



CONVICTIONS

Number 27 - November - December 2010

Happy Christmas

Dear readers,

Our Saviour called the Magi to the crib. A star was to be their external guide. At the same time, this star enlightened them interiorly, through the light of grace, and this grace impelled them powerfully to obey its summons.

These truly wise men were faithful to the promptings of grace! Once they had seen the star and recognized God's will, immediately they prepared for their journey and left at once. Upon arriving, they proclaimed: "We have seen" - this represents preparatory grace, which enlightens and speaks to the heart - and: "We have come" - this is the ready acceptance and co-operation with grace. To know the will of God and to fulfill it immediately, this is the great virtue of the Magi. They quickly pass from recognition to desire, from desire to determination, from determination to accomplishment, never letting their own personal desires obstruct God's action. What wisdom lies concealed beneath this ready acceptance of grace!



What dangers, on the contrary, are implied in the idle neglect of grace? When God speaks, it would be an act of unfaithfulness to hesitate even for a moment. The least delay may be fraught with irreparable loss. St. Paul warns us not to miss the opportune moment: "It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than when we believed. The night is passed, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light" (Rom. 11:4). St. Augustine adds that there are special moments of grace: "If you hesitate, you run the risk of forfeiting it altogether. Or, are you perhaps of mind that the Lord will wait until it shall please you to accept the gifts of His love?" How many, perhaps countless, inspirations are imparted to us during our life, yet we hardly take notice. Oftentimes we can say with the Magi: "We have seen the star," but dare not add, "and we have followed the call."

The example of the Magi puts many lukewarm, indifferent faithful to shame. We Christians offer stubborn resistance to the promptings of the Holy Spirit while these pagan kings obey without hesitation! Many of us lag behind in our indifference, while we should and could be making rapid strides in perfection.

Great difficulties were encountered by the Magi on their way to Behlehem. They had to overcome many obstacles and brave many dangers. The star led them into a strange country, and when they believed themselves to be at their destination, it suddenly disappeared. Neither Herod nor the inhabitants of Jerusalem could give them the desired information concerning the newborn King of the Jews. This trial, however, neither shattered their courage nor caused their faith to waver. At the prompting of Jewish scholars, they humbly submitted to the prophetic mysteries revealed in Holy Scripture. Thus do noble and magnanimous souls love to act; surmounting all obstacles, they trust in God and obey his servants; they know how to bridle their own desires, to deny themselves, to suffer, to fulfill their duties, heedless of gossip. They seek God alone, and esteem all else as empty.

Do we imitate the Magi? Or do we instead grow mutinous in hours of trial? We know that these difficult hours will inevitably come. God demands the sacrifice of natural tendencies and the crucifixion of self-love. Confiding in God, we should courageously embrace these difficulties and this darkness. As soon as the honor of God and our salvation render it necessary, grace will return to assist us, just as the star reappeared for the Magi. The more sincere and humble our resignation in obscure, trying moments, the greater will be our joy upon the luminous return of God's grace.

The docility of the Magi puts us to shame. With great perseverance they followed the star and never abandoned their search for Jesus. Even when the star disappeared they continued their search with the same eagerness. We also have to be prepared and to fulfill the will of God as soon as the star of faith bids us to recognize it, without even a moment's hesitation.

May this Christmas time help us to follow faithfully the promptings of grace and to practice the virtues they inspire.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Father Jürgen Wegner

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At a pivotal point

Interview with H.E. Bishop Bernard Fellay by a reporter of the Catholic Magazine “Nouvelles de Chrétienté” (Sept.-Oct. 2010).

Nouvelles de Chrétienté (hereafter: NdC): The Society of St. Pius X is celebrating its fortieth anniversary. Is this the end of the wandering in the desert, as it was for the Hebrews in the time of Moses?

the desert, with one difference: the manna is quite difficult to find. There are encouraging signs, especially on the part of Rome; unfortunately they are quite mixed up in other very troubling matters. A few blades of grass in the desert....

NdC: In spite of everything, how is the Society of St. Pius X developing throughout the world?

H.E.: The Society is actually developing a bit everywhere. Some regions are making more rapid progress than others—I’m thinking of the United States, for example—but the big handicap that we run up against is the lack of priests. Requests for help come in from all sides, but because of our severe shortage of priests we cannot respond as we ought. With every appointment [of a SSPX priest to a pastoral assignment] we make a choice that is going to disappoint one or more groups of the faithful. On the one hand that is a rather good sign, since it shows a certain development in our work, but it is also quite painful. Think of the mission countries, particularly in Africa or in Brazil. If we could send fifty priests there, it would be a great relief. The immense continent of Asia is waiting also....

NdC: Archbishop Lefebvre used to say that for the authorities in Rome the statistics of that growth were more eloquent than theological arguments. Is that still true?

H.E.: I don’t know whether we should say “the statistics” or “the facts”. At any rate the two things are equally telling. As the good old saying puts it, *contra factum non fit argumentum*, the-



H.E. Bishop Fellay (hereafter: H.E.): It seems to me that what we are experiencing resembles instead one of those expeditions of the scouts who catch a glimpse of the Promised Land, although circumstances do not allow the people to enter it. In order to avoid any misinterpretation of the image just used, I hasten to add that we declare just as firmly as ever that we are Catholics and that, with God’s help, we intend to remain that way. However, for the Church as a whole this crisis does resemble a wandering in

re is no arguing against the facts—that is still totally valid. And Archbishop Lefebvre’s statement is quite true. We should note that it is not so much the number that impresses Rome, since we are still a negligible quantity in the Mystical Body as a whole. But what we represent, in an extremely vivid way, a living Tradition—that overawes them. These magnificent fruits which are very certainly, by the admission of a high-ranking Roman prelate himself, the work of the Holy Ghost—that is what induces the Roman authorities to take a look at us. All the more because we are talking about fresh fruit springing up in the middle of the desert.

NdC: In this month of September, reports on the implementation of the Motu Proprio concerning the traditional Mass are to be sent to the Holy See. Only a few bishops implemented the Roman directives generously. How do you explain this hesitancy, or this resistance?

H.E.: Just as the new Mass expresses a certain new spirit, that of Vatican II, so also the traditional Mass expresses the Catholic spirit. Those who cling tenaciously to Vatican II because they see in it a new start for the Church, or those who suppose that with Vatican II a new page was turned definitively in Church history, simply cannot accept the coexistence of a Mass that recalls precisely what they thought they had abandoned forever. There are two spirits embodied in the two Masses. That is a fact! And the two do not go together! We find among modern Catholics a similar hatred for the Rosary, for example. And it is all related. We see in the controversy over the Mass a very good illustration of the complexity of the crisis that is rocking the Church.

NdC: Do you mean to say that in the Church today, behind a façade of unity, there are hidden divisions not only between the local bishops’ conferences and the Holy See, but even in Rome among various opposing trends? Do you have factual evidence?

H.E.: Oh! Yes, alas, we certainly are in those times that have been foretold, when there will be cardinal against cardinal, bishop against bishop. This sort of dispute is generally very discreet and escapes the notice of the laity. But recently, on various occasions, it has become open and pu-

blic, for instance in the gratuitous attack by Cardinal Schönborn against Cardinal Sodano. That looked a lot like a settling of scores. But it is no secret that opposing trends clash in Rome itself. We have the facts about several cases, but I don’t think that it is helpful to the lay faithful to reveal such things.

NdC: A recent conference given by Msgr. Guido Pozzo, Secretary of the Ecclesia Dei Commission at the seminary of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (1) attempts to prove the doctrinal continuity between Vatican II and Tradition. To that end it deals with the question about the “subsistit in” and the issue of ecumenism. Do these examples seem convincing to you?

H.E.: I would not say “convincing” but surprising. That conference is the very logical application of the principles enunciated by Benedict XVI in December of 2005. And it gives us a presentation of ecumenism that is fairly different from what we have heard for the past forty years..., a presentation mixed in with eternal principles concerning the oneness of the Church and her unique perfection, concerning the exclusive character of salvation. We do see in this an attempt to preserve the Church’s perennial teaching and at the same time a Council that is revisited in the light of Tradition. The mixture, although interesting, still leaves open some logical questions concerning the role played by the other Christian confessions [denominations]... which were called “false religions” until the time of Pius XII inclusive. Will anyone from now on dare to use that term again?

NdC: In his lengthy conclusion, Msgr. Pozzo proposes a Second Vatican Council that has been re-examined—if not corrected; one that denounces relativism, a certain overemphasis on the “pastoral” approach, and an excessive reliance on “dialogue”.... Do you think that this presentation is capable of bringing about unanimity in Rome and in the dioceses? What do you think about this revised version of the Council?

H.E.: It is interesting, in the sense that they are presenting a new Second Vatican Council to us, a council which in fact we never knew and which is distinct from the one that was presen-

ted during the past forty years. A sort of new skin! It is interesting especially inasmuch as the ultra-modern trend is condemned rather strongly. A sort of moderate or tempered council is being presented to us. The question remains, what kind of reception will this new formula have? It will certainly be deemed too traditional for the modernists and not traditional enough for us. Let us say that many of our attacks have now proved to be justified, a good deal of what we condemn is condemned. But although the matter is condemned, there is still a major disagreement concerning its causes. Because ultimately, if such intellectual disorientation was possible with respect to the Council, and to such a degree, to such an extent..., there certainly must be a proportionate cause! If we discover such a great divergence in interpreting the conciliar documents, we will have to admit someday that the deficiencies in those documents are there for a reason.

