

RELIGIOUS FAMILIES AS SOURCES FOR A THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: MONASTIC, MENDICANT, APOSTOLIC, AND CONTEMPORARY LAY MOVEMENTS

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE MONASTIC TRADITION

Christian monasticism was born in the deserts of Egypt and Syria in the late third century and eventually took a variety of forms in both the East and the West. In the West, it was given definitive shape, certainly after the ninth century, by the sixth century Rule of Benedict (abbreviated hereafter as RB). The Benedictine monastic life and its spirituality has played, and should continue to play,¹ an important role in the development of Christian theology and spirituality.

Although the Holy Spirit is mentioned explicitly only a few times in the Rule of Benedict, the monastic tradition remains an important source for a theology of the Holy Spirit. The sections which follow will discuss the "places" of encounter with the Holy Spirit in the monastic life, the monastery as a manifestation of the Spirit's work of calling people into community, and the monastery as an eschatological witness to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in these "last days." Perhaps, most basically, as an important contemporary monastic commentary has noted:

Because of the many examples of holiness it has inspired in the course of its history, the Rule can also claim to be an objective expression of one of the Holy Spirit's charisms given for the building up of the Church. The training the Rule

¹As Joan Chittister, OSB, notes in her recent commentary on the RB: "The basic contentions of this book are two: First, Benedictine spirituality is the spirituality of the twenty-first century because it deals with the issues facing us now—stewardship, relationships, authority, community, balance, work, simplicity, prayer, and spiritual and psychological development. Second, its currency lies in the fact that Benedictine spirituality offers more a way of life and an attitude of mind than it does a set of religious principles." *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 15.

sets out to give is ordered to awakening sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.²

ENCOUNTERING THE HOLY SPIRIT

According to the Rule of Benedict, the Holy Spirit is encountered in a rich number of ways in the monastic life. Each of these "places" can suggest further ways in which Christians can encounter the Holy Spirit outside the monastic context. In the present exposition, however, only a few of these "places" of encounter can be identified, and parallels cannot be developed.

(1) The RB begins with the invitation "Listen carefully, my son [daughter] . . ." The theme of listening to God's voice runs throughout the Rule and explains the importance that Benedict places on silence. There is a fundamental expectation of the presence of the Spirit, whose voice can be heard by the one whose heart is stilled by the instruments of the monastic life.

(2) The abbot plays a central role in the life of the monastic community and of the individual monastic. The RB presupposes that the abbot is a person filled with the Spirit, able to discern the movement of the Spirit, and able to see the Spirit at work in others.³

(3) Certainly, Benedict assumes that the Spirit is encountered in prayer. A later section will examine the place of the liturgy in monastic spirituality. Here it is important to note the importance placed on *lectio divina* in monastic spirituality. The daily schedule laid out by Benedict includes four hours a day devoted to holy reading, especially of the scriptures. The practice of *lectio divina* involves a prayerful meditation and "rumination" over a text in which there is a "creative mutuality between text and reader due to the presence of the Holy Spirit in each."⁴ Monastic *lectio*, then, is not meant to yield only general and universalizable truths, as a scholastic commentary might; rather, *lectio* is meant to serve as a medium for an encounter with God in which God can reveal a particular, personal message to the monastic through the action of the Holy Spirit. A lifetime of encountering the Spirit through *lectio* and the other practices of the monastic life conforms the monastic to the ways of the Spirit.⁵

(4) Benedict assumes that it is the Holy Spirit who cleanses the monastic of sins and vices through a path of humility leading to a "perfect love of God which

²Daniel Rees et al., *Consider Your Call: A Theology of Monastic Life Today* (Kalamazoo MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980) 49.

³André Borias, "St. Benedict's Reverence for the Trinity," *Monastic Studies* 17 (1986) 160.

⁴Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12th Century*, vol. 2 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994) 133.

⁵Matthias Neuman, "The Action of the Holy Spirit in the Individual Believer: Perspectives from Christian Spirituality and Theology," *Cistercian Studies* 7 (1972): 39-40.

casts out fear" (RB 7.70). In other words, it is the Spirit who empowers the ongoing conversion of the monastic, represented in the distinctive Benedictine vow of *conversatio morum*. This Spirit-empowered conversion occurs not so much in heroic ways but precisely through an openness to the Spirit in the mundane rhythms, relationships, activities, struggles, and joys of daily monastic living.⁶

(5) The RB calls for discernment which involves, again, an attentive listening. The RB seems to be the first monastic rule to suggest that the *entire* community, rather than just the most senior members, should be called together for counsel before major decisions are made.⁷ As Benedict says, God may speak through the youngest (RB 3.3). Similarly, the abbot is to listen carefully to the criticisms and suggestions made by visiting monastics, since God may be speaking through them (RB 61.4).

(6) In the same way, the RB manifests an openness to adaptability in different times and circumstances, as the need for adaptation is discerned. For example, after laying out a lengthy and detailed plan for the distribution of the psalms for an entire week, Benedict concludes by urging his readers simply to change the ordering if deemed necessary (RB 18.22). It is precisely this flexibility within a basic structure of stability and order that has allowed Benedictine monastic life to continually adapt itself to new circumstances. In fact, Bernard McGinn has concluded: "No other institution in western history, religious or secular, has had the ability to reform itself from within as often and as successfully as monasticism."⁸ This is a remarkable claim and must suggest the working of the Holy Spirit.

(7) Certainly one of the most significant ways in which monastics encounter the Holy Spirit (and through which the work of the Spirit is manifest to the Church and the world) is in the life of the monastic community itself. The next section will focus on the central place of the community in the Benedictine way of life.

THE HOLY SPIRIT CALLING INTO COMMUNITY

A frequent theme of early monastic authors was the identification of the monastery with the life of the early church as portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the eschatological gift of God witnessing the arrival of the last days.⁹ Luke's idealized portrayal of the Church symbolizes the effect of the Spirit's presence and the shape of the reign

⁶Neuman, 41-42.

⁷RB 1980: *The Rule of Benedict*, ed. Timothy Fry et al. (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1981) 178-79 (note to RB 3.1).

⁸McGinn, 121.

⁹George T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (New York: Paulist, 1976) 253-301.

of God yet to be fully realized. According to early monastic authors, the monastic community is meant to be a manifestation of the ideal presented by Luke as he describes the Church immediately after the Pentecost event:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people (Acts 2:44-47a NRSV; see also Acts 4:32-35).

Benedict received this tradition through his own sources: Pachomias, John Cassian, Basil, and Augustine.¹⁰

It is the mission of the Holy Spirit at work in human history to call all people together into community with one another and ultimately with the triune community. Benedict manifests an appreciation of this social view of salvation when, after a discussion of the need for mutual obedience, patient forbearance, and fervent love for one another, he concludes: "and may he bring us all together to everlasting life" (RB 72.12).¹¹

The work of the Holy Spirit drawing people into community is manifest in at least three important ways in the RB: (1) in the challenge to mutual forbearance and service, (2) in the emphasis on the liturgy, and (3) in the outreach of hospitality.

(1) Benedict was acutely aware of the practical requirements for the upbuilding of community, such as mutual forbearance, patience, forgiveness, respect, and ultimately a real love lived out in daily action (RB 71,72). One particularly important theme upon which he expounds is the need for mutual service (RB 35.1-6). At the same time, Benedict is not naive about the obstacles to the upbuilding of community, for example: complaining ("grumbling" or "murmuring"), possessiveness, and an unwillingness to forgive (RB 33, 34, 71).

