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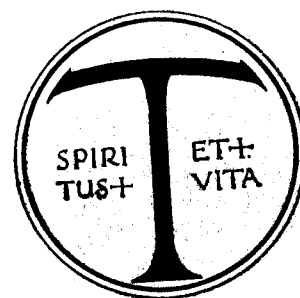
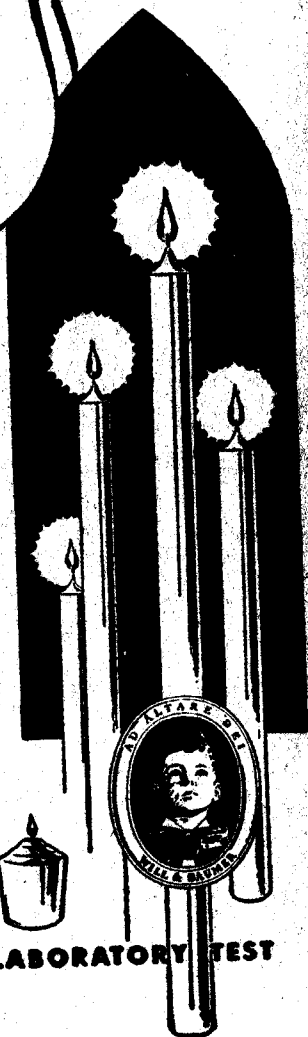
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# the CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

VOL. VI, NO. 5, MAY, 1956

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## THE MONTHLY CONFERENCE

### THE QUEENSHIP OF MARY

#### I

In the Book of Esther we find recorded a dramatic episode in Jewish history. It occurred around 480 B.C., when the Jews were in exile. The scene was the glittering court of Xerxes the Great, or Assuerus, as the Hebrews pronounced it. The Persian prince was lord and master of the whole Eastern world, from Ethiopia to India, and ruled with an iron hand. Though Xerxes himself was not an evil man, Aman, his prime minister, was cleverly and unscrupulously cruel, especially in his hatred of the Jews. He finally managed to convince Xerxes that Persia's greatest enemy was not any of her foreign foes but the subject Hebrew people who were weakening the empire from within. He connived a wholesale massacre that would wipe God's chosen people off the face of the earth. The facts were made public. The date was set. In all the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the empire the terrible edict was published. The Jews, however, turned to prayer and penance, and implored God to save them from destruction. In this crisis there was one ray of hope: unknown to either the king or the prime minister, the queen was a Jewess.

It had happened in somewhat strange fashion. When Xerxes had returned from his conquest of Greece, he had ordered a tremendous celebration that went on for days. The princes of neighboring states and the governors of the Persian provinces had been invited to the banquet hall that they might glimpse the power and glory of Xerxes the Great. On the seventh day of the feast, the impulse had seized him to have Queen Vasthi brought to the banquet hall that he might display her beauty before his guests. But Vasthi was proud, and had refused to have her royal dignity exhibited before the roistering nobles. The consequence of her affront to the royal will had been deposition. Thereupon Xerxes had sent couriers to every province of the empire to select the most beautiful maidens they could find and to bring them into his presence that he might choose a successor to the deposed Queen. And of all the beautiful maidens in the Persian empire, Esther, niece and adopted

daughter of Mardochaeus the Jew, had seemed most desirable to the mighty Xerxes. He made her his Queen, and raised her up from her lowly estate. At the advice of Mardochaeus, however, she had said nothing of her Jewish origin. Mardochaeus, on his part, had kept close to the royal court that he might watch over his lovely Esther as much as possible. That was how he happened to discover a plot against the King's life. He relayed the information to Esther, who brought it to the King. The conspirators had been punished and Mardochaeus' name, according to Persian custom, had been put on public record as a benefactor of the King. But this had occurred months ago, and now when the Prime Minister Aman was planning to exterminate the Jews, the name of Mardochaeus was gathering dust in the royal archives. There was no way of bringing it to the King's attention; no way, unless Queen Esther would act for him. But this was no easy matter in an age and a nation wherein kings were hailed as gods and women regarded as mere slaves of male pleasure. It was, in fact, strictly forbidden for any of the King's women to enter his presence unless called for. The penalty for disobedience was quite effective. It was death.

Yet Queen Esther could not ignore the message of her foster father. *Remember the days of thy low estate and speak to the king for us and deliver us from death* (15:2). She asked her people to pray and fast with her for three days and three nights; then, arraying herself in her most splendid attire, she presented herself with fear and trembling at the throne-room of her lord. When Xerxes saw her his face darkened with anger. To the trembling girl he seemed like one of God's avenging angels. Thinking that all was lost, she grew faint and sank to the floor. But then, as Scripture says, God touched the King's heart and his anger turned to compassion. He extended his sceptre as a sign of pardon, but Esther did not see it. She had fainted with fear. Xerxes rose from his throne and lifted his Queen tenderly in his arms. "*Fear not,*" he said to her, "*thou shalt not die; for this law is not made for thee but for all others*" (15:12-13). "*If thou shouldst even ask one half of the kingdom, it shall be given to thee*" (5:3). So Esther was allowed to plead for her people, and the King reversed his edict. It was not the Jews that were wiped out, but their enemies. Queen Esther had saved her people.

Sacred history, no less than profane history, repeats itself. Queen Esther was God's token or sign of greater things to come. And it is to honor the fulfillment of that token that the Church has introduced the Feast of Our Lady's Queenship which we will celebrate for the first time this year. For, as Pope Benedict XIV put it: "She is that most beautiful Esther whom the King of kings so loved that for the salvation of His people He seems somehow to have granted her not a half but the whole of His kingdom and all of His power" (*Gloriosae Dominae*, Sept 27, 1748).

## II

Certainly there are many reasons why Mary can be called "Queen." Metaphorically, any woman who excels others in loveliness, virtue, sweetness, graciousness, or any other perfection could be called "queen." Esther was the beauty queen of Persia even before she wore the bridal ring of Xerxes and Queen Vasthi's golden crown. And because Mary's beauty was flawless—because she was all-fair and there was no spot of imperfection in her, she is *Queen conceived without original sin*. Because she was full of grace, she is *Queen of all Saints*. Because she was the handmaid of the Lord, she is *Queen of Virgins*, where "virgin" means one consecrated or dedicated to God in love.

But Mary is more than queen in metaphor. She is queen in fact and in truth. There are three ways in which a woman may be truly queen: as Queen-mother, as Queen-consort, and as Queen-ruler. When Elizabeth ascended England's throne a few years ago, it was as Queen-ruler. But there were two other titled queens in her family, neither of whom had ever ruled England: Elizabeth, her mother, who was queen because she had been the consort or wife of King George VI, and Mary, her grandmother, because she was the mother of King George. In Our Lady all three titles are present. For when the King of kings searched for another Esther, He chose a queen who would mother Him in His infancy, who would stand beneath His cross, and who would rule with Him one day in heaven. Mary is the Queen-mother of the Annunciation; the Queen-consort of the Crucifixion; and the Queen-ruler in her Assumption and Coronation.

1) Mary became Queen-mother at the Annunciation. "*Be not afraid, Mary,*" the angel said, "*for thou hast found grace with God.*"

*And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he shall be king over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end"* (Lk. 1:30-33).

2) But Mary was also to be Queen-consort, the feminine companion and associate of the Saviour-King in His redemptive work. For in consenting to the incarnation, Mary consented to become *Queen of Martyrs*, to sacrifice not merely her own life, but Him who was infinitely more precious. For the Child she was to bear was a Jesus, that is, a saviour, a redeemer. Mary had no illusions on this score. And even if she had, they would have been quickly dispelled. First there was Simeon's prophecy; then the flight into Egypt. We may wonder if Mary could ever forget the heart-piercing cries of those Judean mothers whose babes had been torn from their arms and slaughtered by Herod's soldiers. And as the years passed, the pattern grew clearer. There was the incident when Mary and Joseph had to search three days for their twelve-year-old Jesus, only to find Him sitting calmly in the midst of the Temple doctors discoursing with them. And to Mary's gentle reproach He had answered so strangely: *"Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"* And Scripture tells us that neither she nor Joseph understood the word that he spoke to them, but adds that *his mother kept all these things carefully in her heart*. And the more she pondered them, the more she began to realize that this Son she had come to love as any other normal mother, did not belong to her. And she knew that if she would share His ideals, His hopes and aspirations, as she had shared His childish confidences, she too must be concerned about His Father's business. Sometimes we forget that Mary was only about fifteen years older than her son, hardly the difference between the oldest and youngest child of a large family. And when Joseph died, it was Jesus who became the man of the house, who supported His mother. In those years they were much more like two dear friends than mother and son, and when Our Lady heard her Son speak of His lost sheep, her own heart must have burned within her and she must have longed to share His redemptive work as far as possible.