NdC: Some people committed to Tradition think that the crisis in the Church should end instantaneously, that the passage from this crisis to its solution should take place all at once. In your view is this a sign of supernatural confidence or of all-too-human impatience? In a gradual resolution of the crisis, what are the positive steps that have already been taken? What steps do you hope to see in the future?

H.E.: The instantaneous solution of the crisis, as some people imagine it, can result only from a miracle or from large-scale violence. If it does not come about in that way, then there will still be the gradual solution. Although absolutely speaking one cannot exclude the possibility that God could work such a miracle, usually God governs His Church differently, through the more normal cooperation of creatures and of His saints. In general it takes at least as much time to get over a crisis as it did to unleash it, if not more. The path of reconstruction is long, and the work—immense. But above all the choice of personnel will be the determining factor. If the policy for nominating bishops finally changes, then we can hope. By the same token there will have to be a thoroughgoing reform of teaching at the pontifical universities and of priestly formation in the seminaries. These are long-range projects which at the moment are still

dreams, but over a period of ten years they could already be taking shape seriously. Everything depends on the pope at first. For the moment the positive thing is above all the acknowledgment that many things have gone awry.... People are admitting that there is a sickness, a grave crisis in the Church. Will they go much further? We will see.

NdC: What specifically can the Society of St. Pius X contribute as a solution to this unprecedented crisis? What role can Catholics devoted to Tradition take in this work of restoration? What do you expect from the young generation which is now twenty years old and will be sixty... in forty years?

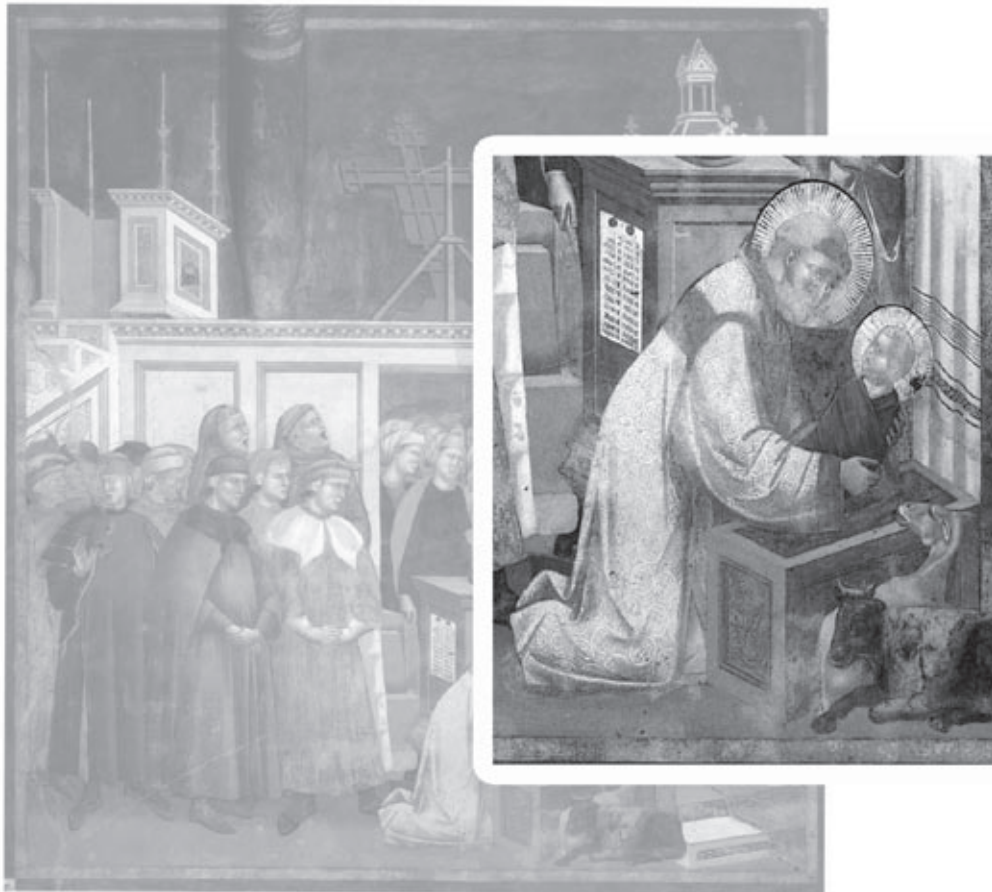
H.E.: [We can offer] a reminder that the Church has a past that still remains quite valuable today. This is not dusty nostalgia but a fresh look at the Tradition of the Church—a decisive contribution toward a solution of the crisis. We should add to this the reminder about the power of the traditional Mass, about the mission and role of the priest as Our Lord intends it, in His image and according to His Spirit. When we ask priests who approach the Society what they expect from us, they tell us initially that they expect doctrine. Even before the Mass! This is surprising, but at the same time it is a good sign. The lay faithful have the important role of witnessing, of showing that the Christian life as it has always been understood, with its demands and respect for God's law, is quite possible in the modern world. It is Christian life put into practice, a very concrete example needed by the man in the street. And for the generation of twenty-year-olds, I see that it is waiting, ready for the adventure of Tradition, sensing very well that what is being offered to it, apart from Tradition, is nothing but imitation goods. We are at a pivotal point for the future reconstruction and, although it is not yet clearly apparent, I think that everything is possible.

(I) Conference given by Msgr. Guido Pozzo on July 2, 2010 at the seminary in Wigratzbad (Germany), entitled, "Aspects of Catholic theology in the reception of Vatican II". See our commentary in DICI no. 220 dated August 7, 2010, "Vatican II: a debate between Romano Amerio, Msgr. Gherardini and Msgr. Pozzo".

St. Francis and the Crib

To celebrate the birth of Christ, St. Francis recreated the manger scene in a cave in the hills above Greccio, Italy. The real miracle was not, as some people say, that the figure of the infant came to life - but that there St. Francis first understood the humility of the Incarnation.

By Rev. Fr. Leonard Foley, O.F.M.



The lord of Greccio

Christmas was 15 days away. Francis was staying at a hermitage at Fonte Columbo. He had just come from Rome—the last time, for he would die in three years—where the pope had approved his Rule. The brief future would be filled with pain, even the pain of the wounds of

Christ. How to celebrate Christmas? He remembered his visit to the Holy Land, to Bethlehem. Why not? A kind of replica of the manger there. There was a cave, in Greccio... He had a good friend, Giovanni (John) Vellita, whom he had met on one of his preaching tours. John was a military man, lord of Greccio, just two miles

away. John had fallen under the spell of Francis, had renounced all worldly honors and was trying to live a life imitating that of Francis as well as he could. Francis, with the assurance of friendship, sent word: "If you want to celebrate the Feast of the Lord at Greccio, hurry and diligently prepare what I tell you. For I wish to recall to memory the little child who was born in Bethlehem. I want to set before our bodily eyes the hardships of his infant needs, how he lay in the manger, how with an ox and ass standing by he lay upon the hay." John began immediately. People prepared torches and candles to light up the night. The manger was prepared in the cave, and the ox and ass brought in. When Francis came from the friars' hermitage, he was delighted.

in Greccio, one can still see the stone—perhaps three feet high and two feet wide—on which the hay was placed. It has a brownish gray top and bottom, with a band of gray in the center. The top has a rough, shallow, V-shaped indentation. Here the carved image of the baby was laid. There were no figures of Joseph and Mary, just the two animals. As the villagers and friars crowded around, a priest began the Mass. Francis gave the sermon. His biographer, Thomas of Celano, Francis' contemporary, writes: "The saint of God stood before the manger, uttering sighs, overcome with love and filled with a wonderful happiness... He sang the Gospel in a sonorous voice, a clear and sonorous voice, inviting all to the highest rewards. Then he preached to the people standing about and spoke charming words concerning the birth of the poor King, and the little town of Bethlehem....When he spoke the name 'Child of Bethlehem' or 'Jesus,' his tongue licked his lips, relishing and savoring with pleased palate the sweetness of the words." The accounts do not say whether the child was a living baby or a carved figure. It was probably the latter, for it is recorded that at least one of the observers "saw the infant come alive."

Francis' vision

The simple celebration was not the first time the birth of Jesus was celebrated in a dramatic way, as we shall see. But Francis brought to the scene a vision that saw more than the pleasant tableau we now have. As quoted above, he wanted to show the hardships Jesus suffered already as an infant. In the daring phrase of St. Paul, he saw the emptying of the glory of the Son of God, born of a gentle mother but still thrown upon a stony and resisting world. Francis wanted to realize and help people realize exactly what God had done for his people, and "how poor he chose to be for our sakes." Francis himself had chosen the bitter poverty of being on the margin of society, with no resources or security. He saw the Son of God placing himself, as it were, on the margin of divinity. He saw a truly human Jesus, not a divine being hiding behind a deceptive physical facade. The humility of the Incarnation and of the Cross was his constant preoccupation. He wanted to think of nothing else—Bethlehem and Calvary. His life centered, then, around poverty and humility, sister virtues. He told his friars not to be ashamed to beg, "since God himself became poor for our sakes...."