In contemporary terms, we can say that the monastic community, as envisioned by Benedict, strives to realize the right relationships that are the foundation of authentic mutuality. Clearly, such relationships would be the manifestation of the presence of the Spirit of God as a proleptic realization of our promised participation in the mutuality of triune love.

(2) The reverent celebration of the liturgy has certainly come to be seen as a distinctive Benedictine charism. This emphasis might be expected since the RB assumes that the monastics will be spending several hours a day in common prayer and that it will have a priority in their lives (RB 43.3). In effect, a Benedictine spirituality is strongly and necessarily a liturgical spirituality.

¹⁰Claude Peifer and Mark Sheridan, "Introduction: Historical Orientation," *RB 1980: The Rule of Benedict*, 25, 33, 62, 93, 167.

¹¹Marian Larmann, "The Meaning of *Omnes pariter* in RB 49.3," *American Benedictine Review* 29 (June 1978): 153-65.

Benedict was concerned that the liturgy be celebrated with a prayerful reverence (RB 19.6). While an explicit Christocentrism is evident throughout the RB, his somewhat novel insistence on the frequent and regular use of the trinitarian doxology in the daily liturgy nonetheless reveals the trinitarian foundation of his perspective.¹²

The celebration of the liturgy in the monastic community, as for the entire Church, is both a celebration of community as already realized and a new drawing together of community. In the liturgy, the Spirit's work of drawing people together into the Body of Christ is especially evident. The important place of the liturgy in Benedictine monastic life makes it a rich source for understanding the community-building work of the Holy Spirit in the Church's liturgy.

(3) Of course, no authentic Christian community can be concerned only for its own life. The outpouring of the Spirit serves not only for the upbuilding of the Christian community itself but also necessarily for mission. Obviously, the "mission" of a monastic community is different from that of an "apostolic" community. The Benedictine charism of hospitality (RB 53) serves as both the extension of the Spirit's drawing together of the monastic community itself as well as one important manifestation of the monastery's sharing in the community-building mission of the Church. In welcoming guests, monastics welcome people into the community that the Holy Spirit has made possible, and therefore they witness the mission of the larger Church to continue the Spirit's work of calling all of humanity into community.¹³

CONCLUSION: ESCHATOLOGICAL WITNESS

In the past, there has sometimes been a tendency to suggest a dichotomy between "charismatic" and "institutional" elements in the Church. Although there is a certain tension between them, the dichotomy ought not be drawn too definitively since both elements are rooted in the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church.¹⁴ It has already been noted above that the RB envisions a way of life that involves flexibility within a basic structure of stability and order. Still, despite this balancing of adaptability and order, the tension between the charismatic and institutional runs throughout the monastic tradition.

Clearly, the first men and women who went out into the desert were happy to flee the secular but also the ecclesiastical society of the late third century. Their radical lifestyle was seen by many as the replacement for martyrdom.¹⁵ But while the first monastics can be said to have taken a "radical" or "prophetic"

¹²Borias, 155-65.

¹³Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, 1.

¹⁴Brian Gaybba, *The Spirit of Love: Understanding the Holy Spirit* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987) 167-71.

¹⁵Peifer and Sheridan, 13-16.

stand in relationship to society and church, history shows that they did interact with the Church even to the point of influencing contemporary ecclesial controversies and councils.

Benedict envisions a nonclericalized life, relatively free of frequent contact with society and ecclesial structures. Still, the RB does refer to important points of contact with local bishops; and it is rather soon after the time of Benedict that monasteries took a central place in the institutional life of the medieval church and of society. While the various reform movements within the Benedictine family through the course of its history have often begun with a more "charismatic" emphasis, they have generally entered the mainstream of institutional life rather soon.

The historical "institutionalizing" of monasticism notwithstanding, Benedictine monasticism must retain the charismatic element of an eschatological witness suggested in the section above. In an age of individualism, consumerism, mass media, societal and domestic violence, and impersonalism, Benedictine monastic life, authentically lived, is a witness of the age to come. Empowered by the presence of the Spirit working within the community and in the life of each of its members, the monastery witnesses to the possibility of authentic community built on right relationships aiming at love's mutuality, a true foretaste of our full participation in triune mutuality. Benedictine monastic life, therefore, is a microcosm of the Church's mission, an "*ecclesiola*," which remains an important source for understanding the Spirit's working within the contemporary Church on behalf of the world.

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THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE MENDICANT TRADITION

To desire only the work of the Holy Spirit within. . . .

FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES

In broad terms, "mendicant tradition" refers to the tradition of religious life that emerged in the thirteenth century as a "new form" of gospel living in response to the sociocultural changes of early urbanization.¹ For this presentation, however, "mendicant tradition" is approached in Franciscan terms. The presentation originates from the perspective of (1) a Franciscan scholar who traces the textual tradition and the historical praxis as a member of the Third Order and not the First Order; (2) a member of Franciscan community facing questions of what is the unique Franciscan role in the Church today.

Within the Franciscan tradition, the core perception is that the Holy Spirit works in and through every Christian. In writing about founders and charisms, John Lozano has said that "Every religious institute in order to arrive at a clear understanding of its own mission in the Church, must continually return to and reinterpret the charism of its founder/dress."² This is necessary *because we are subject to the flow of history*, and there is always new inspiration from the Spirit for each generation. According to Lozano, "Time is never a constitutive element of a charism."³ Therefore, Franciscans must ask themselves: What would the Spirit have us do now? What are the permanent traits of Franciscan life, what are the "episodic facts"?

"To desire only the work of the Holy Spirit within . . ." is the essential value of the Franciscan form of mendicant life. The personal vocation stories of Clare of Assisi and Francis of Assisi provide examples of and insight into the "holy manner of working" of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The original Franciscan vision is based upon a deeply held belief that the vocations of Clare and of Francis were the result of divine inspiration.⁴ The constitutive first consequence of responding to that divine inspiration was that each could say "When God gave me brothers" / "When God gave me sisters. . . ." ⁵ Both modeled in their

¹Keith J. Egan, "mendicant orders," *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 852-53.

²John Lozano, *Foundresses, Founders, and Their Religious Families*, trans. Joseph Dariago (Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1983) 87.

³*Ibid.*, 82.

⁴See RegNB 2:1; RegCl 2:1; TOR Rule 2:1.

⁵For Francis, see his *Testament* 14; for Clare, her *Testament*, 7 in *Francis and Clare*:

dealings with each other a deep respect for the work of the Holy Spirit in each other and in the lives of the sisters and brothers who walked with them.

The Franciscan vocational inspiration was missionary rather than monastic. The friars were to "go through the world as pilgrims and strangers," as a sign of their openness to the world. As soon as there were eight followers, Francis sent them off two by two to preach penance and peace; within six years of his conversion, Francis traveled to Syria with the desire of being martyred for the Gospel.⁶ This sense of mission—following the Spirit's inspiration to preach by word and example—is one of the most important differences between mendicant life and the preceding era of monasticism. Franciscan life suggests that each member is responding to the missionary discourse of Jesus presented in the gospels (Matt 10; Lk 9.1-5).

