

FREEDOM IN GOD'S ARRIVAL

Chilota Elochukwu



Dedication

TO
all those who are
sensitive to the Divine
LOVE IN ACTION

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Typeset Mrs C Clark

First published Feb 2000

Printed in England
Wordcraft Limited
Feb 2000

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INTRODUCTION

When a handful of the Daughters gathered at DRACC to wish me a happy Sabbatical, their message to me through our Vicar General, Sister Jane Francis Chioke was, "... we command you for a long rest".

Now within this rest, I had the opportunity to reflect on my congregation and its Founder, and I tried to see myself again in this congregation where God has planted me.

I had an opportunity also to reflect on my life journey, and on my service in the congregation; an experience that carried me to feel the closeness of God.

My experience of God has empowered me to reflect further on the general idea of vocation, which brought out very clearly again God's intention for creation, and wretchedness of life when a person fails to respond according to this intention.

The general search for the meaning of life has led many to ask

questions about ways and means through which the relationship with God is possible, and in this small book, I am trying to create an awareness to help us see how life looks when a person has arrived at the total dependence on God.

Through the experience of many others we will be able to observe the wretchedness of life without God. A life that has robbed itself of God.

One cannot experience the love of God and keep quiet. The purpose of this small book with very short chapters is to remember and to articulate in thanksgiving, the graciousness of God, which occurred in the concrete life situation within my mandate in the congregation.

CHAPTER ONE

BISHOP OKOYE : A POWERFUL LEGACY

In a book that based itself on concrete experiences within the spiritual journey, it is appropriate to turn towards our Father Founder, who through his teaching and example showed us the way to follow to attain the grace of our vocation and to live Divine love.

Bishop Godfrey MaryPaul Okoye, C.S.S., the Founder of my Religious Congregation, Daughters of Divine Love, was one of the twentieth century personalities that tried to express the life of Jesus Christ. He was a man, who when you are with him, you feel that you are the most precious, and another person being with him feels the same. This made him a unique personality. All his life Bishop Okoye remained a man who had a great love for humanity. The gift of friendship, and the qualities of a leader he had, drew people to him. Our Founder, Bishop Okoye, reminds us of the existence of a

broad-minded father who saw no reason for unnecessary restriction and delay for what should be done for the glory of God.

I am privileged to be among those who had immediate contact with our Father Founder. In him, it was seen a Blessed Father who allowed himself to be captivated by the goodness of God.

Our Founder was bold in his faith, and his boldness in speech and expression portrayed a man who was imbued with the freedom and conviction that emanated from his contact with the living God.

Bishop Okoye had a capacity for tenderness. He understood the essence of the Gospel. He had a great concern for others. He was concerned about the real questions and needs of life. He brought charity, compassion and mercy in this life.

Our Founder was a Thomas Merton of his time. Like a Trappist Monk Thomas Merton, our Founder Bishop Okoye, had a spirituality that embraced all. He was not just a quiet Father, performing his function quietly. He was a national figure, whose voice was heard clearly among the people of his country. Although very active in his function as a

Diocesan Bishop, yet he took active part in discussing the social issues of his time.

Many people quoted and have given almost a perfect description of Bishop Okoye's life of witness. Most of these quotations and descriptions came from the members of the Daughters of Divine Love Congregation which he founded. What is still lacking is the imitation of him as he imitated Christ.

The memory of Bishop Okoye reminds anyone who knew him, of a man, whose life was permeated with Divine Love.

CHAPTER TWO

BECOMING MORE REFLECTIVE

I was on a sabbatical, and during it, one of the places I visited was Italy. I spent the greater part of the months in Rome.

When I was in Rome, every morning, I rushed out early to catch a bus to the school of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) where I went to re-set myself in God's talk. Every afternoon, I came back by bus full of students, pilgrims, tourists and other bus users. The City of Rome is always busy, full of visitors. One afternoon, I came back in a very reflective mood; suddenly I remembered my congregation - the Daughters of Divine Love into which God has called me.

I took the opportunity of that sharp moment to thank God for inspiring me and for calling me into that congregation. I thanked him for opportunities he had given me in life through this congregation.

BEING ON THE WAY TO SOMETHING

The experience of my earliest preparation for religious life that is, the aspirancy and my earliest religious life - the Novitiate¹ were likened to the influence of early childhood where the example of parents, neighbours and even of friends exert a lasting influence on a child.

When I remember my earliest experience and influence of aspirancy, I remember Mother Charles Anyanwu, a Benedictine Nun whose Monastery, at the request of our Father Founder, permitted her to direct the new Foundation. At that time, she was in charge of both the Novices and the aspirants. She was looked-up to as a Mother, a model to imitate, and the aspirants were many.

I remember Mother had one long bench for five of us right in front of her seat in the Chapel at Isienu Nsukka. We made an effort to be in the chapel before

¹ Can 646

Mother. The effort to be early in the Chapel took different forms:- In order to meet up, I remember one of us would sleep with her trunk on her bed while leaving her feet in her bathroom slippers in order to rush to the bathroom, as soon as the bell went. Some would get up fifteen minutes early and wait while kneeling and holding the handles of their buckets of water waiting for the bell. Others would rush out of their beds as soon as the bell went saying their prayer while racing to the bathroom. All this was done by the aspirants in order to be early in the Chapel, to put into practice what Mother had taught.

Turning to my earliest experience of religious life, I remember my Novice Mistress, a Benedictine Nun, Mother Patricia Alufo, who at our Founder's request, was released by her monastery to continue the formation at the departure of Mother Charles. Mother Patricia continued to warn us of a "Capital M". "Capital M" means a miserable condition that shall be the fate of any of us - Novices - who would fail to put into practice all she taught and lived with us

concerning the religious life. If such a novice be professed and sent to a community, she would be miserable because she would be quarrelling with every member of the community - and by doing this, she constitutes a perennial problem for everyone. She would continue to live in perpetual sadness and misery, the "Capital M".

Our Novitate name for her, our Mistress, "Sister Pathy", shall continue to remain a memorable event for those of us who were in the Novitate at the time. The influence Mother Patricia had on us shall never leave us.

When I recall my early experience, I think of my two Superiors' General Mother Ifechukwu Udorah, and Mother Angela Uwalaka. These two wonderful women were the Superiors' General of my congregation at the early stages of my religious life. It is always good to remember that God has the liberty of working sometimes through people. Therefore, I am grateful to my two Superiors' General for allowing a favourable environment that encouraged me.

I also remember the wonderful people whom God allowed into my life during this early stage of my life and beyond; among them was my spiritual director, my friends and others who encouraged me with their lives full of evangelical witness. I must at this point acknowledge the love of most of the Sisters of my congregation which has been so supportive.

Vocation is a mysterious and a delicate thing. It is always better that no human person stands against its realisation in any individual.

CHAPTER THREE

EXPERIENCING THE GRACIOUS ONE

THE SECRET OF COPING

God is Great!
Psalm 8

"Sister Chilota, it seemed your mandate ran through the most difficult periods in the history of our country. How did you cope with the situation?"

I was mandated to serve in my congregation at the time when my country was in distress. Things became so bad that there was real hunger, lack of money, and lack of every basic need. It was an austerity that the country suffered for many years.

One day, one concerned person came to me officially and asked me the question at the beginning of this chapter: "How did you cope with the situation?"

This question met with a prolonged smile, which I ended with the exclamation: God is Great! I never said another word, but I continued with the smiles. When the person left, I kept that question to myself and continued with other pressing matters.

