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DECEMBER, 1989

The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW



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The CORD

A Monthly Franciscan Spiritual Review

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Standard Abbreviations used in **The CORD** for Early Franciscan Sources

I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions
BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo
CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun
EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony
EpCler: Letter to Clerics¹
EpCust: Letter to Superiors¹
EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful¹
EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo
EpMin: Letter to a Minister
EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order
EpRect: Letter to the Rulers of People
ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God
ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father
FormViv: Form of Life for St. Clare

Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221
LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God
LaudHor: Praises at All the Hours
OffPass: Office of the Passion
OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix
RegB: Rule of 1223
RegBB: Rule of 1221
RegEr: Rule for Hermits
SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady
SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues
Test: Testament of St. Francis
UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare
VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy
¹I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis 2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis 3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles CL: Legend of Saint Clare CP: Process of Saint Clare Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis

LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis LMin: Bonaventure, Minor Life of Francis LP: Legend of Perugia L3S: Legend of the Three Companions SC: Sacrum Commercium SP: Mirror of Perfection

Omnibus: Marion A. Habig, ed., St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).

AB: Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., ed., Francis and Clare: The Complete Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

EDITORIAL



Election of Chapter Delegates A Modest Proposal

One of the fruits of Vatican II's call for religious to return to their roots has been an extension of the participation of religious in the governing of their communities. In the Order of Friars Minor, for instance, delegates are not only the ex officio office-holders (Provincial and Council, Guardians) but also delegates elected from groupings based on seniority in religion, apostolate, and in some instances geographical area.

The process of electing delegates is a cumbersome one, and must start long before the Chapter. It includes a primary among a selected group, and then a final ballot in which all vote, having seen the result of the primaries. It would make an interesting sociological study to see if elected delegates have impacted the legislative and provincial electoral process significantly (once the first Chapter got out a book of legislation). What doesn't need scientific study is the fact that the same people seem to be elected to serve as delegates. This offers the advantage of experience but, in my judgment, limits the participatory intent of the idea of delegates. A recent Chapter of Mats (see my previous editorial November, 1989) has convinced me, of what I knew long before: there are three or four times the number of friars who do go to chapters who are fully capable of serving as Capitulars, and if you will, deserve that experience.

As it stands, some friars do not make a high profile, and haven't been in a high profile post, so the present voting process works against them. I propose a simple solution, a lottery system instead of elections, among the eligible voters. With elections every three years, one who lived 30 years in religion would most likely get to a chapter, even in a quite large Province. The mechanics should offer no problem and can be worked out in many ways.

Someone might argue that the goal of wider representation at chapters could be achieved by limiting the times a delegate could

be elected (two successive times would seem to be enough in my view), but I think the lottery idea carries with it the view that Provincial matters are matters for everyone in the Province, and may work toward diminishing feelings of alienation and distance from the Province that do arise in humans who want a part in determining their future.

PRAISE THE LORD TREES

AND
BUSHES

GROWING

THINGS

Searching for Francis

RAYMOND F. NALEWAJK

They came from places like Albuquerque, Salt Lake City, Cleveland, and Brooklyn. They were the unwitting wise men and women of the new world returning to the old, bearing gifts of enthusiasm, curiosity, and the desire to learn. What they would learn in six weeks of an Italian summer would exceed their greatest expectations. Some would indulge themselves in medieval art, some would become enraptured by the Tuscan countryside, some would savor the Umbrian cuisine, and most would engage in stimulating debates over the early biographies of Francis of Assisi by Thomas of Celano and St. Bonaventure. Still others would be changed human beings.

Who were these people? They were fifteen outstanding, hand picked, secondary school humanities teachers invited to search for Francis under the sponsorship of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Dr. William Cook, the director of the seminar and his committee knew why they had selected these fifteen teachers from over one hundred and fifty applicants. But what is more interesting is why these teachers themselves chose and applied for the seminar entitled "The Early Lives of Francis of Assisi." In light of the availability of forty-nine other seminars including ones dealing with Galileo, Pascal, Socrates, and Aristotle, to mention a few, why Francis of Assisi?

In terms of the humanistic tradition, studying figures with the cultural status of Shakespeare or Dante might have been more appealing to scholars instead of studying the life of a former merchant who never wrote a book, never held office, never fought a war, and loved being poor. Therefore,

Raymond Nalewajk teaches Latin and Spanish at Derby High School (Conn.). As the article indicates, he participated in a summer seminar in Italy sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities with Dr. William Cook as director. Mr. Nalewajk did his undergraduate work at Fairfield University and holds a master's degree from Niagara University.

the choice of a seminar on Francis would immediately set these teachers apart from their colleagues. They were not only going to study an historical figure but a figure who was also a saint of the Catholic Church.

What is still more amazing is that of the fifteen teachers only seven were Catholic; the others were Methodist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Mormon, Fundamentalist Baptist, and Jewish. Again we must ask what prompted this group of educators to study the Poor Man of Assisi? We know that one woman saw her mother cured through a friend's prayer to Francis. Another taught a course on the environment and hoped to find in the life of Francis ideas on the stewardship of nature. Another had been brought up in a Franciscan parish and felt he ought to know more about Francis. And one came to search for his Christian roots.

But what did they expect to find? Did they have preconceived notions? Ironically, while Francis may be the most popular saint in Christianity, he is probably the one about whom the least is known by his admirers. The popular image of Francis is someone who preached to the birds and to animals. That he spoke to men as well is not always included in that image.

Currently, international environmentalists have adopted Francis as their patron. His love of nature is well known. But whether or not he really focused on ecology, the environmentalists still see him as the spiritual custodian of the great outdoors. Francis has also become a saint acceptable to most religious sects. In fact, not only was Assisi the recent center of an international day of prayer for peace; but young pilgrims perennially flock to Assisi as if to a pious Woodstock singing their songs of peace and brotherhood into the wee hours of the morning in the town's square.

But peace and brotherhood, while noble aims in themselves, are only a part of Francis' legacy. His love of poverty, humility, and penance is a side of Francis the modern world does not hear about or perhaps does not wish to hear about. Finally, Francis' primary goal which was to become as Christlike as possible becomes blurred in the popular peace and brotherhood movement.