WHAT THE SOURCES TELL US

Mendicant life in the Franciscan model relies upon the teachings of the founders. In the *Rule of 1223* Francis told the brothers: "Let them pursue what they must desire above all things: to have the Spirit of the lord, and the [Spirit's] holy manner of working."⁷ Clare wrote in her 1253 *Rule*: "Let [the sisters] . . . devote themselves to what they should desire above all else: the Spirit of the Lord and [the Spirit's holy manner of working]" (Reg Cl 10.9). And the exhortation to the penitents who began the Third Order includes the entreaty to preserve the "words of spirit and life" together with "a holy manner of working even to the end."⁸ And it is written that Francis himself claimed that the true Minister General of the Order is the Holy Spirit, "who rests equally upon the poor and simple" (2 Cel 193). What emerges from the texts is a very full sense of an egalitarian self-understanding, common vision, and openness to divine inspiration.

In one sense, these were rather generalized concepts. The *praxis* of the *sancta operatio*, however, allows us to see several standards of application. First, the operation of the Spirit in each person's life meant a way of "being" in the world much more than clear monastic prescriptions for the journey to God. Second, "mendicant life" meant to preach by word and example in whatever way a particular individual was called. It was *not founded for any specific work*—what is today called "ministry"—but for the *following of the gospel and the imitation of the poor Christ*. Third, mendicancy implies a way of being in relationship to Jesus who is our brother, and therefore to all persons as brother or sister; for Franciscans, there is the subtext of *minority*, that is, being willing to take the last place as *lesser* brother/sister.

The Complete Writings, trans. and ed. Ignatius Brady and Regis Armstrong (New York: Paulist, 1982).

⁶See 1 Cel 29 and 56.

⁷RegB 10.8. The Latin text uses *sancta operatio*.

⁸EpFid II.21.

Such praxis also includes a fourth element: a devotion to God consequent upon this way of being in the world wherein one becomes willing to do anything for the sake of the reign of God, even to the point of martyrdom, of laying down one's life for a brother or sister. And a fifth element of following the Spirit requires a trust that every member of the group lives with the same basic values: poverty, minority, prayer, and ongoing conversion. But it does not demand that every individual manifests these values in exactly the same way. For example, Thomas of Celano recounts one story which tells of the brother who awakened the others with his cry that he was dying of hunger. Francis is said to have immediately asked that the table be set; he joined the hungry brother in eating and invited the others to join them; then Francis "carefully admonished each one to consider his own strength in the service of God." (2 Cel 22). This counsel is also fundamental to mendicant life: respect for the individual graces present in another's life.

In Clare's *Rule* there is the prescription that if a sister receives from her relatives or other benefactors something she needs, she may use it—but if she does not need it, "Let her in all charity give it to a sister who does need it" (RegCl 8:10), thereby placing the responsibility on the individual sister to care for her sister. Elsewhere in the same *Rule* Clare writes: "Let each one confidently manifest her needs to the other" (RegCl 8:15)—which explains how any sister would be aware of the need of another. Consequently, the heart of the mendicant way of life is the work of the Spirit in empowering what we call today *evangelical freedom*. In all of the above areas, there is always the underlying premise that a mendicant desires to be faithful to the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit and relies upon the presence of the Spirit in everyday affairs.

The other aspect of mendicant spirituality which must be mentioned is the aspect of deep prayer that marked the life of the early Franciscans. Thomas of Eccleston, chronicler of the English foundation, wrote that the friars lived, not according to human rules, but by the free impulses of their devotion (Eccleston V, 25). Celano writes of those times when Francis was visited by the Spirit, which visitations he followed as long as the Spirit allowed. The movement flourished not merely because of human effectiveness, but because the friars and sisters came together from so many different places and became "living stones," which "were joined together into a dwelling of the Holy Spirit" (1 Peter 2:4-5).

Historically, one must acknowledge that the institutionalization of the charism over time radically altered the understanding of "Spirit-inspired freedom." The structures of monastic life were already beginning to infiltrate the life while Clare and Francis were still living. Ultimately, the mendicants became the instruments of reform in a post conciliar (Lateran IV) church. Issues of literal poverty and itinerant wandering came into conflict with the needs of the ever-increasingly centralized Church. But there is a continuing history of the desire to return to the "primitive form of life," which balanced absolute poverty and deep contemplative awareness. This desire finally came into conflict with institutionalized apostolic life. Mendicant life, as idealistic as it was, still did not

escape the distortion of the original vision of the founders. Franciscan history is replete with stories of dominance and division, including persecution of friars who wanted a simpler life and internal reform, and the oppression of women's groups desiring to live a common life without canonical recognition or supervision by friars. Over the centuries, especially in the post Tridentine era, "Franciscan identity" was lost.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CURRENT ERA

In the thirty years since *Perfectae caritatis*, Vatican II's decree on the adaptation of religious life, the entire Church has been in what may be called a process of rebirth. At the very least, it is in the throes of a struggle to embrace a Spirit-led transformation. For the Franciscan aspect of mendicant life, this means rediscovery of evangelical charism bequeathed by Francis and Clare. We have begun to understand that the categories of "contemplative," "monastic," "apostolic," and "secular institute" do not adequately describe Franciscan life. As Joseph Chinnici has succinctly stated: "We seemed to share in all four forms."⁹ Chinnici continues:

The lived experience and value of being "brothers and sisters" in community did not sit well with the purist of the apostolic form; "our cloister is the world" (*Sacrum Commercium* 63) hardly resonated with traditionally contemplative religious; itinerancy scratched uneasily inside a monastic garment; the existence of an approved religious rule predated any form of twentieth century form of secular institute.¹⁰

Over a period of time, Franciscans worked out the term "evangelical religious life" for themselves, which means, in simple terms, the call to live the gospel, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, in a way which (1) declares to the world that there is an antidote to pessimism, dejection, fear: the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is preached by word and example; (2) embodies a dialogical relationship with one another, social institutions, and creation, so that the Spirit's lead is faithfully followed; (3) practices inclusivity of all, even the most marginalized, in the common search for peace, justice, and reconciliation.¹¹

The "return to your roots" mandate of the council has been heard and acted upon, and Franciscans in religious life find themselves in a difficult transitional place. At the present moment, we are still comprised of a membership which learned its self-identity as "apostolic" and have not yet formed the next generation into "evangelical" life. We are in stages of diminishment, as are so

⁹Joseph Chinnici, "The Prophetic Heart: The Evangelical Form of Religious Life in the United States," in *The Cord* (November 1994) 293.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹See *Build with Living Stones: A Program of Study of the Franciscan Missionary Charism* (1987) 7.2.1.

many other "traditional forms" of religious life: we have lost schools, hospitals, properties, and even "status" as different from the laity. Secular Franciscan Order members are learning their own historical significance within the Franciscan movement, and are working out how to best enrich their relationship to God and live the values of the movement while pursuing un vowed lives. We have arrived at a place where we know that although our tradition became apostolic, there is much more to our heritage. This knowledge is itself the work of the Holy Spirit; our present and future responses to the Spirit challenge us to enter into the burden and the freedom of true evangelical life and not be limited by past historical limits of given apostolates or narrow vision.