This question put to me set my mind and thoughts working. Although I did not say anything except the smiles and the exclamation, yet the content of the question was clear to me. I gave the answer in the language that should be understood only to the person who had the experience. I knew that the person who asked this question needed a kind of answer in the form of dialogue or discussion, but the answer never came in that form.

The exclamation, God is Great! is found within the big acknowledgement of the greatness of God Psalm of Psalm 8. I have made the exclamation my own. It is borne out of my experience of God, most especially within the years of my service in my congregation.

If I am to answer the question "How did you cope with the situation?" I shall answer it in terms of God's goodness. I

will not stop admiring the Jews for their spirit of gratitude and acknowledgement of God's graciousness to them. The Jews have a sense of remembering, they remember and they celebrate God's great deeds for the people of Israel. They handed this down generation after generation. Even when the children asked parents the significance of the celebrations, they answer that they were remembering the goodness of God to their ancestors. Israelis always calls to mind their unique relationship with God. Exodus is the history of remembering, the remembrance of the steadfast love of God is the cream of the Jewish hand over tradition.

God's children forget too quickly. We lack the spirit of gratitude, appreciation and affirmation. The attitude of the Jewish people constantly reminds me of the appropriateness of the attitude of remembering. My experience of God within my years of service in my congregation was not something I could share with some pages or in a book. In fact, I found it difficult to put into words.

VISIBLE MEANS OF COPING

When I remember the question put to me my mind runs back to the gracious God and I said to myself that for me to talk about how I coped with the austerity that was pervading my country during my service was to talk about the graciousness of God. The Hebrew word "hesed" meaning mercy, graciousness, kindness and acceptance, were the languages God used to make possible what would have been impossible. The faithfulness of God's love, his unconditional love made the coping possible. God is Great!

I said earlier that I lacked words to express my experience of God. My experience of him was so vivid and concrete in many ways. I think I will start by saying that God led me to trust him. When I felt that I was almost lost, he reached out to me and surrounded me with his love and encouragement. Sometimes he did this by providing an immediate relief. Sometimes, he did it in the form of what Mother Teresa of Calcutta expressed. She wrote:-

We cook for nine thousand people everyday. One day one Sister came and said "Mother, there is nothing to eat, nothing to give the people". I had no answer. Then by nine o'clock that morning a truck full of bread came to our house. The government gives a slice of bread and milk each day to the poor children. That day - no one in the City knew why - suddenly all the schools were closed.

The bread came to Mother Teresa. See, God closed the schools. He would not let our people go without food. This was the first time, I think, in their lives that they had had such good bread, and and so much. This way you see the tenderness of God.

God would not let his people go without food.²

² Mother Teresa of Calcutta: A life for God p.163

The greatest things God did for my congregation during my mandate was in terms of many vocations. He sent many pretty girls and young women to our congregation. As I said earlier, my country at this time, was in great distress and, because of the large number of candidates, people wondered how we managed to provide them with food, medication and other basic needs during their postutancy, novitate and so on. But it happened. I do not know how it happened. I had no other means except that I have the habit of remembering myself before the Lord in prayer.

I cannot claim that I have established a strong relationship with the Lord. My relationship with him is still poor and weak. All I knew was that he answered my prayers with my poor language of relationship. He understands me, and I try to understand him - with my poor language of relationship.

God answered my prayers and granted my requests in many different ways: He did it by disposing many sisters of my congregation to work hard and share, by inspiring many people and many

funding agencies that made huge donations and Grants to the congregation.

The goodwill of the hierarchy of Nigeria towards me and my congregation during my service was a great encouragement to me. The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria was wonderful in its service. Any of my documents that must pass through it, was promptly attended to. Thanks to the head of that office and his staff.

The Bishop Emeritus of Enugu Diocese, Most Rev. Dr. M. U. Eneja, was in office as the Diocesan Bishop when I was serving in my congregation. Bishop Eneja allowed me and the congregation a laudable breathing space in his Diocese. He gave us every opportunity to blossom in his Diocese. He actually allowed us to blossom.

Bishop Eneja, you are our Father, you are a quiet mover. I am most grateful to you, and to all the Priests and religious in Enugu Diocese.

All My Sons and Daughters were also very supportive.

The generosity of all these people and agencies mentioned above crowned

with the graciousness of God had lasting results in our congregation. One of the outstanding results was that in the Novitiate Chapel, one hears the sound of some hundred voices of novices chanting praises to the Triune God in unison. Thank God! Thanks also to these generous people and agencies.

The goodness of God continued to manifest itself. God surrounded me with sisters, who rated the good of the congregation high on their list of priorities. Everybody knows that it is a tragedy for anyone to work with selfish people; but God delivered me from working with such people. Rather, he surrounded me with many selfless sisters, sisters who, through their selflessness, God made things happen. Thanks to him! God was just wonderful. To think that in a country where the telecommunications were almost at total breakdown, the telephone system and other means of communication installed in our central houses and centres to facilitate both national and international communications, functioned twenty-four hours, seemed a miracle. God made sure

that those systems were functional because he knew that I needed them for communications that facilitated my work. God also sent many good, spirit-filled lay people who worked with me. They were also wonderful and I asked God to reward them accordingly.

You can never know what you are in for, until after having spent many hours working, meeting with many people, sat for long hours, made long journeys, and come home to meet unwelcoming people, met unkept and unwelcoming environments and met no cooked food. God delivered me from experiencing such ordeals by sending one of my sisters in religion, Sister Ozioma to work with me. Sister Ozioma was a caterer. She loved to serve God's children through her profession. She used her profession to serve many during my service in my congregation. She did all the cooking required at the central house at that time. Sister Ozioma cooked and served many sisters who came and went. She cooked and served those of us living with her and making sure that the food was ready on time. She cooked and served many

visitors and workers, and the poor people got their share.

Sister Ozioma and all those sisters who lived and worked in our central house at that time made life comfortable for me.

I am at liberty to say that Sister Ozioma was a holy person. She was totally unassuming. No work was too undignified for her. She was full of kindness. She used her gentleness and kindness to serve God's children. It was all God's work.

God is Great!

CHAPTER FOUR

BRIEF REFLECTION ON VOCATION

GENERAL IDEA OF VOCATION

My overpowering personal experience of God within my own vocation has empowered me to reflect further on vocation.

The call of God is something mysterious, something internal. It penetrates the innermost centre of our hearts. The reality of our vocation is better understood when we look through the scriptures. The Bible described and taught us much about the vocation of those who have been called and the way in which they were called.

The Bible continued the history of the vocation of the people of God. This history of one vocation, gives meaning to the particular vocation of everyone.

The Word of God is creative. It called and the being are. The Word

revealed itself by assigning to each its function

*The Word of God called each being into existence, and each according to its kind.*³

Each being created by God, was created for something. The trees bear within themselves their own seeds, because it was inscribed in the necessity of their nature to do so. Human being because we are free and intelligent, God communicated his plan to us through his word: God blessed them and said to them:

*"Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it".⁴
This is the vocation in general.*

God destined each person to a personal life of knowledge and love of God. Within this realisation still, God destined certain being to belong to him in

³ Genesis 1:11

⁴ Ibio 1:28

a specific way through consecration for a mission.

A quick study of the way God has planned our vocation over the course of the years, and how the people became aware of it through the presence of the events, will help us to discern and understand better what God is saying in the mystery of our own vocation.

VACATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, BRIEFLY

The vocation of Israel was evidenced in the way God led them. Israel was called into existence through the sign by which Abraham was chosen and consecrated for a mission. Through other memorable events in their history, the Israelis knew themselves as people chosen and preferred by God.