Who then is the real Francis? Was he the popular image of the handsome young hippie seen in the film *Brother Sun*, *Sister Moon?* Or was he the forty year old man physically ravaged by fasting and penance concealing the bleeding seal of his God — the stigmata? This is what fifteen high school teachers came to find out. This was the beginning of the search for Francis.

At this point, one may ask what all this has to do with secondary school teachers in public schools in which the majority taught. During the seminar sessions, one point that continued to rise was the way, if there were a

way, in which the values of Francis might be conveyed to the youngsters back home. As one teacher put it, "My students don't have any values. My own son doesn't have any values. How do we give them values?" However, as one might expect, which of Francis' values were appropriate for today and which were not consumed a great deal of discussion time. A common question was what would Francis say today? So every day for six weeks, the pursuit of the real Francis continued.

But the six week search did produce discoveries. These discoveries ranged from academic and historical observations to personal enlightenment and inspiration. As one seminar member cautiously uttered during one session, "I never realized this before, but it's clear to me now that Francis is the greatest saint in the Church at least in this millenium." While those well versed in the knowledge of Francis might consider that remark naive, it was the kind of illumination that took place during the quest.

And what precisely did the quest involve? The group investigated three areas under the direction of Dr. William Cook, a history professor at SUNY, Geneseo, New York. First was the translated texts of the early biographies of Francis; second the art dealing with Francis; and third, the actual locations where Francis lived. The original texts were The First and Second Lives of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano and The Life of St. Francis by St. Bonaventure. These were the very first biographies of Francis written immediately or shortly after his death. In other words, the group's first impressions of Francis came from Thomas of Celano who knew Francis personally. This was no fantasy as is sometimes found in well intentioned novels or films. But in spite of the stark descriptions of Francis by Celano, the teachers kept questioning and trying to see beyond the text, probing for the real Francis.

An interesting sidelight concerning the texts studied is that nearly all copies of Celano's *Lives* were destroyed by command of the Franciscan Minister General at the Chapter of 1266. In fact, only two copies of II Celano remained extant and that was because they were in the possession of some Cistercians who were beyond the jurisdiction of the Franciscan Minister's edict. The reason for this book burning was that it was decided that Bonaventure's biography would be the official Franciscan view of their founder.

It should be noted that I Celano has a slight different view from II Celano and Bonaventure's tone differs from both. This naturally aided and complicated at the same time the group's goal of discovering the real Francis but also added the adventure of personal interpretations for those of us in the twentieth century.

The second area which the group explored was the world of visual images, that is, Francis as he was depicted in frescoes, altarpieces, and

paintings of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is interesting that there are only two hundred surviving such art works from that period. According to Dr. Cook, scholars estimate that there is only a one percent survival rate of such works which means that at one time there were probably twenty thousand images extant. It should be further noted that St. Francis received more attention in art than other saints which is an indication of his early popularity if not his importance. However, of the two hundred catalogued art works depicting Francis most are in Italy. The rest are scattered throughout Europe and the United States in Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Kansas City, New Haven, New York, Pasadena and Williamstown.

However, the group's focus was on those paintings and frescoes in Italy. They visited Rome and Florence, Pescia and Pistoia in Tuscany, and lesser known places like Montefalco, Orte, and Nocera Umbra. Wherever there was a museum or church, large or small, open or closed, that housed even one medieval picture of Francis, the group traveled there and examined it. These artistic illustrations aided in the search for Francis because they complemented the texts of Celano and Bonaventure and even added knowledge to the life of Francis. In our time videocassettes will record the lives of saintly contemporaries, but in the Middle Ages art was the visual means of instruction. In fact, a special art form known as the dossal was created especially for Francis. The dossal contained a large central figure of the saint with small panels to the right and left illustrating important events from the life of the saint. Of course, Dr. Cook brought the teachers to every dossal within reasonable travel distance. One of the most memorable dossals was in the Bardi Chapel in the church of Santa Croce in Florence which contains twenty scenes from the life of Francis.

The climax of the search for Francis in art came during the final three weeks in Assisi where the teachers saw for the first time the grand and famous frescoes of Giotto in the Basilica of St. Francis.

The mention of Assisi brings us to the third area of study which was the geographical locations where the group would experience first hand the actual places where Francis had walked, preached, and lived the most important events in his life. Visiting Assisi is a sine qua non in any in depth study of the life of St. Francis. Assisi is a city of enchantment. If it had a certain charm at the time of Francis' life, that charm has only grown due to its most famous citizen. The medieval city has not changed much from its original ambience. One can walk the same streets Francis walked; and one can visit the cathedral of San Rufino where he was baptized; one can enter the Chiesa Nuova, the church that houses the residence of Francis' parents, the Bernardone fmaily. There is also the

church of Santa Chiara in which one finds the tomb of one of Francis' most devoted followers, Saint Clare.

About a half hour on foot below the town of Assisi, one finds the church of San Damiano in which the crucifix spoke to Francis and declared his mission. A short bus ride takes you down into the valley to the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in which is enshrined the Porziuncula, the tiny church where Francis lived and died. A longer walk of less than an hour takes one up Mount Subasio to the Eremo delle Carceri, a monastery tucked away in the forest which Francis frequented as a place of retreat.

Besides living in Assisi, the teachers visited Greccio where Francis built the first Christmas crib, Laverna where Francis received the stigmata, and even Gubbio where Francis tamed the famous wolf of that town.



Perhaps the most impressive sight for many members of the seminar was the first visit to the crypt where the remains of Francis lie. After three weeks of churches, museums, and discussions in Siena, the reality of the man Francis struck home at the sight of his resting place. If anyone has ever seen the tomb of Napoleon, one is impressed by its grandeur. The tomb of Francis is quite simple yet exudes a feeling of a power of its own. Where Napoleon's power is gone, that of Francis continues to grow.

Upon seeing the tomb, some of the participants were not sure whether the journey had come to an end or had just begun. The arrival in assisi, the Franciscan Mecca, produced the simultaneous feeling of coming home and the feeling of asking where do we go from here? On the last day of the seminar, the participants were asked to give their views of the study and the experience. One comment that stood out was that it was difficult to evaluate and compare a secular figure who affected history with a spiritual figure who affected history unless one believed in the spiritual. Do we say that Augustine cannot be compared with Cicero or Virgil because he was involved in a spiritual world? It was important to see history as the story of God's people with Christ as the central figure in that story if one were to understand Francis' place as a man who affected his age. If one has that view, then Francis can be seen as just as influential as Charlemagne, Napoleon, or Lincoln. Most participants learned at least that one can affect history without wearing the garb of conquerer, philosopher or president.

