

fect. Nonetheless, by reason of the careful and mature study that their formulation and approval, as also of the many hands that at perfecting them—the Order as a whole, the General Chapter, the mittees, the learned consultors of the Sacred Congregation—the laws are far more perfect than any previous codification in the history and thus reveal a genuine step forward. Indeed, for this alone they merit high respect and reverence.

But to appreciate, reverence and observe to the full the and prescriptions of the new legislation, the General continues, one must have the right approach. The letter of the law without the spirit and only the spirit gives life. To acquire this, it should suffice to study the documents bearing on the promulgation.

First, in the Apostolic Brief giving specific approbation to the new text, Pope Pius XII declares that the Friars have contributed to the Church when they have kept the Rule more exactly, and as the Constitutions of the Order, now and in the past, have provided the most salutary aids to that observance. Therefore, after tracing the history of the Constitutions from the thirteenth century, His Holiness declares that the new text is intended to foster a deeper religious life day and to promote a more useful apostolate. He therefore specifically approves and confirms the General Constitutions and commands their observance by each and every member of the Order. By such papal approbation, Father Capobianco notes, the new Constitutions become one together and singly, particular pontifical laws; by it their excellence is made more evident, while they receive greater efficacy and stability.

Again, in a special decree making known the papal approbation of the Sacred Congregation of Religious stresses the double purpose of the new legislation: a more fruitful religious life and apostolate in keeping with new conditions in the world and new legislation on the part of the Church. One would not be rash in concluding that the text reveals the most up-to-date directives for religious life and reflects most fully the mind of the Congregation and of the Church.

Lastly, in an Encyclical Letter marked by a deep tone of true Franciscanism, His Paternity the Minister General promulgates the Rule to all Friars subject to him and in fatherly fashion expresses his concern for their importance and above all as to the spirit which must guide them to their acceptance and observance. "The Constitutions," he points out, "offer better ways and means to a more perfect observance of the Rule: for they show the pattern of a truly Franciscan life and lead us by the hand, as it were, to the attainment of Seraphic perfection with

the CORD

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OUR MONTHLY CONFERENCE

By our vocation to the religious life we were called out of the world to lead a more perfect spiritual life. The election of Israel and its segregation in Palestine from the nations which surround it might serve as a type of ourselves. Palestine was guarded on the North by mountain ranges, on the East and South by desert, and on the West by the Mediterranean Sea. And the special charge was given to the Israelites as we read in Leviticus: *You shall be holy because I, the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine* (20, 26).

We too have been brought by God into a land flowing with milk and honey, the profusion of his heavenly graces. He has set a barrier around us to keep the world out of our lives. It is like the enclosed garden of the Canticle of Canticles, fragrant with spices, the incense-bearing tree, where the King alone should walk with whom he has chosen for himself. *I have separated you from the peoples that you should be mine.*

Here along with the more excellent call, he provided a daily abundance of grace and unceasing guidance in the way. We are to walk together with the full light of obedience and constant correctives and encouragements of superiors and holy angels, and he has given us the consciousness of belonging to him alone. To use a different image, we might quote the words of Isaiah which he describes God's solicitude in preparing his own vineyard:

My friend had a vineyard

On a fertile hill;

And he digged it, and cleared it of stones,

And planted it with choicest vines;

And built a tower in the midst thereof,

And likewise hewed out a winepress therein;

And he expected that it should yield grapes (5, 1-2).

And the prophet adds the distressing words, *But it yielded sour*

grapes. When we apply the image, the *sour grapes* would be carelessness and lukewarmness in our spiritual life. It might be profitable to examine the stock of ourselves. When one becomes lukewarm the will be-

comes languid, the exercises of piety are neglected or are performed in a mechanical and fruitless way, meditation becomes a period for day-dreaming, the examination of conscience is not searching and no contrition is aroused against our faults, prayer is superficial—a mere performance of external courtesies with no heart in it, no real pouring forth of love, praise and thanksgiving—spiritual reading is skipped or is pursued as a matter of curiosity and not as a sincere seeking after enlightenment and encouragement.

Yet, all these things are to be a source of spiritual strength; without them one cannot have an exuberant life. In consequence, the soul becomes more languid and lukewarm because the means that will prevent or cure it are not used. Hence, there is less spirit of retirement, less interior recollection, and greater indulgence is given to the body. Thus the bulwarks that should protect our spiritual life are cast down and we let ourselves open to attack: worldliness, distraction, sensuality—all of them dangerous to the soul. When one is lukewarm one no longer shows child-like candor toward the confessor, there is no humility in receiving his advice, and obedience to his guidance is not what it used to be.

It is easy to imagine the spiritual barrenness. *And he expected that it should yield grapes, says Isaiah, but it yielded sour grapes.* Such a one lives under a rule without observing the spirit of the rule. Meditation, Mass, Holy Communion, prayer, all are routine. And what should give an abundance of life is slowly bringing death. While the hearts of others are being inflamed, he is cold—deliberately cold. Others are amassing merits and growing in grace, he is losing merits and meriting chastisements and obstructs the flow of grace; others are truly rejoicing in God, he cannot rejoice at all except in a hollow piety; others long for the coming of Christ, he dreads the thought; others have confidence of going to a reward, he is fearful and apprehensive. Still, there is no change while the days and years pass on relentlessly. What a degeneration! The prophet Jeremiah might truly lament, *the noble sons of Sion, and they that were clothed with the best gold: how are they esteemed as earthen vessels* (Lam. 4, 2).

With such a spirit there will be an accumulation of sins. Nature left to itself will produce a numerous progeny. List them: impatience, uncharitableness, selfishness, criticism, back-biting, vanity, disobe-

dience, complaining, plus lack of spirit of prayer and growth in holiness. This is all very disappointing:

*And he expected that it should yield grapes,
But it yielded sour grapes.—*

What is the meaning that my beloved hath wrought much wailing in my house (Jer. 11, 15)?

Of course, reflections such as these do not unsettle a lukewarm soul. He has his arguments to defend himself—at least if there is no evident serious sin. “Oh, they are all little things. I know I am in sin when I see it. I’ll leave the future take care of itself.” When he is disturbed, when the Good Shepherd prods him with his goad (perhaps during a reading, or by an admonition, or the good example of others), he laughs at the grace and calls it a scruple. So he continues through the years. He will not turn at God’s reproof, but he is satisfied with himself. But his criterion is unsound: *measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves* (2 Cor. 10, 12). But God uses other standards. He inspects us round and round and his diagnosis might be terrible:

*From the sole of the foot unto the head,
There shall be no soundness in it;
Bruises and weals,
And fresh wounds,
That have not been pressed nor bound up,
Nor softened with oil (Isa. 1, 6).—*

How long will fools covet those things which are hurtful to themselves, and the unwise hate knowledge? . . . I called and you refused to answer, I also will laugh in your destruction (Prov. 1, 23-26).

Each will be judged in his turn. Each will be challenged to his vocation, on the perfection he should have pursued. Will you defend the lukewarm religious stand: “Why, those were little things; those were scruples; I used to laugh at them”? Can you retort, *I also will laugh in your destruction?* It will take a long sentence to atone to wounded Love. There in exile he will rue over the lost years of grace and the levity with which he regarded many things. *What fruit had you then from those things of which you are now ashamed (Rom. 6, 21)?* God, in his goodness, c

as his own, but he lived for himself; He gave grace upon grace, but they were spurned; He gave the hundredfold which he had promised, but the gift was not appreciated; He gave him many brethren whom he should have edified, but he scandalized them; He gave him the many provisions of rule and statutes to urge him onward and upward, but he kicked against the goad.