The vocation of Israel was definite and particular in various vocations: There were Patriarchs, Leaders, Judges, Prophets, consecrated individuals, Priests, etc. God guided, taught, admonished and delivered his people through these means.

The idea of Israel's election may not have been clear to them initially, yet they knew that they were in a unique relationship with God. It was this, their peculiar relationship with God, that made them aware of their true identity.

The memorable events during Moses' time: The exodus from Egypt, the covenant at Senai, the given of the Law, the journey in the wilderness and the conquest of the promised land, gave to Israel their unique identity and personality.

For a long time, the notion Israel had about their vocation revolved around the idea that God called them and preferred them. Until after the exile, when everything became different and Israel began to think more deeply about the mystery of their vocation.

VOCATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, BRIEFLY

*At various times in the past
and in various different ways,
God spoke to our ancestors
through the prophets; but in*

*our time, the last days, he has
spoken to us through his Son.⁵*

The word who in various times has been addressing itself to the people through the law and the prophets finally came to us through his perfect image.

When we think of the vocation in the New Testament, we will be recalling the call of our Blessed Mother Mary. The Blessed virgin Mary was called, and she answered the call. She answered the call by welcoming the message of the Angel. The word became flesh. God called us to himself through the incarnate word. Christ was the only one who was able to show us to the Father:

*He is the image of the invisible
God, the first born of all
creation; for in him all things in
heaven and on earth were
created through him and for him.⁶*

⁵ Hebrew 1:1-2

⁶ Colossians 1:15-16

We are called to live in conformity to the image of the Son.

To attain the fullness of our vocation is to live in conformity to Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit, and this means a transformation. The transformation will be so radical that it will mean a new creation through which the individual resembles the incarnate word:

*Your mind must be renewed
by a spiritual revolution, so
that you can put on the new
self that has been created in
God's way, in the goodness and
holiness of the truth.*⁷

VOCATION INITIATIVE OF GOD

Vocation is God's initiative that is before a vocation became an idea in anybody's mind, it was God's idea. It was God's choice.

⁷ Ephesians 4:23-24

*You did not choose me,
No, I chose you,
And I commissioned you
to go and bear fruit,
fruit that will last.*⁸

This choice of God preceded even the person called:

*Before I formed you in the womb,
I knew you;
Before you came to birth,
I consecrated you;
I appointed you as prophet to the
nations.*⁹

The source of our call is love. God called us because he loved us. God was at liberty to do what he wanted. Nothing constrained him. If God loved, it was because he wanted to love.

*I have loved you with an ever-
lasting love,*

⁸ John 15:16

⁹ Jeremiah 1:5

*I am constant in my affection for
you.¹⁰*

St. John the Apostle reminded us of this gratuitous love, when he said that we can say we love God only because he first loved us.

*Love consists in this.
It is not we who loved God,
but God loved us, let us love then,
because he first loved us.¹¹*

The call is a gift out of love which we must receive with humility and gratitude. Israel was aware of this gratuitous gift when their leader addressed:

*It was not because you were
the most numerous of all
peoples that Yahweh set his
heart on you and chose you,
for indeed you were the smallest*

¹⁰ Jeremiah 31:3

¹¹ 1 John 4 : 10-19

*of all, but because he loved
you and meant to the oath
which he swore to your ancestors:
that was why Yahweh brought
you out with mighty hand and
redeemed you from the place of
slave labour, from the power of
the pharaoh king of Egypt.¹²*

St. Paul was aware of this gratuitous gift and he warned us against the temptations to pride in receiving it.

*Consider brothers and sisters,
how you were called; not
many of you are wise by human
standards, not many were
influential, not many from noble
families. No, God chose
those who by human standards are
fools to shame the wise;
he chose those who by human
standards were weak to shame
the strong, those who by human
standards are common and*

¹² Deuteronomy 17: 7-8

*contemptible so that no human
being might feel boastful
before God. if anyone wants
to boast, let him or her boast
of the Lord.*¹³

FREEDOM OF RESPONSE

Our God decided to give us the gift of his love. He respects our freedom. Our response to love has to be free. God does not compel us. He does not force us. He allows us to take a free decision.

We can only notice his continued love. He leads us on with all tenderness and with all kindness.

Having been made in the image of God, human beings are irresistibly drawn towards the creator. Just like St. Augustine echoed that our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

*God continued to love us and
lead us with ties of human*

¹³ 1 Corinthians 13:26-31

*kindness, with strings of love and
with all tenderness.*¹⁴

¹⁴ Hosea 11:4

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCERNMENT AND RESPECT FOR OUR FREEDOM OF RESPONSE

God revealed himself. He approaches the person and conferred a mission. Most of the time this call has been addressed to a broken human being. A person with a complex heart who has been influenced with all sorts of backgrounds; social, economic, intellectual, family, and even personal history. Doubtless too, this call has many times been addressed to a heart that bears the scars of its sins. There is no doubt that our environment affects us, our refusal to love, our selfish motives, etc.

Whatever the luggage the person called might be carrying along, the Lord is saying that none of that is as yet an insurmountable object for God's action. Because God takes us as we are.

Sometimes, by means of our limitations and wounds, God leads us to himself.

There is a modern trend concerning vocation, in some parts of the world where

there are many vocations. Some people say that many vocations in those parts of the world are increasingly getting far from being genuine; that many enter the religious life and the priesthood in order to get the opportunity to study and other basic human needs and development which the generosity of the people can offer. In some of these countries with many vocations, they are mostly developing nations.

Everyone has a right to his or her own opinion. But, I will risk to say that vocation is a delicate reality. Sometimes, the person involved is not clear with what is happening to him or her. Sometimes, God's voice is heard through intermediaries;

God can use people, events, admiration of others and persons, readings, etc. In the call of Samuel, Samuel did not understand what was happening to him, until the Priest Eli discerned the voice of God in the call.¹⁵

¹⁵ 1 Samuel 3:9

Commenting on different means God uses to draw persons to himself, I wrote:

It is possible for one to enter into the religious life or priesthood because one is attracted by someone that one likes. One may also enter into the religious life or priesthood because one is attracted by the community's specific work, by the importance it attaches to the evangelical quality of life, by the importance it attaches to the contemplative dimension of Christianity or because of some impression one receives from someone. All these reasons enter into the choice of this form of life of Christian living, but J. M. R. Tillard said that those who are satisfied with these reasons and do not look for the deeper meaning and motivation, risk never getting to the essentials. Those who

*stay on without looking for deeper motivation, may simply persevere in the religious life or priesthood without living it as a meaningful experience.*¹⁶

To think that a person could leave her or his home for a religious life or priesthood, in order to get an opportunity to study and other human development, seems strange. In fact, it is a hard statement.

To study in order to gain knowledge and develop oneself is a good thing; but having been in the religious life for a long time, and having had a general knowledge about priesthood and having observed closely those who are in the priesthood, it stands out clearly to me and to all those who might have been through the same experience, that it is not possible to equate studies with religious life and priesthood. I do not think that it is as cheap as that.

¹⁶ Chiloia Eloehukwu, *Prophetic Function of Religious Life*

(Enugu: Snaapp Press Ltd, 1989) pp. 68-69

In the end, what I am trying to say is that anyone who might have left home for a religious life and priesthood, must be looking for something more than just an opportunity to study.