Few American Franciscans live with the literal poverty that characterized the thirteenth-century founders, nor would they want to. We no longer rely upon alms and begging, but is it not evangelical poverty to share our patrimony in new and creative ways: AIDS hospices, mission work in the countries that were once behind the iron curtain, missionary foundations in new places totally foreign to our past experiences? Is it not minority, that is, being pilgrim and stranger, to express solidarity with the underclass of the world when we devote personnel and financial support to membership in an NGO office at the United Nations? To refer to Chinnici once again:

The evangelical religious life means witness—witness as a Roman Catholic to the good Gospel of Jesus Christ. It means taking seriously and publicly naming the fact that God, who encompasses all things, is the personal heart of the evangelical life and the goal of our desires. It means talking about this search for God, a community of Three in One, whose Word became flesh in the womb of a woman, and giving it a social language which communicates to people WHO OUR GOD IS AND WHO WE ARE.¹²

We Franciscans must appropriate internally the mystery of God as Trinity, as incarnate in Jesus, and present in creation. We must also be open to the action of the Spirit, whether it is apprehended through Scripture, creation, relationships as brother and sister, or the particular events of a given's person's life. We must learn to follow the divine inspiration which allows us to live in this world, which is to be perceived as pure gift from a gracious God, by letting go of possessions, material and spiritual, and by entrusting ourselves to the providence of God in the person of one another. The Franciscan experience is open to all people and has multiple forms; for its religious, it may be itinerant, enclosed, eremitical. The titles "Sister" and "Brother" are not hierarchical: they are relational, conveying a social and spiritual reality. Obedience is an obedience of love, governed by communion and solidarity—an obedience of interdependence.¹³ Yet the experi-

¹²Chinnici, 297-98.

¹³See Sr. Dorothy McCormack, "The Essential Elements of the Evangelical Life of Franciscans," *The Cord* (September 1988) 241-46.

ence of communion and full gospel life is not a given, it must be continually created anew, in response to the Spirit, to the pastoral needs of the Church, the needs of society, and the "religious wilderness of the time."¹⁴

Immense diversity is once again evident in Franciscan life. The option for the poor has radically changed some congregations and provinces; international refoundations and global awareness have become the new face of living literal poverty; overactive friars and sisters take refuge for periodic refreshment of spirit in the monasteries of their Poor Clare sisters. This new diversity, in some respects, is the fruit of integration of the new code of canon law, the revision of the constitutions, and the celebrations of the eight-hundredth anniversaries of Francis and Clare. Even in the face of diminishing numbers, some communities act with courage and daring in following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

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¹⁴Chinnici, 296.

THE SPIRIT, THE TIMES, AND APOSTOLIC RELIGIOUS LIFE

Concern over shrinking numbers of apostolic religious is a sign of our times. Invited to consider the role of the Spirit in the renewal of apostolic religious life, I chose to look closely at the connection between the apostolic form of the life and two periods of time: the period of its birth and flourishing, and that of its decline. Briefly, I define the apostolic "family" of religious as those groups organized toward ministry or service; for that reason they are neither cloistered nor bound to choral office. I will begin by examining the correlation between the form of life and its birth period, with attention to the different experience of women. Then I will reflect on the shift that marks the present period, with attention to possible implications for the forms of religious life. My assumption is that if a form of religious life develops under the impetus of the Spirit of God in response to the needs of the times, two things follow. First, better understanding of the connection between the form and its times will lead to better understanding of the renewing work of the Spirit. Second, a significant shift in the times should evoke a significant shift in the available forms of religious life.

Europe in the sixteenth century saw the birth of modernity, the beginning of a significant shift in religious sensibility, and the word become print.¹ First, the beginning of modernity, with its location of the rational in what is demonstrable. Starting from the work of scientists like Copernicus and Kepler, others like Galileo, Francis Bacon, and Newton reimagined the universe, and in the process designed the method of modern physics. Unlike their predecessors, the metaphysicians, who sought to understand what is "universal," the new scientists wanted to understand what is "general." Human experience is full of particulars which obscure the view of the general. Control of the particular makes it possible to discover the general; thus rose the need for controlled experiments. One learns what would *really* happen — what is *really* real — in a situation where all complexity is controlled except one variable, which finally is responsible for all else. In this approach lie critical implications for how humans know (the rational is what is demonstrable) and what humans know (the interrelationships between quantity and force). Here in time faith and reason would find grounds for divorce.

¹I have looked for features which are useful in contextualizing the broadest spectrum of orders and institutes of apostolic life, and which serve well across time. Major factors which had to be omitted here are Christian humanism, and the expansion of European nations into other continents.

Even while Copernicus (1473–1543) struggled to grasp a clear and coherent understanding of the cosmos using the tools of science, Martin Luther (1483–1546) endeavored to understand the position of humans vis-à-vis God, being led through a combination of his own experience and his scholarship to conceive the problem as one involving the relationship between grace and faith (rather than one concerning the relationship between nature and grace).² Luther's struggle is emblematic of a shift in religious sensibility not limited to what would become the churches of the Reformation but extending into Catholicism as well. In the long term Christians, Protestant and Catholic alike, will conceive differently of their relationships with Christ and God,

A third factor critical in the shifting sixteenth-century situation was the word become print, a development whose widespread availability was new to Europe at that time. While print made the word more accessible, it also brought its own demands. How would those entrusted with the Word utilize the printed word in ministry? Print led Catholics into "textualism," that is, a binding by the text, which affected both Word and Sacrament. The debates on revelation at Trent show that it was not yet possible for the Fathers of Trent to apply the distinction between human words and the Word of God to sacred texts. Thus they presented Tradition as a body of authoritative texts. Both the texts of the Vulgate and of the Roman Ritual were in turn canonized. Restriction to the Vulgate in effect prevented access to Scriptures in the original languages, a loss. But access to a printed version of the common Latin text permitted a continuous tradition of interpretation to go on, a gain. With the Roman Ritual, what was gained sacramentally was a uniform and recognizable rite; wherever one went, one was "at home" in the liturgy. But, in Bossy's words, "the liturgy itself began to suffer from typographical arthritis."³ What was lost sacramentally were local rites and adaptability to social change. While there were difficulties introduced by textualism, on the whole print shaped pedagogy positively; for adults, devotional literature fed piety, and for children (as well as some adults), catechisms were the educational tool of choice.

In the period Christians were hearing not only of "new worlds" but also of new ways to understand the cosmos. Catholics, aware of religious conflict raised to new dimensions, were themselves gradually being informed by a changing religious sensibility. All were confronted with the opportunities and the puzzles presented by the new medium of print. Inseparable from the period is the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, who were part of it, founded in it, and shaped by it, founded not to be the "first" of a "new form" of religious life, but, as John O'Malley, SJ,

²See Eric W. Gritsch, "Origins of Lutheran Teaching," in *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, ed. H. George Anderson, et al. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 163-67.

³Bossy, 100; with discussion, 97-104.

has stressed, "to help souls" (meaning people) through their ministries.⁴ O'Malley's study of the early Society gives an impressive picture of the Jesuit pattern of life, through the eyes of Jeronimo Nadal, one of the first Jesuits, a man entrusted with heavy responsibility for implementing the Jesuit *Constitutions*. O'Malley notes that, for Nadal,

Ignatius' story was somehow the story of every Jesuit and, hence, revelatory of the deepest meaning of the Society as a whole. The story was basically one of the inner life of the soul. It moved in this sequence: a conversion to God from a previously unsatisfying or disordered life; visitations from God in the form of consolations, clarification of vision, dispositions to give oneself in God's service that resulted in an "election" to follow these dispositions; a period of probation and trial like that Ignatius experienced at Manresa; and a life thenceforth inspired by the desire "to help souls." Just as God had guided and aided Ignatius in this course, so God guided and aided every Jesuit.⁵

By composing the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) made possible what Nadal recognized to be true. The *Exercises* were designed to be used by a director to assist an exercitant through just such a pattern, and remain today mandatory for every Jesuit. That God's guidance and help is available, not only to every Jesuit, but to every person of good will, is a critical foundational assumption. Such a conviction is not unique to Ignatius; other religious leaders of the age, including Luther, shared it, and it is an additional mark of the change in religious sensibility proper to the modern age. What is distinctive is the way Ignatius implemented his conviction. The practice of the *Exercises* led to the refinement of the practice of discernment of spirits, to the development of the practice of spiritual direction as well as of spiritual retreats, and shifted the practice of confession toward the development of individual conscience. Jesuits used the *Exercises* among men and women of all walks of life wherever their ministries led them. In combination with the Society's rapid growth and far flung dissemination, the *Exercises* helped give Catholic piety in the modern era an interior and individual caste.

