
The Servant

Nov/Dec '89 #129

Founder's Forum

Being great

The Brotherhood was gathered in one place... for the purpose of giving glory to God... In the world, yet not of it. These are all familiar words to this community. We gather this way every year and discuss what we have been doing. Some of it's been great and some not so great. All is for the glory of God.

Jesus Christ knew that men and women everywhere wanted to be great. Some wanted to be great for him and some for themselves. The last thing any of us wants to hear is that we are nobody. None of us enjoys being in the shadows and we know that there are plenty who thrive on being great *and* being noticed. But listen to Jesus: "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to hold the first place among you must be your slave."

Think of those words: *Whoever wants to be great*. Oriental religious leaders would not end that phrase in that way, but they would end it with these words: "Let them realize that their very desire is a sin and let them put it out of

their mind." Modern secularists would say "Whoever wants to be great should be assertive; we can do anything we want if we want it enough." We as a young religious community have often come near to the edge of that secular suggestion. We, like other communities, have thought along the line of greatness, only to have God say "stop where you are—I want servants, not rulers."

The church often falls into this trap. Parishes or communities often become famous for a certain preaching or liturgical style, or a ministry, and are so proud in the glory years that they miss the point at which the reality no longer matches the image.

I don't say that being great is bad. Does God condemn us for that? I don't think so. God made us, and inspired us to be great to strive, to expect more of ourselves. Go back to that phrase, "Whoever wants to be great must be a servant."

Jesus said that if you want to be great, do the work of serving your neighbors. The trouble is that it costs a great

deal to be great. So we hold on to the pagan standards and ideals which are planted in our bones. They were there before we matured into Christians.

The only way to learn to serve is *to serve*. The kind of greatness Jesus had in mind is trudging out, ached out, worried out, and prayed out. A slave does what others will not do. It means long hours, loss of pleasures, and criticism.

I pray today and always that this community and its members will search after the model of greatness in Jesus Christ: being healers, enablers, and proclaimers. It takes pain to heal. It takes humility to enable, to be the one who bends down so that someone else can be lifted up. It takes faith in the Gospel to proclaim. The task remains before us. Pray with me for the strength and perseverance to maintain that trust, as servants of the servants of God.

—RTB

For the 27th Sunday after Pentecost

Millennial madness

Take heed that you are not led astray.—Luke 21.8

About 20 years ago, a book came out called *The Late Great Planet Earth*. In this book, the author, Hal Lindsey, predicted that the end of time was imminent, and that by the end of the century Christ would come again. Lindsey claimed that his predictions were based on the prophecies of the end times found in Scripture, particularly the Book of

Daniel and the Revelation of John. He proceeded to draw up intricate plans for Armageddon, sketching out each battle campaign, each victory, each defeat. He listed the weapons used in the great battle, weapons ranging from conventional forces to chemical, biological, and nuclear. He traced the Rise of Antichrist, who would draw all but a chosen few

into his realm of influence, using a world-wide religion and a world-wide economic system. Lindsey took great delight in describing the various plagues that would afflict humanity during these last days, plagues which would cause untold suffering and misery. Of course, before the Great Tribulation began, all true, Bible-loving Christians would have been

removed from the earth through the Rapture, so that they would not suffer the judgment God was inflicting on sinful humanity.

We are now approaching the end of the second millennium. Although we don't hear too much about Hal Lindsey any more, his influence is apparent. Evangelical religious broadcasters speak of this age as the Last Days. They do not speak of the imminence of the Antichrist, the Great Tribulation, and the Second Coming as mere possibilities; they speak of the imminent Apocalypse as an indisputable reality. They have identified several strong candidates for the position of Antichrist (each has a favorite nominee); periodic Rapture Alerts go out and thousands prepare themselves to be whisked away, only to find that they have to go to work on Monday morning, just as usual. *"For many will come in my name saying, 'The time is at hand.'"*

There are many pseudo-Messiahs around these days saying, or implying, "I am He." Sun Myung Moon claims to be the Third Adam, here to complete Jesus' unfinished work. An obscure London Pakistani has proclaimed himself the reincarnate Mohammed, Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, and a host of other great spiritual teachers—making him one of the religious broadcasters' favorite candidates for Antichrist. Meanwhile, celebrities preach the New Age religions of channeling, astral projection, and astrology, all in the name of self-realization. In one of our nation's great cathedrals, neo-spiritualists gather around a huge crystal of quartz to channel their energies and participate in the earth's resonance. British neo-pagans gather at Stonehenge to reenact what they believe to be ancient, Druidic ceremonies. *"For many will come in my name saying, 'I am He.'"*