UNDUE RECOURSE TO PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

These days people talk about the accuracy of psychological tests. They have been used by some, in discerning vocations and in evaluations of our personality and our life. I would say that psychological evaluation, however accurate and exhaustive, will be relevant only at the level of the psychological procedures, and the case in question. I think we will do well if we do not reduce everything to psychology. Experience has shown that psychological theories did not agree and they varied in their understanding of human nature. John Crossin of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales lamenting on the recent faiths in the psychological idea, wrote:

Many summers ago, when studying for a Masters Degree in Psychology, I came to the realisation that psychology was the belief system of some of my fellow students. It wasn't just a tool as it was for me; it was the toolbox. For them, all earthly and heavenly events could be explained by conditioning, repression and various other psychological concepts. I found this faith in Freud or other psychologists curious. What I was learning was that the various psychological theories didn't agree with each other, they varied greatly in their understanding of human nature and were sometimes at completely opposite poles in their explanations. Material we studied showed that one school of thought seemed just as effective

*as another when it came
to getting good results in
therapy, just as many people
recover from their problems
without any counselling.
The longer we live, the more
we see that most of our actions
are our responsibility and that
there is an objective world
beyond our subjectivity and
personal fulfilment.
Psychological models have
some validity but they certainly
don't explain the meaning of life.¹⁷*

MORE COMPLETE WAYS OF READING HUMAN TRAITS

We have a more complete method
of reading and evaluating human
characteristics. This more complete
method takes into account our freedom. It
is a spiritual one. In it, the delicate
method the discernment of the spirit

¹⁷ John W. Crossin, *Friendship - The Key to Spiritual Growth*
(New Jersey: Perdlist Press 1997 MacArthur) pp. 6-7

comes into play. It involves much effort
and sincerity.
Our freedom of response if it is
exercised in its fullness, will lead a person
to respond to his or her vocation in view
of which God has given him or her being
and existence. When we allow ourselves
to be led and formed by the spirit of God,
then we become free with the true liberty
of the children of God. Discernment of
the spirit and evaluation of our personality
that takes this form will eventually be
more complete and infinitely profound.

RESPONSE

The story of the rich young man in
Mark, Mathew and Luke's Gospel¹⁸, is a
very significant one.

It was said that in the third century,
a young Egyptian called Anthony heard
this reading at church, he understood
these words of Jesus to be addressed
directly to him. Without delay, he put

¹⁸ Mark 10: 17-21; Mathew 19: 16-22; Luke 18: 18-23

them into practice and retired into hermitage.¹⁹

The word of God is living active and penetrates like a sword. The spirit holds it in the heart of those who listen.

In the Gospel accounts the man in question was full of enthusiasm. We would say that he had the right intention. God revealed his will in his law.

*"If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments".
Jesus enumerated the Ten Commandments*

The young man responded with frankness, "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" The man had a feeling that he lacked something, but he did not know what it was.

From the Gospel account, the young man's problem was a lack of awareness. His observance of the law was too negative; he did not kill, he did not steal,

¹⁹ The Call of Silent Love, Carthusian Novice Conferences
(London: Dartan Longman and Todd Ltd 1995) p.5

he kept himself from doing evil, but he did not love positively enough. However, the goodwill of the young man was duly acknowledged, for Jesus looked at him and loved him. The young man was a serious minded person, very conscious of his observance. In him, we see someone who was practically faithful to the law.

NEW LAW

"If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me".

Jesus invited the young man to go beyond the observances of the old law to the more radical demand of the Gospel. He made good use of his possessions. He fulfilled the law. He even sensed that there was something else he had to offer up, but he did not know what it was, although it meant everything. "Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor".

Jesus proposed a completely new way to the man, the way of poverty. It

meant a complete stripping, in order to be free to love.

The word of Jesus, while leaving everything to the freedom of the person called, if you like, nevertheless, pointed out the only way to eternal life.

When the young man heard these words, he went away sad, for he was a man with great wealth. He was unable to respond to the proposal because he was ensnared in his possessions. His possessions were the chains that enslaved him, that deprived him of the freedom of the spirit.

In the end, the young man went away, sad, because he was torn between the love of Christ and the love of himself. He was sad, because sadness is often linked to love of self, and joy is the patrimony of those who became poor for God.

CHAPTER SIX

JESUS IN DISCERNMENT AND FORMATION

JESUS DISCERNING SKILL

"What are you looking for?"

"What do you want?"

"What do you seek?"

In the call of the first disciples, Jesus taught a most powerful method of discerning the disposition of the person called.

The first question Jesus addressed those who wanted to follow him was: "What do you seek?" They replied that they were looking for where Jesus lived. "Rabbi (teacher) where do you live?" Jesus replied, "Come and see", and they went and saw where Jesus lived.²⁰

²⁰ John 1 : 35-38

The testimony of John the Baptist attracted the disciples to Jesus, and in the same way more followers joined them.

The disciples in the Gospel were already searching for the light that was not clear to them. They had been in the school of asceticism and prayer of John the Baptist. After the disciples had lived faithfully in this way, Jesus invited them to climb higher. The invitation was difficult to accept. Then, the Apostles reminded Jesus about the fate of those of them who had left everything and followed him. "We have left everything and followed you".²¹ Others like the rich young man went away.

As we have said in the pages, John the Baptist was only a man but he pointed the disciples to the true light. So in our time, many people have their interior desire awakened before they have a clear knowledge of Christ.

In view of what we are trying to remind ourselves about vocation, discernment and response, the question of

²¹ Matthew 19:27

Jesus to his disciples was very significant to us. It was the appropriate question to a candidate expressing a desire to join a religious life or priesthood.

"What are you looking for?"

"What do you want?"

When a candidate presents herself or himself and expresses a desire to join a religious life or the priesthood, the ideal question should follow the pattern of Jesus' question. What do you seek? Sometimes we ask "Why do you want to become religious?". I have taken note that "Why do you want to become religious?" is not an appropriate question to a candidate expressing a desire for a religious life or otherwise. There should only be one criterion: that she or he is seeking God. Every other consideration should be secondary; social background, intelligence, luggage or selfish intentions.

In the end, the only thing that will give meaning to our life, and create a balanced person, is the search for God. It is because we seek something else that dissatisfied people are to be found in

convents, seminaries and monasteries. This dissatisfaction is manifested in many unpleasant ways.

God takes us as we are. He takes the individual where he found her or him, at the point where he found her or him, and through that means reveals the mystery of himself and draws her or him to himself. The important point is on the disposition to seek God alone.

To find Jesus, we have to follow him, we have to live with him. He is the revelation of love and it is only this love that is able to see him.

JESUS IN FORMATION OF HIS FOLLOWERS

Jesus' Invitation: "Follow Me"

This theme of invitation evoked the memories of the Exodus, when the Israelites travelled through the desert following the Lord who guided them, showing them the way, by the pillar of cloud and by the pillar of fire.²²

²² Exodus 13:21

Jesus invited us to follow him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.²³ Following of Christ means much. It involves much love on the part of the follower, but it is a following that will bring the person - the follower - to the true wisdom - the heavenly wisdom.

We know that true wisdom has a problem of misconstruction. I remember early this year, the reflection given by the Very Rev. Fr. Professor P. D. Akpunonu of the Mundelein Seminary, Chicago. The reflection was given at the private morning Celebration of the Eucharist in Madison USA, when we went for the Ordination of one of My Sons, Ugo. Just the four of us: Fr. P.D., two other Daughters and I.

Fr. P.D. reflected on the first reading of that day, 29th May 1999. Basing his reflection on Ecclesiastics 51 : 17-27, said that he has a big worry and his worry was that many people misunderstood the meaning of wisdom. He said that many people think that

²³ John 14:7

wisdom means someone who has common sense, someone who is knowledgeable, someone who is intelligent, someone who is able to challenge people or someone who is able to manipulate others and wangle her way or his way through.

