
The Servant

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#123

Founder's Forum

Paradigms: changed rules, shaken foundations

That's how it was in 1969. That's how it is now. That's how it will be in the future.

We have just completed In-House Week at the Episcopal Church Center; a week of intense looking inward and outward at ourselves and — the ways we serve and work for the greater church. *Paradigm* is not a word used every day nor is it what I thought of when I founded the Brotherhood of St. Gregory. A paradigm is a pattern; a pattern of thought or behavior in this case. Our expectations and outlook tempers and shapes our perception, sometimes blinding us.

The month of September is an intense one for me and the community. The fourteenth is our foundation anniversary, the Feast of the Holy Cross. I discovered that in addition to the Order of the Holy Cross we share the day with the Anglican Franciscans. Holy Cross Day: it's good to remember how many paradigms were changed on that cross.

The paradigms of the religious life were changed on September 14. They were changed when the Brotherhood was founded; and you can be sure they changed years before with the founding of the Order of the Holy Cross and the Order of St. Francis. It's interesting how we resist the changing of the rules that we know are in effect. We allow our paradigms to blind us to possibilities and opportunities. That was how it was in 1969 when I was told, "You can't possibly live the religious life and have a job!" I can't resist pointing out the irony that current members of the orders who said that are now working for a living. Paradigms do change. We challenged the rules—the standard paradigm—for the religious life. We dared to be different and heed the winds of the Spirit. The service of God is perfect freedom—not freedom *from* a paradigm; that would be chaos—but freedom *within* a paradigm. It's largely a matter of style!

At our Chapter retreat in 1986, Sr. Clare Fitzgerald used the changing of paradigms as the basis for her workshop meditations. I discovered that we had been associated with that unusual word for 17 years; we just didn't call the changes in which we were involved by such an exotic term. We called our methods revolutionary; we called ourselves different; we called ourselves contemporary. Not so, for all we were and are and hope to be is servants of God, guided by the Holy Spirit, tracing the pattern of faith.

In 1969... I was told, "You can't possibly live the religious life and have a job!"

As I recount the founding of this community, I begin to realize just what we did. We followed the guidance of God, through the Holy Spirit, and we found new paradigms for the religious life. We have to do that or we're lost to the past, or lost *in* the past.

I learned a phrase this week and I would like to share it with you. "If someone doesn't want to do something, tell them to get out of the way of those who do." It parallels another statement: "Lead, follow or get out of the way." "The truth is clear, the path is not easy but the mandate is still there. God doesn't ask us to be successful, but asks that we be faithful. A large part of that faith is having the courage to be brave and look for the new paradigms, the new models. The religious life is no exception. We need to clean our glasses and look into the future. Is the future bright or dim? The choice is ours.

— RTB

For the 24th Sunday after Pentecost

Leanness in the soul

And Elijah said to her, Fear not; go and do as you have said: but make me a little cake from the flour and oil first, and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for you and your son. For thus says the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of flour shall not run out, nor the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.

—
1 Kings 17.13-14

Br Edward Munro lives in Bowie MD, and is a sergeant with the Fairfax County (VA) Fire Department. He serves at Mount Calvary Church in Baltimore, and is a volunteer at Joseph Richey House, a hospice for terminally ill patients. He is provincial for Province III of the Brotherhood, and an aspirant in the Diocese of Maryland's Deacon Training Program.

As religious, we are called to be prophets, just as Elijah was called by God to be a prophet. As religious we are called to be dangerous—dangerous in the sense of willing to question the priorities of the society we live in.

Elijah lived in Israel at a time when King Ahab was promoting the worship of Baal over the worship of Yahweh. Although he was afraid, Elijah confronted Ahab and warned him of the consequences that idol-worship would bring upon the people of Israel.

We live in a society that professes faith in God, but in fact has made wealth and its enjoyment an idol placed above God. It is our duty to confront the leaders and people of our time with the reality that we too face the wrath of God if we do not overcome our worship of material things.

Elijah had to run for his life because of his confrontation with Ahab and Jezebel. They wanted to put him to death. Our society is more subtle. Prophets speaking out in our day are murdered intellectually rather than physically. Anyone not conforming to the materialistic values of the majority is looked upon with contempt, and is seen as weird or unenlightened.