There were two occasions when Christ addressed His mother as "woman." Significantly, they were at the beginning and at the end of His public career: at Cana, when He was embarking on His messianic mission, and on the cross, when His career reached its climax. You may find a footnote in your Bible pointing out that "woman" is not a term of contempt or reproach. But that is not all that can be said of the word. It is still a strange term for a son to use in addressing his mother, and the meaning of that term takes on deeper significance when we turn to the first pages of Genesis. When Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed the serpent that tempted them: *"I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel"* (Gen. 3:15). It was in reference to Mary that God made this promise, for through her Son she would crush the devil's power. Just as the "Son of Man" was Christ's messianic title, the title by which the prophets referred to Him, so "Woman" was Mary's messianic title, the name under which her coming was foretold. And it is here that theologians see an indication that the human race was promised not only a new Adam, a redeemer, but also a new Eve, a co-redemptrix. But here we must tread cautiously. We know that Christ alone is our redeemer in the full and strict sense, for His death was the price of our sin and by it He purchased for us sanctifying grace, which is the Christ-life in our soul. But as Eve played a part in our downfall, God willed that a woman should be partner in our redemption. If Mary had any power of intercession with God, any ability to merit grace for her children, she owed it to her Son. As Eve was the fruit of Adam's side, so Mary was the first-fruit of the lanced side of Christ. But just as Eve in union with Adam became the *mother of all the living*, so Mary in union with Christ was to be the source of that more abundant life that Christ could give. And that is why the woman at the foot of the cross is not so much Queen-mother as Queen-consort. For Mary had come to surrender all her maternal ties that Christ might become the world's ransom. No two souls were ever so closely knit as that day on Calvary. Christ suffered that we might become *sons of God*; Mary suffered that we might become brothers of her First-born. In that moment, then, they were no longer mother and son but the man and the woman. And

to proclaim that truth for all ages to come, the Son of Man turned to the Messianic Woman and said: "*Woman, behold thy son.*" And looking at John, who in that moment had become a type of all those begotten in Christ, He added: "*Behold thy mother.*" To the King of kings Mary became Queen-consort; to us she became mother.

3) But it was not enough that Mary be Queen-mother by divine election, or Queen-consort by personal conquest. She must also be Queen-ruler. That is why her Annunciation and the Crucifixion had their sequel in her Assumption and Coronation; for it is in heaven that she exercises the fulness of her Queenship.

Unlike Queen Elizabeth II of England or Queen Victoria before her, Mary is not simply a feminine monarch, a substitute king, wielding her power independently of the King of kings. The Papal declaration is clear on this point: "Only Jesus Christ, the God-man, is King in the full and strict meaning of the term" (*Ad coeli Reginam*). On the other hand, Mary is not simply a minister who executes commands or proffers advice. As Albert the Great put it: "The Blessed Virgin has not been called by the Lord to be a minister, but an associate and a partner." Mary in truth has regal power, but her power is her Son's power, and she exercises it in Him and through Him. This is something unique and unparalleled in any other king and queen. Christ has given Mary the fulness of His power. He neither can nor will refuse her anything. Mary, however, on her part, can neither will nor ask for anything contrary to the will of her Son or the welfare of His kingdom.

The fulness of royal or ruling power is threefold: legislative, like that of the Congress; judicial, like that exercised by the Supreme Court; and executive, like that with which the President is invested. In Christ's kingdom, His will is law. But because of her "intercessory omnipotence," her irresistible power over the will of Christ, Mary's will also is law. The perfect judge tempers justice with mercy; and it is our Blessed Lady who exercises in a special way this role before the divine tribunal. For her, to exercise justice is to plead for mercy; which is why we hail our Holy Queen as *Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope*. Mary also shares the administrative or executive power of her Son. As *Queen of*

*Angels, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Confessors, and All Saints*, her jurisdiction extends to the length and breadth of His kingdom. The angels obey her commands, the devils tremble at her footstep. But it is especially as Mediatrix or dispenser of all grace that she administers the economy of salvation. As Saint Bernard said: "God wished that all He gives us should come to us through the hands of our mother."

### III

If there is something tremendous and dazzling about Our Lady's Queenship, there is something more comforting and consoling to know. Like Esther, she has not forgotten her "low estate," when she was one of us. Themistocles told his youngest son that he was the most powerful person in the whole of Greece. "Why?" asked the youngster. "The Athenians command the rest of Greece; I command the Athenians; your mother commands me; and you command your mother!"

Perhaps we can say the same. In *Problem Island*, the Ruler Primus does not wear a crown as a sign of his kingship but a little chain about his wrist, to remind him that the authority he possesses chains him to the service, not the exploitation, of his subjects. Mary too, as the Curé of Ars said, will never rest so long as there is something to be done for her children. And that we might know how to reach her, as *Queen of the Rosary* she taught us how to pray. But if our rosary requests are to have the force of law, they must spring from a humble and contrite heart. Like Esther, Our Lady of the Rosary at Fatima asked that her people pray and do penance, that they amend their lives; for only then can she bring that crowning gift of peace—with God, with our neighbor, and with ourselves—that is somehow the *raison d'être* of her Queenship. Perhaps this is the reason why at the very close of the Litany of Loreto we pray: *Queen of Peace, pray for us.*

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



## THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARITY IN FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

The following has been adapted by the editors from an article by the late Fr. James Heerinckx O.F.M., which appeared serially in *Antonianum*, 1938. The translation is by Fr. Marvin Woelffer, O.F.M.

All theologians and spiritual writers agree that the essence of Christian perfection is charity. Christ Himself made this unmistakably clear. When the doctor of the Law asked Him: "*Master, which is the great commandment in the Law?*" Jesus said to him,

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God  
with thy whole heart,  
and with thy whole soul,  
and with thy whole mind.'*

*This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like it,*

*'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'*

*On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets*" (Mtt. 22:37-40). Saint Paul echoes the words of Christ when he gives first place to charity in the spiritual life: *But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection* (Col. 3:14). Love is the summary of all the Commandments and the fulfillment of the Law (Rom. 13:8-10). Faith itself (Gal. 5:6) and all the other virtues together, have their value and efficacy from charity, and without it they are nothing (I Cor. 13:1-13). Saint Augustine says: "Where there are the beginnings of charity, there are also the beginnings of justice; where charity is practiced, justice is practiced; where charity is dominant, justice is dominant; and where charity is perfect, justice is also perfect."<sup>1</sup> Saint Thomas writes: "The perfection of Christian life consists *per se* and essentially in charity, which manifests itself primarily in love for God, and secondarily in love for neighbor."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*De natura et gratia*, c. 70, n. 84, Migne, P.L. 44, 290.

<sup>2</sup>*Sum. theol.*, II, q. 188, a. 3.

All the faithful without exception are bound to strive for this perfection and charity. *For this is the will of God, your sanctification* (I Thess. 4:3); *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight in love* (Eph. 1:4). In a very special manner religious and priests are bound to tend to the perfection of charity, for they are obliged "to lead a holier interior and exterior life than the laity, and having done this with true virtue and righteousness, to set before the laity their good example."<sup>3</sup>

Even from the little that has thus far been said, we can clearly see the tremendous importance and absolute necessity of love. But love is of a two-fold nature: affective and effective. Now the question is: Can affective love alone lead to perfection? Is it true that one who focuses his loving affection on God and thus allows the Holy Spirit to work within him, is thereby accomplishing the will of God and his own sanctification?