Fr. P.D., reflecting further said that a person of wisdom is someone who focuses on the Lord, has shed off the idols of selfishness. Someone who, basing herself or himself on the love of God, has been able to break the yoke of selfishness and live the life-style of Christ the Lord.

Fr said that the wisdom from heaven is not something one can acquire as one acquires knowledge, as one reads and studies. Reading and studying lead one to acquire knowledge and he knowledgeable, but the heavenly wisdom, which the book of Ecclesiasticus is talking about, is not acquired by being studious. It is the work of the Holy Spirit of God. It is all grace of God. That is why, he said, that Jesus told us not to worry about what we shall say or what we shall do at a given situation, because when such time comes, what we shall do or what we shall say will be given to us. It is all God's work, not

yours. The spirit of the Father will be speaking to you.²⁴

Wisdom from heaven, Fr. P.D. said, means saying an doing what Jesus would say and do in a given situation. It means living the life of Jesus in word and action, but do we still desire and cherish such people in our midst?

SKILL IN JESUS' FORMATION

Jesus the Way, the Truth and Life, showed the way which will lead his followers to one thing necessary. Jesus led the way through the formation he gave to his disciples.

I have carefully looked through the scriptures to discover the secret of Jesus in discerning vocation. I have been trying to see Jesus' method of screening and discerning vocation. The skill he used in selecting the disciples and Apostles respectively. The method and skill he used in the formation of his disciples. Each time, the answer was a return to

²⁴ Mathew 10 : 17-20

prayer. In other words, every method, every process, every skill, will eventually be out-modelled, but the only constant skill is the intimate communion with the Father in prayer, and Jesus led the way.

Jesus began the formation of his disciples by constantly being with them. He based the formation of his disciples on basic truth about the Father and himself. He lived in communion with his Father.

It must be noted that in Jesus' time, the disciples of Jewish rabbis were not formed simply by book learning. They lived with their teacher, they watched him translate his doctrine into many and various circumstances of life, in order to understand it through these living principles.²⁵

Jesus lived with his disciples. He formed them by being with them and led them to the Way, the Truth and the Life that he was. In fact, he communicated to them the way to eternal life.

²⁵ The Call of Silent Love : Carthusian Novices Conferences

(London: Darton Longman and Todd 1995) p.49

As we know from the Bible, Jesus was not an official accredited rabbi because he did not study at a school of recognised and highly reputed teachers.²⁶ The only authority Jesus had for teaching was his own person, and the truth of his teaching.²⁷ hence he taught like someone who has authority and this makes a whole world of difference.

Jesus taught the disciples what the kingdom of God was all about. Those who follow him, must follow unconditionally. It must be all or nothing.

Jesus in the formation of his disciples, taught them that following him involved all of their being and all of their existence.

The sincerity of Jesus, and the love he had for the Father and his disciples, encouraged the disciples to attach themselves to him.

The lived example of Jesus, the love he has for humankind and zeal for doing his Father's will, awakened in the

²⁶ Matthew 21: 23

²⁷ Matthew 7: 28-29

disciples personal love for Jesus. The personal love which drew them to listen to his teaching and internalised them, and above all, to live love in which every commandment of God is fulfilled. In fact, the disciples learned from Jesus the heavenly wisdom.

Jesus, when he was forming his disciples, taught and lived acceptance and welcome to people. He welcomed children, youths and adults. He fed the hungry and the poor, took care of the sick, and cured them.

The disciples saw and watched Jesus live infinite mercy and compassion towards sinners, seeking them out, forgiving them, as his heavenly Father forgave.

He taught the disciples how to love people no one has ever loved.

The dedication with which Jesus followed his mission without counting the cost and without self-seeking encouraged the disciples to follow him with enthusiasm.

In the end, the cross that was unique came. The disciples formed by Christ himself deserted him, but Jesus waited

with patience. With this incident of desertion by the disciples, Jesus taught the lesson of patience of a formator.

The disciples deserted Jesus, but the grace of the resurrection and glorification of the Lord so sustained them, that after the Easter, the disciples were able to follow Christ to the end, because the following of Christ was not an external reality. It was rooted and based on ardent love of God, and it was love that bounded the disciples together.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FORMATION

Religious Formation at any stage is not a question of a body of doctrine which the novice or candidate at any stage of formation has to learn. It is the transmission of a life. It is the transmission of divine life that the Father gave through Christ by the working of his spirit.

The well-spring of our congregation Daughters of Divine Love, is divine love, and it is the same source for other congregations, including monastic congregations. The goal of our lives is divine love, and the way into which every stage of formation is moving us, is divine love.

Formation at any stage is the work of the divine master who dwells in the heart. It is the spirit alone that teaches us from within. It is only the spirit that guides us in the ways of God. The spirit alone can search the depths of God, the

spirit alone communicates the life and love of God.

IS A FORMATOR OF ANY USE?

The spirit is the sole teacher, and since the spirit is the sole formator, what use is a novice director or a formator? She or he is not of much use except if it is seen in her or him certain qualities, a particular kind of experience, prudence, and a specific religious decorum.

A formator can transmit useful information at a certain level and can ground the candidate in a certain discipline, but she or he cannot bestow God. A Carthusian commenting on this wrote:

*For the solitary whose gaze
seeks God alone beyond all
that is created, the ultimate
guide can only be the divine
master. So, then, what use
is a Father master?
Not very much if one sees
in him only a man with*

certain qualities, a particular experience and a specific monastic polish.

Of course, he can transmit an abundance of useful information at a certain level; he can ground the outward person in a certain discipline that allows insertion into the monastic milieu without too many hard knocks, he can mould certain moral and ascetical perfection but he cannot bestow God, he cannot enable entering into the intimacy of divine life. He is not able to do this for himself by means of his own resources and of his own wisdom. But as an instrument of God, if God wishes to use him or her, he can support, affirm, give a certain visible and concrete reality to the teaching and action the master within. He can remove in ourselves the more or less hidden obstacles to that action. We are so clumsy, so deaf, so blind because of our passions and egotism that we easily

*deceive ourselves in regard to what the spirit wishes to say to us. We need to have it confirmed by a voice other than our own.*²⁸

Christ continued in our time through his body the Church, the Lord Jesus sanctifies and guides us. He does this through his teaching and the sacraments, but also through all who participate in the power of the Church.²⁹

By the virtue of her or his office, and as a member of the body of Christ, a novice director or a Formator participates in the function of the Church. In other words, she or he is the voice of Christ for the function of formation entrusted to her or him.

²⁸ The Way of Silent Love, Carthusian Novice Conferences
(London: Darton Longman and Todd 1995) p2

²⁹ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
Laymen Gentium Nos: 10-13; 18-21
(A Flannery, Op-Cit) P.350

A formator is not a perfect being, but she or he has a sense of office, and according to the measure of her or his ability, and transparency, Christ speaks and acts in her or him. To achieve this she or he must be a woman or man of prayer.

A formator is one who will like John the Baptist be able to point the candidates to the true light.

A novice Director or a formator, in the image of Christ must take upon herself or himself the trial and imperfections of those she or he directs and present them before God in Prayer. In fact, the worth of a formator depends on the worth of her love. A formator must be a person of great charity.

FORMATION OF CANDIDATES

From the beginning of the Church there were men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty, and to imitate him more closely, by practicing the evangelical counsels. They led lives

dedicated to God each in his own way.

Many of them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, became hermits.²⁰ The renewal, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and with the guidance of the Church, must be promoted in accordance with the following principles:

Since the final norm of the religious life is the following of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel, this must be taken by all institutes as the supreme rule.