When the end comes we shall see it. Self-deception is impossible in eternity begins to search you out; just values are again restored. The consciousness of tepidity will be distressing:

*Ingemisco tamquam reus,
Culpa rubet vultus meus,
Supplici parce, Deus.*

But suppose lukewarmness had led to mortal sin, and that he had become careless even of that and had been taken away in that condition. In the first supposition of venial sin he was saved indeed, but, “as it were through fire.” In the second supposition there is no rescue; the gate of heaven will be closed in his face, *Nescio vos— I know you not!* What an astonishment in the abyss to see him go down into the depths!

*Sheol beneath is astir for thee,
At the prospect of thy coming;
It arouses the shades for thee,
All the chiefs of the earth;
Makes to rise up from their thrones
All the kings of the nations;
They shall all answer
And say unto thee:
‘Thou too hast been stricken like us,
Thou art become like unto us!
Thy pomp is brought down to Sheol,
The music of thy harps;
Beneath thee the worm is thy bed,
The maggot thy covering.
How art thou fallen from heaven,
O radiant one, son of the dawn!’ (Isa. 14, 9-12:Kissane)*

That one who was a favorite of Christ should be among the

damned! In life, he was graced with that lovely title; he was taken out of the world and placed in the garden of God which he tended; he was held in esteem by the Church as leading a good life; even the wicked revered him. But now, all has been changed into his eternal dishonor. *They . . . have borne their shame with them that descend into the pit* (Ezech. 32, 25).

Therefore, if we must admit that we are lukewarm, we must change immediately. Lukewarmness is ingratitude for the graces and mercies of God. God was angered at the Israelites because they were ungrateful for his many favors, and he withdrew his love from them. *The Lord saw, and was moved to wrath; because his own sons and daughters provoked him. And he said: 'I will hide my face from them'* (Deut. 32, 19-20). We must resume all the former practices of piety and be diligent in observance as in the past, with fervor, notwithstanding the repugnance or the lack of satisfaction which we might experience. Then we shall no longer be lukewarm; if we persevere, we shall not only regain the lost ground, but we shall acquire a new spiritual agility which we did not possess even in the springtime of our religious life, *For God has not destined us to wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor. 5, 9).

Heaven must be a conquest. Even the innocent wage war for it—a war unto blood. If the saints labor and sweat for it, how can we get it who rarely even yearn for it? Listen to the admonition of the Apostle Peter: *Therefore, brethren, strive even more by good works to make your calling and election sure. For if you do this, you will not come into sin at any time. Indeed, in this way will be amply proved to you the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (2 Pet. 1, 10-11).

Fr. Silvano Matulich,

THE SERAPHIC ARTIST

"Always was he occupied with Jesus. Jesus he carried in his heart, Jesus in his mouth, Jesus in his ears, Jesus in his eyes, Jesus in his hands, Jesus in all his members" (Thom. Cel. 1, N. 115). Thus we see the glorious tribute paid to Saint Francis of Assisi by one of his early biographers. In this praise is embodied the masterpiece of art which "little brother Francis" sought to create from the very first moment of his conversion from the world. Verily, to fashion such a work of art, Francis must have employed a priceless tool. What was that tool? Love! Saint Francis had discovered what is *hidden from the wise and prudent and is revealed to little ones*, for he found the only way to the perfect imitation of the God-Man—love without limit, the love of the Seraphim. Only seraphic love could produce the replica of Christ which Saint Francis of Assisi was. Only a love that was completely devoid of self, desiring only the interests of the Beloved, could merit the external recognition of oneness which Christ gave Francis in the Sacred Stigmata. Hence the Poverello could justly repeat the stirring words of St. Paul, *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.* (Gal. 2:20).

But the impression of the Stigmata, as it were, was the consummation of the love of Francis. It was the result of years of constant endeavor to be more like the Jesus Who captivated his heart. His love, indeed, was not seraphic at the onset of his flight to sanctity; he was a beginner in the science of sanctity, a novice. Soon after his initial conversion, his new manner of acting brought abuse upon him from his former acquaintances which forced him to flee and go so far as to hide in a cave. Celano says of him on this occasion. "He was as yet only a novice among the champions of Christ" (Thom. Cel. 1, N. 115). This example proves clearly to us that Francis was not yet seized with the love that was to forever characterize him. His early growth in love cost him dearly, as is indicated by this episode and others, of which perhaps the one most repulsive to his fine nature, yet replete with blessings, was his encounter with the leper. It is easy to imagine the disgust that overtook him, who was the son of a wealthy cloth merchant, accustomed to only the best in living, when he realized that he was being inspired by God to embrace a leper—the leper who sig-

nified the nadir of filth and vileness in the mind of those in the thirteenth century. But Francis loved! He loved Jesus and that love triumphed. He kissed the leper in all tenderness, the result of which was an increase in love, which was another link in the chain that was to terminate in the seraphic degree.

In considering Francis of Assisi and his manner of loving, we should well to recall that, born into the race that he was, his very nature was fiery and vehement in the exercise of its actions. Saint Francis was born a lover. We know of his attractive personality, his love to love and to be loved from his early youth. His early life was upon being the leader of the crowd, arranging parties and feasts, desiring to show that he knew "how" to live, and in return to expect that all should acquiesce to his leadership. But God had something else to say. He wanted Francis; He "needed" Francis, and when the "Hound of Heaven" pursues us, the chase is the most adventurous we shall ever know. Thus, in a series of graces, as his drew him from sicknesses, Saint Francis was led to see the fleeting character of this life and the permanence of eternal joy. It is an axiom that fire does not destroy, but perfects nature." This was well verified in the case of the Poverello. Almighty God was not to make his choice of Francis but as *gold is tried in the furnace*, the love which was so much in the heart of Francesco Bernardone was to be gradually and systematically fashioned into a love which was no longer of earth, but angelic in likeness. The refinement of his love was not to be on the part of God alone, however, for in addition to his cooperation with God's graces, Francis was not to remain passive, merely awaiting the opportunity of increasing in love, but he was to act in a positive manner, beseeching through fervent prayer, the opportunity of becoming more like his Divine Model in every way.

Since the lover tends to union with the Beloved, Saint Francis gradually became obsessed with the vehement desire to be united to Jesus in all things. Francis' love demanded this; and he found his most powerful recourse in the attainment of his likeness to Jesus in prayer. Had not Jesus assured him in Sacred Scripture: *Ask, and ye shall receive; things whatever you ask for in prayer, believing, you shall receive* (Matt. 21:22)? Concerning his prayer, Thomas of Celano states that in his constant meditation he reflected on his words, and with deep

as he pondered on his works" (Thom. Cel. 1, N. 84). Consequently, his prayer became his constant joy, his greatest solace, his strength in trial, his sweetest pastime. But most of all, his prayer rewarded him with love—and with Christ.