Many pseudo-mystics have fallen into this error and have greatly de-emphasized the personal activity of man, even to the point of excluding it entirely. The accepted Catholic doctrine, however, is this: We ourselves, with the help of God's grace, work out and accomplish our own perfection. *Now he who plants and he who waters are one, yet each will receive his own reward according to his labor. For we are God's helpers* (I Cor. 3:8-9). Saint James tells us: *You see that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only* (Jas. 2:24). For without active co-operation with divine grace on our part, merit, virtue, and perfection would not be intrinsic and proper to the soul, but merely external, and hence would soon disappear, or remain only as figments of the mind.

But in the work of perfection no half-hearted human co-operation is sufficient; this is a task requiring strenuous, unrelenting labor, constant vigilance, the spirit of mortification, and self-denial. We are often inclined to forget that Christ pointed out the spirit of renunciation and sacrifice as the fundamental principle of perfection. *And he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For he who would save his life will lose it; but he who loses his life for my sake will save it"* (Lk. 9:23-25). Saint Paul, the faithful interpreter of Christ's doctrine, teaches plainly that the spiritual

<sup>3</sup>*Codex Juris Canonici*, c. 124, coll. 592.



life is a battle between the flesh and the spirit, between the old man and the new. And he insists repeatedly that we must deny and mortify ourselves. *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, that we should live according to the flesh, for if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live* (Rom. 8:12-13). *And they who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires* (Gal. 5:24).

Accordingly, all the Catholic schools of spirituality have taught that the spirit of mortification and self-denial are necessary. All men, throughout their entire life, are attached to the flesh and to the three concupiscences, and all are inclined to satisfy the cravings of the senses, even in opposition to right reason. Hence, if we wish to persevere in goodness, we must resist the flesh and deny our sensual tendencies. It is required that our virtues be positive and perfect, the results of honest striving; for our co-operation with divine grace must not be *active* merely, but positively *strenuous*. We must put forth every effort to accomplish the difficult and arduous task of following Christ.

Every school of Christian asceticism, therefore, emphasizes the necessity of charity, personal co-operation with grace, and the spirit of self-denial. But from here on there are differences. Spiritual writers in general divide the various schools into two main classes: those that stress love, and those that stress self-denial. Saint Francis de Sales is commonly regarded as blending the Benedictine and the Dominican schools. Trusting in the help to be furnished to man's re-born nature, he places love before everything else in order to make the practice of self-denial somewhat easier. He does not, however, exclude mortification, but he recommends that it be practiced in a temperate and gentle manner so that the desired end may be more easily and surely attained. Saint Francis de Sales thus represents the first class of schools. The second class is exemplified by the Ignatian and French schools of the seventeenth century. Although the authors belonging to these schools do not deny love to God as the purpose and end of asceticism, they nevertheless place the first place, especially for novices, to mortification and love of the cross or the crucifixion of the old man, as the surest way to true and effective love. These authors seem to fear that un-

less one is trained in self-denial right at the beginning of his religious life, he will not progress far in true love of God but will fall into delusion, since his love will be more emotional and imaginative than genuine.

Unfortunately, however, most of the recent spiritual writers have had little to say about the Franciscan school. Surely Franciscan spirituality is distinctive enough and important enough to merit a thorough examination, covering not only self-denial in the strict sense, but also personal co-operation with divine grace or ascetical activity. With this in mind, the present writer has tried to set forth the relationship between charity and ascetical activity, and the ends assigned to both in the Franciscan school.

The relationship between charity and ascetical activity and the scope of each is extremely difficult to establish, yet it is a matter of the utmost importance and should be given thorough consideration. This relationship is a fundamental in ascetical theology, and one that provides countless practical working principles and exerts a tremendous influence upon the entire spiritual life.

Many have written about Franciscan spirituality. There is assuredly no dearth of books on the subject. Yet, one or another isolated study is hardly sufficient to establish clear and definite principles based on sound ascetical theology. Hence it often happens that the untrained reader is misled by the rules of perfection some of those authors have recommended, rules that are insufficiently expounded or else over-done; and almost always the norms of practical conduct advocated by such authors are of little value, if not positively dangerous.

It is our intention, therefore, to look into this matter from an historical point of view and to determine from this the role of charity in traditional Franciscan spirituality. We must note in passing, however, that there are many differences among the various spiritual authors of the Minorite Orders who have written about charity and asceticism in the past seven centuries. Furthermore, some of them have been considerably influenced by other schools and consequently do not have as much of the seraphic

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Krautkraemer, OMFCap., *The Spiritual Life According to Franciscan Masters, The Franciscan Educational Conference*, VIII, pp. 107 ff., (1926) and L. Bracaloni, OFM, *La spiritualita francescana, Studi Francescani*, XXXI (1934) 144-46.

spirit as we could expect.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, however, we shall treat only those doctrines which have always been accepted as characteristic, distinctive, and proper to the Order.

That the importance of charity may be presented the more clearly and intelligibly, we shall first look into the sources of seraphic spirituality. Then we shall consider the specific character of Franciscan charity, and lastly we shall show that charity is the center and soul of our Franciscan life.

## I. THE SOURCES OF FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

### *Saint Francis*

Normally, every school of spirituality has its origin in the spirit of the founder. To become acquainted with the distinguishing characteristics of the various schools, then, we must look mainly to the spirit of the founders themselves. This is especially true of the Franciscan school. Although there are differences among the spiritual writers of the Minorite Orders, there is still a certain family likeness that unites them to our Seraphic Father. Generally speaking, this family likeness is clearly discernible in their basic ascetical principles.

Our Seraphic Father Francis was not a spiritual writer in the accepted meaning of the term, but he did leave us some documents that give a very clear idea of what was going on in his mind. His life and the example he gave to his first companions also help us to know the spirit that guided him.

Without doubt, Saint Francis was wholly evangelical. This is perhaps his most characteristic quality. He desired nothing but to absorb the Gospel teaching of Jesus Christ and to imitate His divine example. Since charity, however, is the first and greatest command of God and the special precept of Christ, we can safely assume that for Francis, too, charity was supreme. Indeed, we can hardly fail to observe that the dominant note in the life of the seraphic Saint was love. At all times and in all circumstances, he gave first consideration to love. Love permeated all his actions and motivated all his undertakings. Love was the wellspring of his admonitions and exhortations, the theme of his preaching, the source of his joy and exuberance and radical simplicity. Ultimately, it was love that crowned all his virtues on Alverna's heights,

and it was love that gave the title "Seraphic" to our holy Father himself and to his Order. Contemplating our Seraphic Father's passionate love for Christ, Saint Bonaventure was moved to exclaim: "Who can describe the burning love that inflamed Francis, the friend of our Spouse? For he was completely absorbed by the flame of divine love as by a burning coal. He was suddenly aroused, stimulated, inflamed by the call of the love of God as though the strings of his heart had been plucked by the plectrum of a voice."<sup>5</sup>

The immediate object of Francis's seraphic love was Jesus Christ in His Sacred Humanity, especially in His crucified Humanity. The love of Francis for the Crucified is expressed in the Franciscan seal of the crossed arms; one is the arm of the wounded Christ, the other is the arm of the stigmatized Francis.

Since Francis loved Christ so intensely, he longed to conform his own life as closely as possible to his divine Master's and to practice all His virtues in the most perfect way. Love impels the lover to adopt the characteristics and habits of the beloved and to become as much like him as possible. The ideal of the Poverello was to imitate the Christ of the Gospel and to be like Him as far as the imperfections of human nature would allow. But the virtues that Francis acquired did not of themselves enable him to reach his goal; rather they were the expressions of his loving desire to become like the Master he adored.

Seraphic poverty, for example, was a visible expression of the Poverello's love for Christ. It was the virtue that Francis loved and practiced most radically and in the most spectacular way; but he did not love it for itself nor did he take consolation in it as an end in itself. Francis loved poverty purely and simply because Christ had loved it and had made it the necessary condition and means for attaining evangelical perfection and for leading the apostolic life. The same may be said of the other virtues that characterize the primitive Franciscan ideal. They all stem from personal love for Christ.

Obviously, then, we can hardly err in calling charity or love of God the source of all the virtues that distinguished our Seraphic Father.