I quoted verbatim, the definitions given of religious life by the synod Fathers to help us have a focus on our discussion concerning the formation of

²⁰ Vatican II Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life
Perfectae Caritatis N.L. A. Flannery, Vatican, The Councillor and Post Councillor Documents New Eds (New York: Costello Publishing Co. 1996)

candidates to religious life. I also quoted in part the principles that all institutes must bear in mind during the process of renewal.

It must be noted that the emphasis is on the following of Christ more closely. He emphasised the imitation of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel. Therefore, the focus is on Christ's footsteps, since the formation of the candidates should follow Jesus' methods.

We have seen the skill Jesus used in forming his disciples. I wonder how much of this skill we bear in mind in the discernment of vocations and in the formation of candidates. Often we are pre-occupied with the process of screening that we forget the essentials.

In every process of discernment and formation, Jesus had in mind one aim for his disciples and followers, that is, in the end, people will see a balanced person who will be so filled with the spirit of God that no one will be talking about the keeping of the commandments but living love.

In the *perfectae caritatis* the council Father echoed perfectly Jesus' aim for his followers. Therefore, from Jesus own example, it is clear that anybody who involved herself or himself in discerning vocation and formation, has to be someone already in friendship with God.³¹

To respond to a call in the religious life involves belonging to a religious community or congregation, and usually, congregations make a programme which is aimed towards the formation of the candidates.

The formation programme especially that of the novitate is usually lengthy and elaborate. The lengthy and elaborate programme is to acquaint the candidates with the texts of the statutes, and tradition. They study especially the statutes to know the history of the congregation in order to imbibe its spirit, but it should not stop there. They must make the texts of the statutes alive.

If we can recall our early childhood, in how many ways, the influence of

³¹ *Perfectae Caritas* : NN 1-29

parents and the environment affected us positively or negatively. It is the same with formation.

Jesus in the formation of his disciples stayed with them, ate with them. He prayed with them. They watched him when he went to the mountain for prayer. Sometimes he went to the mountain in the company of the disciples for prayer. He taught the disciples that transparency was necessary for the light of God to penetrate their hearts.

A formator has to be a person who likes the process of staying with. She or he has to be someone who would like to stay with the candidates - not giving into unnecessary travels and journeys.

However, the staying with does not indicate a kind of keeping at watch over the candidates, after all, we are moving towards a process that is aiming at a balanced person eventually. Therefore, it is a staying with through which a formator communicates to the candidates materials necessary for disposing themselves to the spirit of God that has drawn them, and led them to the radical transformation desired.

The contact of a formator with the candidates is essential because the spirit and the tradition of the congregation is not transmitted to the novices, younger members, and other members of the congregation only by studying the texts of the statutes and by lengthy and elaborate programmes. It is a life that is transmitted. Life is communicated more by contact than by teaching.

In the life of every congregation, there is much to be communicated to the beginners and the younger member by means other than written documents. The formator has to know that she is transmitting the life of the congregation she herself has lived with conviction in the congregation. Therefore, the candidates must see in the formator the expression of the tradition of the congregation.

The formator is not transmitting a written document. She is not handing down a list of laws and practices, but a life. It is a life she has lived, an experience of lived example which will enable the candidates to learn and live the original language of the Founder. Therefore, we have to guard against too

legal an approach to congregation's life. Divine love cannot be reduced to laws. It is a life that is full of evangelical witness, and of divine love that will give meaning to our outward observance.

In the end, it must be a person who has been to the mountain of prayer with the Lord that will be able to communicate this life. A formator who will be able to influence candidates is not the one with the best skill in handing down of doctrines and practices, but the one who had found the reign of God and has given up everything for its sake.

A formator should be the person of interior. She or he should be a person of great prayer, someone who is in deep communion with God, and the fruit of this life of communion becomes a light to younger ones and others.

A formator for example who has little interest in the liturgy will exert the same influence on the candidates.

A formator who does not pray does not know the value of prayer. Community prayer is followed with great reluctance; then personal prayer a big war, and she influences the candidates the same way.

In a formation house, where the formator does not know how to keep a house, invariably, she will not know the difference between a kept house and unkept one; and she will exert the same influence on the candidates.

If a formator does not care for the candidates, for visitors and others, she will exert the same influence on the candidates.

If a formator tends to explain all written laws and practices without through lived example, led the candidates to any intimate life of communion with Christ, which expresses itself in divine love, the whole effort may be of little value if not worthless, because no one will be earnestly seeking God while forsaking the road that is laid down in the Gospel, that is the road to charity.

What we have said about a formator or formators is also true for the whole congregation and its houses where the members live. It is the life of the congregation, the witness of the members that is being transmitted to the younger members of the congregation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FURTHER REFLECTION ON LIFE'S MEANING

My experience of God during my mandate, to serve in my congregation which I have already shared in the early pages, has awakened my interest more and more in reflecting further on ways and means of deepening this life of communion.

Interestingly, I had the opportunity of meeting with many people during my mandate. Most of these people asked questions about the spiritual meaning of life and some simply asked questions like:

"What is prayer?"

*"How does a person know
that she or he is praying?"*

*"Is it possible to stop jumping
all day long from one activity
to another, from one meeting
group to another, and ask the
basic question about the primary
goal of life?"*

In the remaining part of this work I shall try to reflect on these questions basing my reflection on my own personal experience and on the experience of others; hoping that the reflection will help those seeking spiritual growth, who have not been in prayer to get started.

A Jesuit Priest, Fr. William Barry, in his book on prayer used his personal experience to offer some help to those who want to develop their relationship with God, by suggesting some way that might lead them to deep communion with God. He defined prayer as:

*"A conscious relationship
with God".*

MEANS FOR PERSONAL ENCOUNTER

From our discussions, and from the experience of many people and from the questions many ask, it becomes clear that many people desire to enter into relationship with God.

Many writers on spiritual life have used our human way of interacting to

drive home to us what happens between us and God. To get into a conscious relationship with God, we need to go about it the same way as when we need to know more about anyone. If we want to know more about another person, we begin by asking those who know the person, and if it is someone we admire and almost want to get into an imitation of him or her, we look for things that can say something to us about that person. It can be in the form of write-ups about the person, photographs, and persons, etc.

Once we admire someone, there is always a movement towards an imitation of that person.

Many people have used these means to know God. Many people have also learned about God from reading of the scriptures, books on spiritual life, life of the saints, their autobiography, confessions of St. Augustine, newspapers etc.

A TRAGEDY

It is interesting to note that reading of the scriptures, spiritual books, are a

means by which God can touch us, but it is amazing to discover that there are some people who made general statements indicating their interest in seeking to develop relationship with God, who do not seem to take the desire seriously.

Last month I read in a magazine a four-page write-up with the title: "A Lamentable Lack". In this write-up, a woman writer from a developing country was lamenting over a lack of interest in reading she noticed in most women in developing countries.

She, however, encouraged women from those countries to develop an interest in reading because much is discovered in reading, she said.

The writer of the article made a big point, because there are people who have never opened any book, and have never read anything that can inspire them towards the personal encounter we are discussing. It is a tragedy.

To get to know God better, Fr Barry wrote:

One thing is clear. To get to know someone better,

we have to spend a lot of time at it, but if we want a more personal relationship, rather than a vicarious one with another, we have to take the chance of a personal encounter.

In the case of God, even making the effort just described can open the door to a personal encounter. He seems ready to take any opportunity for closeness. Have we ever been attracted to someone and just hoped that he or she might be interested in us? Many people, past and present, have found God to be like that, ready to take the slightest bit of interest in him as a chance to enter a closer relationship.³²

But the question of how one can enter relationship with God still lingers. However, since we have known prayer as

³² William A. Barry : *Prayer as a Personal Relationship with God* (New Jersey: 997 Macarthur Boulevard, 1987), p.17

a conscious relationship, the immediate answer is a return to prayer.