The great evening arrived. People began to come in procession, carrying their torches and candles. The woods rang with their songs. They were rediscovering the joy of childhood. Today,



Poverty is the heritage which our Lord Jesus Christ has acquired for us." Thomas of Celano says, "He would often meditate on the desolation of Christ and his holy mother with tears, and he maintained that poverty was 'the queen' of the virtues, as she had become so radiantly manifest in the King and his mother." Francis' love and compassion for the suffering and Passion of Christ were so deep that he no longer cared about his own pain. In the year after this celebration, he would be so identified with the suffering Christ that the five wounds appeared in his body. (A Seraphim would indeed mark him with the five Wounds of Christ on Mount Alverno. Note from the Editor).

Spread of the Devotion

Before Francis' time, as early as the fifth century, the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome had a small oratory built like the cave of Bethlehem. The basilica's second title was "St. Mary at the Crib." The pope's first Mass of Christmas was offered there. Christmas plays, imitating those of Easter, probably grew up in the 11th century. And in the century before Francis lived, ecclesiastics dressed up as the midwives, Magi, shepherds and other persons of the Christmas story, as well as live animals, are already recorded in descriptions of the liturgical drama, the *Spectacula Theatralia*, as participants in Christmas celebrations. But it was Francis who thrilled the Catholic world with his simple and fervent celebration. After his death in 1226, the custom of having the crib at Christmas spread widely through Europe. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Volume IV, page 448) says: "By the dawn of the baroque era, the crib setting had become an intricate scenic landscape, and numerous secular figures were now added to those of the Holy Family, shepherds and Magi. Crib-making thus developed into an important folk art, especially in Portugal, in the Tyrol, and most of all in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, where it was actively patronized by Charles III de Bourbon (d. 1788). "The home crib became popular in Catholic Europe after 1600, owing, it is said, to the efforts of the Capuchins. Except for the crib (the 'putz') of the pietist Moravians, manger-building was not originally adopted by Protestants. Pre-Reformation England had had its own crib custom, that of baking the Christmas mince pie in an oblong manger shape to cradle an image of the Child. The British Puritans, therefore, in

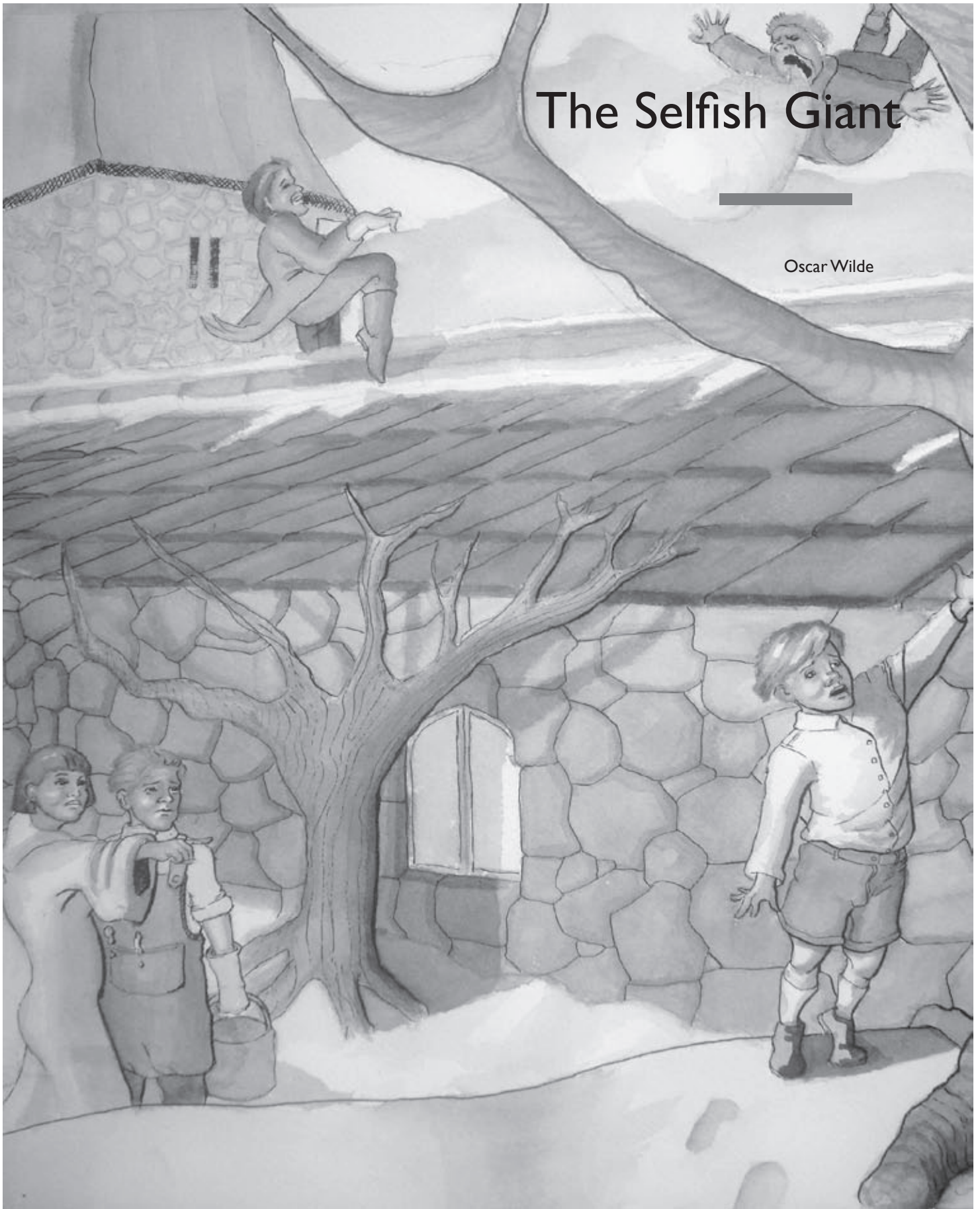
outlawing Christmas, declared particular war on mince pie as 'idolatry in crust.'"



Francis would smile at our nice varnished cribs, though he would bless any home that has one. Probably he would prefer those set up outdoors with live animals. And if he were to stand by one and preach today, he might say something like this: "Look deeper than this pleasant scene. See your God become your food for eternity in a feeding place for animals. See the simple bands wound around the helpless baby, not the embroidered dress. See a man and woman wearing the clothes of the poor. See and smell the animals. Feel the cold and dirt of the cave, lighted only by a little fire. And adore your God, who took a human heart that could know the greatest love and the sharpest pain, arms that could embrace the sinners, the neurotics, the lepers, and hands that could touch cheeks running with tears, and be pierced with nails. Adore your poor and humble God."

The Selfish Giant

Oscar Wilde



The Giant's garden

Every afternoon, as they were coming from school, the children used to go and play in the Giant's garden. It was a large lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that in the spring-time broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. "How happy we are here!" they cried to each other.

One day the Giant came back. He had been to visit his friend the Cornish ogre, and had stayed with him for seven years. After the seven years were over he had said all that he had to say, for his conversation was limited, and he determined to return to his own castle. When he arrived he saw the children playing in the garden. "What are you doing here?" he cried in a very gruff voice, and the children ran away. "My own garden is my own garden," said the Giant; "any one can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself." So he built a high wall all round it, and put up a notice-board:

TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED

He was a very selfish Giant.

The poor children had now nowhere to play. They tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones, and they did not like it. They used to wander round the high wall when their lessons were over, and talk about the beautiful garden inside. "How happy we were there," they said to each other. Then the Spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Only in the garden of the Selfish Giant it was still winter. The birds did not care to sing in it as there were no children, and the trees forgot to blossom. Once a beautiful flower put its head out from the grass, but when it saw the notice-board it was so sorry for the children that it slipped back into the ground again, and went off to sleep.

The only people who were pleased were the Snow and the Frost. "Spring has forgotten this garden," they cried, "so we will live here all the year round." The Snow covered up the grass with her great white cloak, and the Frost painted

all the trees silver. Then they invited the North Wind to stay with them, and he came. He was wrapped in furs, and he roared all day about the garden, and blew the chimney-pots down. "This is a delightful spot," he said, "we must ask the Hail on a visit." So the Hail came. Every day for three hours he rattled on the roof of the castle till he broke most of the slates, and then he ran round and round the garden as fast as he could go. He was dressed in grey, and his breath was like ice. "I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming," said the Selfish Giant, as he sat at the window and looked out at his cold white garden; "I hope there will be a change in the weather."

But the Spring never came, nor the Summer. The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant's garden she gave none. "He is too selfish," she said. So it was always Winter there, and the North Wind, and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow danced about through the trees.

One morning the Giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. It sounded so sweet to his ears that he thought it must be the King's musicians passing by. It was really only a little linnet singing outside his window, but it was so long since he had heard a bird sing in his garden that it seemed to him to be the most beautiful music in the world. Then the Hail stopped dancing over his head, and the North Wind ceased roaring, and a delicious perfume came to him through the open casement. "I believe the Spring has come at last," said the Giant; and he jumped out of bed and looked out.