While the issues of secular and spiritual were debated the spiritual aspect did affect a few participants. One teacher confessed, "I don't know what it is, but I really feel different, more spiritual I think."

Another example of the spiritual effect came from a current participant who said, "I pray to Francis now. I never did before. I think you'd have to be foolish not to." Whether that teacher was impressed by the list of miracles recorded in the texts studied, one will never know, but that is the kind of change that took place.

Today there are fifteen more people across the United States who have been exposed to and filled with the spirit of Francis. Fortunately, they are teachers of high school students; for what better representatives can one find to bring back the message to a captive audience of teenagers. Since all the teachers are involved in the humanities in some way, their students will be able to receive the benefit of whatever rubs off from their teacher's exposure to Francis. Bear in mind that these fifteen educators did not apply for the program with the intention of proselytizing. But each one with so much experience in the classroom knows the emptiness found in the hearts of our youngsters today. They see how television, walkmans, computers, and vers have blocked out the rest of the world from their senses and souls. Most young people have never heard of Dorothy Day, Mitch Schneider, or Bruce Ritter. And many can hardly recognize Mother Teresa. Young people deserve to understand the values that inspire contemporary heroes and the tradition that inspires those values. Fortunately, there are fifteen more classrooms around the country this year where the youngsters can learn these things from teachers who immersed themselves in the study of such values.

This is why the search for Francis was an extraordinary opportunity not only for teachers but also for their students. Regardless of their faith or degree of spirituality or whether they brought back slides, posters, or books for their students, they all brought back Francis.

The Importance of the Images of Francis of Assisi for Worship

WAYNE SIMSIC

The modern pilgrim who visits the Upper Basilica in Assisi admires the life-size frescoes depicting Francis' life but has a difficult time imagining how powerful these images were for the medieval worshiper. Twentieth-century people understand how effective words can be when they are used with impact but find it difficult to understand how images can produce effects that are psychologically, intellectually, and emotionally powerful. We are familiar with verbal texts as the dominant force shaping imagination and belief, but in the early medieval period images were primary and defined a person's vision of self and the world. Images were readily available to the entire community through sculpture, stained glass, carved pulpits, painted panels, and frescoes.

Private devotion centered on small statues, relief plaques, crucifixes, and relics of the saints. Worshipers did not experience the aesthetic distance toward religious images that we do today but embraced them, first of all, as mnemonic and didactic aids which allowed them to participate in the liturgy and, secondly, as ways of concentrating the will and eliciting powerful emotional responses. Seeing the images of Christ or of saints like Francis could transform one's life. We can never completely regain the medieval perspective toward religious images, nor would we necessarily want to, but we need to understand it if we are to appreciate the extraordinary impact that the images of Francis had on a medieval worshiper.

Mr. Wayne Simsic, a high-school teacher from Cleveland, Ohio, is currently on sabbatical from his teaching activities and is writing a book on nature and prayer. This article is a follow-up on a N.E.H. seminar in the summer of 1988 conducted by Professor William Cook on biographies of St. Francis. Mr. Simsic is a regular contributor to THE CORD

The Primacy of Images

In thirteenth — and fourteenth — century Italy visual participation in the lives of the saints and Christ began in the cradle and continued into adulthood. It was thought that images left an imprint on the imagination at a very early age. In 1403, Cardinal Dominici, a leading spokesman for the church, gives the following advice on a small child's religious education: "...you should observe five little rules... The first is to have paintings in the house... of holy little boys and virgins, in which your child when still in swaddling clothes may delight, as being like himself, and may be influenced by the similar images."²

The importance of images for introducing an adult to a life of faith is especially outlined in a thirteenth-century compendium of knowledge:

Know that there were three reasons for the institution of images in churches. First, for the instruction of simple people, because they are instructed by them as if by books. Second, so that the mystery of the incarnation and the examples of the saints may be the more active in our memory through being presented daily to our eyes. Third, to excite feelings of devotion, these being aroused more effectively by things seen than by things heard.³

The medieval worshiper, unlike the modern person, did not passively look at images but participated in them. The image did not catch the eye but the eye caught the image. The soul was affected in a fundamental way by a painting. To walk into a church and see the life of Christ as well as scenes from the lives of the saints covering the walls and depicted on the altarpiece was to experience an intimacy between one's life and the spiritual world. Even the person who was illiterate possessed a visual sophistication that came from many other frescoes and knowing the symbols used by artists. This allowed the ordinary person to enter a fresco and translate it in an intimate and powerful way.

For people at the time, sight was the entrance to the heart. Franciscan scholars in the thirteenth century had come to accept the theory that the universe originated in a light which gave birth to the spheres and infused the world. Light was the source of grace and closed the gap between creature and Creator. Gazing at this light could lead a person to beatific contemplation because the eye allowed the radiance of love to fill the heart. A dramatic example of the primacy of vision can be found in the fourteenth-century rite of the Mass. Reception of communion was rare during this period. Participation in the Eucharist was more a matter of seeing than eating. The priest paused for a long time during the elevation of the host so that the worshipers could gaze with love and devotion. This alone, according to St. Gertrude, was enough to bring spiritual merit. Worshipers would go from Mass to Mass timing their arrival so that they would see the elevation of the host and leave immediately afterward. A

topic for theological conversation at the time was the disposition necessary for seeing the host.

Due to this belief in the potency of sight, paintings and frescoes were understood as more than tools for teaching about faith events. "Minimally, images instruct; maximally, they are capable of translating the worshiper to ecstatic states of contemplation, and the maximum was not beyond the reach of the humblest worshiper." Images were means of discovering direct insight into the mysteries of faith. It was presumed that even those who were illiterate had access to states of prayer that were closed to a more sophisticated and analytical viewer.