PRAYER AND ITS PSYCHOLOGY

In all we say and do in prayer, we must retain in our mind that it is God who takes the initiative.

To develop a closer relationship, the outstanding answer is time. Experience teaches that for a closer relationship to develop, we need to spend time with the person.

It does not matter what you do at such time. You can have lunch together, you can take a walk, you can pray together, you can tell stories. It does not matter the time spent together. It can be short or long, depending on the circumstances. It can be in the form of a quick telephone call, or a short letter, a card, and of course, hours together in deep conversation, whenever such an opportunity presents itself. If we put off communicating with a friend until such a time when you are able to arrange longer time, which you might not get, then the

relationship will gradually disintegrate until it becomes impossible to trace.

So too with God, we need to spend time with him. During such time you can read the scriptures, and its words speak to you, you can recite the rosary, recite prayers from a book etc. All this time you are in a conscious relationship and you are praying. All these we mention are not God, but they are the means through which God reveals himself.

The time spent in prayer may be long or short, depending on the circumstances. Some people think that the authentic prayer requires a lot of time. If prayer is a conscious relationship, then we shall begin to respond to those moments when our mind and heart turn to God. Of course, it is worthwhile to set aside a longer time for an encounter with the Lord.

PLANNING PRAYER

Many books and spiritual books have extensively demonstrated in writing different forms of exercise which must be followed and brought into prayer. We

cannot blame anybody for writing or for thinking the way he or she thinks, because everyone has a right to her or his opinions.

I remember not too long ago, I was involved in a three week workshop where we concentrated on some preparatory exercises for prayer. I practised the exercises; focusing, concentrating, calming and brought them to prayer, because I thought they were new ways of getting at the heart of prayer. Later I personally realised that these exercises have a slim chance of leading to the encounter desired.

I am trying to say that prayer needs everything except much planning, much focusing, and much centring exercises. According to my little experiences of the Lord, focusing, centring and calming down exercises are not so much needed, because there are certain things that take their natural settings unannounced during prayer. What I think is needed in prayer is some kind of discipline and reverence.

PLACE AND TIME

Some people ask where to pray and the best time of the day to pray - morning - midday - evening - midnight etc. Those who have the experience know that close relationships do not base themselves on protocols and ceremonies and they do not require special places.

Prayer could be said at any place and at any time accompanied by certain postures and gestures. However, we read in the Gospel of Mark that night was a favourite time for prayer with Jesus.³³

Community prayer requires a certain time of the day or night to give the community members the opportunity to be present.

It must be noted that the suggested more suitable places, for example, besides confirming that the temple of Jerusalem is God's "House of Prayer".³⁴ Jesus exhorted his disciples to enter into their private room and shut the door in order to pray there in secret to their Father in heaven.

³³ Mark 1 : 35

³⁴ Luke 19 : 46; Isaiah 56 : 7

Granted that there are certain postures and gestures that many people do not want to hear about these days because they said "God is our Father, and our Friend", and since God is as such, there is no need in bothering anyone about postures and gestures.

I add that a child talking or discussing any issue with his or her father who does not show some kind of respect that stems from love, must be something else, every culture demands this. I repeat what I said before that two friends should have mutual respect otherwise the friendship is aiming at extinction. However, one can pray kneeling, sitting, prostrating, lifting up ones hands, lying down, walking, standing, bowing, words, gazing, tears, songs.³⁵

In close relationships there are certain languages that only those persons in that relationship will understand. So too, in the relationship with the Lord, certain actions will be meaningful only to

³⁵ Fabio Giardini, *Pray without Censing* (Roma: Millennium Romae Editrice 1 Largo, 00184, 1998)

those persons who have had the experience of being with the Lord.

PRAYER PARTAKING OF DIVINE NATURE

*Oh, man, recognise the
dignity of your prayer!
When you confess
that you have become
partaken of the divine
nature, then you also
confess that your prayer
is not just the prayer of
man, man who is in you,
but rather the prayer of
the spirit of God. You
yourself still don't notice
what enormous things
are taking place in the
abysses of your heart,
when you begin to say
"Our Father".*³⁶

³⁶ Karl Rahner, *The Need and Blessing of Prayer*
(Minnesota Collegeville 5632, 1997) p.22

Father Karl Rahner saw prayer as partaking of divine nature, and he went further to help us in the explanation of how we partake of his divine nature in prayer.

The courage and power for prayer we have is in the Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. We speak to God in communion with Christ, because it is Christ who can adore God in spirit and in Truth because he rests in the Father's heart for all eternity as the only begotten. So, we can speak to God in Christ Jesus.

We also pray in the spirit of God. The spirit helps us in prayer. If we are tired in prayer, the spirit does not. The spirit of God prays in us. That is the most exalted dignity of our prayer. He prayed in us. That is the power of prayer that never fails.

Our prayer is to a certain extent consecrated by the Holy Spirit. The spirit of the Father and the Son prays in us. We know in faith that he prays in us, prays with us, and for us.³⁷

³⁷ Karl Rahner, *The Need and Blessing of Prayer* - 15 :
23-24

Prayer is based in the incarnation. It is a sharing in God's life; that life which was in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. It is a gift, it is grace; Prayer is a response to the word of God.

Cardinal Basil Hume replying to the question put to him during an interview with an English journalist, had this to say of prayer: "What do you feel when you pray?"³⁸

*Oh. I just keep plugging
away. At its best its like
being in a dark room with
someone you love. You
can't see them but they're
there.*³⁸

Cardinal Hume said something that was borne out of experience. He used a powerful image which reminds us of the teaching on prayer and contemplation found in the 14th Century mystical text, *The Cloud of Unknowing* in which at the beginning of prayer, sometimes, one feels

³⁸ Paul Murray, OP, "Living Knowledge of God" in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 63 (1998) p.330

nothing but a kind of darkness about one's mind. She or he will feel nothing except a disposition that is seeking God.

I read in the *Irish Theological* review the reply of an old Monk of the Monastery of Mont-des-Cats in France.

This Monk was a man with an extraordinary gift for prayer. He did not just say prayers; his whole life, his every gesture, became a prayer. When he was once asked how he had attained to this state, he replied:

*Looking back, my
impression is that
for many, many years
I was carrying prayer
within my heart, but
did not know it
at the time. It was
like a spring, but one
covered by a stone.
Then, at a certain moment,
Jesus took the stone away.
At that the spring began to flow
and has been flowing ever since.*³⁹

³⁹ Paul Murray, "Living Knowledge of God", in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 63 (1998), p.330

We may ask what is this prayer that has been in us and seemed forgotten. The first answer to this question is the gift of the Holy - the gift we received in Baptism. Prayer then is in the words of Gregory of Sinai, "The manifestation of Baptism".

Karl Rahner saw prayer again as the fullness of love. If we want to say what he said, we must be talking about the love of God. Since the fullness of prayer is love, then we must talk about the love of God if we want to say what prayer is, and he went further to say what the love of God meant. He wrote:-

*This love of God is selfless.
It doesn't think of itself, it
is faithful and tender. It
loves God, not his reward
because it is itself reward
enough. It stands firm in
cheerless hours. It conquers
all bitterness, the waters of
distress are not able to
extinguish it. It is still
and not given to many
words because great love*

*is pure and chaste. It is
bold and intimate and yet
respectful, it despises
coarse familiarity before the
incomprehensible God
because it is not love of
just anyone but love of God.*⁴⁰

Prayer is developing a true relationship with God in which we depend unconditionally on him and do not seek any other support apart from him. In which the gift of God is no more important. That is, we are no more interested in what we can get for ourselves. Only one thing counts - to have a genuine relationship of love with him. It is an all-inclusive relationship in which we lose all the limited goals in which we are continually tempted to find our security. Prayer is seen as a relationship of dependence on the risen Lord.