As he persevered in constant meditation and prayer, the change from a worldling to a saint was gradually effected in Francis. Urged on by his newly-found desire to become one with his Master, Saint Francis became absorbed in the focal points of the life of Jesus. The "little poor man" began to alter his manner of living as a rich and proud merchant's son to becoming a poor and humble follower of Christ. He saw these two virtues of poverty and humility lovingly portrayed in the birth of Jesus. Thus, Francis grew to love the mystery of the Nativity dearly. The lesson taught by the Infant Jesus at his birth soon became an integral part of the Poverello's spirituality. His love for the poverty of Christ enveloped his whole being as a flower bud encompasses a honey-bee seeking the sweetness that lies therein. Saint Francis' exterior demeanor announced one of the poorest of the poor, in imitation of his Lord, Whose birthplace was an animal's shelter and Whose crib was a manger of straw. The simplicity of the Child-King, wherein He chose to show us that the one who is most simple is most like God, enraptured Francis, and became forever a dominant note in himself and in his friars in turn. Thomas of Celano testifies to this love of Francis for the Infant Christ and also tells us of another major focal point in the life of Christ which most impressed Saint Francis, when he writes: "The humility of the birth of Jesus and the love of His Passion occupied the soul of the Saint in such a measure that he could scarcely think of aught else" (Thom. of Cel. 1, N. 84).

In the Sacred Passion of Christ, the Saint envisioned the life of penance and mortification which Jesus was offering him in place of his former life of ease and frivolity. Henceforward, he was to become crucified. But to be a crucified man, much suffering would have to be borne by him and endless mortification was to refine his nature. Saint Francis, moreover, did not shirk the inspiration of grace, but with a resolute spirit, set about the most difficult task in the world—crucifying oneself so that only Jesus can become ruler of one's soul. Thus he began to pass long periods in fasting, and what

little food he did eat, he would sometimes render insipid by every device he could. His apparel became coarse and poor; he came content to call no refuge his own, for Jesus had said of himself: *The son of man hath nowhere to lay his head* (Matt. 8:20).

As the months and years went on, the marked resemblance between the Beloved and the lover could be felt by any who had contact with Saint Francis. His growth in love was steady and unceasing, slow at first, but it was truly progress. Just as Our Lord told us that "by your patience you will win your souls" (Luke 21:19), so did Francis patiently and entirely lean upon Christ to lead him along the narrow path to perfection, always aware of his own weakness, but trusting in Him Who is all strength, being convinced of the words of St. Paul, *I can do all things in him who strengthens me* (Phil. 4:13). Celano well formulates this "idee fixe" of Saint Francis when he says, "His supreme endeavor, his most ardent wish, his most principle was to observe the holy gospel in all and sundry things, and to follow perfectly, with all zeal, with the fullness of his spirit, with all the love of his heart, the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to imitate his example" (Thom. Cel. 1, N. 1).

For a space of nineteen years, from the early steps in his conversion, the encounter with the leper, his statement of a profound insight into the life and teaching of Jesus, until two years before his death, Saint Francis' life continued in the pursuit of his "idee fixe"; each year having a deadly toll upon his poor body, but rendering his soul immeasurably richer with a growth in love. His love had become stronger with each act of penance, with each step towards heaven, until finally, physically enervated, his spirit was able to fly to his Beloved.

But he could not leave Sister Earth yet. His love was still so earthly and seraphic. He had his greatest desire yet to fulfill. On the morning of the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, 1224, Saint Francis employed once again his unfailing device for attaining his desire: he prayed his most powerful prayer. It was to result in the fulfillment of his greatest longing. "O my Lord Jesus Christ, I pray Thee to grant me two graces before I die; the first, that in my lifetime I may feel in my soul and in my body, so far as is possible, all the pain and grief which Thou, O Sweet Lord, didst feel in Thy most bitter

and; the second, that I may feel in my heart, as far as possible, that excessive love by which Thou, the Son of God, wert impelled willingly to sustain so great sufferings for sinners" (*Fioretti*, 3a Considerazione delle Sante Istimate). We know Jesus' answer.

From that day forward the now Seraphic Francis, filled with a selfless and joyous love, bore in his body the bloody wounds of Christ, and felt along with them the most agonizing pains and sufferings of Jesus; he was the living image of his Master. Now, as completely as possible, "always was he occupied with Jesus. Jesus was carried in his heart, Jesus in his mouth, Jesus in his ears, Jesus in his eyes, Jesus in his hands, Jesus in all his members." He had used his tool well, he had loved seraphically; his Masterpiece was complete. For, there was no longer a Francis of Assisi; there remained only the "Christ of Umbria".

Friar Alcuin Weiss O.F.M.Conv.

MARY'S MEDIATION IN FRANCISCAN TRADITION

Part Two: *Co-redemptrix*

The Blessed Mother's title of Mediatrix of all graces, as the Franciscan school sees it, follows not only from the fact of her absolute predestination, but also from her office as co-redemptrix. This theme our *Florilegium* of Franciscan texts will unfold its treasures—the exquisite roses cascading from Juan Diego's cloak—before our eyes. Co-redemptrix of the human race.

Some theologians do not care for the title "co-redemptrix." They feel that it attributes too much to Our Lady. In this matter the Franciscans adopt the spirit of Saint Bonaventure when he says: "Diligent care shall be taken that the honor of Mary in no way be diminished; nay—it should be kept intact even if it means we must give our life." The term itself has found favor with Franciscan theologians since the seventeenth century; Luke Wadding, for example, popularized the term in his book, *The Active Redemption of the*

Mother of God, and addressed Mary as both redemptrix and trix.

At any rate, it would seem that the controversy over the of the title has been settled—implicitly at least—by the Pop have called Mary “Reparatrix” and are quite plain in asser does Benedict XV, that “it can be truly said that with Ch redeemed the human race. Our Lady’s co-redeeming functio place first in her cooperation in the Incarnation and, secondly intimate association with the entire work of Christ the Sav

A. In the Incarnation

Our theologians say first that Mary merited, to a certain (de congruo) the acceleration of the coming of Christ; the her virtue moved Almighty God to send his Son sooner into that so longed for a Redeemer. This was an opinion that championed.

And pondering these things in their hearts, Franciscan would have us realize that Mary was fully conscious of all the consent to the Incarnation would involve. Saint Bernard example, said that her *Fiat* meant that she consented to the fixation of her Son and to His death as the price of superab satisfaction for all sinners and as the means of reparation for elect. Without thought of herself, Our Lady consented, he con not only to the Incarnation but also to her role as co-suffer thereby the reparation and restoration of the entire world m effected and that God might thus be praised and glorified.

Then, with the eagerness of one putting in the last piec jigsaw puzzle, Bernardin concludes: “Through this conse sought the salvation of men and procured it; and by this cons dedicated herself in an altogether special way to the welfa salvation of all men, so that from then on she carried all men heart as a mother does her children.”

Conrad of Saxony, the true author of the *Mirror of the B Virgin Mary*, marvelled at the fullness of grace that the Divin ternity implies: “If she encompassed God in her bosom, how more in her heart? And if the immense capacity of her heart

led with grace, we must necessarily conclude that the grace which led such a capacity was itself immense.”