What did he see?

He saw a most wonderful sight. Through a little hole in the wall the children had crept in, and they were sitting in the branches of the trees. In every tree that he could see there was a little child. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children's heads. The birds were flying about and twittering with delight, and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing. It was a lovely scene, only in one corner it was still winter. It was the farthest corner of the garden, and in it was standing a little boy. He was so small that he could not reach up

to the branches of the tree, and he was wandering all round it, crying bitterly. The poor tree was still quite covered with frost and snow, and the North Wind was blowing and roaring above it. "Climb up! little boy," said the Tree, and it bent its branches down as low as it could; but the boy was too tiny. And the Giant's heart melted as he looked out. "How selfish I have been!" he said; "now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever and ever." He was really very sorry for what he had done.

Eyes full of tears

So he crept downstairs and opened the front door quite softly, and went out into the garden. But when the children saw him they were so frightened that they all ran away, and the garden became winter again. Only the little boy did not run, for his eyes were so full of tears that he did not see the Giant coming. And the Giant stole up behind him and took him gently in his hand, and put him up into the tree. And the tree broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, and the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them round the Giant's neck, and kissed him.

And the other children, when they saw that the Giant was not wicked any longer, came running back, and with them came the Spring.

"It is your garden now, little children," said the Giant, and he took a great axe and knocked down the wall. And when the people were going to market at twelve o'clock they found the Giant playing with the children in the most beautiful garden they had ever seen.

All day long they played, and in the evening they came to the Giant to bid him good-bye.

"But where is your little companion?" he said: "the boy I put into the tree." The Giant loved him the best because he had kissed him.

"We don't know," answered the children; "he has gone away."

"You must tell him to be sure and come here tomorrow," said the Giant. But the children said that they did not know where he lived, and had never seen him before; and the Giant felt very sad. Every afternoon, when school was over, the children came and played with the Giant. But

the little boy whom the Giant loved was never seen again. The Giant was very kind to all the children, yet he longed for his first little friend, and often spoke of him.

"How I would like to see him!" he used to say. Years went over, and the Giant grew very old and feeble. He could not play about any more, so he sat in a huge armchair, and watched the children at their games, and admired his garden. "I have many beautiful flowers," he said; "but the children are the most beautiful flowers of all."

Little boy

One winter morning he looked out of his window as he was dressing. He did not hate the Winter now, for he knew that it was merely the Spring asleep, and that the flowers were resting. Suddenly he rubbed his eyes in wonder, and looked and looked. It certainly was a marvelous sight. In the farthest corner of the garden was a tree quite covered with lovely white blossoms. Its branches were all golden, and silver fruit hung down from them, and underneath it stood the little boy he had loved.

Downstairs ran the Giant in great joy, and out into the garden. He hastened across the grass, and came near to the child. And when he came quite close his face grew red with anger, and he said, "Who hath dared to wound thee?" For on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.

"Who hath dared to wound thee?" cried the Giant; "tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him."

"Nay!" answered the child; "but these are the wounds of Love."

"Who art thou?" said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child. And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, "You let me play once in your garden, today you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise."

And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.

Can religion be taught successfully?

Teachers and parents alike have to face up to a common problem. Anybody can teach a child to memorize the questions and answers of the catechism. However, this does not mean that the child, once grown up, will keep, observe and practice the Faith

Fr. Peter Scott, SSPX

Teachers and parents alike have to face up to a common problem. Anybody can teach a child to memorize the questions and answers of the catechism. However, this does not mean that the child, once grown up, will keep, observe and practice the Faith. To the contrary, we are all aware of the frequency with which our students and children abandon everything. This is a great frustration for traditional parents and teachers. We explain the Faith at length, we drill on the memorization of the catechism; we teach apologetics; we explain, at least to some extent, the crisis in the Church. Yet all this abundant information appears to be on no avail with certain students and young people. One response to this tragedy is to simply attribute it to free will, since ultimately no one turns against God unless he chooses to do so. Another response is to blame it upon the spirit of the world, which introduces into the imaginations, passions, mind and will of young people its own false principles of materialism, self-satisfaction, personal advancement, success, etc., entirely opposed as they are to the principles of the Catholic Faith.

Is something missing?

However, a more truthful examination of conscience finds such explanations too facile. Is

there not, perhaps, something that we are doing wrong in our teaching of the Faith? Is there not, perhaps, something missing that paralyzes children's free cooperation with grace? Is there not some inadequacy that makes our children easy prey to the world and to its false principles?

It seems, indeed, that there is, and that far too frequently we have focused on filling the minds of children with information, but have left the character as a whole unformed. Just as one can study Theology without being a saint, so also is it possible, nay even frequent, for children to know their catechism very well, but to have missed out on a supernatural character formation. Their intellect has learned the truths of Faith, but there is no corresponding supernatural elevation to their thoughts, views, judgments, opinions, appreciations, passions, desires, bearing, manners, to their whole outlook on life. Here lies the real defect in our teaching of the catechism. The teachings, well known as they are, tend not to be interiorized so as to form the whole man according to Christ. The book of the catechism alone, as thorough and precise as it might be memorized, is no more sufficient for teaching the Faith than the Bible alone is in teaching divine Revelation. Good teaching methods alone, as sophis-

ticated and well developed as they might be, are no more sufficient in forming character than theology is in making saints.

Faith depends on hearing

What, then, is this elusive, missing element, that ought to be communicated along with the catechism? An inkling of this comes from the very word "catechism", a Greek word that means to teach by word of mouth. It is likewise referred to by St. Paul, when he explains that the mission of the Apostles is to preach "the Gospel of peace", the "word of faith", and explains why, namely: "Faith then depends upon hearing, and hearing on the word of Christ" (Rm 10:17). It is, he explains, the Profession of Faith with the mouth, that brings about eternal salvation both for those who speak and those who hear (v.10).



If Faith is a gift that God alone can infuse into the heart, the human act that best disposes to this is the exterior but heartfelt profession of supernatural Faith. For although it is a divine and theological virtue, it is exercised by real men, using their human intelligence, overflowing there from to all the other human faculties and activities. It is consequently not surprising that from the time of the Apostles until now, it is the sight of a living and enthusiastic Faith, placing all thinking and life in dependence upon divine re-

velation, that most attracts souls to the Church. Why would the teaching of catechism to Catholic children be any different? It is true that the baptized child already has the gift of Faith, but he still has to be drawn to use it, to exercise it, to apply it to daily life, and to see his happiness in this Faith. This is not done by pure instruction.

Here lies the most frequent defect in the teaching of catechism. The mind is filled with truth, but the character is not formed by the catechist as it ought to be, as it was by the Apostles, as it was by St. Francis Xavier. Father Edward Leen, C.S.Sp., in *What is true education?*, has this very relevant observation to make:

"The growing child in its character reflects not a book, but the person under whose ascendancy the child comes. If the young person is to acquire a strong Christian temper, this will be done not through the dead letter of the printed page, but through a person whose own mind and will and emotional nature are attuned to the spirit of Christianity. It is not enough that the catechist know accurately the truth he teaches and the morality he expounds. He must have a love for, and an enthusiasm for, the truth...The catechist must aim at inflaming the minds and the hearts and the emotions of his pupils with an enthusiasm for their religion." (p. 166)

The Acts of the Apostles demonstrate the method used by the Apostles. They spoke of Jesus Christ Himself, His works, His sufferings, His death, His teachings, and His divine life. Would it not also be very effective for us to relate the teaching of the truths of the catechism to the words of Our Divine Savior, or His passion or His life? This is the great intuition of St. Ignatius of Loyola in his meditation on the call of Christ the King. It is the divine Person that we are invited to follow, rather than simply a moral code or even a teaching, that sharing in his life and sufferings, we might also share in His victory.

World appealing to the young

What a better response could there be to the attractions of the world? The world attempts to make itself appealing to the young by presenting itself as genuinely human, capable of giving man self-confidence and self fulfillment, so as to achieve his full human potential. The deception is diabolically devious, but it is a trap laid

for every young person, especially if he has some sense of an ideal. Very many are those who fall for it, for they very wrongly consider the practice of the Faith as the following of a book of rules and laws, of obligations and restrictions. In answer to this, the catechist must present the appeal of a divine Person, only capable of enabling man to overcome his sins, failures and weaknesses; the sublime appeal of a divine Person alone capable of bringing man to rise above his littleness, his finite pusillanimity, to satisfy his longing for the infinite, for a share in the divine life, to fulfill the restlessness of the soul who, like St. Augustine, will remain restless until it finds its rest in God. There are always exceptional young people who are aware of this, and who are consequently drawn to follow a vocation. But why should not all teenagers feel this divine attraction, which is just as necessary to make sense of life in the world as out of it? Is it, perhaps, that their teachers do not always present it adequately to them?