<sup>5</sup>S. Bonaventura, *Legenda major*, c.9, n.1, VIII, 530 a. Cf. Celano, *Vita II*, n. 196.



### *The School of Franciscan Theology*

If we must look to the founder of an Order to discover its true spirit, we must next turn our attention to the theologians of that Order to discover how they set forth the spirit of their founder in the systematic of their ascetical theology.

Among the great theologians in the Franciscan school of spirituality, first place is always given to Saint Bonaventure. Unquestionably, Bonaventure ranks among the greatest teachers of ascetical science, and, as Pope Leo XIII asserted, he easily holds first place in mystical theology.<sup>6</sup> The Seraphic Doctor was deeply filled with the spirit of Saint Francis, and his doctrine is a perfect technical exposition of the mind of our holy Founder. Burning charity, refinement of thought, and intimate union with God distinguished him in life, and these characteristics are easily discernible in both his philosophical and theological works. Even when involved in the complexities of scholastic method, he never fails to dwell upon topics that tend to enkindle a more intense devotion and a more profound love of God. This was the primary purpose of all his writings, and everything he wrote was impregnated with his own burning love and deep knowledge.

As the Roman Pontiff, Sixtus V, says of Saint Bonaventure: "... while writing with profound learning, he nevertheless unites with it an equal ardor of love for God. Thus he moves his readers by his teaching and enters into the intimate recesses of their souls. Then he pierces their hearts with seraphic darts and floods their hearts with a wonderful sweetness of devotion."<sup>7</sup>

We should perhaps mention in passing that the Seraphic Doctor was greatly influenced by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who in turn is largely responsible for the affective element in the spirituality of Saint Bonaventure.

The second great leader of the Franciscan school is Blessed John Duns Scotus, the Subtle Doctor. In matters pertaining to dogmatic and speculative theology, Franciscan scholars from the fourteenth century on have followed Scotus rather than Bonaventure. Although Scotus barely touched the field of mystical theology, it is dogmatic and speculative theology that provide spiritual writers with a solid basis in fact and truth, and consequently his influence on Franciscan spirituality has been very great. In fact the influence of Scotus in speculative matters far outweighs that of Bonaventure, and in Franciscan ascetical works he is frequently given more consideration than the Seraphic Doctor.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Acta Ordinis Minorum*, IX (1890) 177.

<sup>7</sup>*Bulla Triumphantis Hierusalem*, 14 Martii, 1488.

Saint John bore witness to the fact that "*God is love.*" (I Jn. 4:8 and 16). Taking this sentence as a foundation, Scotus built a wonderful theological structure whose stones were cemented together with the mortar of love. For him, love is the complete synthesis of the religious life. It is the reason for all the communications of the Most Holy Trinity to creatures, and it is the necessary condition for creatures, born of the love of God, to attain to their final end. The whole spiritual life, from justification to mystical union, is determined primarily by a progressive increase of infused charity. Finally, the eternal union of the elect with God is consummated in love.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, despite the apparent formality and involved technical style of his writings, Scotus is truly deserving of the title "Doctor of Charity."

### *Some Fundamental Points in Franciscan Theology*

It is not our purpose here to present all the characteristic tenets of the Franciscan school of theology. It will suffice merely to consider in passing some of the more fundamental doctrines that have bearing on the relationship between charity and asceticism.

Seraphic theology considers God under the aspect of infinite perfection and goodness which continually flows in good works and demands above all a return of love. This aspect of Franciscan theology is especially noticeable in the teaching of Duns Scotus. As he puts it so exactly: "God not only causes love and charity but He is love and charity as such."<sup>9</sup> But since God is infinite and most perfect love, by that very fact He loves Himself in an infinite manner and wishes to be loved by others. As Scotus expresses it: "He first loves Himself ordinately and consequently not inordinately, in a jealous or envious fashion. Secondly, He wills to have others as co-lovers."<sup>10</sup> The sole and total reason for divine communications to creatures, therefore, is this love.

The first thing God decreed was the Incarnation of His Son. For even had Adam not sinned, the Word of God would nevertheless have assumed human nature. To use the words of Scotus: "Speaking of the love of someone outside Himself, God wished to be loved by something else able to love Him, and even though no one should fall, He provided for the (hypostatic) union with the nature that was to love Him

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Longpré, *La philosophie du B. Duns Scot*, Paris: 1924, esp. pp. 140, 149, 159; among the most recent and readable discussions of Scotus' doctrine is that of Béraud de Saint-Maurice, *John Duns Scotus, A Teacher for Our Times*, Saint Bonaventure, N. Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1955.

<sup>9</sup>Oxon., I, d. 17, q. 3, n. 31, X, 93a.

<sup>10</sup>Oxon., III, d. 32, q. un., n. 6, XV, 433a, corr. ex ms. Assisi 137, fol. 174b.

in the highest degree possible."<sup>11</sup> Thus Christ is conceived in relation to God even before He was conceived with reference to the world. Christ of course, is the Redeemer of mankind by reason of His most holy Passion. But what is prior and essential to Christ is that He is the Glorifier of the Most Holy Trinity by the love He bears the Trinity in His Heart.

Secondly, Infinite Goodness deigned to create men, that He might love them, communicate Himself to them, and be loved by them in return. Hence it was in Christ, because of Christ, and through Christ that men received existence, and Christ became the *first-born of all creation* (Col. 1:15).

Even the pre-vision of Adam's sin did not, according to Scotus' view, make the Incarnation of the Divine Word—not to mention His Passion and Death—necessary, not even hypothetically necessary—that is, on the assumption that God willed to receive satisfaction sufficiently equivalent to the offenses committed against Him. And yet God's supreme love triumphs completely over the evil by a new decree of mercy, that of the Incarnation of the Word together with His sorrowful Passion and ignominious death, as well as the whole economy of the Redemption with all the graces that would arise therefrom. Thus because Christ could have redeemed man by other means and yet freely chose this way, we are bound to love Him very much, "more so," as Scotus says, "than if this had been necessary, or the only way we could have been redeemed. He did this, then, primarily to draw us to His love, and because He wanted man to be attached to God even more."<sup>12</sup>

Almost the entire Franciscan school, and many theologians outside the Order, have held this opinion of Scotus concerning the motive for the Incarnation. As God became incarnate because of love, so too, because of love, He revealed Himself to us and redeemed us. All human activity, therefore, should be subordinated to the demands of love, and in so far as love can be the end of a deliberate action, one ought to render to God charity for charity. The theologians of our Order view primarily under the aspect of the good not only God but also created beings and by this goodness of being they mean the essence. From this arises Voluntarism, or the doctrine that holds the primacy of the will over the intellect and a certain independence of the will from the intellect. Just as the Thomists profess Intellectualism, so the Franciscans hold fast to Voluntarism, which is one of the most widely known doctrines of the Augustinian-Franciscan school.

Saint Bonaventure has this to say: "...since the theological virtues

<sup>11</sup>*Rep. Par.*, III, d.7, q.4, n.5, XXIII, 303b.

<sup>12</sup>*Oxon.*, III, d. 20, n. 10, XIV, 738a.

have as their object that which is uncreated, so they are the more perfect the more they unite with and join with that object . . . ; charity is the greatest (unitive) virtue among the theological virtues, and consequently its performance or act makes men more like God than the others. Consequently, as regards the uncreated object, the more noble manner of understanding is through touch and embrace, rather than through sight or insight."<sup>13</sup> Although the act of love cannot function without some knowledge, nevertheless, according to Saint Bonaventure—whom the Franciscan mystics follow and support—the extension of love is much broader than knowledge. For the faculty of cognition is not able to attain to the Supreme Being except through vision of Him, but love is able to reach Him through goodness, and in so far as He can be touched and enjoyed.

Thus, since Franciscan theology lays emphasis on Voluntarism, it subjects the intellect to love and extols the personal activity of man and his cooperation with divine grace.