It is probable that Francis himself preferred a thought process that depended on images rather than to concepts. We do know that Francis espoused using images for worship sice he prayed to painted images though not as objects but as openings to a sacred reality. In the ruined chapel of San Damiano he knelt down before a crucifix and heard Christ command him to rebuild his church. It is this image of the crucifix that had profound effect on Francis. Francis indicated to his followers that he understood himself in the form of a cross when he used the Tau as a signature. In his biography of the saint, Bonaventure depicts Francis as one whose entire life could be understood as the gradual interiorization of the image of the cross.

The Icons of Francis

The early images of Francis grew out of the Byzantine icon. These icons, like the cross that Francis prayed before, were considered extraordinary images that acted as mediating points between the believer and God. They were used for instruction but were primarily ways of prayer. Because Italians grew up with an awareness of the Byzantine icon, the icons related to Francis' life had an immediate and powerful impact on their consciousness.⁶

The first images to appear after Francis' death were small paintings of altarpieces. The first of the altarpieces can be found in the church of San Francesco in Pescia. This early thirteenth-century representation of Francis painted by Bonaventura Berlinghieri offers an idealized image of the saint in heaven at the center of the altarpiece and scenes from his life in the panels around the sides. The artist was not interested in a photographic likeness but in conveying a transcendent reality. The central image is not attractive; it is not the welcoming figure of Francis with arms outstretched but an ascetic figure like Elijah or John the Baptist. The lines of the habit are thick and straight, accentuating the heavily shadowed cheek bones. The eyes are penetrating and call the viewer to repentance. This Francis is a herald of God, a prophet, and his message is one of conversion.

The eye moves from the central figure to the scenes from Francis' life in the side panels and back again to the central figure. This visual movement allows the worshiper to consider the earthly life and the glorified existence of the saint together. Perhaps the most imposing feature of the altarpiece, though, is the wounds of Francis' hands and feet. No other saint had ever been portrayed in a way that was so closely indentified with Christ.

Imagine a worshiper attending a liturgy at San Francesco in Pescia and seeing the figure of Francis flickering in the candlelight. The wounds on Francis parallel the wounds of Christ as he hangs from the cross above the altar. A friar dressed in the same garb as Francis points to individual panels on the altarpiece and describes Francis' life using postures and gestures that are meant to enact the scenes of the worshiper. The visual expression of the sermon threatens to usurp the verbal. With emotional intensity rising in his voice the preacher proclaims that Francis is a new and powerful saint, one who has been marked by God with the stigmata, and whose life serves as a model for us all.

In time the scenes from Francis' life, such as his conversion before the bishop, preaching to the birds, and the stigmata, became well known. Of all the saints that could be identified in Italian panel paintings between the late eleventh-century and early fourteenth-century the figure of Francis of Assisi was the most common.⁷

In the fourteenth century devotion had shifted from rites and priests to the people. This process was partly due to Francis himself who through his preaching gathered together and inspired large groups. Later his friars would follow in his footsteps and continue to win over the masses. As a result, works of art began to reflect the needs of a more popular, devotional and private religion. The greatest concentration of images could be found in the Church where side chapels sponsored by wealthy patrons were used for devotional purposes separate from the liturgy. One of the most famous examples of this can be found in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence where Giotto, around 1320, painted a Life of Francis in the Bardi Chapel. One need only remain for a time in this side chapel of seven frescoes to appreciate the meditative quality of Giotto's artistry. The beauty and power of these few frescoes convey more than the eye expects to see and it is easy to imagine how a person's heart would be opened to devotion after remaining for a time in their presence.

The proliferation of images culminated in the Upper Basilica in Assisi. A medieval pilgrim who came to worship would first visit the bare crypt of the saint in the Lower Basilica and then climb the stairs to view the images of Francis' life in the Upper Basilica.

The potency of these Basilica images is clear from the extraordinary

experience of Blessed Angela of Foligno. ⁸ Angela followed Francis in a life of strict poverty and prayer. Around the feast of St. Francis she took a pilgrimage to Assisi to implore the saint that he give her strength to be faithful to the rule of the Third Order. This penitent from Foligno, who had consistently invoked Francis help from the beginning of her conversion, was open to whatever grace Francis might obtain for her. She first went to the Lower Basilica to pray. Then, after a meal, she returned to the Upper Basilica where her gaze became focused upon a stained glass window depicting Francis in the bosom of Christ. Awestruck by a sense of divine presence, she heard these words:

Thus I will also hold you closely; and much more so that can be considered with the eyes of the body. For now is the hour, my temple, my delight, when I will fulfill what I told you; for as to this consolation it will depart from you; but I will never depart from you, if you love me. 9

Angela later told her confessor, Brother Arnaldo, that this was the point when she became conscious of the indwelling of the Holy Trinity. When asked to explain further, she said that words failed and comparisons were useless.

Even ordinary worshipers who saw scenes from the life of the saint... overcame any distance between themselves and the saint.

The image of Francis of the Assisi Basilica may not have had the same dramatic effect on the lives of other pilgrims but there is no doubt that they charged the imagination and inspired devotion. Giotto's enormous frescoes of Francis' life that covered the walls of the Upper Basilica allowed the pilgrim to enter the saint's life in a personal way. The relationship between the scenes from Francis' life and scenes from the life of Christ and Old Testament events heightened one's awareness of participating in a sacred drama.

The representation of Francis that the pilgrim uncovers in the Assisi Basilica is highly sophisticated. Unlike the early icons these images emphasize Francis' relationship to Rome and the approval of the order; they also reinforce the validity of the stigmata. Francis' life is closely modeled on Christs's life and Francis himself is linked to John the Baptist, Elijah, and the Angel of the sixth seal of the Apocalypse. Francis' ministry now

receives cosmic significance. He is considered the representative of a new age, a focal point of salvation history, and a model for Christians everywhere.

Art and other Forms of Devotion

The images of Francis found in paintings were reinforced by other forms of devotional spirituality common in the late Middle Ages, namely, literature, theatrical perfomances, and sermons. A new spirituality had emerged in the cities of towns of Northern Italy. Individuals and groups of every size practiced a devotional religion that evolved from Francis' dedication to the historical Christ and to the passion in particular. This spirituality appealed to the emotions and the imagination and, though it took various forms, it never strayed far from the visual texts that could be found on the walls of local churches.