Father Leen points out clearly the connection between the enthusiasm of living our Faith focused on the divine Person, with its immediate consequence of the sharing in Christ's life through sanctifying grace, on the one hand, and the resistance to the world's temptations on the other:

"It is only when mind and will and imagination are, as it were, steeped in the person of Jesus, His life, His works, His sayings, His views, His principles, His ideals, that one is strong to resist the seduction of what competes with the Saviour for the loyalty of the human heart...Vividly should be set before the young person the words, the works, and especially the kind of life Jesus wished man to live. The spiritual beauty of the moral life taught by Christ should be painted in glowing colours to recommend the asceticism without which it cannot be. The child should be taught that this good way of acting is necessary, otherwise the soul cannot get the beautiful life of God which the soul of Jesus had and which He was anxious to share with men." (Op. cit. pp. 167-171).

Simplification

Clearly creativity and imagination are required to communicate this enthusiasm for the Faith that forms the character. However, alone

they do not suffice, no matter how elaborate the class. There is another requirement: simplification; going beyond the detail of the catechism to enable the child to discover the essential mystery of the catechism. What is this, if not to be filled with wonder at a leitmotiv to be found throughout - namely that God came to share our human life, that we might share his divine life, that we might be lifted up to the supernatural order, which we know only by Faith. It is this sense of the supernatural, to which children are so open, that is fundamental in the teaching of the catechism. Allow me to quote Father Leen once more:

"The whole economy of God's love relations with mankind turns upon the notion of the supernatural....The great central notions of the whole Christian scheme are, then: Divine Grace; Jesus the meritorious cause of Grace; the Mystical Body, the actual mode in which Christ's grace is communicated to and shared in by man. To these three notions is joined that of Our Blessed Lady who, as Mother of the Mystical Body, exercises the function of motherhood towards the whole redeemed race of mankind." (Op. cit. pp. 176-179).

Here lies the key to character formation in teaching the catechism: - the imitation of Christ so as to share his life in a supernatural way. Understood in this way, the catechism is no longer a list of questions and answers, a compilation of facts to be learned, but an appealing invitation by the Most Holy Trinity to share His goodness and happiness with His creatures. The teachings of the Gospel and the lives of the saints can be used to illustrate this plan of love that extends from the divine permission for the evil of Original Sin to the final transformation at the Last Judgment. A supernatural character based upon the admiration for the mystery of sanctifying grace, and the living of the reality, is established in the soul. The character of Jesus, our Saviour, is imprinted, so that it is no longer the child who lives, but Christ who lives in him (Gal 2:20). Thus are defeated the false ideals of the enemy of mankind.

The discerning of spirits

If we can contact evil spirits in the paranormal world, it is of the utmost importance that we discern which spirits we contact. We must be aware of Satan's tricks, so that he, the liar, cannot deceive us.

Mrs. Martie Dieperink

How do we discern?

Paranormal healers, reiki-masters and spiritual leaders tell us that they communicate with spirits. This will be dealt with in more detail in the next section. What is of interest at present is whether they discern between good and evil spirits and, if so, how they make the distinction.

It is remarkable that, without exception, New Age authors speak about their spirits and guides in a positive way and don't wonder whether they may be deceived. Sanaya Roman and Duane Packer write in their book *Opening to Channel* that people, without exception, say that channelling has influenced their life in a positive way. For instance, they now have a broader worldview and have more compassion for themselves and others. Almost all people, they say, have experienced more prosperity and have become more conscious of their goal. Moreover, they have got more confidence in their inner messages. Many people experience channelling as an important step towards illumination. They experience spirits as being higher light bearers. They write that many guides of a high level are almost pure energy and radiate light. They also realise that there are lower entities with which we must

not contact, but they don't call them evil entities; they are only less developed and can give negative experiences. They predict calamities or they promise wealth or fame. After their advice you feel powerless, depressed or anxious.

The medium Ursula Roberts also warns in her book *All about Mediumship* against lower negative entities. We should distrust messages like: "You will save the world," "you are a strong personality," and "Jesus writes to you." All these messages need not be untrue, she says, but good spirits preach humility. Evil spirits only want to flatter the ego and foster a spirit of misplaced pride.

The conclusion is: New Agers can indeed make a certain distinction between lower and higher good spirits, but they don't believe that there are also high, but fallen angels. They simply think that the spirits they communicate with are higher light bearers; therefore they are good.

In New Age books there is no warning about the risks taken when we start communicating with spirits. Roman and Packer only relate petty discomforts. For instance, the world may look unreal in the aftermath of a trance. And one can

experience pain, which is explained as follows: the guide brings a higher energy into your body with which you are unable to deal. Or you can become depressed. This is explained as an after-effect of the higher consciousness that one has experienced.

Only John Klimo – in general he has a positive view of channelling – remarks on the fact that serious troubles can occur and cites Hans Bender, a psychiatrist, who talks of “mediumistic psychosis.” In his experience a lot of patients who suffer from a psychosis, have entered the paranormal world in one way or another. Channelling can even lead to suicide. In general there are no references to the great risks of channelling in New Age books.

Experiences with the paranormal

When I was still at school I met a Greek who read my palm and predicted that something quite horrible would happen before my death. For a long time I lived with the feeling that something terrible was going to happen to me at the end of my life. Predictions are very often concerned with negative things and can cause great anxiety.

Once in a while I too had predicting or telepathic dreams concerning disasters. One summer when I was staying in Germany I had a nightmare in which a war started in a city. The next day I heard that the Berlin wall had been built. Just before going to India I dreamed that I was on my way to India by ship but there was something wrong. The ship could not sail through the Suez Canal and had to sail around Africa, which meant I arrived in India too late. I sensed some pending disaster. Fortunately, the ship could sail through the Suez Canal on the way to India and I forgot about my dream. But when I stayed in the ashram, a war against Israel broke out and the Suez Canal was indeed closed and the ship had to sail around Africa.

Once you have entered the paranormal world, one thing leads to another. During my student days I examined the different aspects of the alternative circuit. I attended a meeting of the Sufis (mystical Islamic sect) movement and a course with the Rosicrucians. I read books written by eastern gurus and Rudolf Steiner and occult books on Palmistry, astrology and also mag-

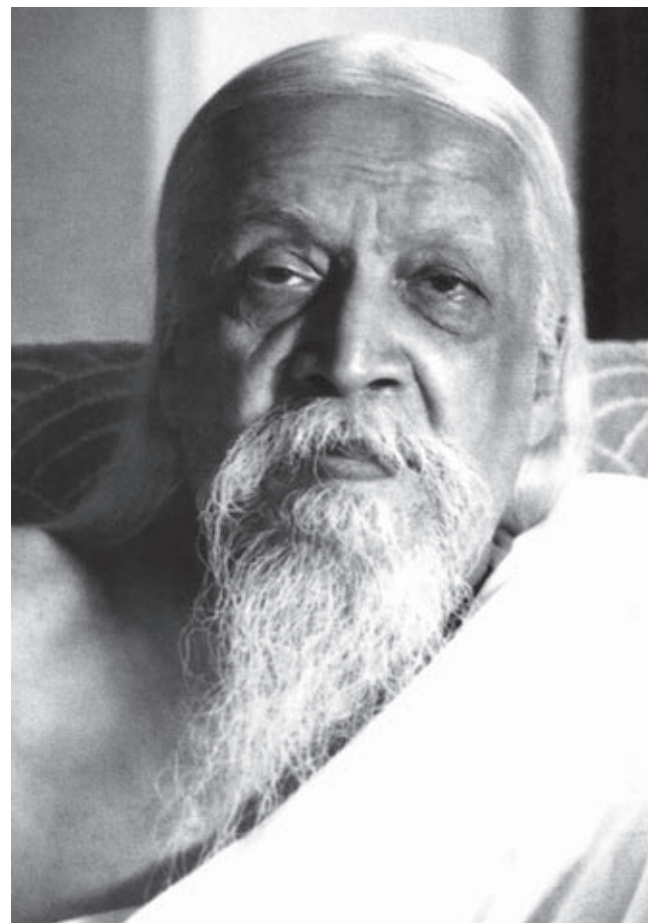
ic. I practiced some yoga exercises and went to a meeting with the paranormal healer Croiset. I attended séances several times. The medium, a woman, was hypnotised by her husband. She would lose consciousness and then the so-called spirits of the dead would speak through her. A young man who was visiting was troubled by a black magic spell, he was apparently treated by the spirit of an Egyptian doctor. I never heard whether he got cured or not. The medium said that she was exhausted after such séances. These sessions did not have a beneficial effect on her health. But, in those days, that did not bother me at all. I was not aware of any dangers and, full of expectation, I even went to India on my own.

Aurobindo Ashram

My stay in the Aurobindo Ashram in South India during 1966 – 1967 impacted my life enormously. An ashram is a community where one practices yoga under the spiritual guidance of a guru. The guru, Sri Aurobindo, had already died but his co-guru, a western lady of almost 90, called the ‘Mother’, was still alive and possessed great paranormal powers. She had trained in occultism for years. On my birthday I went to visit her. She laid hands on me and I received her ‘blessings.’ I sensed that her powers were paranormal.