In the story recounted in the First Book of Kings, Elijah, following God's wishes, travels to a distant land in the midst of a parching famine, and there convinces a poor, starving widow to share her last scrap of bread with him. He says to her, "Feed me first and the God of Israel will provide you with oil and flour in abundance until the famine breaks." This foreign woman had the faith to give up what little food she possessed. All that stood between her and

death was God.

There were many widows in Israel during the famine; but where was the faith in God's favor? The hearts of those in Israel—were they as barren and parched as the land? Is our society—rich in material wealth—barren and parched at the heart, like the widows of Israel who had turned, with Ahab, from the living God to a god of wood and metal? Are we as spiritually dead?

How much longer will God put up with us squandering our wealth on unimportant things while millions starve? How long will God accept our putting billions of dollars into weaponry while millions of people have no shelter. When will God grow tired of our self-righteous and elitist attitude toward the rest of the world? How much longer will God tolerate us, and the leanness of our souls? I fear not much longer.

As religious, as prophets, as Christians, it is our responsibility to convey the true meaning of the gospel to the people of our society. Let us hope we can do it before it is too late. If we can't do that, we must be prepared to pick up the pieces and start again after God passes judgment on our society and the things it considers important.

Like Elijah we must be prepared to suffer the consequences of being prophets. We must have the courage to question the actions, goals and priorities of the society we live in. Such questions are rarely welcome. But we may be lucky. We may find, that like the widow of long ago, faith may awaken—a faith willing to give up in an act of sharing what is possessed in the knowledge that God will provide in unexpected and miraculous ways.

The family gathers for

Annual Convocation

Br James Teets is the Brotherhood's treasurer and director of public relations. He serves as administrative assistant to the executive for World Mission at the Episcopal Church Center in New York.

Mind, body and spirit

The word retreat conjures a variety of images in the minds of most Christians. Military implications aside, these may be thoughts of silence, reflection, contemplation or meditation. But the goal of all of these images is the same: getting right with God. For a number of years the Brotherhood has included structured retreat time in the schedule of its Annual Convocation. This year's convocation and retreat were held

in August at the Briarwood Retreat and Conference Center on Cape Cod.

While it can be said that an individual is made up of three elements—mind, body and spirit—these elements are not mutually exclusive. The end to which a person prays (spirit) affects that individual's thoughts and concerns (mind) and actions in the physical world (body). This unity of person and of community was very much a part of the Brotherhood's retreat design.

A major portion of the agenda of the General Chapter meeting was to be dedicated to renewal of the working documents of the community: the *Rule*, *Constitution* and *Customary*. To set the stage for this, Br Tobias Stanislas Haller began the retreat with a presentation on the theme of communication. In the talk, he showed how perception directly affects how the community acts and how it grows spiritually.

The presentation led into three simultaneous workshops on the Brotherhood's documents: Br Ciaran Anthony Della Fera led a group discussion of a number of other communities' rules and constitutions; Br William Edward Orce compared the Brotherhood's *Constitution* with the forms of secular and church government; and Br Christopher Stephen Jenks discussed architecture as a metaphor of constitutional structure. As a final exercise the three workshops independently projected both their hopes and their fears onto a time line for the next ten years.

Reassembling into the body of the whole the three recorders summarized their discussions and set out possible future projections. To this was added the remembered history of the Brotherhood's past nineteen years. It was easy to see the patterns of mind, body and spirit. At that moment everyone clearly understood the purpose of these exercises: the living documents of the community must ultimately be designed to facilitate the progress along these three paths toward God through an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the past and the pitfalls which may lie in the future.

The vision was summed up in the statement: "Diversity / not merely tolerated but affirmed = unity." It was pointed out that the church often tolerates difference of opinion instead of truly affirming it. The strength of the Brotherhood has been in affirming differing ministries, alternate patterns and unusual courses, not in trying to fit all its members into the same mold. We saw that when we were weakest was when we tried either to be something we weren't or tried to pretend differences didn't matter. So the slogan is, "not toleration, but affirmation!"

