoni, Most Rev. Pacific M., O. F. M.  
*Our Vocation as children of St. Francis*, being the encyclical letter "Divina Providentia" of the Most Rev. Fr. General Pacific M.  
 Perantoni, O. F. M. Translation authorized and distributed by the Very Rev. Ministers Provincial O. F. M. in the U. S. 1947. 59p.
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*Franciscan Spirituality*. Herald Press.
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- Matulich, Silvano, O. F. M.  
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## FRANCISCAN BRIEFS

PSYCHIATRY AND CATHOLICISM, James H. Vander Veldt O. F. M. Ph. D. and Robert P. Oldenwald. M. D., F. A. P. A. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1952 Pp. 433. \$6.00.

Father James VanderVeldt and Doctor Robert Oldenwald, both of the Department of Psychology and Psychiatry of the Catholic University of America, have worked together to produce a book of considerable value. PSYCHIATRY AND CATHOLICISM, as the title suggests, is aimed primarily at breaking down the prejudice against psychiatry that exists in so many Catholic—especially clerical—circles, and at making available to pastors and counselors the findings and methods of modern psychiatry. The authors themselves state their purpose tactfully, yet none the less effectively. Among those who directly or indirectly come in contact with the mentally ill are the Catholic clergy. Since priests are not only moral theologians but moral psychologists, they ought to have an understanding of the various classes of mental diseases and the theories attempting to explain them. One objective of the present book is to impart this knowledge. In presenting a description of the main forms of mental disorder, the authors have tried to show what pastors and other nonpsychiatric counselors, when confronted with mental cases, can do and what they should avoid. For the same reason, the counseling procedure and symptomatic methods of psychotherapy have been discussed in some detail because these can—*suppositis supponendis*—more readily be applied by advisers who are not psychiatrically trained than other methods of treatment.

"The second objective of this book is to point out the principles which, according to Catholic philosophy and theology, should govern the theoretical and practical approach to the problem of mental disease."

A third, but apparently secondary, purpose of the authors is to oppose to the fallacies of some modern schools the principles of Christian ethics.

In line with their expressed purpose, the authors have devoted the first half of their book to a summary of general principles and methods of psychiatry and to an evaluation of these from the standpoint of Catholic theology. Such topics as the role of the priest and social worker in helping the mentally ill, the relation between religion and psychiatry, the value of psychoanalysis, are included in the first section.

The second half of the book gives a summary description of the various types of mental illnesses, their nature and treatment. To each chapter is appended a discussion of the moral guilt of such patients and of the pastoral problems involved.

Since *Psychiatry and Catholicism* is primarily addressed to the nonprofessional reader, some of the sections may seem rather thin from the medical point of view. The thinness, however, is amply compensated for by adequate notes and references at the end of every chapter.

This is a book that can be highly and unreservedly recommended.

THE FRIENDS OF SAINT FRANCIS, Sidney F. Wicks. Chicago: The Franciscan Herald Press, 1952. Pp. 164. \$2.50

As the title suggests, THE FRIENDS OF SAINT FRANCIS is a collection of short essays on the friends of the Poverello, together with an analysis of the qualities that enabled him to inspire friendship in others. The approach is not new, but the manner is lively and provocative. It is a decided relief to find an author with an obviously poetic turn of mind deeply Franciscan enough to see in our Seraphic Father something more than a romantic lover of birds and flowers.



The following is a translation of the handwritten letter of the Supreme Pontiff to the Most Reverend Ministers General of the four Franciscan Families, on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the reception of His Holiness into the Third Order of Saint Francis. (*Acta OFM*, LXXI, 201-202)

To My Beloved Sons

Augustine Sepinski  
Minister General of the Friars Minor

Bede M. Hess  
Minister General of the Friars Minor Conventual

Benignus of Saint Hilary  
Minister General of the Friars Minor Capuchin

John Boccella  
Minister General of the Third Order Regular  
Beloved Sons, I, Pius XII, wish you health and

Apostolic Benediction

The gracious letters received respectively from each of you on this occasion recall to Us the memory of a dearly-cherished event; for fifty years ago, while still among the newly ordained, We most willingly enrolled in the ranks of the Third Order of the Patriarch of Assisi, and We entered the highly-esteemed Franciscan Family with supreme spiritual happiness. For even from the flower of Our youth We were well aware how valuable would be this institute of your Founding Father, and how timely, not only for the state of human affairs in the Middle Ages but even for our own time, which is no less tormented by mental care, civil strife, and by international discord and disturbances. We further realize that those evils which are threatening public and private moral standards as well as undermining subversively the very basis of human society can have only one remedy—a return to Christ, Whose Image your Seraphic Father wonderfully mirrored in the activity of his daily life and represented vitally in his own body. In his burning desire to revive and conform to the Christian law, he founded his twin Order for religious men and women who, bound by solemn vows, would professedly strive to live according to the Gospel. But being unable to receive everyone into his religious cloister, his glowing zeal urged him to lead others to their heavenly home in another way. He took counsel and revealed a plan whereby those harassed by the cares of this world could find a path to Christian perfection suited to their state. And so he founded an Order of Tertiaries whom he wished to stamp with singular zeal for penance for their own sins and for the sins of others. He wanted them

endowed with the zeal of fraternal charity, with a longing for domestic and money, and above all with a burning love for God, which would not only away from their wanton vices but also from the enticements of an allusion and from an uncontrolled avarice. Truly he knew full well that the seeming desire for possessing and the insatiable thirst for pleasures gain entrance into the hearts of many. And he realized that from these evils discords arise, disagreements and hatred are ignited, which continually alarm the human race and bring evil destruction upon it. The Apostle bears witness to this fact: *Wars and quarrels come among you? Is it not from this, from your passions, from the wars and quarrels come among you? Is it not from this, from your passions, from the wars and quarrels come among you?*

Even as in the time of Saint Francis, so too in these our times, the Institute of the Third Order can undoubtedly offer supreme support in this regard. For the same evils arise, although they may be cloaked in other garb, yet, granted the same remedies can be applied. Therefore Tertiaries should strive for the perfect fulfillment of the purpose which their Founder kept ever in mind. With an unflagging zeal for all the virtues, they should spread far and wide the love of Christ.

Beloved Sons, we ardently desire that this memorial of our own private life should cede first place to the good of souls. And We will that it may more contribute to the arousing of those seraphic spirits and to their solidification of these evangelical virtues wherein the poor Francis so richly excelled. We are pleased with your information that many Third Order Members, enrolled in the ranks of Catholic Action, are fighting valiantly and often take leading roles. When the united forces become solidly stronger, this Order will do its best and most if it joins a helping hand to this kind of social action; just as the enemies of the Christian are uniting to ward off the efforts of all the good.

Meanwhile, seizing our opportunity from the recent solemnities so devoutly and heartily, We renew our vows to God and recommend to Him in our prayers the Franciscan Third Order, richly endowed by the Catholic Church, may enjoy more widespread growth and may blossom with more abundant fruits of holiness. By way of fostering these salutary benefits, may our Apostolic Blessing be granted to Our Paternal approval. With an overflowing charity, beloved Sons, We impart our Blessing upon every one of you, as well as upon all the members of the Third Order.

Given at Saint Peter's in Rome on the fifteenth of August, the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the year nineteen hundred and fifty-four, the fourteenth year of our Pontificate.

Pope Pius XII

Fr. Owen Anthony Colligan, O. F. M.  
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