After that year I returned to the Netherlands with the feeling that I had gained new inspiration that could also be important for the church. I continued my studies and had almost completed them when my life took an unexpected turn. Ini-

Guru Sri Aurobindo



tially, I had the feeling that the trip to India had done me good, but then I was suddenly confronted with a long period of suffering. It all began when I went into a trance and this happened whether I liked it or not. According to Roman and Packer a trance is a state of consciousness in which you can contact a spirit guide. I also experienced that, in a state of trance, you can become hypersensitive to influences from the paranormal world of spirits. In such a mental state your own spirit becomes empty and then another spirit can act through you. At first it was a state of supreme bliss. I had a sensation

started to suffer from nightmares and the physical troubles increased. One night I woke up with excruciating pains in my chest. They were so severe that I could no longer even sit in a chair as usual. This caused me to spend months lying on my bed. In my distress I wrote to my guru who sent me a 'blessings packet,' in which she had radiated energy. I was required to put it on my chest. (This is the same method now used by Jomanda.) Then I had a wonderful experience of being healed! I was so happy! In spite of everything I had completed my studies and now I could start to work.



**Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry**

of experiencing something of the divine and the feeling of having reached a state of illumination. But this bliss did not last long. I even lost consciousness like the medium did through hypnosis and, when I came out of the trance, I experienced a tremendous tension and pressure on my head for the first time in my life and I was unable to study.

From that moment I had continual problems. From time to time I would go into a trance, I

But my joy did not last long. A few months later the misery began again, and from that time on I started to feel pain and tension in my whole body. I had the feeling that I had to compete with a power much stronger than myself. With ups and downs I suffered like this for many, many years.

A paranormal healer crossed my path; he wanted to help me because he could transmit energy. And, again, I experienced the same

thing. After the treatment, for a time, things improved but afterwards my health deteriorated once more so that I finally came to the conclusion: things are only going to go from bad to worse. In the next section we will see how the turn for the better came. Of course each story is unique and, fortunately, not everybody who enters the paranormal world needs to endure such pains, but there is always a price to pay.

The Bible

I have personally experienced that evil powers and forces do exist. The warnings given in the Bible are not the product of the narrow-minded from the distant past, but are highly relevant today.

The criterion for New Agers is, as we have already seen, that their spirit guides are of a high level and are light bearers and, therefore, good beings. Once when I talked to Jomanda I asked her, "How do you know you have contacted good spirits and not the evil ones?" She answered, "They are of a very high level." But I replied, "Jomanda, that does not mean a thing. The Bible teaches that the devil is of a very high level." Then she became very angry. I simply wanted to make clear that the Bible warns that this is not an adequate criterion. Satan was created as a high-ranking angel and the apostle Paul warns us that he, Satan, can imitate the miracles of God (2 Cor. 11:14). In the Old Testament we find a striking account about the battle between the real prophets of God and the magicians who imitated God's miracles. We read:

"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'When Pharaoh says to you, Perform a miracle, then say to Aaron, Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.' So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs." (Exodus 7:8 - 12)

As we have seen, Professor Tenhaeff thought that the saints perform the same miracles as the witches and magicians. Indeed, the wonder Aar-

on performed was exactly like the magic of the Egyptian magicians. Although it appeared they performed the same wonders, the miracles of both parties came from different sources. Moses and Aaron accomplished the miracle in the name of God but the Egyptian magicians performed their signs by means of their idols. There was a radical difference between God and these idols because Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. God shows here that He is the Conqueror and that He is stronger than the demonic forces. Jesus warns also, as we have seen, that people who are influenced by satanic spirits can perform great signs and wonders.

Satan has brought illness and ruin into this world. A well-known example of this is Job's suffering. God had permitted Satan to test Job. Job sat down among the ashes, covered with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head (Job 2:7). He looked so terrible that his friends did not recognise him. This is Satan's horrible work.

Jesus speaks of bondage to Satan in the case of a special disease "On the Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, 'Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.' Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath. The Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?'" (Luke 13:10-16)

Satan can also make people mentally ill. Job was afflicted by inner unrest (Job 3:26). This is also a great problem today. Satan can even make man possessed or mad. He can also cause man to lose his or her humanity and so become like a beast.

“They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.” (Mark 5:1–5)

So Satan can inflict a great deal of suffering on men. But apparently Satan can also cause people to have good luck and he can perform healing miracles. How is that possible? We associate Satan’s work with death and destruction, but what about healing? We have to realise that Satan was not bad originally; on the contrary, he was a high-ranking angel. Being one of the highest angels he received great gifts and power from God. The force and energy he has received from God, he now uses for evil in order to bind people. Because he has received his power from God originally, he can imitate the wonders of God and also healing miracles to a certain extent. He can also inspire you to make beautiful art and to write fascinating books. If you will fall down and worship him, he will give you all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, he told Jesus (Matthew 4:8, 9). If man binds himself to satanic powers, he can do abnormal things. We have seen that a possessed man could wrench his chains apart. This is impossible to do with our normal strength. This man had paranormal strength from an evil spirit.

At the start things can look pretty good. We have the feeling that we have benefited from it and have received gifts, but the end is bitter. The devil’s intention is to bind a person’s soul to himself and pull him into hell. One does not immediately see that because the devil comes as an angel of light. Remember demons know how to make a good impression at first, but after a time you discover that you have been deceived by them.

The effects

When I went to India, I was still young and naïve. I had no idea that evil powers could indeed deceive you. So it is with many people today who enter the paranormal world not realis-

ing the dangers. Sometimes people only realise on their deathbed that they have been taken in by the devil. Rolf Wennekes saw Transcendental Meditation teachers who died rebellious, frightened and insecure.

Often people only perceive after a time that they have become bound: they suffer from psychic troubles, like anxieties, depression or suicidal tendencies. Their headache may be healed at first, but after a time the complaint returns and often much worse, or they have psychic disorders. The worst effect is that a spiritual blockage arises, making it impossible to believe in Jesus Christ. Such a person has become bound and, in the worst case, becomes possessed like the man in the gospel of Mark. He is completely under Satan’s control.

Simon the magician

Let us look once again at what we need to notice when we come into contact with a person who claims to have seen an angel or can heal people so that we know whether that gift or experience is of God.

We have learned the following principles:

- One can recognise a false spirit by arrogance
- Satan discredits the gospel
- Satan imitates the miracles of God. At the outset they seem real and positive miracles.
- We have to pay a high price for his gifts: we become bound and rush headlong to perdition. Jesus said you will know the trees by their fruits.

We have seen that Professor Tenhaeff made no distinction between miracles done by the apostles and the magic practiced by Simon the magician. In either case the point would be that general human capacities are at work. The Bible, however, mentions a battle between the apostle Peter and Simon the magician. If Peter and Simon had the same spirit as their source, this battle would not have taken place. The battle is really only understandable if there was a conflict of spirits.

Let us see whether we can recognise the above-mentioned principles of false wonders worked by Satan in the story of Simon the magician. The account is as follows:

"And Philip going down to the city of Samaria, preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord were attentive to those things which were said by Philip, hearing, and seeing the miracles which he did. For many of them who had unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, went out. And many, taken with the palsy, and that were lame, were healed. There was therefore great joy in that city. Now there was a certain man named Simon, who before had been a magician in that city, seducing the people of Samaria, giving out that he was some great one: To whom they all gave ear, from the least to the greatest, saying: This man is the power of God, which is called great.

And they were attentive to him, because, for a long time, he had bewitched them with his magical practices. But when they had believed Philip preaching of the kingdom of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also; and being baptized, he adhered to Philip. And being astonished, wondered to see the signs and exceeding great miracles which were done. Now when the apostles, who were in Jerusalem, had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Who, when they were come, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost.

For he was not as yet come upon any of them; but they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw, that by the imposition of the hands of the apostles, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying: Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I shall lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said to him: Keep thy money to thyself, to perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." (Acts 8:5-20)

This story gives us several indications that Simon's miracles were not of God.

1. Simon had a spirit of arrogance. He claimed to be a very special man. He was even called 'the great power of God.' He believed he was divine.

2. In Acts 8:19 it is clear that his heart is not right in the sight of God. He thought he

could purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit with money. (This is still called simony.) So he perverted the ways of the Lord.

3. He worked miracles and people were baffled by his magic, but he was not able to all that the apostles did. His wonders were an imitation of the real miracles of God.

4. He did not set the people free, instead he bound them to himself. They listened to him. When the apostle came into the city, there was great joy which they did not have before. Magic does not give real joy. On the contrary, the atmosphere takes on an air of dejection. The gospel brought real deliverance to the city.

In an early Christian writing (Recognitions of Clement) we read more about the battle between the apostle Peter, who had also come to Samaria, and Simon the magician. "I have," Simon said, "made the soul of a boy, unsullied and violently slain, and invoked by unutterable adjunctions, to assist me, and by it all is done that I command." So he was into spiritualism. This spirit assisted him. Peter recognized that Simon was deluded by demons. It is not true that his magic was simply a matter of general human ability. He was assisted by a spirit, probably a demon.

He felt very special; he claimed to have an exalted power, which excelled that of God the Creator. His flesh was so influenced by the power of his divinity that he believed he could endure through to eternity. Furthermore, he said that could make himself invisible to those who wished to lay hold of him, and again become visible when he felt it was right for him to be seen again. He professed to have made a boy out of the air. The ancient account of Simon is that he went to Rome where he embarrassed people. That is why Peter went to Rome. Simon also believed that he could fly and, in the end, he destroyed himself. The Bible warns the ungodly: "Then I (the psalmist) understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin." (Psalm 73:17,18)

Jesus never did miracles in this way. He did not want, like a magician, to satisfy his hunger by commanding the stones to be made bread. It is vital that we discern between the real wonders of God and the magic of Satan.