According to the teaching of Saint Thomas and his school, theology is more of a speculative science than a practical one.<sup>14</sup> The Franciscan school, on the contrary, considers theology an affective and practical science. This is not the place to discuss whether or not Saint Francis was opposed to learning. But this much can be said: undoubtedly he was opposed to vain or mere speculative knowledge that is not carried out into some kind of action. On the other hand, he advocated affective, practical knowledge that results in love of God. This is clear from his writings, especially his *Testament*, where he says: "And all the theologians and persons who administer the most holy words of God, we must honor and respect as people who minister spirit and life to us." It is in this spirit of "ministering spirit and life" that Alexander of Hales, the founder of the Franciscan school, regards theology not as a theoretical but as an affective science.

The Seraphic Doctor insists upon this even more strongly. He regards theology, in so far as it is an affective science, to be principally ordained to make man become good, and in so far as it is wisdom or complete knowledge, to be something more than mere knowledge and to involve affection and spiritual relish. According to Bonaventure, this is the end and the fruit not only of Sacred Science but also of "all science, so that in all, faith may be strengthened, God may be honored, character may be formed, and consolation may be derived from the union of the Spouse with His beloved, a union which takes place through charity, to the attainment of which the whole purpose of Sa-

<sup>13</sup>*III Sent.*, d. 27, a.2, q.k, ad6, III, 604b.

<sup>14</sup>*Summa*, I, q.1, a.4.

cred Scripture, and consequently, every illumination descending from above, is directed—a charity without which all knowledge is vain. . .<sup>15</sup>

According to the Subtle Doctor, theology is a practical science, for as Saint Paul exclaims; *Love is the fulfillment of the Law* (Rom. 13:10). The *praxis* or action theology is concerned with is love, and practical theology is nothing more than a theology of charity. This practical knowledge “was not developed to escape ignorance,” as Scotus tells us, “but because of our inner needs, namely, to control our passions and actions.”<sup>16</sup> The ultimate end of theology is not the knowledge or vision of God but the love of God seen face to face. It is in this love that Scotus primarily places eternal beatitude. Hence, the saints “seek to know God more and more in proportion to the extent that they love Him, and finally their interior acts by which the will commands exterior acts are so ordained that the will arrives at the vision of God. And this vision is ultimately ordained for the love of God Himself.”<sup>17</sup> Yet the practical truths of this science “are repeated frequently so that the hearer may be more efficaciously induced to put into action those things which are here presented persuasively.”<sup>18</sup> Such is Scotus’ opinion.

Since almost the entire school of Franciscan spirituality follows the basic principles set forth above, it has a distinctively affective character. Love is the characteristic note of Franciscan learning and of Franciscan spirituality. To know is to love. Often, indeed, to love is better than to know. Even in the highest reaches of speculation, Franciscan theology places love as the Alpha and Omega of truth, as the queen of the intellect, as the infinite Good, which is formally the beatitude of the elect; and thus love becomes the supreme purpose of our entire life.

(To be continued)

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Fr. Marvin Woelffer, O.F.M. (Transl.)

<sup>15</sup>*De reductione*, n. 26, V, 325b.

<sup>16</sup>*Oxon.* I, c.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, prol., q. 4, Comment., n.84, VIII, 243a.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, n. 42, VIII, 286a.

## THE HOLY FRIARS OF SAXONY

### HOLY NICHOLAS: FRIAR AND TEACHER

#### I. His sanctity even in childhood.

7. Now when God through the merits of holy Father Francis had multiplied the friars throughout the Province of Saxony, He willed that the seed of the father’s holiness should bear fruit in his sons. And so, out of the riches of His goodness, He poured into some of them His abounding grace in order to show clearly how all who follow that holy father on the path of perfection in our Order are guided by Him in their activities and how He takes care of them always as His beloved children. Therefore after the death of Saint Francis, when the friars of the Saxon province began to offer to God the sacrifice of a contrite heart and exemplary life, a certain schoolmaster named Nicholas, seeing the exemplary humility and ardent devotion of the friars, entered their Order and became a truly holy man, a mirror and pattern of the whole religious life.<sup>7</sup>

8. Since Nicholas had been born during Saint Nicholas’ night, he kept the name of that saint whose life even in boyhood he had begun to imitate, for he was a child with a good disposition. After he had passed from that tender age into the years of adolescence, he began to make progress in the things of God: not only did he acquire the solid foundation of scholarship but he strove also to develop his character and to cultivate chastity. He was so successful in this that during the whole course of his life he never committed a deliberate mortal sin nor did he ever stain his body through the petulance of the flesh. When he had reached manhood and had mastered the habit of perfect learning, he became headmaster of the students at the Church of Saint Sebastian in Magdeburg. At this place a flourishing school existed which was attended by students in great numbers. During his lectures he often interspersed some wholesome and edifying word on God so that at times his hearers were moved to sobs and tears. Also on the days when a Latin sermon was customarily delivered in the Cathedral, he urged his students to attend, advising them not to neglect good works for the sake of study and learning. And as Friar Daniel, who was a pupil of his at that time, used to say, he not only taught his students effectively but he also edified them by his spirit of prayer, by the austerity of his life, and by all his exemplary conduct.

<sup>7</sup>Chroniclers seem remarkably silent concerning Friar Nicholas (but see note 10, below). From the fact, however, that he knew the Friars soon after the death of Saint Francis and had John of Neustadt as his confessor and secretary, we may reasonably conclude that he was already a Friar about 1250.

## II. The mortification of his body.

9. Nicholas shunned the pleasures of the flesh, and in order to restrain his body from the craving for carnal delights he tamed it, cruelly scourging himself with thorny rods. Once a devout Religious by the name of Gerard visited him to hear the word of salvation.<sup>8</sup> In the chamber where Nicholas used to study and sleep he saw underneath his bed the scourges with which Nicholas vigorously punished his flesh during temptations. And when this Religious inquired about the purpose of these rods he was told that they were very good for keeping in check the lusts and leanings of one's flesh.

## III. His entrance into the Order.

10. Once while Nicholas was in the Church of the Canons of Saint Sebastian, where he was head of the school, he was standing near a pillar and gazing upon the large wooden cross which was in the center of the church facing the choir. As he was praying and weeping devoutly, lo! the Crucified bent down to him and spoke to him of the way of salvation as a friend would speak to a friend. This loving conversation made his heart melt away in sweetness of spirit and inflamed it mightily into a fire of even greater devotion. When this furnace of divine love had been set aflame within him he began to spurn all wordly comfort and to yearn only for entrance into the religious life.

After a while this master left his father and mother, who were both living, and entered the Order of Friars Minor in which he lived for more than thirty years. There he made a steady progress not only in the science of Theology but also in all sanctity and virtue so that he bloomed among his brothers as the lily among thorns.

## IV. His piety during the time of his novitiate.

11. So great was the fervor that burned within Friar Nicholas while he was a novice in Magdeburg that he slept very little or not at all; for day and night he was at prayer. As a novice he had the key to a certain oratory with a private altar. This oratory adjoined the choir of the church. Here during the day, when the church was empty and closed, Friar Nicholas could hide himself away from the company of the friars and beseech the Lord's forgiveness for his shortcomings and pour out his fervent prayers. One day he was engaged in his customary devotion before the altar of Saint Peter and Paul, and while he was gazing with compassionate glance upon the image of the Crucified, the latter spoke to him and consoled him wonderfully by the sweetness of His words.

<sup>8</sup>This seems to be the same Gerard mentioned later, in n. 22.

## V. The complete forgiveness of his sins and his vocation to the priesthood.

12. Friar Nicholas continued to bewail even his slightest sins and to recount his years in bitterness of soul, besides lamenting over the sins which he would have committed if the mercy of the Saviour had not prevented him. And while he was so incessantly disturbed by them, the Lord *Who heals those of contrite heart and forgives sin in tribulation* assured him of the complete remission of his sins by deigning to grant him the following vision.

This happened during the third year of his entrance into the Order, on the Thursday within the Octave of Pentecost. He was sitting in choir chanting Matins with the others when he beheld a ray of unknown light issuing from the altar and approaching his breast. He lifted up his eyes in amazement at the new light which had appeared so suddenly, and behold! he saw Christ standing before the altar, from Whose radiant Body the light issued forth. The Lord said to him: "Overcome by the insistence of your tears, I forgive you your sins because I am good." By this gracious vision of Christ he was filled with such joy that on that day he felt nothing but the all-pervading happiness of Christ's presence. And on the following day when he recalled that his sins were forgiven him, he began to render joyful and jubilant thanks to God.