One form of devotional religion, meditational literature, concentrated on the human and fragile nature of Christ and the saints. This literature was a form of prayer that imaginatively re-created an event, thus allowing a worshiper to become part of it. The intent was to place the worshiper in the event itself so that a personal identification with Christ or a particular saint could be complete. Meditational reading often led to contemplation of image, usually a crucifix or a small panel painting portraying the life of a saint.

One popular text commonly attributed to Bonaventure, Meditations on the Life of Christ, is addressed to a nun, a Poor Clare. The text itself evokes a Franciscan form of spirituality in its opening pages when the author presents this question: "Do you believe that the Blessed Francis would have attained such abundance of virtue and such illuminated knowledge of the scriptures... if not by familiar conversation with and contemplation of his Lord Jesus?" The reader, of course, realizes that meditation to follow should be experienced through the prism of Francis' spirituality, namely, his poverty, humility, and dedication to the Passion. This message is visually reinforced in the book by an illustration of Francis receiving the stigmata, an image that the reader had seen many times in local churches.

Perhaps the most powerful image reinforced by verbal texts like the *Meditation on the Life of Christ* was the presence of Francis at the foot of the cross. The medieval worshiper was already familiar with the visual representation of Francis at the foot of the cross kneeling and bending over, resting his head on Christ's feet, his body draped in rivulets of blood. With this image in mind, the worshiper herself assumes Francis'

position at the foot of the cross and reads the following meditation on Christ's last hour:

Behold, then, the Lord hangs dead on the cross; the whole multitude departs... But you, if you will contemplate your Lord well, will consider that from the sole of His foot to the crown of His head there is no health in Him: there is not member or bodily sense that has not felt total affliction or passion... Study devoutly, faithfully, and solicitously to meditate on all this. 11

The strong relationship between meditational text and artistic images continued into the sixteenth century. Cardinal Borromeo made a retreat in 1584 at the Franciscan shrine at Varallo, north of Milan, and we have a detailed account of his experience. ¹² The Sacro Monte at Varallo was the largest and most sophisticated of the Franciscan shrines which began to dot the landscape in the thirteenth century. It became a popular pilgrimage site, reconstructing the way of the cross so that individual Christians would find an intimate experience of contrition and forgiveness.

We know from his biographers that Borromeo used written meditations in preparing himself to visit the chapels dedicated to scenes from Christ's life. The meditations described each of the twenty-eight chapels in personal and intimate terms. The Cardinal read the meditations during the day and in the evening, by flickering lamplight, visited the chapels that illustrated the themes of his meditations. Each chapel contained a literal representation of a sacred story from Christ's infancy, the Passion, or the life of the Virgin Mary. Inside each chapel were life-size figures arranged to represent a story and frescoes painted on the back and side walls to illustrate the actual location of the event.

Ideally, the practice of prayerful reflection on a meditative text and viewing the recreation of a scene from Christ's life elicited an emotional response in the pilgrim that was immedate and intimate. Even without the text the visual language of the chapel was so accessible that any pilgrim could engage in imaginative forms of prayer.

Pilgrims who found their way to Sacro Monte or to other Franciscan shrines were, in effect, following Francis' own footsteps to Mount La Verna where he prayed and fasted in solitude. Whereas Francis was transformed into an alter Christus through his love for the Passion of Christ the pilgrim who indentified with Francis and meditated on the suffering and humanity of Christ became an alter Franciscus. Francis, whose life and teaching were commonly recognized as modeling Christ, led the pilgrim who imitated him to union with Christ himself.

Meditational texts were not the only form of devotional spirituality that reinforced the popular images of Francis. Reinforcement came from theatrical performances and sermons as well. Medieval drama took place outside the context of liturgy. Audiences saw saints' lives portrayed and heard lyrics sung by Franciscan preachers. These performances were even more compelling when we realize that the theatrical images of Francis' life acted out in courtyard were also staged in a dramatic style on the walls of the Upper Basilica.

Sermons in courtyards or on street corners were also popular at the time because people would rather listen to a good preacher than go to their rooms and pray, and because the friars were more experienced than the local parish priests in their ability to hold the attention of a crowd. Popular preachers appealed to ordinary life experiences and called on people in the audience to be involved in the sermon. Preaching itself was dramatic since it often imitated the emotional intensity of religious painting. The preachers were performers who, using specific gestures and body language found in manuals, would act out scenes from paintings such as Francis' dramatic conversion in the courtyard of Assisi.

Medieval worshipers, then, were not only aware of the painted images of Francis but found that these were reinforced by devotional texts, drama, and sermons. Their visual experience was highly sophisticated and intimately related to their faith. Because of this interrelationship of various forms of devotion we might easily imagine that the intensity of the experience may have had transformative influence on a worshiper's life. Ordinary worshipers without any aspirations to mystical prayer could enter Francis' life through the images that surrounded them and discover a deepening faith.

Conclusion

The main point of this essay has been to clarify the manner in which the medieval worshiper participated in the images of Francis. The worshiper's experience of paintings and frescoes was not predominantly passive as is our experience of images today. Whereas we allow our conciousness to be flooded with images from film or newsprint without much participation, the medieval worshiper felt an indentification with the images from Francis' life. Even ordinary worshipers who saw scenes from the life of the saint depicted in frescoes, dramatized during a sermon, and emphasized through devotional texts, overcame any distance between themselves and the saint. Perhaps the closest we can come to this experience today is by spending time contemplating and studying the images of Francis without assuming an artificial distance between ourselves and them. The images of Francis are not simply images from the past but are archetypal; they reflect the process of conversion in saints throughout history and in some way reflect our own faith process. It is also possible that, through these images, we too may become present at the nativity,

the crucifixion, the resurrection and the Last Judgement and intuit what it means to participate in a divine plan of creation, redemption, and eschatology.

Endnotes

¹Margaret Miles, Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p. 44.

²Creighton E. Gilbert, *Italian Art: 1400-1500* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1980), p. 145.

³Quoted in Margaret Miles, Image as Insight, p. 66.

⁴Georges Duby, *The Age of the Cathedrals: Art and Society*, 980-1420, trans. Eleanor Levieux and Barbara Thompson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 236.

⁵Margaret Miles, *Image as Insight*, p. 67.