Though from their beginnings Jesuits were hated and loved in equal parts, in those beginnings they themselves offer a strongly pastoral image. O'Malley notes that "the Jesuits' most basic pastoral program consisted in the triad word-sacrament-works," but he makes the case that they were "first and foremost ministers of the word."⁶ They understood their ministry broadly, including in it preaching, lecturing, teaching (including catechesis), conversations, missions, and the giving of the *Exercises*. At first they actually excluded publishing.⁷ Here the

⁴See John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge MA: Harvard, 1993) 17-19.

⁵*Ibid.*, 65.

⁶*Ibid.*, 91.

⁷On the entire topic see *ibid.*, c.3 "Ministries of the Word."

early Jesuits reflect both the preoccupation of the age with the word, and an ambiguity like that at Trent about the word become print.

The style of pastoring adopted by Jesuits was distinct from that of parish priests for at least three reasons: the income connected with a parish conflicted with their understanding of religious poverty; the then lifetime nature of a parish appointment conflicted with the mobility they considered essential to their understanding of their way of life; and they believed their ministry was not to those who already had pastors.⁸ More to our point, neither did the Jesuits understand themselves like other existing orders. They neither wore monastic garb nor lived in a monastery nor retained choir. Nadal repeatedly insisted "We are not monks."⁹ For him

the essence of the monk was "to flee the company of other human beings." But the essence of the Jesuit was to *seek* their company "in order to help them." "The world is our house." Again and again Nadal reiterated this point.¹⁰

Nadal knew quite well that the Society of Jesus was not the same sort of thing that other orders were. The rapid growth and fruitful work of the Society witness to the presence of the Spirit in the new apostolic form of religious life which it represents. Before commenting further on the question of the correspondence between that form and the age of its birth it is important to note that women's experience with this form of religious life was different from that of men. Prominent among the women founders of institutes of apostolic religious was Mary Ward (1585-1645).¹¹ The daughter of a Catholic family who remained steadfast in the faith under England's Penal Laws, Mary's own faith bore the stamp of a generation of martyrs, many of them Jesuits. The Jesuit Rule had been approved in 1558; as we have seen it was the first in which the whole way of life of an order was directed to the apostolate. As a young woman Mary experienced a call to work for the faith in England, and ultimately in the world, as did the Jesuits. Thus her experience offers a striking comparison. With seven companions she began her enterprise in Flanders, opening a school for English Catholic girls in 1609.

She worked out her Rule in a series of three documents between 1611 and 1620; she completed the second of these in 1615, submitting it to Pope Paul V the following year. This document gives as reason for the project the state of

⁸See *ibid.*, 74.

⁹*Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 68.

¹¹*The Heart and Mind of Mary Ward*, ed. Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Wheatthampstead, Herts.: Anthony Clarke, 1985) contains a brief biography, extracts from Ward's writings, an essay on the development of Ward's Rule, and the text of the Rule of 1620. Hereafter this work is referred to as IBVM. For a more extended biography, see Mary Oliver, *Mary Ward, 1585-1645* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959).

heretical England; it gives as object of the Institute to aid as far as women can in the great work of England's conversion.¹² The pope replied favorably, putting the women under the protection of the local Ordinary, and promising that if they continued in their holy way of life and their good work, formal confirmation would be considered. Already there were almost sixty members and the Institute was growing rapidly.

But in 1611 Mary had received what she understood to be a divine enlightenment directing her to follow the Jesuit Rule. Her formal Rule, completed in 1620, was modeled verbatim on that of the Jesuits. The major provisions should be familiar since many of them are now commonplace for active women religious.¹³ These religious were to be "at the service of the pope," "to undertake whatever work he desires," even in distant lands. They were to "undertake all forms of the apostolate through which women may work for the propagation and defense of the faith." To carry out such apostolic work requires mobility; by implication, then, cloister is overruled. Furthermore, to coordinate their work there must be a General Superior with appropriate authority—another innovation for women. Likewise, for the sake of the apostolate the women sought to be subject directly to the pope rather than to the local bishops—yet another innovation for women. The needs of the apostolate also dictated that "the members are to lead an ordinary manner of life, devoid of anything remarkable; they should therefore conform to the customs of the particular country and surroundings in which they are working."¹⁴ Respect for local customs is thus incorporated, and the matter of dress resolved.

Since what she asked was already approved for the Jesuits, Mary thought it would meet quick approval. She was undoubtedly both holy and courageous, but she certainly did not understand what she was up against. The Roman authorities did not believe women could live such a way of life or carry out such far-flung activities. They were, after all, "but women." Neither Church law nor custom favored the project. After a delay of several years in which the Institute grew rapidly, Rome acted in 1631, not to approve it, but to suppress it.

What had not changed in the early modern era was the view of women. It is symbolic that the Tridentine reform of religious life required cloister for nuns, and that in implementing these decrees Pius V went beyond them to oblige all women who were living in community in simple vows without cloister to make solemn profession and accept strict cloister.¹⁵

¹²Oliver, 82.

¹³Following the summary at IBVM, 90-92.

¹⁴IBVM, 91.

¹⁵See "Circa pastoralis," 29 May 1566, in *Bullarium Diplomatum et Privilegiorum Sanctorum Romanorum Pontificum*, ed. S. Franco and H. Dalmazzo (Turin, 1857-1872) tome 7, cols. 447-50.

How is the difficulty women experienced in becoming recognized as apostolic religious to be understood? Minimally, as a failure of ecclesial imagination supported by cultural mores. But it was more than that. While Vatican II affirmed the equal dignity of the sexes (*Gaudium et spes*, #29), it remained true that until the Code of 1983 women and children were alike regarded as minors in the eyes of canon law.¹⁶ As we are well aware, theologians and canonists alike with rare exceptions maintained women's basic inferiority until quite recently.¹⁷ It is hardly surprising that women were not welcomed into the apostolic life which demanded their involvement in the broader world. The shift in Church teaching on the equality of women is so recent that its ramifications have not yet begun to be actualized.

I began this paper by referring to the startling drop in numbers of apostolic religious. If that form of religious life in its growth illustrates a response in the Spirit to the signs of the times, how ought one to understand its present decline in North America and Europe? Wittberg's social movement analysis is helpful, although she treats the apostolic orders and teaching congregations as distinct forms.¹⁸ She quotes 1992 figures which show the combined number of sisters and nuns per 10,000 United States Catholics is 18.1, as she notes, "lower than at any time since 1860." Her figures show that less than one percent of United States women religious are recent recruits; figures for men are similar.¹⁹ Similar figures apply in Canada and Europe, while religious communities in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are growing.²⁰ In part four of her book, the section I suggested as preparatory reading for this session, Wittberg applies social movement analysis to the causes of the change in the North Atlantic region. She locates those causes in a collapse of the ideology supporting apostolic religious life in that region and in the loss of key environmental resources. In her conclusions Wittberg writes:

The decline of Catholic religious communities is at least as important for the Church's future as is its priest shortage, even if the latter has received far more attention. For centuries, Catholicism has combined an institutionalized virtuoso

¹⁶See Nancy Reynolds, S.P., "A Comparison of the Specific Juridic Status of Women in the 1917 and 1983 Codes of Canon Law" (unpubl. diss., for Licentiate in Canon Law, CUA, 1984) 19 nn. 11 and 12.