By the very fact that Mary conceived and brought forth Truth, Saint Bonaventure tells us, “she merited reconciliation for the entire human race.” And in the same context he carries on the traditional comparison of Eve and Mary, a comparison favored by Franciscan writers and frequently met with in the encyclicals of the popes: “That woman, namely Eve, expelled us from paradise and sold our patrimony; but (Mary) led us back and bought it back for us. As a strong and holy woman she paid the price.”

B. In the Work of Salvation

It was indeed a great price, but the heart of Our Queen embraced all mankind. Mary offered, in her divinely ordained fashion, the sufficient price for the human race and likewise directly and positively acquired the graces themselves of the entire supernatural economy, and this by reason of her most intimate union with Christ the Redeemer. Saint Bonaventure adds that in the temple “the oblation took as it were its beginnings and foundation in the oblation of the Virgin. . . The glorious Virgin brought much, she who brought to the temple such a Victim which she offered for all.”

In the style of a Saint Luke telling the story of the first Christmas, Ubertino de Casale expressly states that, at the Presentation, “through the hands of the most holy Virgin as from the common mother of the Saviour and of those to be saved, in a common place, that is in the temple of God, to a common person, namely to the most holy Simeon, as to an authorized and rightful procurator for the world, the gift of Jesus Christ, God and Man, was made to the human race, and the Church, the Spouse of God, was introduced into the possession of the gift.”

The offering was later made in full, as Saint Bonaventure writes, when she gave her Son on the Cross. “No one,” says Ossuna, “is ignorant of the fact that Mary, exercising a priestly function and standing beside the altar of the cross, offered a living victim to God for us.” Of course, this sacerdotal character of Mary is to be taken in a spiritual sense rather than in a strict and literal interpretation.

Saint Lawrence of Brindisi explains: "The spirit of Mary, spiritual priest, as the cross was the altar and Christ the sacrifice, and although the spirit of Christ was the principal priest, the spirit of Mary was one with the spirit of Christ; in fact, it was one with Him, one soul as it were in two bodies. Therefore the spirit of Mary together with the spirit of Christ exercised a sacerdotal function at the altar of the cross, and offered to the eternal God the offering of Christ for the salvation of the world.

While proving Mary's right to the title of secondary head of the Mystical Body, Carolus del Moral gives the following beautiful explanation of her mediation: "It is the most special influence of the head upon the predestined, as members of the body of the Church merit to offer as one's own the price of their redemption, and such an offering should obtain as a reward their liberty and redemption; but the Blessed Virgin has such an influence on their redemption by her merits, by means of which she, together with her Son, offered the price of the redemption of the predestined, namely the Son whom she offered as her own; because by the maternal right which she possessed Him she handed Him over to the Father for the world, wishing that He should die for men; and thus the redemption of the Mother of God pleased God."

Franciscan writers have meditated on Mary's part in the passion and have come away filled with wonder. Saint Bonaventure says "because she turned the sorrows and the blows and the oppression of her Son upon herself, she felt them in her own person, feeling which was also in Christ Jesus. She stood beside that Martyr as a martyr in spirit, wounded together with Him who was pierced by lance. Saint Bernardin does not hesitate to maintain that "the sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was greater than all the creatures of the world could bear, since if that sorrow were divided up and distributed among all living creatures of the world they would fall. And considering all these things, Leonardo Bello sums up the Franciscan belief: "By all this (sorrow and suffering) the Blessed Virgin acquired after the manner of merit all grace and each single offering for the entire Mystical Body, and by way of satisfaction effected cooperated in the bringing about of the Redemption."

C. Conclusion

This second part of our *Florilegium* has high-lighted Franciscan theological thought on Mary Co-redemptrix of the world. But we have besides, our singers of our Lady. Thus the *Stabat Mater* is a typical Franciscan song. What the friars felt, Jacopone da Todi put into words. He said what all the friars had been trying to say:

Quis non posset contristari,
Christi Matrem contemplari
Dolentem cum Filio?
Juxta crucem tecum stare,
Et me tibi sociare
In planctu desidero. Amen.

Fr. Geoffrey Bridges, O.F.M.

TWO LITTLE SAINTS

Far from being the result of chance, and certainly not merely a coincidence, the feast days of two Saints fall yearly side by side in the calendar of the Church. October 3rd and 4th of each year bring back reminders of Saint Therese and Saint Francis. Even if we should forget them for any length of time throughout the year (which is hardly possible), yet Holy Mother Church juxtaposes them very strikingly to refresh our memories. These facts of course do not state anything new; nor are we attempting to achieve a startling statement. Rather, by pointing to the nearness of their Feast days, we would indicate a starting-point that leads to a search for further resemblances.

TWO TROUBADORS

In her *Story of a Soul*, the Little Flower speaks strongly of her New Canticle. Her purpose was a simple, life-long song of Love to her Beloved. But, besides the Imitation, it revolved solely around the evangelical life of Him Whose Gospels she carried close to her heart.

The way she sang it was by living it. As she tells us, she simply *in the sweet odor of His ointments*. Far from being merely a phrase, she explains, this means opening the pages of the Gospel (especially in time of doubt) so as not to wander along the way. Small wonder, then, that her strides were *like a giant along her way* of perfection. But, before her, Saint Francis too had recognized the straightforward sureness of copying the Christ of the Gospels. Whenever he happened to be, he found very real reminders to sing his graphic love-song to God. The Canticle of the New Testament, whose heart is the Gospel, was his constant companion as he walked the straight and narrow way that leads to Life.

THEIR LITTLENES

When we emphasize that the whole law of God is contained in the love of God and neighbor, we reach the heart of the matter of sanctity. For verification, we can point to the words of Christ Who declared that on these two Commandments depends the whole of the Law and the Prophets. And we can rightly remind ourselves of the constant sermon of the beloved disciple to his flock at Ephesus, selling them to love one another. But would it not also be worth notice how both the Master and the disciple introduced their courses? In giving His final commandment of love before He left Christ began: *Little children. . . A new commandment I give you: that you love one another, as I have loved you* (Jn. 14:21). And the Bishop of Ephesus, the beloved John who counselled the world, began his talk with *Filioli*, 'Little Children.' So the 'how' of learning to love God and neighbor would seem to be after the manner of little children. Certainly, by so acting, people would avoid the error of the Apostles in making comparisons to see who is greater and holier.

Both Saint Therese and Saint Francis had this child-like approach to the law of Love. Small enough to pass through the eye of the needle, their individual littleness made each great in the Eyes of God. And if, like to the Apostles arguing over the greater, we were to point out examples for us, would He not show us a Therese or a Francis? After all, *of such is the kingdom of Heaven*. Not only did she will to become little herself; the Little Flower also wished

to make her example a sure little way for others. And Francis, in doing his way with all cumbersome complications, introduced his simple rule for the little "Lesser Brothers." Rightly then, can the stories of his life and those around him be called "Little Flowers." For, far from belittling himself, his littleness made him realize that he was only so much as he appeared in the Eyes of God and no more. That both of these Saints had hit upon true child-like littleness is evident from the great esteem they enjoy today.