⁶Art, Creativity, and the Sacred, ed. Diane Apostolos Cappadona (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 278.

⁷See especially Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation, ed. Jill Rait (New York: Crossroad, 1987), pp. 75-105.

⁸Paul LaChance, O.F.M., The Spiritual Journey of the Blessed Angela of Fologno According to the Memorial of Frater A. (Rome: Athenaeum Antonianum, 1984), p. 90-92.

⁹Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁰Meditations on the Life of Christ: an Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Paris: Biblioteque Nationale, Ms. Ital. 115; Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 10.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 337, 338.

¹²See William Hood, "The Sacro Monte of Varallo: Renaissance Art and Popular Religion," in *Monasticism and the Arts*, ed. Timothy Gregory Verdon (Syracuse, New York; Syracuse University Press, 1984), pp. 291-312.



The night is far spent the day draws nigh

The Virgin Birth

Not many words spoke she, yet in silence eloquently The simple phrase "be it done to me" Mary became The Temple of the Lord

But Joseph knew
For he too
Minced no words
Scripture tells only
That he believed
Thus the Babe born of her
Joseph claimed
His Son

One day in distant land
These two
Beheld the mystery unfold
A Child born, Divine
Yet human He
born a King in poverty

Rich in Love, Infant Arms
Stretch out to hold
A world
Transcendent to enfold
His Cross of Love
Our cross of sin

A Babe, a man, a God
Destined a sinful world to free
Our Lord
Our Light
Our Christ
Is He!

Sr. M. Thaddine, O.S.F.

In The Fields of Light

SR. CLARE IMMACULATE MCDONNELL, O.S.F.

Saints and Mystics, Poets and Painters have occupied themselves well and to our advantage with the effects of light.

"Since Christ," as Bonaventure says, "is pure efusion of the brightness of the power of the omnipotent God," the soul, he urges, "should run to this fountain of Light as to the Source of all goodness." Light here is that self-generating *person* who will aid us in our ascent to Godliness.

But in his account of Francis' death, Bonaventure¹ writes of Francis freed from his body and absorbed into "the abyss of divine Light," so that Light here seems equated with a place-a place and rest where shines an abundance of wisdom. Yet in the Prologue in his *Life of Francis*, Bonaventure calls Francis himself a "light-bringer for believers, one who prepares the way of Light and peace into their hearts, a guiding light for those sitting in darkness." The Biblical language (Isa. 49:6; Luke I:76,79) identifies the saint who most resembled Christ and was the most reflective agent of his Divine Light.

But, the mere physical aspect of light is included also in Bonaventure's account of the blind friar whose sight was repaired with a splendrous light; and light is treated symbolically in Francis' own unconcern with the really serious eye illness he suffered:

For the body receives the gift of light for the sake of the spirit, and not contrariwise

he said, preferring to lose his physical sight rather than his interior vision. The story is told that one night when Francis was praying and weeping for the Lord's passion, a witness to the Light that shone within his soul said that an extraordinary illumination surrounded his body. Francis him-

Sister Clare Immaculate holds a graduate degree in English from Catholic University and a M.Hum. from Penn State. She is Assistant Professor of English at Neumann College. The thoughts on Light were suggested by a casual reference from Ewert Cousins in whose 1986 NEH seminar Sister says she was privileged to be a member.

self did not speak of such moments of grace, for he said, "it happens that if a person loses some priceless thing for the sake of a small gain, he easily provokes the one who gave it not to give it again."

As we think upon both light-givers and light-receivers, we should not forget how Bonaventure credits Augustine with the consideration that Light is also a process — "the light of everyone who reasons truly is enkindled by that truth which he strives to reach." Bonaventure himself thought of Light as a thing: "all sciences have infallible rules, like rays of light shining down upon our mind from eternal laws... thus the radiation and contemplation of this Light lifts up the wise in wonder. How like the spirit of Francis is this theologian's concluding application of the heart to the relevance of the mind's earthly knowledge.

It is in his meditation on the stages of illumination that lead from creatures to union with the creator, that Bonaventure speaks of the light of truth as "a candelabrum that glows upon the face of the mind." He perceived that Francis' intellect — unlike his own university trained mind was yet illumined by the brilliance of eternal Light so that he could probe the depths of scripture with remarkable acumen — a gift the world acclaims resulted in Francis' extraordinary sanctity.

When the puritan poet Milton (PL, Bk. III, 52-4) in the most personal of his invocations addressed his Muse as light, was he speaking of the same divine Light (I John, 5); (I.8.12) as the Saints or Mystics or Dante in Paradise (XIII)? Surely that Muse is the same God's essence, agent, or creative power. One hears all these overtones as well as an intimation of mere physical light from which Milton like Francis was cut off by his blindness in his prayer to Celestian Light:⁴

Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence Purge and disperse. (III.52-4)

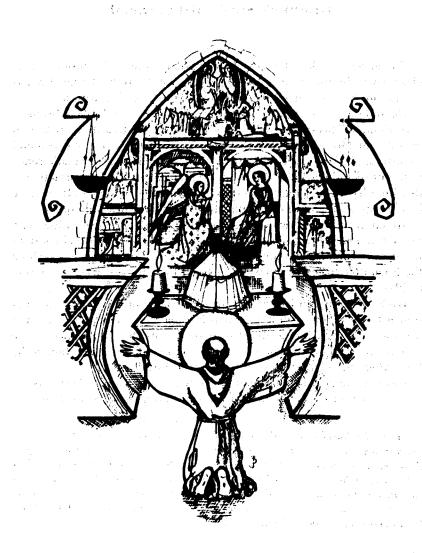
To turn now to artists of light working in another medium. Who can forget Bernini's masterful effects of light in his *Theresa in Ecstasy* providing us, as it does, the visible representation of that which is invisible.

Two painters, Giotto and Bellini have effectively contrasted the sources of light in their execution of St. Francis in Ecstasy. In his rendition of *The Stigmata*, Giotto's source of light is heaven-directed, otherworldly. In Bellini's work, though his landscape is more cool, inviting, and delightfully suffused with light, its source derives from the sun, from this world, so that the effect is a kind of daylight painting.