A tool in the hands of Providence

*A Short Biography of Saint Brother André, C.S.C.
(We are reproducing it from the St. Joseph Oratory Website, after Fr. Guéguen, SSPX, got permission from the Oratory to re-publish copyrighted materials for his french article on Saint Brother André, which you can find in our french issue # 27).*

Difficult years

His name was Alfred Bessette. He was born on August 9, in 1845, and was baptized on condition the very next day, for he was so weak at his birth his parents feared for his life.

In 1849, with employment scarce and his family living in poverty, Alfred's father decided to move to Farnham (in Quebec) where he hoped to earn a living as a lumberman. Unfortunately, he lost his life in an accident when he was crushed by a falling tree when Alfred was only nine years old.

His mother found herself widowed at the age of forty with ten children in her care. She died of tuberculosis three years later. Much later, Brother André would say of her, "I rarely prayed for my mother, but I often prayed to her."

The ten children of the Bessette family were dispersed, and at the age of twelve Alfred found himself having to face the hardship of life. He was forced to find work. Alfred embarked on a thirteen year path of wandering from job to job without much baggage and very little learning, for he was barely able to write his name and to read his prayer book.

The Labourer

In spite of his physical weakness, Alfred tried to make a living. He travelled from job to job as an apprentice and was easily exploited by those stronger than himself. For a time, he worked on construction projects, later as a farm boy, a tinsmith, a blacksmith, a baker, a shoemaker and a coachman.

Following the flow of French-Canadian emigrants, he went to the United States and worked four years in the textile mills. Even if his health was poor, he put his whole heart into his work: "Despite my weak condition, " he would say, "I did not let anyone get ahead of me as far as work was concerned." In 1867, he came back to Canada.

In 1870, Alfred presented himself as a candidate in the novitiate of the Congregation of Holy Cross in Montréal. Because of his weak health, his superiors had doubts concerning his religious vocation. However, these reservations were soon put aside as he was finally accepted and given the name of Brother André with the responsibility of porter at Notre-Dame College. While talking about his early duties at the college, brother André was found to say: "When I entered the com-

munity, my superiors showed me the door, and I remained there for 40 years without leaving." On top of his porter duties, his daily tasks consisted of washing floors and windows, cleaning lamps, carrying firewood and working as a messenger.

The Friendly Brother

Soon, Brother André started to welcome the sick and broken-hearted. He invited them to pray to Saint Joseph to obtain favours. It was not long before many people were reporting that their prayers were being answered. For twenty-five years, he spent six to eight hours a day receiving those who came to him, first in his small office, then in the tramway station across the street from the college. He built the first chapel with the help of friends and with the money he earned giving haircuts to the students of the college, he had the certitude that Saint Joseph wanted to have a place on the mountain: thus, he spent his whole life preparing a beautiful shrine worthy of his friend in heaven.

Brother André began visiting the sick in the area and travelled as far as the United States where he had made friends. He earned the reputation of miracle-worker, but he vehemently protested such a title: "I am nothing... only a tool in the hands of Providence, a lowly instrument at the service of Saint Joseph". He went even further by affirming: "People are silly to think that I can accomplish miracles! It is God and Saint Joseph who can heal you, not I. I will pray Saint Joseph for you."

His aloofness in the presence of strangers contrasted sharply with the carefree and humorous attitude he adopted among friends. He loved to tease and would often say: "You must not be sad: it is good to laugh a little." He made good use of his humour to share his joy and to subtly slip some good advice into a conversation, or to change the subject when a conversation was developing into nasty gossip at someone's expense.

He was a man of determination and uncompromising principles. Kindness and slightly impish wisdom were reflected in his eyes. His great respect for others was largely responsible for the respect others had for him. He was a very sensitive man. At times, he could be seen crying with the sick, or being moved to tears after hearing a particularly sad experience shared by one of his visitors.

A Man of Great Undertaking

During all these years, an immense project was underway and larger crowds were swarming to the Oratory. The first small chapel had been erected in 1904, but it soon became too small to receive all the people who were coming to the mountain. As a result, the chapel was extended in 1908, and then again in 1910. Still, this was not enough: a larger church in honour of Saint Joseph was needed.



In 1917, a new Crypt-Church was inaugurated. This crypt was able to hold at least a thousand people: but, this was only the starting point of an even greater endeavour. Brother André devoted his efforts to building the Oratory, which was to become the world's greater sanctuary dedicated to Saint Joseph.

The economic crisis of 1929 forced the construction of the Basilica to come to a standstill. In 1936, the authorities of the Congregation of Holy Cross called a special meeting to decide if the project should continue or not. The Provincial summoned Brother André to ask for his opinion on the matter. The ageing Brother André had only a few words for the Assembly: "This is not my work, it is the work of Saint Joseph. Put one of his statues in the middle of the building. If he wants a roof over his head, he'll take care of it." Two months later, the Congregation had amassed the necessary funds to continue working on the construction.

A Kind-Hearted, Devoted Man

Brother André took great care in meeting and greeting people. He spent long hours in his office where thousands of people came to see him and, in the evenings, he visited homes or hospitals accompanied by one of his friends. His kindness and compassion were matched by a remarkable sharpness of mind. He would make the following comment concerning the numerous requests for healings he received: "It is surprising that I am frequently asked for cures, but rarely for humility and the spirit of faith. Yet, they are so important..." adding, "If the soul is sick, one must begin by treating the soul." Consequently, he would often ask the people consulting him questions such as, "Do you have faith?" "Do you believe that God can do something for you?" Then, before doing anything else, he would tell them, "Go confess yourself to the priest, go to Holy Communion and then come back to see me." Indeed, Brother André had a true understanding of the sense and the value of suffering, and he spoke with wisdom when addressing this subject: "People who suffer have something to offer to God. When they succeed in enduring their suffering that is a daily miracle!"

A Man of God

Brother André always denied that he had any gift of healing, saying "I have no gift and I cannot give any." His exhortations were always the same: to make a novena to Saint Joseph and to rub with oil or a medal of the saint. For him, these were truly "acts of love and faith, of confidence and humility."

He encouraged people to see a doctor for treatment. As to the doctors themselves, he would tell

them, "Yours is a great work. Your science was given to you by God; therefore, you must thank Him and pray to Him." Brother André had such a way of speaking about God that he succeeded in sowing seeds of hope in the people he met. One of his friends related this fact: "I never brought a sick person to Brother André without that person returning home enriched. Some were cured. Others died some time later, but Brother André had brought them peace of mind."

The Road to heaven

For Brother André, heaven is living in God's house. His views on death as life's ultimate fulfillment were often expressed thus: "You know, it is permitted to desire death if one's unique goal is to go forward to God... When I die, I will go to heaven, I will be much closer to God than I am now, I will have more power to help you." A few moments before his death, those around him heard him cry out, "I am suffering so much, my God! My God." And then, in a very weak voice, "Here is the grain," referring to the Gospel of John 12:24, "unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies. It remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit." "He spent his whole life speaking of others to God, and of God to others." In giving this testimony, his friend presented a valid assessment of Brother André's life imbued with faith, and love. In fact, it is difficult to say at what point in his life work ended and prayer began as the two seemed to flow so naturally one into the other.

On January 6, 1937 at 91 years of age, Brother André died at Hôpital Notre-Dame de l'Espérance in Saint-Laurent, a suburb of Montréal. Newspapers reported that well over a million people attended his wake and burial. His body lies today in a simple tomb in the beautiful Oratory that rises so gracefully on Mount Royal. To this day, thousands of visitors come to Saint Joseph's Oratory to receive physical and spiritual healing. Even today, Brother André remains for us a living symbol of Christian renewal to which we are all invited. Whatever Brother André was able to achieve through God's grace, we are also able to achieve through that same grace offered to us so generously and consistently. Brother André was beatified in 1980, and was recently canonized by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

Saint Brother André, Pray for us!

What is happening in the Church?

This column strives to keep the reader up to date with some of the more important statements, events, challenges that confront the Church in Canada, Rome and the world. Keeping in mind the fact that the Church militant does not just consist in the works of Tradition, but in all those who keep the true Faith, even if they do not love and defend it as they ought, it hopes to keep Catholics aware of good and positive developments, as well as the betrayals of modernism, in order to understand the situation of the Church in all the complexity of its reality.

General House of the Society of Saint Pius X, Menzingen

Note on the remarks of Benedict XVI concerning condom use

In a book-length interview entitled *Light of the World*, which was released in German, Italian and English on November 23, 2010, Benedict XVI admits, for the first time, the use of condoms “in certain cases” “to reduce the risks of infection” by the AIDS virus. These erroneous remarks require clarification and correction, for their disastrous effects—which a media campaign has not failed to exploit—cause scandal and disarray among the faithful.

I. What Benedict XVI said

To the question, “Are you saying, then, that the Catholic Church is actually not opposed in principle to the use of condoms?” the pope answered, according to the authorized English translation of the original German version, “She of course does not regard it as a real or moral solution, but, in this or that case, there can be nonetheless, in the intention of reducing the risk of infection, a first step in a movement toward a different way, a more human way, of living sexuality.”