THEIR SIMPLICITY

Oftentimes the solutions offered to difficulties seem more complicated than the original problems. And this thought is no stranger to the spiritual life. There are involved methods for meditation, planned processes of prayer, and devious diversions from the temptations that beset us. However, this is not stated without fear of contradiction. For a certain amount of direction, explanation and advice can be very beneficial in all three cases. Yet, often one can hardly help but wonder if he is wandering further and further into a maze of labyrinthine windings, when he applies so many "directives" to the development of his spiritual life. Handbooks on the progress of spirituality, for example, often offer stereotyped patterns in going step by step from virtue to virtue. And, to cap it all, they even try to fit the Saints (who would be so bewildered as not to recognize themselves) into the molds which the authors have so cleverly constructed.

But, the Little Flower, for one, would have none of this. Unless we are mistaken, she stated once that she had to put aside those complicated meditation books because, far from helping her, they even made her head ache. And, valuable though discursive mental prayer can be, it is hard to picture Saint Francis going from point to point as he wandered about God's universe singing his heart out for the love of God. The point is: have we become so methodical, and even so logical, that we refuse to let the prayer of simplicity take us straight to the Heart of God? Must we become so spiritually straight-laced that simplicity (a "first attribute" of God) comes last on our agenda, and perhaps never arrived at until the end of our lives? Do we clutter up our minds with book-shelves filled with holy

advice while the book of the Cross gathers dust on the desk of the heart? Have our personal systems of spirituality become like the clutter of the past, obstructing our view and blocking off the simple panorama of the direct glance upon the Beauty of God? If so, let us return to the simplicity of Therese and Francis.

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

A SERMON ON SAINT FRANCIS

by
Saint Lawrence of Brindisi

I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to little ones, etc. (Mt. 11: 25).

Little children are always pleasing to God because God is delighted by humility, innocence, and purity of spirit. Saint Francis is pleasing and acceptable to God because he was most humble and pure of spirit. God raised him up because He Who humbles the proud raises up the humble above all measure. *I the Lord have brought down the high tree, and exalted the low tree; (Ez. 17: 24); for he who humbles himself shall be exalted (Lk. 14: 11).* Because Saint Francis was humble on earth among men, he is now high in heaven among the angels. God raised him up to Paradise because he humbled himself on earth. Saint Francis is great with God because he was little with men. *Thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to little ones (Mt. 11: 25); but in malice be children (I Cor. 14: 20); and crave, as newborn babes, pure spiritual milk (I Pet. 2: 2).* This little Francis is given by Solomon to the true mother: *but that which is above is free, which is our mother (Gal. 4: 26).*

It seems to me that today something happened similar to the story of the two women appearing before Solomon and arguing over the child, each one saying that the infant was hers. But when Solomon asked for the true mother he gave the child to her, and not to the other who had suffocated her child while she was asleep. Saint Paul says that in every man there are two men: the one, exterior, carnal, and corruptible; the other, interior, spiritual, immortal and incorruptible. For he says:

Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day (II Cor. 4: 16). The exterior man is this earthly, carnal, and animal body; but the interior man is the heavenly, spiritual, angelic, and divine soul. The mother of this exterior man is earthly nature, but the mother of the interior man is heavenly grace. Therefore, Baptism is called the sacrament of regeneration, as Christ said: *unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit (Jn. 3: 5).*

Today earthly nature, the mother of the exterior man, killed her son in Francis, who is dead according to the flesh, but only in the body and in the eyes of this world; in the spirit, however, by which he is the child of the heavenly Jerusalem, he never dies, but lives immortally with God forever. Indeed, nature often attributes the divine virtues to herself, that is, to a person's make-up or education, to his industry or diligence, or to some other human virtue, but not to heavenly or divine grace. Earthly nature said that Francis was her son because she had brought him forth into the light, she had conceived him, she had borne him, she had nursed and educated him, she had given him life, senses, and reason. "Who does not know," she said, "that man was formed by God in my womb? *The Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth (Gen. 2: 7).* But Francis is a man, and therefore he is my child. Why then is he taken away from me, his true mother, and given to heaven?"

But on the other hand heavenly grace said; "Francis is entirely of heaven in his spirit, virtues, manners, life, and conduct. Therefore, he is my son, for *he who is from the earth speaks of the earth (Jn. 3: 31),* thinks of the earth, and desires the things of earth. However Francis' thoughts, desires, affections, virtues, efforts, words, and all his works are heavenly, as is shown also by his numberless miracles which were worked by heavenly power and which could not have been done except by divine help. How then is Francis an earthly man and not a heavenly man, if in his life and virtues he is wholly divine? I acknowledge that according to the flesh he is your son, but I do not seek him according to the flesh, because according to the flesh you have killed him. In the body he is already dead, but he lives in the spirit. But you did not give him his spirit, you did not conceive it, nor implant it, nor form it, nor educate it; I did all this. Predestination, election, vocation, justification, sanctification, and the perfection of all divine virtues—these are not the works of nature, but of heavenly grace. For Francis was predestined, chosen, justified, sanctified, and made great so that he became like to God and Christ in his life and virtues. Therefore, he is not an earthly man, but a heavenly man, not a child of nature, but of grace according to the

interior man. Do you not see how similar Francis is to Christ? We deny that from such a great and perfect likeness and from their love Francis was a very dear brother to Christ?

Thus Benjamin was the dearest possible brother to Joseph, Prince of Egypt, although he was the youngest of all the brothers who received greater gifts from Joseph than the other brothers did. The other brothers Joseph gave two robes each, but to Benjamin five robes and three hundred pieces of silver; and at the meal a part to each of the brothers, but to Benjamin he gave a much larger part so that it exceeded the parts of the others five times; and the sack of Benjamin did he command that his silver cup be put in as a sign of very special love because this was his dearest brother. They were born of the same mother and father. Thus, I say, Christ to Francis as a sign of His very special love the five wounds of His body, the signs of our redemption, and a much more abundant grace and love. How then could you say that Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, is not my child? If then Christ is my true child and Francis is a very dear and dear brother to Christ, he is, therefore, my child. Let God judge between us, because He is the Judge of truth and justice.

Therefore the child was given to the heavenly Jerusalem as his true mother.

So today the heavenly Jerusalem, receiving Francis' spirit and embracing it, accompanied with a great multitude of angels, took him up into heaven, to the eternal delights of Paradise, to the glory of the heavenly kingdom. As when the beggar Lazarus died, he was carried by the angels into the bosom of Abraham, to the place of perpetual consolation, so too when Blessed Francis died, his most holy spirit was carried by the angels of Paradise into the bosom of God, the Heavenly Father, the Father of souls and the God of all consolation (2 Cor. 1: 3) so that together with the blessed spirits he might also praise God forever: *Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord: they shall praise thee for ever and ever* (Ps. 83: 5).

When our Blessed Father was close to death, he said: *Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the just wait for me, that thou reward me;* where the Hebrew says: *Lead my soul out of prison, or out of prison, to praise thy name; the just will crown themselves because you will reward me, or the just shall crown themselves in heaven because of me, when thou shalt have rewarded me* (Ps. 141: 8). The world was like a prison for Francis and for that reason he desired the way by which he might leave this world, as a person who is held in prison

for a long time very naturally and earnestly desires his liberty, and as a bird wishes to be freed from his coop or cage to fly through the air. *I desire to depart and to be with Christ* (Phil. 1: 23). Although his body was like a sacred temple of the Holy Ghost whose door was the wound on his side, and the wounds of his hands and feet were like four windows in this temple, yet to his spirit it seemed to be a dark and shadowy prison. *Lead my soul out of prison to praise thy name with the holy angels and the blessed spirits; for the just wait for me and all the saints in heaven and all the holy religious of my Order will make of me a crown of honor and glory for themselves. For they will glory that they have such a great and perfect Father and Patriarch, since thou dost reward me with such glory on earth and in heaven, in the world and in Paradise.*"

II.

Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me (Mt. 11: 28-29). Because of the merit of holy Henoch's virtue, God took him from this world to a better and happier life without his having to die. For according to his name he dedicated himself totally to God and walked with God in the way of justice and sanctity and was pleasing to God (Gen. 5: 24). Therefore, we do not read that he died, but that he was taken up by God to a better life, to signify, as Chrysostom notes, that immortality and eternal life are the reward of virtue as death is the reward of sin. For as the Apostle says, *the wages of sin is death* (Rom. 6: 23), and through sin death entered into the world (Cf. Rom. 5: 12). Thus today Saint Francis, on account of the merit of his sanctity, was taken up from earth to heaven, from this earthly world to the most heavenly Paradise, because he had dedicated himself entirely, interiorly and exteriorly, to the worship of God.

As Moses, the leader of the Jews, at the end of his wanderings went up the peak of a very high mountain to view the happy and blessed land of promise, so today Francis went up to heaven to contemplate Divinity itself. For in this contemplation consists the happiness and glory of all the Saints.

Finally, just as Elias was whirled up into heaven in a fiery chariot, so today was Francis, who on earth was full and overflowing with the twofold spirit of Elias. Behold the chariot: *take my yoke upon you*. He is called an ox under the yoke while he is bound by the yoke and pulls the chariot. The fiery chariot is the law of the Gospel because it consists entirely in charity: *In his right hand a fiery law* (Dt. 33: 2); because

nothing is better or sweeter than fire when we feel cold, as the Scriptures rightly say: *For my yoke is sweet and my burden is light* (Mt. 11:30). For this fire does not burn, but illumines and gently warms, as the fire in the bush of Moses.

The fiery chariot is the Gospel of Christ which has as its four wheels the four cardinal virtues. With these the soul easily observes the laws as an ox easily draws a light chariot which has good wheels. Therefore, as a chariot is drawn not by one ox but by two, so a twofold spirit is necessary for observing the divine law. And just as one's eye, as it enjoys perfect vision, can not see anything without external light, and therefore a twofold light is necessary, so there is also needed a twofold spirit for observing the divine law. This twofold spirit, the human and divine, pulls the chariot with extreme ease. It makes it run, but makes it fly. This is why we read: *A fiery chariot drawn by fiery horses* (4 Kings 2: 11), for the fiery horses are these two spirits, the divine and human. So then Saint Francis took up this sweet yoke and light burden and with the help of the Holy Ghost he pulled the chariot. And by it he was carried up to heaven and was taken to the Paradise of God.

SAINT FRANCIS IN RUSSIAN SPIRITUALITY

Saint Francis is one of the few western medieval Saints who have been highly venerated in Russia. Since there is a striking similarity between Franciscan and Russian spirituality, Christian Russia has embraced Francis as her own, recognizing in him her own spiritual life. And even though he is a Roman Catholic, his feast is celebrated throughout Russia on October 4th. The Fordham Russian Center assures us that the immortal *Fioretti* has so captivated the Russian heart that it is the most popular Catholic book in the Russian language.¹ All of Russia knew whom Lenin referred to when on his deathbed he cried:

I have made a great mistake. Our main purpose was to give freedom to a multitude of oppressed people. But our method of action has created worse evils and horri-

¹The eighth Russian edition has sold out. The Fordham Russian Center would like to publish a new edition if it could find some assistance.

ble massacres. You know that my deadly nightmare is to feel that I am lost in this ocean of blood, coming from innumerable victims. It is too late to turn back now, but in order to save our country, Russia, we should have had ten men like Francis of Assisi. With ten such men we would have saved Russia.

The core of the Franciscan spirit is Christ, the God-Man. For Saint Francis the life of the Friars Minor is to observe the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Saint Bonaventure, who is considered the foremost exponent of Franciscan spirituality, adopted Saint Francis' view of Christ as the center of all things, not only of philosophy and the sciences, but of theology as well. No one can read Dostoevsky or Tolstoy, the two great thinkers who have succeeded most admirably in expressing the aspirations of the Russian people, without being struck by the thoroughly Christo-centric and Franciscan spirit that moves them. Berdiaev points out with gratification that ultimately Russian mysticism does not differ from the mysticism of Saint Bonaventure.

In her golden book, *The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought*, Nadejda Gorodetzky shows that one of the most constant features in Russian folk-lore, literature, and theology is the figure of the humiliated Christ. Dostoevsky, who has revealed and immortalized the soul of Christian Russia in his world-famous novels, summarized this attitude in the words: "I have never been able to conceive mankind without Christ." And again: "If it were not for the precious image of Christ before us, we should be undone and altogether lost." In fact, his whole purpose in writing was to bring Christ back into the center of Russian social, political and economic life. In both Franciscan and Russian spirituality, therefore, Christ, is the key to everything.

Whoever is preoccupied with seeing Christ in the center of all things will illuminate the world with his joy. But with what do we associate Saint Francis if not with exuberant joy? We find him saying: "What are the friars but joyous minstrels of the Lord, who move and excite the hearts of men to spiritual joy?" This joy is echoed by Dostoevsky: "Love all God's creatures and pray God to make you cheerful. Be cheerful as children and as the birds." What is remarkable about Franciscan and Russian joy is that it thrives on

suffering. Saint Francis composed his Sun Song while prostrate with illness and almost blind. The Russian people, as Dostoevsky writes, "come out again and again, also realize the atoning power of their suffering and with tears of joy bless God and cause others to bless Him."

"With all thy heart love the Love which loves thee, the Love which desires thee, and has created thee to draw thee to Himself" (*Mirror of Perfection*). What more shall we say of the Holy Father's love of God? We cannot even picture Saint Francis without some manifestation of this love. Now we see him kneeling for the lepers, his brother Christians, at another time, giving his habit to some ragged beggar; again, with a lark on his shoulder and a lamb at his feet, and the Sun Song on his lips: "Praise be to my Lord, through all Thy creatures. . . Praise be to Thee, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth. . . Praise and bless the Lord, give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility." Dostoevsky, in a like vein, gives words to the Russian soul which might have been sung by Francis himself: "Love a man even in his suffering, that is the semblance of Divine Love, and in the highest degree on earth. Love all God's creation,—the whole and every grain of dust in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything." It is this sublime dogma of love which has made Dostoevsky peerless among Christian novelists and has made the world pay tribute to the all-embracing love of the Christian Russian soul.

What saint has had a more tender devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God than Saint Francis? Celano assures us that he rejoiced like a child over every mark of love and esteem shown to Saint Francis consecrated himself and his entire Order to Mary. He always cherished Saint Mary of the Angels as the cradle of his life. The beautiful Marian prayers of the liturgy and Little Office did not satisfy his devotion to Mary, which overflowed in hymns and prayers composed in her honor. The most charming of these is the "Salutation of the Blessed Virgin." His children in all three Orders have always cherished this devotion to Mary as their personal heritage. Saint Anthony, Saint Bonaventure, Blessed Duns Scotus, Saint Bernadin of Siena, and Saint Lawrence of Brindisi—all champions of Mary's prerogatives—have burned themselves out to enlighten the Church with their profession of Mary's glory. Saint Lawrence

of Brindisi speaks for the whole Order when he concludes that Mary, after Christ, God's greatest blessing to the Universal Church, the source of blessings, than which none greater could be thought of, the grace she can do all things for us with God, the Almighty. Francis' devotion to the Mother of God cannot be imagined without this tender devotion to Mary.