What should we make of all this? Many on the secular front are also suffering from "end-of-the-world-itis": nuclear fatalism is widespread; many believe the world will end in the cold darkness of nuclear winter. Environmentalists provide a different scenario: acid rain is destroying our forests and lakes; the greenhouse effect is warming our world, so that arctic regions will be temperate, and temperate regions tropical. Rain

forests will become deserts, deserts will be flooded by rising seas. In the face of these terrors, many react with an aching apathy or indifference. The odds are against us. How can we fight the overwhelming? Is it too late to try? Could Hal Lindsey be right. *"Take heed that you are not led astray."*

What many of the doomsayers seem to forget is that every age has its doomsayers: those who were sure that the world was going to end tomorrow, and should have ended yesterday. Some of these have been like today's religious broadcasters, sure they would be spared the tribulation that would befall everyone else. Others were all-round pessimists.

We need to find the poetic truth, not the timetable of the eschaton.

Why do people insist on believing the end is near? What is it in people that wants to believe that all life can and should end? Perhaps Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians, gives part of the answer.

Like most first century Christians, the Thessalonians believed that Christ's coming was imminent—a week, a day, maybe an hour away. Because of this, many of them had stopped working, and were freeloading off the generosity of others. Paul rebukes them, calling them "mere busybodies, not doing any work," and commands them "to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living."

Like these Thessalonians, many of those who believe the end is near are seeking escape from the responsibilities of life. They do not seek Christ; they seek an eternal vacation. They do not seek the sanctification of themselves or the world, they seek their own eternal deliverance, and "the world be damned." Others tend merely toward stagnation, and an "after me the deluge" attitude. Many of us, if truly honest, can find these tendencies within ourselves.

We do live in a dangerous and frightening world. Prophetic voices speak truly when they say that for the first time in history, humanity has the ability to destroy the world, through nuclear war. Environmentalists warn truly that devastation is being wrought through past and current human activity. But the response of many, instead of positive effort, is apathy: we cannot control the world, so why bother? A self-realized and comfortable life (while life lasts) or a vision of the Rapture plucking one out of a wicked world offer alternatives to reformation and work. *"Take heed you are not led astray."*

The truths expressed in the apocalyptic passages of the Gospels, of Daniel, and the Revelation of John, are vital to our faith. These passages express important truths. From them we gain assurance that the powers of darkness are doomed to defeat, and in fact are already defeated through the resurrection of Christ. From these writings we know that all creation, groaning now, will be brought under Christ's gracious rule. However, these passages express their truths in poetic and symbolic language and imagery. They are not newspaper accounts of the end of time.

Sadly, we live in an age in which poetry has a very low priority, and journalism is the major form of verbal communication. It is far easier for most Americans to name five famous living journalists than five great living poets. So we tend to treat even poetry as prosaic.

We need to find the poetic truth, not the timetable of the eschaton. As Christ and Paul both point out, it is not the *when*, but the *how* that counts: "For of that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed and watch; for you do not know when the time will come." (Mark 14.32-33) In the meantime, the "hardest time of all," as Auden calls it, Saint Paul urges us, "Do not be weary in well-doing." (2 Thessalonians 3.13)

Br Christopher Stephen Jenks is Director of Vocations for the Brotherhood and Companion Sisterhood. He currently serves at St. Peter's Church, Manhattan.

The paradox of blessedness and faith

Now, the birth of Jesus took place in this way...—Matthew 1.18

The birth of Jesus is the mysterious event whereby God reveals himself in a creative act—and the nature of the act is totally hidden from us. It is an act that calls for worship and faith, not discussion and knowledge. Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, that by him all the families of the earth would be blessed.

While Luke's Gospel describes the conception of Jesus, the dialogue of Mary and the angel Gabriel, Matthew covers this part of the story with a veil of modesty. Mary is "found to be with child of the Holy Spirit." Without the intervention of a human father, the Christ is conceived; the moment of conception is not for Matthew to describe. He takes Joseph's point of view: this is a discovery, a revelation.