Of course, Caravaggio and Rembrandt will always remain among the outstanding painters of Chiaroscuro. Problems of light-effects constantly occupied these artists as they shifted dramatic accents in scenes for their heroes or subordinated bystanders in an incredible variety of shadows.

Witness: Rembrandt's David Kneeling before Saul or The Flight into Egypt and Caravaggio's The Call of Matthew and The Call of St. Paul.

While Kenneth Clark feels that it was "the years of the Impressionists that actually added something to our human faculty — an awareness of light which seems almost a new sense," one cannot but acknowledge that in reading or viewing earlier artists — poets and painters — it was with the coming of Jesus that light was made resplendent with deeper meaning, and very ordinary realities given a new and superior dimension.



The Deeper Obervance

HERBERT SCHNEIDER, O.F.M.

The history of the Order of Friars Minor is also the history of its observance. By that I mean the observance of the Rule of Saint Francis for the brothers who lived the gospel life of discipleship with him.

The Rule serves as the Magna Charta of the new lifestyle of the brothers with Francis. This explains why it is so valued and treasured. It is with eyes directed toward the Rule that renewal in the Order has always found its inspiration. More precisely it was always a search for greater adherence to the Final Rule of 1223. But in most recent times the interpretation of this Rule has been sought in connection with the Rule of 1221 because here the spirit of Saint Francis is perceived in tis more original expression.

My concern here, however, is not with its interpretation which certainly is in and of itself most fruitful for awakening our spiritual energies to a greater commitment to the Rule. I am more intent upon approaching the Final Rule from a depth which, I feel, also validly applies to the Rule of 1221.

While the fourteenth century saw observance of the Rule as a strict return to the original lifestyle and will of Saint Francis — which often became fixated on literal observance — the stricter observance of the seventeenth century sought for a renewed prayerful consideration of the Rule which therefore gave rise to the name Recollect.

Today as we approach the end of the twentieth century there arises a new demand of the hour: to seek after an observance of the Rule in a

Fr. Herbert Schneider of the Province of Cologne (Germany) has published extensively in his native language. Following his doctoral studies at the University of Cologne, he taught for several years until he was elected Minister Provincial (1980 - 89). Besides his current duties as Vicar Provincial, Prefect of Formation and Guardian of the House of Studies in Remagen, he serves on a commission of the German Bushops' Conference. This article was translated from the German by Fr. Joseph Doino, editor of The CORD.

renewed way. This must be done if the order wishes to discover its identity at its source and not in externals, that is, neither from external encounters alone nor from an external observance and carrying out of the Rule but from an original sense of the depth of the Rule, and this is the Gospel.

This deeper observance reveals how much the Rule finds its justification in the Gospel, and actually brings this Gospel to expression. The Rule gains its understanding exclusively from the Gospel.

Thus the Rule before all else has as its sole purpose to serve the observance of the Gospel, as Francis says in the first chapter: "The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Rule, therefore, insofar as it is understood to be the basis for the life of the Friars Minor, is both a help and way for the observance of the Gospel.

In this sense the Rule is faithfully lived only when it brings to expression the observance of the Gospel. Its purpose is to bring the gospel to light. Attention must always be given to this fact in every consideration of the Rule.

The first chapter presents an abbreviated form of the Rule which then unfolds itself in the following chapters. This abbreviated form is life, in obedience, without property and in chastity. Consequently the vows can be viewed in a double perspective: an abbreviated form of the Rule and simultaneously the very observance of the Gospel.

One must, therefore, seek to discern the call of the gospel in the Rule and to live it. The more one lives the vows as an abbreviated form of the Rule the more the gospel is brought forth. This likewise holds for fidelity to the Rule in its twelve chapters.

It is this that I call the *deeper observance* of the Rule, which has the power to lead to a renewal and revitalization of our Order's life. How much Francis was concerned in the Rule for the actualization of the gospel is seen in the repeated references to sacred scripture.

Since the entire rule, as previously mentioned, is intended to give actual form to the gospel, those scriptural passages which Francis expressly chooses clarify the sense and meaning of this deeper observance. There are three criteria for the life of the brothers; namely, with what shaping concept, with what promise and with what availability the brothers live.

The shaping idea of the brothers' life is clearly visible in the first text of scripture, Matthew 19:21; the brothers are called to journey as pilgrims with Christ as when Jesus calls the disciples to leave all in order to come and follow him. The evangelical call to be pilgrims and wanderers has its justification in the following of Christ. It tolerates no looking back; one is always to look ahead (Lk. 9:62). The brothers equip themselves for this when they live simply among the common folk (Matt. 11:8), fast (Matt.

4:2), do not quarrel (Lk. 10:5), and show themselves as modest and undemanding.

In the faithful observance of the Rule the friars minor gain a deep understanding of what it means to be a pilgrim with the Lord and one of his disciples.

The promise made to the brother who in accordance with 1 Peter 2:11 is a pilgrim and stranger and lives in poverty as did the Lord (2 Cor. 8:9) consists in this: he will be an heir of the Kingdom of Heaven (Jam. 2:5).

In faithfully following the Rule the brother has a new world before him. Francis speaks of the land of the living (Ps. 141:6). The brothers reach it in the observance of the Rule. The Rule restores one first of all to a life which endures. Pilgrimage with its demand for renunciation has its great recompense, for one receives the gift of new life. To live as a stranger is not an end in itself; the lesser brother finds a new homeland in the land of the living. The future is full of life and homecoming.

While journeying, the brothers already obtain a foretaste of the land of the living when they are able to make known their needs to one another with trust (1 Thess. 2:7) and when they serve each other (Matt. 7:12).

Striving for the land of the living as pilgrim and stranger makes the friar minor available for whatever needs he encounters in the world (Ps. 11:7).

Their preaching is to be reflective and clear, that is, it is to be an expression of this pilgrimage to the land of the living. In service of this also is the brief word (Rom. 9:28) which without digression goes directly to the heart of the gospel and arouses the listener to discipleship. The brothers therefore are also to protect themselves against pride and greed (Lk. 12:15) as well as worldly anxiety (Matt. 13:22). As pilgrims underway to the land of promise they devote all their energies in this world toward reaching this one goal alone. Underway they remain totally pointed toward this new fulfillment of life. Thus Francis admonishes them that in their journey they are to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44) and to persevere to the end (Matt. 10:22), rooted in faith and strong and unshaken in the hope of the gospel (Col. 1:23).