¹⁷Mary Aquin O'Neill, RSM, "The Nature of Women and the Method of Theology," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 730-42, reviews the current state of the question; William R. O'Neill, SJ, "A Concluding Theological Postscript: Moral Reflections on *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*," manusc. 8-9, notes that the shift in teaching re women's equality means "the question of the suitability of women to receive priestly ordination is thus not merely raised anew; morally speaking, it is a new question."

¹⁸Patricia Wittberg, *The Rise and Fall of Catholic Religious Orders: A Social Movement Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 1.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, and 285n.4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 2.

status—the ordained priesthood—with a succession of “nascent” lay communities.* This internal outlet for its lay virtuosi has at least partially shielded the Catholic Church from the fissive and emigrant tendencies endemic in institutional Protestantism. With the decline of religious orders, however, such shielding no longer occurs. Researchers have estimated that as many as 100,000 U.S. Catholics convert every year to Protestant evangelism.* Catholics of Spanish background defect to Protestant denominations at a rate of about 60,000 per year, usually joining precisely those types of sectarian groups that provide the virtuoso opportunities Catholicism no longer offers them.* *Unless and until a new Catholic ideology can be formulated that allots a clear and valued place to lay religious virtuosi, the drain of its most committed members will continue.*²¹

The central question then becomes, as Wittberg notes, “What might be the elements of a new Catholic virtuoso spirituality?”²²

A theological assumption governing analysis of religious life is that each of the three great forms came to birth under the impetus of the Holy Spirit in response to the needs of a particular age. The apostolic form saw the light of day in the sixteenth century, a time of great change marked in Europe by the dawn of modernity, shifts in religious sensibility, and the comparatively widespread availability of the printed word. Jesuits, as typifying that form, were not founded intentionally either to meet the problems of modernity or to correspond with its insights. Rather, the new Society accepted modernity as a condition of life. Modernity was, simply, *there*. The approach to reality sketched in the second paragraph of this essay provided the background to the first centuries of the Society’s existence. As such it was neither ignored nor rejected; rather, in time members of the Society engaged in critical reflection on modernity, brought into it like other reflective people by the Galileo case, and held in that reflection by the complex of related questions affecting biblical exegesis, questions which eventually would demand reassessment of the relation between language and history so central to their primary ministry. The Jesuits were founded “to help souls;” nothing that affected people could remain indifferent to them, but the Society was (and is) at its best when its primary focus remains on the God-meant wholeness and holiness of the people to whom it ministers. Closely maintained, this focus provides entree into every question affecting human life.

Neither was the first apostolic order founded to correspond to the shift in religious sensibility that marked the sixteenth century. The early members reflect the shift, and the genius of Ignatius applied through the Society helped to shape the development of the new sensibility.

Finally, the ministry of the Word was key in the foundation of the Jesuits, although at first they were uncertain whether the *printed* word should be part of that ministry. How then did the first apostolic order relate to the time in which

²¹Ibid., 268-69. Emphasis added; *indicates where I omitted notes.

²²Ibid.

it was founded? Its members were men of their era, affected by but critical of its approach to reality, engaged in and shaping its religious sensibility, and serving others in ministries central to the needs of the era with the tools provided by that era. The parallels between the era's approach to reality, religious sensibility, and factors affecting ministries are more difficult to trace in the women's orders because of the intrusion of other cultural factors outlined above. The present changes in the situation of women should make for a difference in the future.

Not only is women's situation shifting, but in the twentieth century we have experienced global upheaval. "Postmodernity" is increasingly used to denote this era, one which Hans Küng sees beginning with the end of World War I. He explains that it

began with the collapse of bourgeois society and the Eurocentric world around the time of the First World War. For central and Eastern Europe it brought the collapse of the thousand-year old German Reich and the empire of the Tsars, of the four-hundred-year-old Protestant state-church system, and of modern liberal theology; along with the downfall of the Hapsburg empire it brought the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Chinese Empire. What is decisive is not the word "postmodernity," which is often used in a nebulous and facile way, but the fact of a global epoch-making upheaval, the implications of which need to be analyzed more closely.²³

Major changes have affected geopolitics, ideology, and theology; witness not only the fall of modern liberal theology in Germany, but also the shifts internal to Catholicism focused on Vatican II. Sallie McFague names some major assumptions, different from those that created the modern world, which are operative now:

a greater appreciation of nature, linked with a chastened admiration for technology; the recognition of the importance of language (and hence interpretation and construction) in human existence; the acceptance of the challenge that other religious options present to the Judeo-Christian tradition; a sense of the displacement of the white, Western male and the rise of those dispossessed because of gender, race, or class; an apocalyptic sensibility, fueled in part by the awareness that we exist between two holocausts, the Jewish and the nuclear; and perhaps most significant, a growing appreciation of the thoroughgoing, radical interdependence of life at all levels and in every imaginable way.²⁴

In McFague's opinion such assumptions set the context for valid theological work.

If a significant shift in the times evokes a significant shift in the available forms of religious life, we might expect the development of a new form. If such

²³Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (London: SCM, 1991) 3.

²⁴Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) x.

a development is underway in North America and Europe, its context includes a view of reality affected by developments in science and in language theory. Increasingly scientists find themselves urged to consider other than purely technological goals in their work. Simultaneously scholars who work with language recognize both the limits and possibilities inherent in language, which is a major tool for expressing our understanding of reality. Access to what is *really real* is no longer the province of scientists. Furthermore, the shifting religious sensibility which would shape and be shaped by a new form of religious life is increasingly marked by the encounter among the great world religions; it is also one in which privilege is moving towards the dispossessed, and one which knows the reality of holocaust. Finally the ministerial context in which we Americans, Canadians, and Europeans live is a solitary world becoming, despite itself, increasingly aware of its interdependence at all levels. Ecology is a dominant theme even as the word becomes electronic. If the Spirit continues to work as She has, this changed view of reality, this religious sensibility, and this ministerial environment typified by awareness of interdependence, ecological concerns, and wise use of new media will be at work among new religious groups. No more than did Mary Ward or Ignatius of Loyola will someone today set out to create a new form of religious life. Rather, those who may found such a new form will seek to respond to the signs of the times as we ourselves must do. Such response among its members may even now evoke the Spirit-given impetus for the renewal of apostolic religious life.

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THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE AGAPIC PRAXIS OF L'ARCHE

As lived experience and as a disciplined study, Christian spirituality is concerned with the work of the Holy Spirit in tensive interaction with the human spirit: (1) within a culture; (2) in relation to a tradition; (3) in light of contemporary events, hopes, sufferings, and promises; (4) in remembrance of Jesus Christ; (5) in efforts to combine elements of action and contemplation; (6) with respect to charism and community; (7) as expressed and authenticated in praxis.¹ These focal points provide the framework for this investigation of Jean Vanier and l'Arche as they give expression to a lay Christian spirituality. The governing concern throughout is to consider l'Arche as a repository of practical and theologically sophisticated insight into the Holy Spirit.