This serves to emphasize the power and activity of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' birth. It is not the absence of the human father, nor the cooperation of the virgin mother which is the focus of Matthew's story—it is the fact itself: Mary is found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was born a man by the creative act of the

Holy Spirit, and his humanity was the beginning of a new era.

This season of Advent speaks to us of two main themes: obedience and faith. Luke's Gospel tells us that Mary went to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth. (1.39) Mary is to give birth to the Lord. Each mother learns from heaven about the other's child: Mary through the angel, Elizabeth through the Holy Spirit. That Spirit fills her, and her faith leads Elizabeth to address Mary as "the mother of my Lord"; and then to pronounce the blessing and beatitude over Mary, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." As Mary is a model of obedience, Elizabeth is a model of faith. Her unborn babe is prophetically aware of the unborn Christ.

Mary was chosen and granted the blessedness of being the mother of the Son of God. To be chosen by God often means, at one and the same time, a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. The truth is that God does not choose a person for ease and comfort and selfish joy, but for tasks that will take all that head and heart and hand can bring to them. God chooses to use. Our response should

be, "use me as much as I can be used." When that is realized, the sorrows and hardships discipleship in serving God may bring—these will not be matters of lamentation; they are our glory, for all is suffered for God.

Elizabeth alludes to Mary's blessedness—but even more important is her ultimate obedience. And let us not forget Joseph's faith—the faith to risk the wagging tongues of gossips, to take as wife one who would give birth before nine months were up—and his obedience to the angel's instructions.

Jesus' birth is surrounded by people who not only respond to a miracle, but to a new act of creation and acceptance and response. They accept God's will and respond to a call of obedience to God, who can and will further that new creation. Whether it is a call to a prophet like Isaiah or Jeremiah, or the simple conviction of something we should do because God asked it of us, a new creation begins with our own obedience.

The groundwork for obedience is the grace of faith. If one will only trust, there are no limits to what God may bring to pass. Jesus says, "According to your faith be it done to you." (Matthew 9.29) Compared to Elizabeth, to Mary and Joseph, how can one have faith? How can one believe when the dead weight of the world seems to pull the other way? The grace of faith turns our hearts to God. It is the quiet surrender of self to God, which takes hold and brings to fulfillment in us the gifts which open the way for all God's continued giving.

It is the paradox of blessedness that it confers upon a person, at one and the same time, the greatest joy and the greatest task in all the world.

Br William Edward Orce serves at St Francis, Potomac MD.

Two children, both boys

John was quite a precocious child; a womb-borne prophet, leaping as his Lord came nigh.
He started—knowing Mary standing by —
Leaping up with hardly any room.

Two very different boys: the first was born just after summer's sun stopped in the north; the other as the sun stood south came forth into a winter world cold and forlorn.

The barn is cold; the animals stand 'round, and shepherds kneel, adoring what they've found.
There; listen—you can hear it if you try—
the newborn John, his first breath in a cry
—a prophet's cry of joy, and riot of fear—
salutes his Lord from half-way 'round the year.

—TSH

Community notes

Annual Convocation

A "mountaintop experience" is sought by many Christians, and this year the 33 members of the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood found that experience at Graymoor, the motherhouse of the Society of the Atonement, the Roman Catholic Franciscan community located in Garrison, New York. Graymoor's situation on a mountaintop, and the Feast of the Transfiguration ending the week-long retreat, led to the theme for the convocation: transformation. The homily at each daily eucharist spoke to this theme, as did a community-wide "Emmaus Walk." When the members came down from the mountaintop to place the ashes of our late brother William E Bunting (who died last October) in the columbarium of New York's Cathedral Church of St John the Divine, this service, too, spoke of personal and community transformation. During the Convocation, word came of the death of a dear friend, Br James Madden, SSJE; the community lifted him up in prayer.

Some of the internal transformations involved new commitments, vows and promises. Brs Charles Kramer (Trinity, New York City) and Laurence Andrew Keller (St Paul's Cathedral, Boston) made life profession of vows; and Sr Clare Connell (St Raphael's, Brick NJ) and Br Alan Andrew Speer (Calvary, Cincinnati) made their first vows of profession. Newly noviced were Brs Roger-Michael Goodman (All Saints', Chicago) and Damian Curtis Kellum (St



Sr Clare and Br Richard Thomas, in the St Francis Chapel

Swithin's Fellowship, Clinton AR); and the Rev Christopher Thomas Connell (St Raphael's, Brick NJ), Ronald Silas MacGregor (St Thomas', Malverne NY), and Richard John Lorino (St Barnabas', Ardsley NY) were admitted as postulants.