13. Now this friar was a man of such humility that he would not approach the dignity of the priesthood until he was so constrained through Holy Obedience that he could no longer refuse this honor. When his superiors decided that he should receive the Holy Priesthood and be ordained on a certain Saturday, he kept a vigil throughout the night from Friday to Saturday, preparing as diligently as possible, watching all the night in prayer. But he became afraid he might faint during the conferring of Holy Orders if he did not have a little sleep. So in order to give his weary limbs a short rest he lay down after his night-long vigil and began to doze fitfully. Then, while he was between waking and sleeping, there appeared to him the Holy Trinity with the Ever-blessed Virgin, and speaking audibly they deigned to show to him how worthy he was in the sight of God to offer Him that most august Sacrifice. For the Father, offering to him His Son, spoke to him in this manner: "Go with confidence to receive the Order of Priesthood. Behold, I offer you My beloved Son that you in turn may offer Him to Me in the Sacrament of the Altar for My glory, and for His own and that of the Holy Ghost, and for the benefit and consolation of the whole Church, both the living and the dead." The Son also spoke to him; "Behold! I offer Myself to you that you

in turn may offer Me in the Sacrament of the Altar to My Beloved Father for His and My praise and glory and for that of the Holy Ghost as well as for the welfare and benefit of the whole Holy Church." Likewise the Virgin-Mother Mary said: "Behold, I offer you my beloved Son by the Holy Ghost for my praise and glory and for the welfare and benefit of the whole Church, both for the living and the dead." Consoled and strengthened in God by this vision, he bravely approached and received Holy Orders for the praise and glory of the Holy Trinity.

14. Now that he was a priest and had begun to celebrate Mass and to handle the Sacrament of the Lord, he realized his own worthlessness and the majesty of the most sacred Victim. Then so great a fear overcame him that he often celebrated Mass all a-tremble and for about a year he always said Mass with these unspeakable tremors. But when the year had turned, that sweet Consoler of the sorrowful calmed him by some marvelous but secret revelation and so sweet was the communication that from then on he always said Mass with an exceedingly great eagerness and joy and went to the altar filled with happiness.

*VI. The devotion he felt when saying  
his Mass and Office.*

15. So diligent was Friar Nicholas in guarding against any negligence at Mass that, as he used to tell his confessor, he was more concerned to avoid distractions than he was about the salvation of his own soul. He said his Office with such devotion, integrity, and attention that his confessor and secretary, Friar John of Neustadt (who later was Provincial of Saxony),<sup>9</sup> related that sometimes Nicholas would recite his entire Matins without a distraction or a mistake in one single word.

*VII. The Blessed Virgin cures him of  
his headaches and sadness.*

16. Because of his excessive vigils and fastings, Friar Nicholas had done such mischief to his poor head that he was in an agony of fear lest in this life he would never recover the strength and courage to give God the generous service that was His due. But finally he put his trust in God and through love, praise, and worship he offered himself as a burnt-offering of most sweet odor. Friar Nicholas also begged the Blessed Virgin that through her intercession she would obtain for him the glory of God, the grace of never becoming a useless

<sup>9</sup>Friar John of Neustadt, Civitate: tenth Minister Provincial of Saxony; elected in 1298 and died the next year on the return journey from the General Chapter of the Order of the Friars of the Blessed Virgin (see *Acta Franciscana*, II, p. 107, and p. 584).

burden to himself and to others, or by his infirmity a hindrance to the welfare of his neighbor. While he was imploring our Lady with unspeakable groanings she, who is close to all who sincerely invoke her, suddenly appeared to him. In her hand she carried a pyx of ointment with which she anointed him, thereby fortifying him to such a degree that the strength she granted him never again left him, and all the weaknesses contracted by previous excessive mortification were healed forever.

*VIII. His abounding gift of prayer  
and supplication.*

17. Now while Friar Nicholas was a lector in Leipzig it happened that a certain novice, who longed to attain to the same fervor and perseverance in prayer, tried to do so by secretly eavesdropping on him. For a long time the novice imitated him in his vigils and prayers until at last he had to give up his attempt because of constant headaches and pains in all his senses. When this was related to Friar Nicholas he remarked: "He cannot follow me." By this he seemed to mean: "The great gift of prayer that has been given to me is not for everyone."

Another friar, who had heard the following from Nicholas' own mouth, told us that the latter took such a delight in praying for the salvation of all mankind, that he wished he could be present in every part of the world. He also wished to know all the sins of every human being so as to be able to pray and weep for every poor sinner in person and to recover for him the lost graces of God.

*IX. How he fulfilled prelaties in the Order,  
and was highly esteemed.*

18. Friar Nicholas thoroughly despised all honors of this world for love of the glory in the world above. Yet, He Who called Aaron to the summit of dignity also called Friar Nicholas to ascend higher. Step by step he was promoted to the offices of the Order, first as lector in several different places, then as guardian and later as custos of great and deserved fame.

Since he knew that the love of Christ consists in feeding His sheep, he feared lest he stubbornly resist Divine Providence. When therefore his superiors called him to various offices he obeyed with such humility as though God Himself had imposed them in person and had summoned him to accept.

When he made a prolonged stay at the University of Paris for the sake of study he shone with such sanctity of life among the other stu-

dents that by his good example he gained everyone's spontaneous affection and was honored with the profoundest reverence as a saint. And to show to the whole student body the splendor of his merits, God conferred on him the grace of healing whereby he cured a number of sick persons by the mere laying on of hands.

*X. God sends him a drink by an angel.*

19. In time Friar Nicholas completed his studies and prepared to return to his homeland. As a companion, he brought back with him to his province a certain cleric from Saxony, Henry of Wittenberg, who had been invested at Paris and was still a novice.

While they were traveling together, Friar Nicholas did not give up his usual devotions but, as was his custom, he traveled slowly, and while on the way he would go each day to visit and celebrate Mass in some church he came upon.

As the two were wending their way together they had no one to provide food for them in their hunger save God alone. So one day when the heat was very great, as it gets in France during the summer, it happened that Friar Nicholas began to suffer a burning thirst and to faint for want of a drink. When he saw that no one would take pity on them with some refreshment, he turned to the Fountain of Life whose Blood he had drunk that day, and most earnestly pleaded with Him to provide them with a drink of water out of the abundance of His mercy. And lo! the God of all consolation came to their aid and by a divine messenger who all at once appeared before them. He refreshed them in this manner. As they were trudging along, half-dead with thirst, suddenly someone in the garb and appearance of a poor man came up to them carrying on his staff a cruse of the very best wine. When he had joined them he greeted them in a friendly manner and asked them whether they wished to drink. With a deep sigh of joy they answered: "Gladly!" So he made them sit down on the embankment along the ditch in the field and, offering them his little vessel, made them drink generously; and with a happy smile he urged them to continue drinking to their heart's content. When both had drunk their fill, the messenger of God took back the cruse and remained standing in front of them. But after a little, he again offered them a drink. And when they had drunk a second time and stood up to continue their journey, he said: "You must drink once more." Taking a third drink, they gave thanks to God and His servant. And filled with happiness at God's infinite goodness, they resumed their journey. But behold, the stranger was no longer to be seen, and so they began to

praise the name of the Lord, for his eyes are always upon the poor and He does not forsake those that hope in Him.

*XI. How the rains fell and did not drench him.*

20. One day while they were going on their way the rains came down so torrentially that they were drenched three times, so much so that because of all the rain even their drawers clung to their bodies. Friar Henry, who was much quicker than Friar Nicholas, went ahead of him and when he finally looked back he saw Nicholas slowly following far behind, with his hands extended towards heaven and praying so devoutly that Friar Henry's fervor was aroused merely by beholding him, and he too felt urged to pray. After a brief interval of calm, the weather seemed to turn again towards rain, and Friar Nicholas began to worry about Friar Henry's handsome habit which was quite new. Therefore he speeded up his pace and hurried on to join him. When they had been walking together for a while the clouds prepared for another downpour. Friar Nicholas lifted up his eyes towards heaven and said: "O dear Lord, if it pleases You, we are wet enough!" And at his humble petition Almighty God spread over them His protection against the downpour and divided it in two so that although to the right and left of them the ground was drenched, the two friars in between wandered on without a drop touching them. Seeing this stupendous miracle, they both sang the praises of the Lord Who "has heed of the poor and needy one" and on this evil day condescended to deliver them from the torrent of rain. Friar Henry, then a novice but later a distinguished lector in our Order, would never reveal this miracle during Friar Nicholas' lifetime, but when the latter was dead he related it to the friars as a testimony to his sanctity.