I shall proceed in four steps. First, I shall provide a brief survey of the life of Jean Vanier and the development of the l'Arche communities. Since this story is fairly well known, I will not deal with it at great length. In this first move I would like to draw attention to the l'Arche communities precisely as lay communities, as well as to the strengths and weaknesses that this entails. Second, I shall suggest that Vanier's encounter with two handicapped men, Raphael and Philippe, was the decisive event in his own call to found the l'Arche community. This human encounter is at the same time an encounter with the Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ. Third, I shall nod to elements in the Christian tradition which have influenced Jean Vanier. Vanier does not merely restate insights from tradition, but articulates a contemporary Christian social spirituality rooted in this tradition as well as in what he learns about human nature and the call to communion from the mentally handicapped. Central to his spirituality is the notion of the heart which, in its vulnerability, brokenness, and desire for communion, is the focus of the Holy Spirit's presence and action. Fourth, I shall tease out several insights about the Holy Spirit that emerge from the praxis of l'Arche.

JEAN VANIER AND L'ARCHE: LAYMAN AND LAY SPIRITUALITY

A Canadian, born in Geneva, Switzerland, on 10 September 1928, Jean Vanier is one of five children of the late nineteenth governor-general of Canada, Georges Philias Vanier, and his wife, Pauline Archer Vanier. Many things could

¹For a fuller development of these seven focal points of investigation in the study of Christian spirituality see Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996).

be said about Jean Vanier, even in a very brief biographical sketch such as this. Let it suffice to offer a few brief remarks.

After serving in the Royal Navy, as well as in the Royal Canadian Navy, Vanier resigned his commission in 1950. Sometime after his resignation from the navy, Vanier joined l'Eau Vive, a small community of students, predominantly lay, situated in a poor neighborhood near Paris, close to the Dominican community of Le Saulchoir. Shortly after his arrival at l'Eau Vive, Vanier was asked to direct the community when ill health forced the resignation of his friend and teacher, Dominican Thomas Philippe. Vanier directed the community under adverse circumstances for approximately six years, at which point he himself resigned from the directorship.

In 1962, Vanier successfully completed his doctoral dissertation in philosophy at l'Institut Catholique de Paris. Upon completion of his dissertation, *Le Bonheur: Principe et Fin de la Morale Aristotélicienne*,² Vanier began teaching philosophy at Saint Michael's College in Toronto.

Shortly after beginning his career as a professor of moral philosophy, Vanier moved to Trosly-Breuil, France, at the suggestion of his friend and former teacher Thomas Philippe. There he bought a small, dilapidated house which he called l'Arche, the Ark—Noah's Ark. After visiting a number of institutions, asylums and psychiatric hospitals, Vanier welcomed two mentally handicapped men, Raphael and Philippe, into his home on August 4, 1964.

From the seed sown in Trosly-Breuil in August 1964, l'Arche has grown to include over one hundred fifty communities worldwide, representing well over two hundred family-like homes. Small in number, loose in structure, the communities of l'Arche are founded upon the belief in the uniqueness and sacredness of each person, whether handicapped or not. Motivated by the affirmation of the primacy of the beatitudes in Christian and human living, the gifts of each person are to be nurtured and called forth with predilection for the poorest, weakest, and most wounded in community and society. The handicapped and their "assistants" (the nonhandicapped) live together in the spirit of the beatitudes.

As the communities of l'Arche have grown, they have taken on an ecumenical and interreligious character. For example, Christians and Hindus join together in common tasks and shared prayer in l'Arche, Bangalore. At the same time, many "assistants," particularly in France, where the majority of the communities have a high ratio of Roman Catholics, have asked that they be recognized as members of a canonical religious community. Although l'Arche has invited some of the assistants to make a covenant, a permanent commitment, within the community, Vanier has resisted efforts to establish l'Arche as a religious community for at least two reasons. First, because l'Arche presently has no official ties to the Roman Catholic Church, its members are at liberty to work with the

²Jean Vanier, *Le Bonheur: Principe et Fin de la Morale Aristotélicienne* (=LB) (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1965).

handicapped and begin communities in countries whose governments may be suspicious of or hostile toward the Roman Catholic Church. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Vanier has resisted the "canonical tendency" because of the restrictions which canon law would place on the mentally handicapped vis-à-vis their eligibility for full participation in religious life. In the spirit of l'Arche, the handicapped are the *core members* of the community. This central conviction would be harder to safeguard given the understanding of the suitability of the handicapped for religious profession as articulated in the Code of Canon Law.

Vanier did not set out to found a community, let alone a religious community. He insists that he simply responded to a call from Jesus to create a home with Raphael and Philippe. Those who live in the spirit of l'Arche have none of the "securities" provided by more traditional, canonical approaches to religious life. Vanier has chosen to forfeit the profit of recognition in order to do what needs to be done. At the same time it must be recognized that collaboration between l'Arche and various religious communities, particularly those whose members are committed to the poor and the marginalized—such as the Little Sisters and Little Brothers of Jesus of Charles de Foucauld—has been strong from the outset. There are several religious who have made a permanent commitment to l'Arche while remaining canonical members of their religious communities. Further, there are several men who have been ordained "priests for l'Arche," whose ministry is solely to the members of the community. Thus any understanding of the spirituality of l'Arche as lay must take cognizance of the strong measure of collaboration between l'Arche and those whose commitment is more formally or canonically recognized in the Church.

ENCOUNTER WITH HANDICAPPED PERSONS: ENCOUNTER WITH THE SPIRIT

The decisive revelation of Vanier's vocation occurred in his encounter with the handicapped people in 1964. Vanier writes that his life with handicapped people has taught him far more about living and about human relations than any theory or writing.³ The decisive event, the pivot around which his life and writings turn, is the meeting of Jean Vanier, Raphael and Philippe in 1964. It is to this event that one must look in an effort to appreciate Jean Vanier's spirituality.

Of the handicapped people of l'Arche, Vanier writes: "They have taught me much about human nature and the real meaning of human existence, the true value of love, of wonder, and even of contemplation."⁴ What Vanier could not find satisfying in the sophisticated theory of Aristotle, he stumbled upon, as if by surprise, in the struggles and half-audible sounds of these two handicapped men. Vanier had learned the systems of thought which emphasize the rational

³Jean Vanier, *Eruption to Hope (=EH)* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1971) 46.

⁴EH 39.

and intellectual capacities of the person. Post-World War II Europe had impressed upon him the importance of efficiency and technology in national and international development. What he had not yet learned prior to the encounter of 1964 is that while the person is comprised of the abilities of the intellect (head), and a great capacity for efficiency and productivity (hands), he or she is, more importantly, a being with a heart.⁵ In their woundedness and affliction, while not exhibiting capacities of the head or hands, handicapped persons demonstrate tremendous qualities of heart: celebration, forgiveness, tenderness, and compassion. For Vanier, the person is comprised of head, hands, and heart. The handicapped people of l'Arche enabled Vanier to uncover insight into the third, and most important, of these dimensions.

Handicapped persons, deprived of the possibility of accomplishing great things with the head or the hands, are richly endowed with qualities of the heart: joy, celebration, forgiveness, tenderness and compassion. It is precisely within this domain that the handicapped person is capable of making great progress.