Now devotion to the Mother of God is also an essential part of Russian spirituality. The Holy Father in his Marian Year Encyclical calls upon our Russian brethren to unite their prayers with hers, "knowing full well how greatly they venerate the Mother of God, Jesus Christ and celebrate her Immaculate Conception." The Byzantine liturgy is at once the source and expression of Russian devotion to the Mother of God. It is resplendent with numerous and exquisite prayers to Mary, such as this solemn commemoration:

It is indeed proper to bless thee, Mother of God, the eternally blessed and completely sinless one and the Mother of God. Higher in honor than the Seraphim, who without harm to thy virginity didst give birth to the word of God: thee we extol, true Mother of God.²

The Russian liturgy insistently repeats this versicle in the first antiphon: "through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Savior, save us."³

An excellent example of Russian devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, is the veneration of icons. Nearly every Russian Christian reserves a place of honor in his home for an icon of Mary. He keeps a lamp burning before it and kneeling there recites his prayers. Thus, Seraphim of Sarov, one of the latest Russian saints, expired while kneeling before his beloved icon, "The Holy Virgin of Tenderness."⁴

What is the Mother of God? Dostoevsky, groping for words to express the Russian love for Mary, replies that she is "the great Mother, the hope of the human race."

Dostoevsky created a positive type of Russian sanctity in the

²The Byzantine Liturgy, Fordham Russian Center, 1953, p. 50

³Ibid. p. 20

⁴More examples of Russian devotion to Mary can be found in "Mary in the Eastern Liturgies" by Very Rev. Cuthbert Gumbinger O.F.M.Cap. in the *Encyclopedic Mariology* (edited by Father Juniper Carol, O.F.M.; to be published soon by Bruce Co.)

person of Father Zossima, who has gained literary immortality because of radiant joy and seraphic love. Dostoevsky's model for the Russian saint was Saint Tychon of Zadonsk, the most beloved Saint of Russia, whose spirituality was centered around the Cross, the sufferings of Christ and Divine Love crucified. Saint Tychon, like Saint Francis, taught this to the people and assured them that through the love of the humiliated, crucified Christ would preserve them from sin and lead them to beatitude. Father Zossima so resembles the Russian saint that he is called the Russian Saint Francis. Ivan, one of the "Brothers Karamazov," even calls him "Seraphic Father." To believe, is the fundamental reason why Zossima is the ideal Russian Saint and why Saint Francis enjoys such popularity in Russia because they are *seraphic* fathers, one in fiction, one in reality. Pope John Sheen lists love of mankind as "the first characteristic note of the Russian people" (*Life is Worth Living*), and Helen Iswolsky's penetrating *Soul of Russia* shows that every ideology in Russian spiritual and cultural history was formed by love.

No one should be surprised that we have relied to a large extent on literature to reveal the spirit of Russia, for the spirituality of every civilization finds its best expression in its literature. This is especially true of Russia, for Soloviev insists that the central idea of Russian literature is a religious and moral one founded on the conviction of the sanctity of human personality and human life.

We have frequently quoted Dostoevsky because his message is the message of Christ, his model is the life of Christ, and his philosophy is the philosophy of Christ. With these three he has been able to portray the Christian spirit of Russia better than any other author. The message, model, and philosophy of Dostoevsky are the same as those of Saint Francis; hence, his great appeal to us Franciscans.

These are but a few of the similarities between the Franciscan and Russian spiritualities which bring us to a greater understanding and love of our suffering Russian brothers. They move us to greater obedience to the pleas of our Mother, pleas that we pray and sacrifice ourselves that Russia soon may be one with us in love, in freedom and in faith.

ELEMENTS AND SIGNS OF A VOCATION

The theory or theology of a vocation, whether to the religious life or to the Priesthood, is by no means a perfectly defined teaching. The controversy during the past fifty years or more makes that clear to us. Nor is the question totally settled by the most recent works on the subject. We do not propose to enter into this in any detail, but to limit the discussion to what is fairly well agreed upon in present-day theological circles.

The adequate concept of a vocation would rightly embrace the following elements: a call from God, the due qualities of soul, mind and body in the subject, and the express invitation or acceptance by ecclesiastical authorities. These would go to make up the complete vocation of a man to the priesthood or to the religious life (or both). Within these, however, we may rightly distinguish two aspects, the antecedent divine vocation, with due qualities in the subject; and on the other hand, the external calling by the Bishop or superior.

In the following pages we shall endeavor to point out the importance of each of these elements; and proceed to practical norms to be followed in accepting or rejecting candidates for the religious life and priesthood. In the latter, we have in mind primarily the choice of candidates for the priesthood in the Order, not those for the lay state.

PART I. ELEMENTS OF A VOCATION

What many moderns have written on vocations has been anticipated long ago by St. Francis in a few simple sentences of the Rules. Analysis of his words and of modern writers will show that there are two elements, two aspects of a vocation: the material (subjective, internal), on the part of the candidate; the formal (objective, external), on the part of ecclesiastical superiors. Both must enter to guarantee a true and complete vocation.

A. THE SUBJECTIVE ELEMENT

A certain amount of controversy has been engaged in on this point, in which some have gone to the extreme in emphasizing the internal vocation; while others have, at the opposite extreme, claimed

that there is no subjective vocation properly so-called, that the vocation is that given by authorities in accepting a man into a religious institute or admitting him to Sacred Orders.

1. *The Divine Call*

However, to limit vocation purely to the external, ecclesiastical vocation would exclude what manifestly belongs in the picture of the action of the Holy Spirit as the soul of the Mystical Body, the Providence of God caring for the growth of the Church. A theory would run contrary to the manifest tradition of the Church. For example, St. Francis: "If any one, by divine inspiration, wishes to enter this life" [*Regula prima*, c. 2]; and the words of recent Pope Pius XI: "God himself liberally sows in the generous hearts of young men this precious seed of vocation;"¹ and Pius XII spoke of the "impulse and invisible action of the Holy Ghost . . . the divine call, etc."² Hence we must admit the action of divine Providence and the role of divine grace.

But wherein specifically does this consist? Here theologians do not agree. And here also we meet with some extreme and erroneous views, particularly an extreme predestination theory of vocation, one that is called the "attraction theory."

According to some more ancient theologians, in the centuries immediately after the Council of Trent, there was an apriori determination for each individual, that one must embrace such and such a state of life or else lose his soul.³ Thus Massillon (1697): "The choice of state of life (fixed by God from eternity) is for us the only way to salvation which God has prepared for us. . . In order to obtain the graces of any state it is necessary that God Himself call us to that state."⁴ Even St. Alphonsus can be quoted as holding to such a theory. To it was later added another element, that this antecedent predestination was indicated by an attraction to the priesthood or religious life.⁵ That is, some taught that a strong interior attraction was required as a certain sign of this divine predestination, a

¹Encyclical on the Priesthood, NCWC ed., p. 54.