*XII. On the spirit of prophecy that dwelt in him.*

21. Friar Nicholas was a man of a remarkably pure conscience, and this purity sometimes prompted the Holy Spirit of God to reveal to him what was hidden from others. It happened one time that the Lord Bishop of Havelburg fell dangerously ill while residing at Magdeburg, and the physicians despaired of his recovery. When Friar Nicholas was discussing the illness of the Bishop with another lector, he remarked among other things: "If I were the father confessor of the Lord Bishop of Magdeburg, he is the one I would warn to prepare for death by duly cleansing his soul of sin, for he will die sooner than this sick bishop of Havelburg." His brother-lector was very surprised at



this because the Bishop of Magdeburg seemed well and strong. But the outcome showed clearly that Friar Nicholas was filled with the spirit of prophecy for soon afterwards the Lord Bishop of Magdeburg died, whereas the sick bishop continued to live for a time, just as Friar Nicholas had predicted.

22. Once Friar Gerard, a truly religious man, had the misfortune of concealing a certain sin for a long time. But Friar Nicholas knew of it by the Holy Spirit and revealed it to him as clearly as if he had seen it with his own eyes.

At another time a number of friars had gone to the land of the infidels with much toil and danger and returned after fulfilling their mission. It was revealed to Friar Nicholas by the Holy Spirit which of the friars had labored more assiduously in preaching the Gospel and this Friar Nicholas told to one of the friars in a friendly conversation.

*XIII. How it was revealed to him that he  
was to enter into the highest  
choir amid the joy of the Holy Angels.*

23. While Friar Nicholas was lector in Erfurt there came to visit him a certain upright and devout Father who was desirous of being instructed in the way of salvation. Friar Nicholas had him brought to the study that he used and spoke to him earnestly and effectively on the state of glory and the way that leads to it. After his edifying conversation he put this question to him: "Now let me ask you, if God had revealed to someone that he was most assuredly to be transferred to the choir of the Seraphim, should that person be burdened any longer with such external labors as you see me engaged in, preaching, hearing confessions, lecturing and all the rest of the tasks a lector must accept in our Order?" The Father humbly answered: "You are a better judge of this than I am." Then Friar Nicholas said: "If only it were God's Holy Will and pleasing to the Almighty Lord, how gladly would I be freed from all this, because by God's revealing light I know that my poor body will not stand this life much longer."

From these words the Father surmised that by reason of his great fervor which bore him up to God, Friar Nicholas would be equal with the Seraphim in heaven in the ardor of his love and in his eternal reward. This the same priest also learned more clearly from other trustworthy friars as well as from Nicholas' confessors. For Nicholas had told them of his revelations either in the intimacy of friendship or in confession, and they understood that he knew for certain by God's promise that after this life he would dwell forever with the high choir of angels.

*XIV. How it was revealed to him that  
the office of lector is pleasing  
and acceptable to God.*

24. Now, Friar Nicholas wished to spur this Father on to gain souls and to prove to him clearly that the office of lector in our Order, if carried out humbly and exemplarily, is both acceptable and meritorious in the sight of God. He therefore told him how he learned the Will of God concerning this point by certain revelations: "God graciously vouchsafed to reveal to me that I should suffer these hardships in the Order patiently, because they are for His praise and glory and the salvation of our neighbors.

"Once when I was anxious about a sermon for the next day and was yet loath to neglect my regular prayers on account of it, the Holy Spirit, Who teaches the heart and mind of His devoted servants, spoke to me by a mysterious inner voice so as to free me of all doubt as to His good pleasure. He said, 'Yours is to build temples by the word of God and to decorate the interiors with gold, as it were, so that by the sighs and groans that arise so often from the pain of contrite sorrow, the hearts of men may be worthy to become pure dwelling-places of the Living God.' For by the doctrine made public in preaching and in the instructions given to the people in confession, their hearts are cleansed in due time so that God may abide in them as in His holy temple and dwelling-place."

25. And on another occasion he said: "While my soul was wholly enrapt in meditation on heavenly things, I heard the voice of Christ within the shrine of my heart telling me: 'My great love for the Blessed Peter arose from this, that I saw him aflame with desire for the salvation of souls;' as if He meant to say: 'I will love you in the same way if you, after the example of Blessed Peter, strive by wholesome preaching to gain souls for Me and to foster and preserve them in constant fear of God.' Since I have been taught this by Him Who holds the Chair of Authority in heaven, I do the work of an Evangelist. I shall never weary of the exercise of my ministry which I took upon myself for the weal of souls and the glory of God, but I shall persevere in it to the end."

*XV. How it was revealed to him that he  
should pray for everyone in the world.*

26. While he was lector in Hildesheim he was prompted by the spirit to go out to a certain place within the friars' territory to preach to the people. These people thirsted for the word of salvation just as he with all his heart desired to sow the seed of his preaching for the glory of

God. But when he had come at the place where he was to preach, a messenger suddenly arrived with an order to summon his companion, Friar John of Bucholte, to return to the friary immediately and without any excuses, and not to be tardy about it. Friar Nicholas naturally was greatly disturbed at having to abandon his sermon this way. But God, Who is faithful and accepts the good will for the deed when the latter is impossible, spoke to him saying: "You would like to convert the whole world, but since you can not accomplish this, gather the whole world to your heart and pray most fervently and devoutly for all poor sinners. Then there will be many who will be converted and saved through your prayers and merits, even though you know nothing about it." From these words it is evident how precious in the eyes of God was the prayer of Friar Nicholas, which God promised to apply not to one person alone but to many. Moreover it is also evident that any prayer offered at times for a family or a whole nation will never be wasted, for God, heeding such earnest prayer, will save many and will give them direction and strength in the way of salvation.

*XVI. How Friar Nicholas was assured of his entrance into the Kingdom of heaven.*

27. During the four days before the Feast of Mary's Assumption, Friar Nicholas was filled with joy at the certainty he felt of entering into heaven and the company of the saints. But he so ardently yearned to be taken there with the Blessed Virgin, that he scorned all earthly food. God beheld his desire from on high, and on the feast-day He revealed to him that for the salvation of many his sojourn here on earth had to be lengthened. But lest the deferment of his hope should pain and afflict him, God promised him with great certainty that he would obtain his promised crown and would without any doubt be happily gathered into the company of the Holy Angels who are called Seraphim. And while he still ceaselessly longed to be *dissolved and dwell with Christ*, yet he was soothed by this promise and did not refuse to keep on laboring, because this was the Will of the Lord.

*XVII. His death.*

28. The day was at last approaching when the Lord would call him to the joys of heaven from the prison of this flesh and from the ordeal of work well done. Eight days before he took to his bed he began to lose his strength and become sick in his whole body. On the third day before he left this world, when he could no longer resist yielding to his excessive weakness, the friars flocked about him as to a sainted father for doctrine and edification, and entreated him to leave with them

as a keepsake some consolations and such wholesome counsels as would inspire them to serve Christ more faithfully. Friar Nicholas then realized that the dissolution of his body was near at hand and that without danger to himself he might reveal to them a few of the things he had been shown. So in order to confirm and strengthen them wholesomely in the fear of God, he told them how the Blessed Virgin with many other holy virgins had twice appeared to him in greatest glory while he was on his bed of pain and had joyfully encouraged him to die with full trust in God.