The renewal of the order comes about through each individual who lives his life as a pilgrim and stranger on the way to the land of promise and thereby preserves himself free of the distractions of this world in love, faith and hope.

How does one equip himself for this battle? In no other way than through the acceptance of the gospel which expresses itself in the Rule. Knowledge of the gospel is only the starting-point. Then comes before all else meditation of the scriptures. This allows the word of scripture to enter the heart and it prepares the friar to be open to the gospel from the depths of his being. The second is the sharing of the scripture. This

enables me to dwell with the message of the gospel in the midst of the community.

The third is decisive, namely, scriptural prayer. It leads me to communion with Jesus Christ. When his words become my prayer, I no longer stand next to, before or behind the message of scripture; rather I stand in it. Thus Christ takes shape in me. Scriptural prayer must be a personal priority each day so that scripture and together with it the Lord himself come to expression in my life and are thus made manifest.

The deeper observance of the rule leads to love for the scriptures and to scriptural prayer. In this prayer one's own life is brought into unity with the life of the Lord, together with His words. Also, that which the lesser brother brings to his reflection and prayer, immersed in the word of scripture this prayer brings about and actualizes: to dwell with the Lord and thus arrive in the land of the living.

This life of observance has positive results in the world. As it takes shape in us and as the gospel lives in us, there is awakened a wonderment and curiosity regarding our observance of the vows in the living out of the Rule.

The Rule intends to prepare us so that we live not merely at the periphery of the gospel but that we live in the gospel itself. If we succeed in this, then there also is made visible in the concreteness of our earthly existance an expression of the gospel itself. If our lives are authentic then there are awakened within the hearts of our fellow pilgrims in this world vital questions regarding our hope for the land of promise.



BOOK REVIEW

The Forthbringer of God. By George H. Tavard. St. Bonaventure on the Virgin Mary. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989. Pp. 187. \$9.95.

Reviewed by Francis Berna, O.F.M., Ph.D. (Fordham) Associate Professor of Theology, St. Bonaventure University.

In January 1988 an insightful dialogue took place at St. Bonaventure University. Clergy and theologians representing the Roman and Reformed traditions held an afternoon of study on the topic of Mary. Interestingly enough the Protestant representative focused on Mary in liturgy and iconography while the Roman representative explored biblical images of Mary.

George Tavard's text grows out of a similar dialogue. February 1984 marked the beginning of a dialogue on Mary between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic traditions in the United States. As Tavard notes, he prepared a paper in 1986 comparing Bonaventure and Scotus. He rightly notes the abundant references to Mary in the Seraphic Doctor. He suggests that these references have been overlooked in favor of the Subtle Doctor because of the latter's belief in the Immaculate Conception.

Undoubtedly Tayard has made a significant contribution to the Lutheran understanding of Mary because his text does just that for any reader. Even a quick survey of the text informs the reader that what may have been held by the Marian piety of the 1950's is certainly not the limit of the Church's belief through the centuries.

Selecting the title, "The Forthbringer of God" drives home this point. Tayard aligns himself with the Greek tradition of "Theotokos" and thereby hints at a reconciliation that might take place between Romans and Protestants as well as an internal reconciliation that many Romans would feel in need of with their own tradition.

As Tayard notes, not everything in Bonaventure will be useful or of interest for every reader. He divides the text into four parts. Parts one and two concentrate on Bonaventure's more formal theology - his theological treatises and commentaries on the gospels of Luke and John. At times these sections can become tedious for even the very interested reader. For the most part Tayard is quite attentive to detail. Some points could be explored with a bit smoother flow of logic.

Parts three and four will capture the attention of the reader interested in Bonaventure's more popular Marian spirituality. These sections detail liturgical piety in Bonaventure's preaching and the mystical insight of his final works. In these areas Bonaventure is at his best and Tavard is at his best.

Though some of the quotations of Bonaventure selected by Tavard echo on overly sweet sentiment, the reader should not be put off. Placing the language in its cultural context, the reader should be attentive to the insight garnered by Tavard detailing Mary's role in a truly Christocentric understanding of salvation. It is in these sections that Tavard is best in describing the Church's medieval approaches to Mary. Going back to pre-Reformation un-

derstandings of Mary can be helpful in further ecumenical dialogue, a topic of apparent contemporary interest. It can also be helpful for the Roman seeking some reconciliation with his or her own tradition. This reviewer found something of that in Tavard's text.

Shorter Notices

Iulian Davies, O.F.M., **Associate Editor**

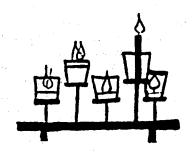
TWO NEW BOOKS WORTHY OF NOTICE

Twelve Tough Issues: What the Church Teaches and Why. By Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk. Cincinnati. Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1988. Pp. 83. Paper, **\$4.95**.

Letters to Marc About Jesus. By Henri I. M. Nouwen. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988. Pp. 85. Cloth, \$12.95.

The twelve tough issues treated by Archbishop Pilarczyk are Abortion, Artificial Conception, Capital Punishment. Divorce and Remarriage, Contraception, Homosexuality, Economics, Warfare, Priestly Celibacy, Ordination of Women, Authority and Conscience. In each case the teaching of the Church is clearly explained, and the reason behind the teaching. The perspective of faith is clearly illumined on each of the issues, and the most common objections to the stands of the Church quite adequately answered: Every priest and religious educator should have a copy of this work, and every parish and Church bookstand have it in stock. Would that its purchase price were a bit lower, but it is worth every penny.

Henri Nouwen wrote seven letters to his 19-year-old nephew explaining why Jesus gives meaning to life. The letters do not form an apologetic treatise, but rather a reflection on the spiritual life which is suitable for the veteran of religious life as much as the beginner. The letters deal with different titles that Nouwen gives Jesus: The Heart of Our Existence; The God who sets us Free, the Compassionate God, the Descending God, the Loving God, the Hidden God. The last letter speaks of listening to Jesus, and calls special attention to His Presence in Church, and Eucharist, Bible and inspirational reading, in personal prayer. Letters to Marc is not only a good homily source, but something for the reader.



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