When Vanier first began l'Arche he undertook his mission as one of providing shelter and comfort for people who were not capable of doing much or of making any significant progress.⁶ But he quickly found that these handicapped persons, given a warm and loving environment of acceptance and friendship, could make great progress and could advance quickly in the domain of the heart.⁷ Further, as Vanier quickly learned, in its domain they are often the teachers of the clever and the robust.

EDUCATING THE HEART: THE PRESENCE AND ACTION OF THE SPIRIT

In his writing and in his speaking, Vanier does not use philosophical or theological language. His approach is quite simple and direct. Philosophical and theological traditions, however, especially those of Thomas Aquinas and the image of the heart in Christian spirituality, have shaped his thought. These need to be kept in view if Vanier's spirituality is to be fully appreciated.

For Vanier, "heart" describes the most fundamental dimension of the person. He understands the person as open to attraction, to be acted upon and influenced by another, and to be drawn to relationship and communion. That is to say, he views the person primarily as an affective being. This does not mean that the heart and human life are irrational. It is, rather, to say that understanding, deliberation and choice are given direction by the affect when it is developed properly. In itself the heart is unformed, ambiguous, dubious, even disordered because of human sinfulness. When it is purified by the action of the Holy Spirit

⁵EH, 42, 47.

⁶"Jean Vanier's Account of the Evolution of His Concept of l'Arche" (=JVA), *Letters of l'Arche* 8 (Winter 1971/1975): 9-14, 10.

⁷JVA, 11.

within, it becomes the basis for contemplation (communication and communion with Christ in his mysteries) and action (service of one's neighbor).

In the active life, this attraction is formed as an openness to the weak, the wounded, and the handicapped. It requires that one be touched in one's own weakness. In contemplation this love of the weak is related to Jesus in his infancy, agony and passion as the disclosure of God.

Vanier contrasts the impurity and ambiguity of the human heart in and of itself with the heart renewed by grace. He recognizes a twofold purification of the heart. The first is by the activity of the Holy Spirit. The second occurs through participation in the life of a community in which one experiences the impact of love upon oneself.

Vanier is concerned with human needs of an affective sort. This concern helps him to understand the affective dimension of human nature, and also enables him to articulate that which is referred to in Scholasticism by use of the notion *voluntas ut natura*.⁸ But for Vanier, this is better appreciated in terms of human needs, longing, affectivity, and their fulfillment. Further, his attention to human needs helps him understand that dimension of human nature which is touched and transformed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁹

Vanier speaks of the three great needs of the human person: the need for light, life, and love. These needs might also be understood as the need for knowledge, freedom, and love. Vanier's understanding of need is based upon experience, in which vulnerability and weakness are crucial, as is human affectivity. In speaking of the heart, Vanier is describing basic human needs, with attention to vulnerability and attraction to communion in love.

All of this is related to an understanding of grace which heals and corrects the affective (*gratia sanans*). This grace also disposes one to the movements of God in the most vulnerable points of human existence. These may come directly to the person or through others in community. As a result one can pursue the good through the active life, and likewise be disposed to the contemplation of God's love in the mystery of Jesus Christ.

In referring to the appeal to the heart, and the instincts or promptings of the heart, Vanier is in line with Thomas' understanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, he has his own particular view, namely, that God's grace and attraction touch one at the most vulnerable region of human existence, and it is response to this action that moves one to compassion, joy, celebration, forgiveness, and similar qualities of the heart. The heart is that which can be

⁸For this treatment of the connection between the heart and the scholastic notion of *voluntas ut natura*, I am indebted to Marie-Dominique Chenu, "Les Catégories Affectives dans la Langue de l'Ecole," in *Le Coeur*, vol. 29 of the series *Etudes Carmélitaines* (n.p.: Desclée de Brouwer and Cie, 1950) 123-28.

⁹See Michael Downey, "A Costly Loss of Heart: The Scholastic Notion of *voluntas ut natura*," *Philosophy and Theology* 1/3 (Spring 1987): 242-54; see also Downey, "Jean Vanier: Recovering the Heart," *Spirituality Today* 38/4 (Winter 1986): 337-48.

attracted, touched, moved, acted upon; the affective inasmuch as drawn, rather than moving toward, of its own motion. Consequently, those who act from the heart, when moved by God to compassion, become signs of God's love and tenderness.

Central to Vanier's thought is his understanding of love in practice, and this he treats in terms of compassion and openness to the wounded and the weak. Love is of preeminence for Vanier as it reflects the very nature of God. It is the highest activity of the human person. From Vanier's Christian perspective, love sublates and nuances the Aristotelian virtues of justice, friendship and contemplation, the subject of this doctoral dissertation.¹⁰

On the basis of this there is a reformulation of the understanding of justice, since in efforts to bring about the common good the needs of the vulnerable and wounded should have priority. Of crucial import in the carrying out of justice is the virtue of hope, which is related to freedom. In pursuing justice one needs to cultivate other cognate virtues, such as poverty, simplicity, and abandonment. Justice is the pursuit of the good for the many in obedience to the mandates of the heart transformed by grace. The exercise of justice is aimed at the establishment of an order in which *la connaissance du coeur* has an important place, and the weak, wounded, and vulnerable have a certain priority.

The goal of knowledge given in contemplation is itself based in love, since it is rooted in the heart, and looks to the weak and vulnerable, or to the mystery of Jesus in the weakness of his infancy and hidden life, as well as to his agony and passion for the revelation of God. Contemplation is of the mystery of God revealed in the weak, and in the weakness of Jesus in his infancy, in his hidden life with Mary and Joseph of Nazareth, and in his agony and passion.

Friendship comes about by response to *connaissance d'amour* as one is prompted oneself by the attractions of grace and of the heart in another, making it possible for friendship to exist between any two persons, even those who in terms of human capacity are vastly unequal. Such a view of friendship is inconceivable in strictly Aristotelian terms.

Together with these there continues to be a need for rational deliberation and prudence, as well as for the exercise of the moral virtues in efforts to realize the goals of the reign of God.

THE SPIRIT IN THE AGAPIC PRAXIS OF L'ARCHE

What can be learned about the presence and action of the Holy Spirit on the basis of this description of the spirituality of Jean Vanier and l'Arche? Or, in other words, what is the understanding of the Holy Spirit that emerges from the praxis of l'Arche as a repository of theologically sophisticated wisdom?

¹⁰Even at the time of his doctoral studies, Vanier recognized the insufficiency of a purely Aristotelian ethic. *LB*, 418-21; see especially Vanier's reference to "le don de l'Esprit Saint," 420, and "la loi nouvelle de l'Amour," 421.

(1) The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ, who touches us in our poverty, fragility, and vulnerability.

(2) The Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ, is known in the experience of our own poverty, vulnerability, and weakness as disclosed in the encounter with the poor, weak, and wounded who reveal to the clever and robust their own brokenness. The presence and action of the Spirit is manifest especially in human woundedness.

(3) The grace of the Spirit has a strong note of *gratia sanans*. It is based on need. It heals and saves in and through participation in the mystery of communion.

(4) The work of the Spirit is to invite us into communion with those who are wounded and weak, and to embrace the weaker dimensions of ourselves as well as the marginalized dimensions of God, such as the divine kenosis revealed in the human history of salvation and the divine vulnerability in creation.

(5) Communion in and through the Holy Spirit is built on justice, friendship, and contemplation—now reconceived in light of the pride of place held by the poor and weak who constitute the core of such communion.

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