He also recounted how three weeks before, when he was in contemplation at about the hour of Prime and was revolving in his mind the merits of Saint Catherine, to whom at that time he was devoting his prayers, Saint Catherine appeared to him in great glory and splendor. He was so enrapt in utter amazement at the brightness of her radiance that he was drawn to look at her untiringly. But while he was entirely absorbed in this heavenly delight, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary also entered in such luminous beauty that it almost darkened the brilliance of Saint Catherine and wholly outshone it. And all this beauty enkindled in him so great a delight that he felt nothing but loathing for this life and became inflamed with a great yearning for the glory of God's Saints.<sup>10</sup>

After he had told these things and had received the Sacraments, his most holy soul was delivered from the flesh and absorbed into the abyss of heavenly radiance.

Thus this holy friar went to God.

*Fr. Ignatius Brady, O.F.M. (Transl.)*

<sup>10</sup>In several other chronicles such a vision is related of a Friar Electus, who was buried at Kiel (as was Friar Adolph, nn. 54-55, below), but we would hesitate to identify him with Nicholas. The latter could possibly be the Nicholas buried at Neuss about 1275 (cf. *Chronicle of the twenty-four Generals*, in *Anal. Fran.*, III, p. 240; Bartholomew of Pisa, *Book of Conformities*, A. F., IV, pp. 325-26).

## FRANCISCAN BRIEFS

**NEW ARCHBISHOP:** His Holiness Pope Pius XII has raised the Vicariate Apostolic of Rabat to the dignity of Archiepiscopal residential see, immediately subject to the Holy See. At the same time the Most Reverend Amadeus Lefevre, O.F.M., who had been Vicar Apostolic with titular church in Eguga, was transferred to the residential archiepiscopal church in Rabat.

**NEW FRANCISCAN BISHOPS:** 1) The Most Reverend Eustace (John) Smith, O.F.M., was elected bishop of the titular church of Apamea Cibotus and named Vicar Apostolic for the Latin Rite in the Vicariate of Beirut, Lebanon. The new Bishop and Vicar Apostolic is an alumnus of the Province of the Holy Name of Jesus (New York). Born in Medford, Massachusetts, August 22, 1908, he entered the Order on August 16, 1927, and was ordained June 12, 1934. Sent to Rome for higher studies, he pursued courses in Sacred Theology at the Athenaeum Pontificium Antonianum, and in Sacred Scripture at the Biblical Institute. He then spent a year in the Holy Land studying at the Franciscan Biblical Institute in Jerusalem. He received the degree of Lector in Sacred Theology from the Athenaeum Pontificium Antonianum and the Licentiate in Sacred Scripture from the Biblical Institute. Returning to America he taught Sacred Scripture at Christ the King Seminary, Saint Bonaventure University, N. Y., until the beginning of the Second World War, when he was chosen to be secretary to the Delegate General for the Order in North and Central America. In 1946 he went to Rome as the private secretary to the Procurator General. At this time he was appointed by the Sacred Congregation of Religious as Apostolic Visitor to Egypt for special affairs. After the General Chapter he again returned

to America where he was re-assigned to Christ the King Seminary. He was Visitor General of the Order in 1952, and Master of Clerics at Holy Name College, Washington, D. C., until the autumn of 1955 when he was again assigned to Christ the King Seminary. He was professor of Sacred Scripture there when he received his appointment to Lebanon. Bishop Smith was consecrated by Archbishop Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, assisted by Auxiliary Bishop Leo R. Smith of Buffalo and Auxiliary Bishop John E. McNamara of Washington, as co-consecrators. Archbishop John F. O'Hara, C.S.C., of Philadelphia delivered the consecration sermon.

2) The Most Reverend John Anthony Nuer, O.F.M., was given the titular Church of El Batanu and named Auxiliary to His Excellency Bishop Ghattas, who is Coadjutor to Alexandrinus, Patriarch of the Copts. The new Bishop was an alumnus of the Province of the Stigmata of Saint Francis (Tuscany) and had been associated with the mission in Upper Egypt. Born in Tamia, Fayum (Egypt) on August 28, 1914, he entered the Order October 27, 1936 and was ordained June 13, 1943. An exemplary religious, sociable and gentle, he held the position of Consultor to the Religious Superior. His elevation to the episcopal dignity crowns the energetic apostolate of his confreres of the Tuscan Province among the Catholic Copts, who have already formed many Franciscan Coptic priests in their house of studies in Cairo and in the Franciscan-Coptic Seminary in Ghiza. Bishop Nuer's appointment is also a precious testimony of the Holy See's appreciation of our Order's attempt to establish a native Coptic clergy.

NFM, VI (1956) 1; 1-2

## FRANCISCAN COPTS IN UPPER EGYPT

Although the Franciscan Order originated in the Latin Church, it is nevertheless Catholic, which means that it is universal. With this in mind, the missionaries from the Province of Tuscany laboring in Upper Egypt collaborated with the native secular clergy when the mission was first established in 1697, until the time was propitious for the forming of a regular clergy, the Coptic Franciscans.

The term "Copt" ordinarily applies to Egyptians, although there are Christians following the Coptic Rite in Ethiopia also, which was brought there by Egyptian missionaries. The Copts or Egyptians broke away from the Church through schism, and during the Arab invasion accepted Turkish Islamism which still prevails among them. Nevertheless, about three of four hundred thousand remained faithful to Christianity, of whom about ten thousand retained unity with Rome and are known as "Catholic Copts." These Copts have five bishops, one of whom holds the title of patriarch.

In 1928 the mission superior blessed a new Seraphic College in Assiut, to which was added in 1939 the Oriental Franciscan Seminary in Ghiza, offering courses in philosophy and theology. Today this Egyptian mission has ten priests of the Coptic Rite, one of the Melchite Rite, six lay brothers of the Coptic Rite, and two novices. There are fifteen clerics and forty students in the Seraphic College.

NFM, V (1955) 11, 29-30.

**SUPER MUROS TUOS, JERUSALEM, CONSTITUI TE CUSTODEM.** The Very Reverend Angelicus Lazzeri, O.F.M., former provincial of the Province of the Stigmata of Saint Francis (Tuscany) was elected Custos of the Holy Land by the Most Reverend Definitorium General. The new Custos sailed for Beirut on December 1, 1955, bearing the standard of the Holy Land. Al-

though the journey from Beirut to Jerusalem, through Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan was without official ceremony, nevertheless the Custos was greeted all along the way by many religious and civil authorities, together with his confreres.

On December 6 the Custos was solemnly led from the Port of Jaffa into the Holy City. Civil authorities awaited him, professing the various Catholic and Orthodox Rites, and also representatives of all the communities of religious in the city. During the chanting of the *Benedictus*, the procession reached the Basilica of the Most Holy Savior. While the *Super muros* was being chanted the new Custos genuflected before the main altar, prayed for success in his new office, and took canonical possession.

On the afternoon of December 8, the Custos entered the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre and opened the closed door while the *Te Deum* was chanted. He thus took possession of this Basilica also, of which he is *ex officio* the Guardian. Finally, on December 11 he took canonical possession of the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem. These three entrances concluded the installation of the new Custos, for whose work in the homeland of Christ we implore heaven's blessing.

NFM, VI (1956) 1, 3.

**OSLO, NORWAY:** The Franciscan Fathers of the Dutch Province have two parishes in Oslo where they conduct retreats, give conferences, and instruct catechumens as part of their regular work. The Parish of Saint Halvard in Oslo number 375 Catholics, a lay apostolate association, and a Third Order youth group. Two priests and a brother are in charge of the parish. The Parish of Saint Ansgar in Kristiansand number 160 Catholics. The work here is carried on in the same way as at Saint Halvard's.

Fr. Wilhard Hartman, O.F.M., is

chaplain at the Florida Hospital in Bergen. He also has good contacts with the students at the University of Bergen, where he teaches.

Fr. Leo van Eekeren, O.F.M., who held the post of Rector at the novitiate of the Sisters of Saint Francis Xavier in Sylling, was called by sudden death on January 1, 1955. He had been a missionary in Norway since 1927 and had come to be highly re-

garded by all. With few exceptions, all the priests of the Oslo Diocese attended the funeral services. His obituary, published in the local paper, was almost a panegyric, and a Protestant minister wrote a long and laudatory article about him in the Sylling paper, extolling the virtues and zeal of this admirable Franciscan apostle.

NFM, V (1955) 11, 29.

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