The final workshop of the retreat was presented by Brs Donovan Aidan Bowley and Edward Ramón Riley on the subject of prayer and theological development. This segment began with the exercise known as the "Emmaus Walk." The entire group was presented a Scripture reading, broken up into random pairs, and asked to go out for an extended walk, during which time discussion and silent reflection could take place. Coming together again, the

group revealed their many new insights about God and the other person which had been brought to light.

The body again broke up, this time into groups of threes, in an exercise to organize each individual's thinking by exploring metaphors for "Theology of Community," "Theology of Relationship With God," and "Forgiveness." Each person was encouraged to expand thoughts on these points with the assistance of team members; then the entire group reassembled for a general discussion and sharing of experiences.

With as diverse a group as the thirty members of the Brotherhood of St. Gregory, how can the corporate success of this retreat be judged? Normally it could not; success, like beauty, is in the eye (and the heart) of the individual. But the goal of this retreat was the renewal of the community's governing documents. When General Chapter last sat in consideration of the *Constitution* in 1984, the revision took more than *a day* to hammer out; this year all three documents were addressed and amended in a bit more than an *hour* of work!

The preparation for the retreat had been extensive. In the end the results of taking time to study communication itself, and the overriding reason behind the documents—the unity of mind, body and spirit that comes through affirmation of the gifts of the Spirit—led to an *incarnation* of each individual's experience of God in community.

First annual retreat for the Companion Sisterhood

The first annual retreat of the Companion Sisterhood of St. Gregory took place at the Convent of St John Baptist in Mendham NJ. The theme was "Centering Prayer," and the retreat was conducted by Mother Suzanne Elizabeth, CSJB.

Mother Suzanne Elizabeth believes that a person first learns centering prayer by experiencing it, rather than reading about it. On the first day of our retreat, we were asked to search in our Bibles for passages about prayer, and then to consider what the Scripture told us. That afternoon, Mother shared with us a short explanation of centering prayer. It is based on the fact that "Christian life and growth are founded on faith in our own basic goodness, in the being that God *has* given us with its transcended potential. This gift of being is our own true self. Through our consent by faith, Christ is born in

Sr Clare Connell, n/CSSG, is, since the withdrawal from the novitiate by Linda Marie Peters, our only novice sister. Those seeking vocational information concerning the Brotherhood or the Companion Sisterhood should contact- Br Stephen Storen, BSG Director of Vocations, St Fin Bairre's House, 42-27164th Street, Flushing NY 11358.

us and he and our true self become one. Our awakening to the presence and action of the Spirit is the unfolding of Christ's resurrection in us." (Thomas Keating, *Open Mind—Open Heart*, p.13).

Contemplative prayer flows from interior silence. It is not a time for petitions or thanksgivings or even meditation about the nature of God. It is a time to lay aside thoughts. It is not so much the absence of thoughts as it is a detachment from them. It is saying, "Not now; perhaps later," to thoughts. One concentrates on just being in God's presence. Mother Suzanne Elizabeth recommends 20-minute sessions twice a day.

On all our retreat days, we said the five daily offices with the sisters of the Community of St.

John Baptist, and shared the eucharist with them. There was also some free time for walking in the woods or sitting by the lake to think and pray. We also shared with the community in the silent meals.

On the second retreat day we studied books by Thomas Keating and M. Basil Pennington, and were able to share our experiences and do centering prayer together. On the third morning we joined the sisters at Morning Prayer and said our good-byes. We then headed off to Cape Cod to join the brothers. Back among them, life was more hectic and much less silent! Yet the gift of centering prayer focuses *all* of us in Christ, and continues not as just a memory of a lovely retreat, but as a means of being closer to God in my life and my prayer.