²Pius XXII, *Menti Nostrae* (1950), nn. 75-76.

³Cf. J. Blowick, *Priestly Vocation*, pp. 19-38.

⁴Quoted, *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵J. Blowick, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-75; A. Carr, *Vocation to the Priesthood*, pp. 88-93.

Farrell, *The Theology of Religious Vocation*, pp. 10-19.

peculiar supernatural attraction, a strong and permanent inclination, or a sweet impulse which is felt in the depths of the soul and leaves little or no doubt that one has been called by God."⁶ In fact, Branchereau, a French theologian (1819-1913), went so far as practically to identify divine vocation and attraction, seeing in the latter "a sort of interior dictate in which we believe that we recognize the expression of God's will for us . . . a secret instinct that tells us that God is calling on us."⁷

Against such theories, we must argue first of all that the absolute predestination theory would seem to destroy the distinction between counsel and precept, and the liberty of choice which God offers us in regard to a state of life.⁸ Moreover, overemphasis on attraction can distort the subjective and purely interior element of a vocation in an unnecessary cloak of mysticism and subjectivism. Furthermore, it opens the way to scruples and subjective analysis. And, some opponents argue, were one to carry the principles of this view to their logical conclusion, it would mean that a man had a right to the priesthood or religious life, while superiors would be forced to admit him.⁹

What then can we admit, as we must admit, in the divine element of a vocation? Certainly this, that there is a certain predestination by Divine Providence of certain men for the priesthood (and, to some extent, for the religious life) independently of their personal merits. God does this for the good of the Church, to provide ministers for the continuance of the saving work of Christ. But this is not an absolute predestination, but rather a divine inspiration, an *afflatus*, sown in the heart of a youth, "the seed of a vocation." Hence it is a gift of God which ought to be accepted, yet which may be refused likewise. It is therefore some action of God upon the rational faculties of the soul, producing a special effect of moving these powers to know, to desire, to decide to embrace the religious life or priesthood.¹⁰ But it is not final, rather inchoative in character, per-

⁶E. Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁷Quoted by J. Blowick, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁸Cf. A. J. Vermeersch, *Religious and Ecclesiastical Vocation*, esp. pp. 34 ff.; J. Blowick, *op. cit.*, pp. 87 ff.

⁹On this point, cf. E. Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 11, n. 4.

¹⁰Cf. E. Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

fectible by the formal acceptance, and even previously to be by human agents, parents, teachers, confessors, pastors, superiors, etc.

In what precisely this subjective call consists, we leave others to declare. Fr. Edward Farrell would place it not in grace, nor in any actual grace, but rather in the virtue of and even more specifically in an intense act of devotion—God.¹¹

2. Signs of a Vocation (Canonical Fitness)

Now, if God so chooses that a man be called to the priesthood (or to religious life), He will, in His infinite power and wisdom, prepare that subject by bestowing on him (besides divine graces) talents of mind and body as are requisite to such calling. There may be the signs of a vocation, while the lack of a divine vocation may also be manifest by negative signs, by the lack of proper gifts and talents. This is the teaching of Pius XI, in his Encyclical on the Priesthood; of Pius XII, in *Menti nostrae* (76ff), and the tradition of the Church.

These signs constitute "canonical fitness," *idoneitas canonica*, and shall be considered below.

B. THE OBJECTIVE ELEMENT

After detailing what is required of the candidates, the Constitutions of our Order proceeds to say that the Ministers may accept them and give them the clothes of probation. St. Francis hereby points to the objective or formal side of a vocation. The canonical fitness of the candidates, were, the potential element which needs must be perfected by the formal principle, the choice by the ecclesiastical superior. It is his duty to pass judgment on the canonical fitness of those who apply, and then admit them if he judge it prudent and opportune.

In the vocation to the diocesan priesthood, the Bishop is the ordinary minister of vocation; his *potestas ordinaria* he delegates in some extent to the officials of the seminary, the rector, faculty, and confessor; the confessors and spiritual directors in the seminary have no formal forum only.¹² With exempt religious, the Major Superior

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 98 ff; p. 112.

¹²Cf. J. Blowick, *op. cit.*, pp. 238-246; and A. Carr, *op. cit.*, pp. 43 ff.

to the ordinary ministers, since they issue letters to the ordaining Bishop and have the responsibility by law of the right selection of candidates. In turn, the lectors, masters, spiritual director, etc., share this duty of judging candidates.

In regard to the religious vocation, the Minister Provincial or the Major Superior is the ordinary minister, since with him lies the final judgment of admitting a man to the novitiate or profession. He in turn entrusts judgment to the lectors, discreet of the convent, etc., in helping him make a proper selection for the good of the order and of the Church.

Hence we would say that the seed of the divine vocation given to a candidate remains always imperfect and at best inchoate prior to the formal acceptance by the Superior or the call of the Bishop. However, to put forward the thesis that the totality of the concept of vocation lies in this formal element is an extreme view. Yet it was the thesis propounded by the Reverend Canon Lahitton, and accepted by many.¹³ Their stand was and is based on a misconception or misreading of a decree of the Holy See giving approval (1912) to three statements in Lahitton's book, *La Vocation Sacerdotale*.

One of the statements approved was that the sacerdotal vocation does not at all consist, at least necessarily and ordinarily, in a certain internal attraction of the subject or in inducements of the Holy Spirit to enter the priesthood. Another statement read that nothing further is necessary in the one to be ordained than the right intention together with suitability, founded on those gifts of nature and grace and confirmed by probity of life and sufficiency of learning, which give well-founded hope that he will be able to fulfill the duties of the priestly state properly and observe the obligations of that state holily.¹⁴

However, the Holy See did not approve a further statement of Lahitton, that no special divine call was required, that antecedent divine vocation was a fiction. . . . Nevertheless, many have misconstrued the decree to read it as an approval, to maintain therefore that "it has been definitely decided that a priestly vocation consists

¹³For the historical details, cf. E. Farrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 20 ff; F. Duffey, *Testing the Spirit*, pp. 144-154.

¹⁴Text in A. J. Vermeersch, *op. cit.*, p. 76; F. Duffey, *op. cit.*, p. 146; E. Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

properly and exclusively in the act of the ordaining bishop a candidate to present himself for ordination. . . [or] analog [that] a divine vocation to religious state [would] consist tot solely in the act of a superior approving or admitting an asp profession or a candidate to the novitiate."¹⁵

The decree, therefore, simply dealt the deathblow to the ordination theory—that and nothing more. It did not exclude any divine vocation, an invitation of the Holy Spirit. This would be in accordance with the tradition of the Church. Moreover, it is untenable against the tradition of the Church. Moreover, it is untenable in the light of the recent documents of the Papacy on the priesthood and vocations. At most, Lahitton's position may be accepted from a judicial viewpoint, but it is not acceptable theologically.¹⁶

To be Continued

¹⁵E. Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁶Thus Fr. Pacificus Perantoni: "Where the previous divine vocation spirit nature and grace is absent, the mere canonical vocation to the Order, cannot be one's acceptance by the superior upon merely external points of suitability does not constitute a true vocation." (Encyclical, "Franciscan Spirituality," p. 25.)

Fr. Ignatius Brady

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