New responsibilities in the community were given to two brothers: Christopher Stephen Jenks (St Peter's, NYC) was commissioned as director of vocations, and Thaddeus David Williams (Mount Calvary, Baltimore) as provincial of Province III.

One brother presented the community with a gift: Michael David Elvestrøm, artist, teacher and designer,

surprised the convocation with a processional icon of Saint Gregory the Great.

Convocation is also a time for vocationers to come and meet us over a three-day weekend, and this year was no exception. Six people came to us from New York, Delaware, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C., and, from what we've heard, they seem to have enjoyed talking, praying, worshipping, walking and generally re-creating with us—as much as we did in having them with us!

Another dimension to the convocations is fellowship. While never needing to be written into the daily schedule, the fellowship enjoyed by each member is obvious. Fellowship was a reality on an ecumenical level too, as a number of Friars and Sisters of the Atonement attended our services, joining us for meals, and generally re-acquainting themselves with us since our visit two years ago.

One of the Atonement sisters who attended Clare's first profession service had become a novice the year their founder, Mother Lurana, died. After the service, she told Clare, "You look just like our Mother Founder!" Clare doesn't lay claim to the title "Founder"—since the Companion Sisterhood is being formed under a twelve year sponsorship



The community "chows down" in the refectory.



Novice Brs Roger-Michael and Damian Curtis with the "S.G."



Br Tobias Stanislas preached the sermon for Transfiguration.

program by the Brotherhood—but she understood what the Atonement sister meant. The formation of the Companion Sisterhood is one of the biggest transformations to happen in the life of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood is learning what it means to experience motherhood; as St Francis said, in his rule for hermitages, "The brothers shall be mothers." As the Episcopal Church continues to participate in the Ecumenical Decade in Solidarity with Women, one could hardly find a better icon of the transforming power of Christ.

Province 1

Brs Donovan Aidan Bowley, Bernard Fessenden, and Michael David attended the funeral service for Br James Madden, SSJE. James had been a close friend of several members of our community in the Boston area, and had been instrumental in the covenant of prayer linking our communities. He will be greatly missed.



Br Alan Andrew and Sr Clare share some thoughts.



Postulants Ronald Silas, Christopher Thomas, and Richard John, with Br Richard Thomas

Sunday picked up on the celebration as the brothers of St Augustine's House, the Bronx, welcomed the province to a pot luck brunch!

Br Christopher Stephen Jenks chairs the Restoration Campaign Building Committee at St Peter's, Manhattan. He continues his work at the New York Landmarks Conservancy, assisting churches and synagogues in New York State in technical and fund-raising concerns.

Province III

Br Luke Anthony Nowicki has begun his Mutual Ministry internship at St Andrew's, Harrisburg PA. He is planning a Brotherhood Vocations Quiet Day in late October.

Province II

Brs James Teets, William Francis Jones and Tobias Stanislas Haller joined Br Richard Thomas in celebrating the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Brotherhood, (and the Superior General's 20th profession anniversary) at the noon Eucharist at the Episcopal Church Center, on Thursday, September 14th. James was asked to participate as subdeacon by the celebrant, Bishop Furman C Stough, senior executive for Mission Planning. Bishop Stough dedicated the service to the Brotherhood and to the Society of St Francis, which observed the same day as their 70th anniversary. The following



Br Laurence Andrew and company rehearse the main service.



A furtive look passes between the Superior General and Br Charles, and by Br William Francis.

Province West

Brs Thomas Joseph Ross and Alan Andrew attended a retreat at the Convent of the Transfiguration, led by Br Robert Hugh, SSF, and Sr Cecilia, CSF. + + + The Province will hold its annual Thanksgiving holiday gathering and Quiet Day at All Saints', Chicago.

Companions

Three new companions have joined us in the last month: Fidel Flores (Chicago), Sheldon Campbell (Washington DC), and Br Thomas Ferguson, FSC, (New York). Our warmest welcome to them.