Chapter Snapshots



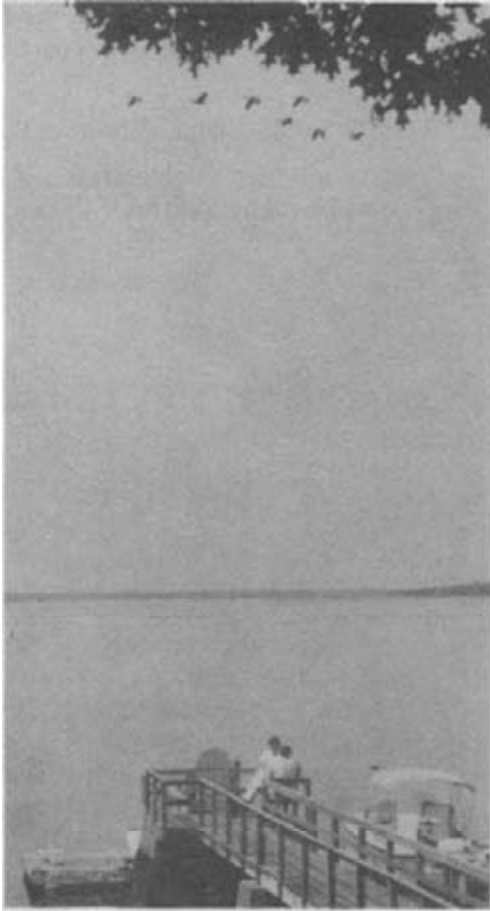
Br Roy Tobin, newly life professed, tries on a new T-shirt for size.



The Chapter deliberates

Time for sharing





The world's largest reconciliation room; as the geese fly overhead



Five happy people: the newly professed brothers: Christopher Stephen Jenks, Ciaran Anthony Della Fera, and William Edward Orce; the Superior General, Br Richard Thomas Biemacki, and the Rt Rev Frederick B. Wolf, retired Bishop of Maine, who was celebrant at the main Convocation eucharist.



(right) Br Bob Greenfield, SSJE, who preached at the main Convocation eucharist



Season's Greetings **From all of us**



Luke Anthony, Richard Thomas, James and Christian

May our Lord Jesus truly give each of you peace and love today and every day in your life.

Each Nativity is a new beginning; thank you for walking with us this journey which is the new year of our Lord, 1989.

Of all proud titles, Jesus has lovingly been named, Prince of Peace is the only one I'm very sure he claimed.

Kevin James

May the joy of the Christ Child be born in you this holy-tide.





Thomas Joseph, William Francis, Stephen and John Peter

May the joy of Christmas remain with you throughout the new year.

May the joy of our Savior's birth be to you a beacon and a light; and may you know the joy the shepherds knew and the exhilaration the magi experienced as they gazed upon the face of the Christ Child.

As Christ came to us, so let us go to others.

Be not afraid: for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a savior.

(below) Roy, William and Thaddeus David and (right) John Francis, with daughter Faith and wife Maryellen, c/BSG

With Christmas joy, Peace...

May the peace and love of the Christ Child be with us all this Christmas and always.

May God bless and enrich each life at this Christmastide and always.

God became flesh

so that we might become children of God—let us be true to our adoption as children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ.

May this season be filled with the joy that fills our hearts, as we await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God bless one and all, on this Christmas Day.

A blessed, holy Christmas to all friends of BSG and best wishes for a happy, healthy new year. Gød Jul!

(below) Edward, Charles, Laurence Andrew and Bernard



Tobias Stanislas





Donovan Aidan, Earl, Bernard Francis and Thomas Martin

He of whom the prophets spoke, foretelling his appearance in the flesh to mortals, is born in a holy cave and is laid as a babe in a manger.

May the true light of the world, our Savior Jesus Christ, brighten your lives this Christmas season and always.
Semper Fidelis

Getting ready for Christmas is like preparing the house for a new baby. When all the trimmings (baby crib, new wallpaper, etc.) are in place and the baby arrives, then the real work begins. So it is with Jesus' birth. The responsibility to care for Christ's body has just begun. Merry Christmas! May you find joy in your ministry.