To illustrate his statement, the pope gives only one example, that of a “male prostitute”. He considers that, in this particular case, it “can be a first step in the direction of a moralization, a first assumption of responsibility, on the way toward recovering an awareness that not everything is allowed and that one cannot do whatever one wants.”

The case in question, therefore, concerns someone who, while already committing an act contrary to nature, for mercenary reasons, would take care not to infect his client fatally in addition.

2. What Benedict XVI intended to say

These remarks by the pope have been perceived by the media and by militant movements in favor of contraception, as a “revolution”, a “turning point”, or at the very least a “break” in the constant moral teaching of the Church on the use of contraceptives. That is why the spokesman for the

Vatican, Fr. Federico Lombardi, issued an explanatory note on November 21 in which we read: “the Pope considers an exceptional circumstance in which the exercise of sexuality represents a real threat for the life of another. In that case, the Pope does not morally justify the disordered exercise of sexuality but maintains that the use of a condom to reduce the danger of infection may be ‘a first act of responsibility,’ ‘a first step on the road toward a more human sexuality,’ rather than not using it and exposing the other to risking his life.”



It is appropriate to note here, to be exact, that the pope speaks not only about “a first act of responsibility” but also about “a first step in the direction of a moralization”. Along these same lines, Cardinal Georges Cottier, who was the theologian of the papal residence under John Paul II and at the beginning of the pontificate of Benedict XVI, had declared during an interview with the news agency Apcom on January 31, 2005: “In some particular situations—and I am thinking about environments where drugs are circulated or where great human promiscuity and great poverty prevail, as in certain regions of Africa and Asia—in those cases, the use of condoms can be considered legitimate.”

Legitimacy of condom use, regarded as a step toward moralization, in certain cases: that is the problem posed by the pope's remarks in *Light of the World*.

3. What Benedict XVI did not say

To the journalist's clear question, "'Are you saying, then, that the Catholic Church is actually not opposed in principle to the use of condoms?' the pope answers by citing an exceptional situation, and he does not recall that the Church is always fundamentally opposed to condom use.

Now the fact that condom use is an intrinsically immoral action, and matter for mortal sin, is a constant point in the traditional teaching of the Church, for example in the writings of Pius XI and Pius XII, and even in the thought of Benedict XVI when he says to the journalist who is questioning him, "[The Church] of course does not regard [the condom] as a real or moral solution," but nevertheless the pope allows it "in certain cases". But that is inadmissible from the perspective of the faith. "No reason," Pius XI teaches in *Casti Connubii*, 54, "however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good." Pius XII recalls this in his *Address to Midwives* (October 29, 1951): "No 'indication' or necessity can turn an intrinsically immoral action into a moral and licit act." Saint Paul condemned the opinion that evil may be done so that good may come of it (see *Romans 3:8*).

Benedict XVI seems to consider the case of the male prostitute according to the principles of "gradual morality" which claims to allow certain less serious crimes so as to lead delinquents progressively from extremely serious crimes to harmless behavior. These lesser crimes would not be moral, no doubt, but the fact that they are part of a path toward virtue would render them licit. Now this idea is a serious error because a lesser evil remains an evil, whatever improvement it may indicate. As Paul VI teaches in *Humanae vitae* (no. 14), "Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good, it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it (cf. *Romans 3:8*)—in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general."

Tolerating a lesser evil is not the same as making that evil "legitimate", nor including it in a process of "moralization". *Humanae vitae* (no. 14) recalls that "it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong," just as one must say that it is an error to propose the idea that a condom, which in itself is wrong, could be made right by the hoped-for path toward virtue of a male prostitute who uses it.

As opposed to a weaning process that would lead from a sin that is "more mortal" to one that is "less mortal", evangelical teaching clearly affirms: "Go and now sin no more" (*John 8:11*) and not "go and sin less".

4. What Catholics need to hear

Certainly, a book-length interview cannot be considered an act of the Magisterium [i.e. of the Church's official teaching authority], a fortiori when it departs from what has been taught in a definitive, unchangeable way. Nonetheless the fact remains that the doctors and pharmacists who courageously refuse to prescribe and deliver condoms and contraceptives out of fidelity to their Catholic faith and morality, and in general all the many families devoted to

Tradition, have an urgent and overriding need to hear that the perennial teaching of the Church could not change over time. They all await the firm reminder that the natural law, like human nature upon which it is engraved, is universal.

Now in *Light of the World* we find a statement that relativizes the teaching of *Humanae vitae* by describing those who follow it faithfully as "deeply convinced minorities" who offer the others "a fascinating model to follow". As if the Encyclical by Paul VI set an ideal almost out of reach, which is what the great majority of bishops had already persuaded themselves of, so as to slip that teaching more readily under the bushel basket—precisely where Christ forbids us to place "the light of the world" (*Matthew 5:14*).

Should the demands of the Gospel become, unfortunately, the exception destined to confirm the general rule of the hedonistic world in which we live? The Christian must not be conformed to this world (see *Romans 12:2*), but rather must transform it as "the leaven in the dough" (see *Matthew 13:33*) and give it the taste of Divine Wisdom as "the salt of the earth" (*Matthew 5:13*).

Menzingen, November 26, 2010

"No 'indication' or necessity can turn an intrinsically immoral action into a moral and licit act"
(Pius XII, *Address to the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives*, October 29, 1951).

"No reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good"
(Pius XI, *Encyclical Casti Connubii*, 54).

Now the use of condoms is contrary to nature inasmuch as it deflects a human act from its natural end. Their use therefore remains immoral always.

Coast to Coast

News and photos from the canadian district activities !!!



Church of the Transfiguration

By Sr. Mary Raphael

Welcome, Sister Maria Barbara

Sister Maria Barbara, from our parish here in Toronto, after receiving her formation at the Novitiate of St. Therese in Salvan, Switzerland, the Novitiate for the Oblates, has been assigned to the Church of the Transfiguration. The parish welcomed her with a nice potluck lunch and welcoming cake. She was able to greet the parishioners and meet the recent newcomers. She brought some photos, to show the life in the novitiate.

She arrived here on June 28th, and as soon as she unpacked, was helping in the church activities, chanting the Divine Office, helping in the kitchen and the sacristy, and with all the jobs that the other two oblates (Sister John Mary Vianney and I) perform. Her first assignment was to make a 10 foot by 6 foot backdrop curtain for an altar.

There seems to be a big difference between two sisters and three sisters in a community. When we take our walks, there are more people who approach us. For example, there was the woman who shouted "Good afternoon, Sisters" from an upstairs balcony across the street, and another who stopped to ask us to pray for her dying mother.

During this coming school year, two of us will be able to go to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Academy on a regular

basis each week, to help with the boarding boys' laundry.

We thank Almighty God for His Divine Providence in sending her to us. We pray for our parishioners and all of the faithful throughout Canada and we ask that you remember us in your prayers, also.

Annual Fund-raising Bazaar

One of our parish activities, which we have (almost every year) to help raise money for the church, is our bazaar. We begin to prepare for it well in advance, by advertising and requesting volunteers. About two weeks before the actual date, people begin to bring items for the yard sale, and we arrange the nicer new items on tables in the hall, for the silent auction. Then, one week before, volunteers come to sort the yard sale items, and to price them. Then we go around the neighborhood, stapling papers to telephone poles, putting them up on advertisement boards in shopping centers, store windows, or wherever we can get permission, and also we put flyers into the neighborhood mailboxes. This year two little boys, 6 and 7 years of age, also helped, running from house to house with the flyers. The items that were to be sold steadily increased day by day, even coming from the neighbors, making our parish hall gradually became fuller and fuller.

On August 14th, the date for our bazaar this year, the day started with Holy Mass at 7:15 a.m. After the Mass, some of our men helped to put up tables outside (in the parking lot), and the clothing racks, boxes of clothing, books, dishes, trinkets, etc. were brought from the hall to the parking lot and arranged on the tables, while our first "early bird" customers approached, even before the scheduled starting time. (People in the neighborhood ask about our bazaar well in advance, in order not to miss it, for they always get good bargains for the "treasures" they find.)

While the yard sale went on, there was food served. We had an outdoor barbecue, and other hot dishes, salad, buns, soft drinks and sweets. There was also a "surprise table", with wrapped up gifts for the children, which could be purchased for \$1.00. The Legion of Mary also had table set up, with Catholic pamphlets, books, cards, etc., only asking for the donation of an offering.

The bazaar was a success, in many ways. Besides the monetary profit, the parishioners had the chance to unite together, and to work with one another for the common good. Also, it was a great chance to meet with many of the parishioners whom we do not have the chance to speak with very often. Thanks be to Almighty God, who helped us all the way through!



**Parish activities in Langley:
Fun, work on the parking lot
and the kitchen,
Father Wegner's visit.**



**Parish Bazaar in
Toronto**



**Baptism, Marriage, Silver
Jubilees of a Marriage and
of a Priestly Ordination.**



**Our prayers and felicita-
tions be assured to all!**

**Pilgrimage to
Saint-Anne-de-Beaupré**



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