(below) Christopher Stephen, Alan Andrew, Ciaran Anthony and William Edward

(above) Michael David, Edward Ramón, George and Matthew

(below) Clare, with husband the Rev Christopher Connell

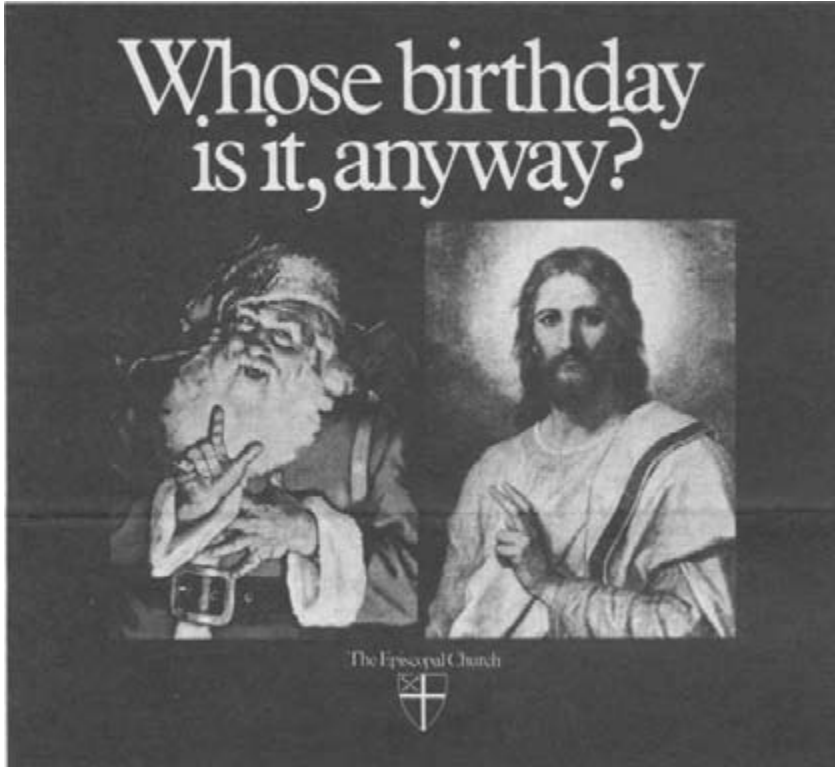


Taking the "X" out of Xmas

"Christmas" turns me off

by Br Charles Kramer

I can imagine the reaction of some readers to the title of this article. What's this!? How can any Christian, especially a member of a religious community, possibly be turned off by Christmas? Christmas does not turn me off at all. "Christmas" does. What a difference the quotation marks make!



Christmas is the time chosen by the church to commemorate the birth of Jesus. With Christmas we associate midnight mass, the creche, *Adeste fideles*, great joy, and—yes, the exchanging of gifts. Christmas is a day and a season of the Church Year, extending from 25 December to 6 January. Christmas is one of the great feasts of Jesus Christ our Lord, whom we worship as true God of true God.

"Christmas" is something else. "Christmas" is the great festival of secular religion, which begins officially in New York City with the great procession on Thanksgiving Day and comes to a grinding halt on the afternoon of 25 December. (In some of the minor sects of the

secular faith the feast is now anticipated even before the usual late November commencement. Others are known to extend the holy season even so far as 12:01 a.m. on 1 January.)

We know that "Christmas" is upon us when the decorations go up: colored lights, evergreens (some rendered even more evergreen by means of their plastic composition), and icons of the chief deity of the secular "Christmas," Santa Claus. Do I go too far in speaking of the deification of Santa Claus? Consider some of the words of one of the great old pagan hymns, "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town"

He sees you when you're sleeping,
He knows when you're awake;
He knows if you've been bad or good,
So be good, for goodness sake!

While exegesis makes clear that the deity Santa Claus is not omnipresent (he is after all *coming to town*), he clearly is omniscient. His omnipotent judgment is veiled in the form of an implied threat of punishment in lines 3 and 4.

How can we as Christians resolve the conflict between Christmas—the *real* one—and the false "Christmas"? We have our own season during the first four weeks before Christmas, which we call *Advent*. In Advent we can prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord. There is nothing wrong with going to the stores to buy gifts for our friends and loved ones. There is nothing wrong in telling one's children about Santa Claus, provided it is done correctly. We can tell them that Santa Claus—whose real name is Saint Nicholas—is sent by Jesus to distribute presents. Since Christmas is Jesus' birthday, and since there is nothing we can give him (after all, he is God), he wants to celebrate his birthday by giving gifts to all who love him. And he has asked Saint Nicholas to perform this ministry. Bishop Nicholas couldn't be happier to do it!

So, a happy Christmas to all of you. Enjoy what you may of the secular feast, but never let it get in the way of the true message of Christmas: God—the true God—with us in innocence, mercy, and love.