⁴⁰ Karl Rahner, *The Need and Blessing of Prayer* (1997), pp. 28-30

CHAPTER NINE

PRAYER - A RELATIONSHIP OF DEPENDENCE

In this book, we have defined prayer in different ways, but all is pointing at one thing - a conscious relationship of love with God. It is clear that when we admire and love our hearts move towards a life of communion.

HESITANCY TOWARDS GOD'S PLAN

When life is full of personal plans and personal security that lacks dependence on God, the result is obvious. I would like to return briefly to the burning issues pervading many people nowadays: Stress and Mid-Life Crisis

STRESS

The human body is both strong and weak, and it works within simple mechanisms: If you eat, work hard and

rest, the body will be strong. If you eat less, work hard, and rest less, the body will be weak and when the body is weak, there is trouble. Even when you eat more, work less and rest more, there is also trouble. Therefore, balance is the word.

It is amazing that people spend time discussing the body; why it should be tired when it should be tired and so on. The body does not lie. Stress comes when the body is tired, and the owner of the body consciously or unconsciously refuses to pay attention to its rightful claims. You can go to bed and think you are resting while your whole being is busy planning and worrying about so many things. It is difficult to know when stress is present in one's life because sometimes, simple tiredness is given a big name - stress.

I read a book in which stressed people were discussed. It is surprising to see that stress has formed part of a course of study, and it is a sign that many people are suffering from the epidemic.

SOME STRESS SIGNS

Touchiness
Complaining

Impatience
 Not feeling well
 Over-eating
 Tense facial muscles
 Getting into a fuss about nothing
 Over-sleeping
 Rarely smiling
 Fatigue
 Moodiness
 Etc.

I know that there are physical and emotional manifestations of stress, but whatever manifestations, all are caused by stressful persons themselves.

Stress does not just come. It is caused by something. We bondage ourselves, make ourselves a slave of unnecessary desires. Then, we blame the body. I see a stressful attitude as a refusal to accept God's plan, and God's control in a person's life. When someone fails to accept the reign of God in his or her life, she or he has other values bothering her or him, she or he manifests these values in many stressful attitudes.

Stressful people are very judgmental and judgmental attitudes

create unhealthy behaviour. If someone goes around judging, then, he or she will be a tensed person in life, carrying a heavy burden of unliberated life because she or he sees only the bad in others, and as long as the masks are on, they continue to constitute obstacles to allow God into one's life.

I am not saying that stress does not exist. It does exist, for those who give it the opportunity to settle down in their lives, because if anyone leaves a space, and allows God to be present and to plan and take control of everything about him or her, stress would go back to its home and stay there for ever.

MID-LIFE CRISIS

Mid-life crisis is a state of men and women who mourn the fact that they are getting older. Mid-lifers are those persons who like to deify youth. Mid life, instead of being an interesting period in one's life, that is called the old age in youth, and youth in old age, this period has become a crisis for some.

It is strange to see that mid-life crisis has become a topic for discussion and conversation, and many books have been written on that. There is a course now available where the mid-lifers go to learn how to accept the fact that they are getting older. There, too, they learn how to handle the signs of ageing. In some parts of the world, they have even formed a club named the Mid-Life Crisis Club.

Not too long ago, people were suggesting that the title Mid-Life Crisis be changed to something more positive. For me it does not matter whether the title is changed or not, whichever title it is given, it is the same old story of people mourning over the fact that they are getting older.

The Mid-Lifers in crisis mourn many things, physical strength, physical beauty, loss of friends, loss of those who love them, loss of admirers and other losses and mournings difficult to name. They forget that those who love them and admire them in life will continue to do so even when they are 110 years older. I am convinced of this.

A Mid-life is in crisis when she or he fails to accept the reality of ageing, and allow life to take its course. There is no doubt that there are some adjustments to make. For some, this is a time to re-assess their commitments and accomplishments in life. For some, it is a time to ask questions and want to know what to do with the rest of their lives. For some, it is a time to run from one new skill to another searching for new skills which they will use to mask up the inner worry and emptiness. It is masking of an internal worry and emptiness because for any adult of a definitive age to want to return to the age of twenty is a sign that the person has been burdened with internal worry that is difficult to name.

People like these find themselves unnecessarily sad and discouraged, because they are holding on to something that will eventually elude them. Their hearts are still far away from surrendering. People like these will continue to be prisoners to themselves unless they accept the reality of ageing and this will be possible only with a return to prayer, a return to the life of communion with the

Lord, a life of dependence with the living God. This is the only way out.

AID TO PRAYER:

A. SOLITUDE

At our recently concluded General Chapter, new laws and regulations were made concerning solitude and other matters of importance. After observing the enthusiasms with which 60 Carpitulars were making these laws, I said to myself, it seems that laws and regulations are gradually interfering with our primary mission: Divine Love in action.

Reflecting further, it became clear to me that solitude and prayer are difficult to separate. They are intimately related. In other words, if solitude is lived with its spirit, it has a lasting effect on the quality of our prayer.

Solitude involves a certain decision to separate ourselves from those around us. It involves discouragement of unnecessary contacts, and other prohibitions which are considered indispensable for authentic solitude.

Jesus is an example in solitude. Jesus took with him Peter James and John to climb the mount and pray. Jesus was called by the spirit to meet his father more intimately in solitude. Many passages in the Gospel show how solitude and prayer are closely connected for the Lord.

In solitude, the separation from those around us may sound too negative, however, solitude in order to retain its character, has to involve some kind of refusal to compromise.

AUTHENTIC SOLITUDE

Solitude is the answer to a vocation from God to encounter him. The entry into the authentic solitude, Jesus is presenting to us, involves a transformation of our interior life.

One who has entered into solitude is the one who has learnt to welcome the least of her sisters and brothers. A Carthusian summarising the person in solitude wrote:

*As long as I maintain
towards the other an*

*attitude of division of
any sort, I do not live
in solitude because
I am in dispute with
him, I am not free as
long as I have not
abdicated my independence
before him, in order to
be passed only by the
spirit of love. I will
truly enter into solitude
only the day when by
God's grace, I will
have become sufficiently
like him for the other to
be no longer in any way
a cause of dissimilarity
between the Lord and me.*⁴¹

Authentic solitude is not the observance of external laws and regulations. It is not the flight from the world either, or the separation from those

⁴¹ A Carthusian Miscellany, *The Wound of Love* (London: Darton, Longman Todd Ltd 1994) pp.42-43

around us. Rather it is an encounter with the living God.

The solitude pleasing in the sight of God is the one who has found God by opening her heart or his heart to others. This person can come from any background, but she or he must be someone who has learned how to render her whole being available for the love of her sisters and brothers, and it is someone who has been in communion with the risen Lord.

B. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Before we enter into the discussion of the all-important topic in the life of the Church, I would like to take the worthwhile advice of Fr. William Barry, in making the prayer of St. Anselm of Canterbury my own:

*Teach us to seek you,
and reveal yourself to
us as we seek; for unless
you instruct us we cannot
seek you, and unless you
reveal yourself we cannot*

*find you. Let us seek you,
let us seek you in desiring
you; Let us desire you in
seeking you. Let us find
you in loving you; let us
love you in finding you.* ⁴²

Spiritual direction has taken on a new look in recent years. This is evidenced in the increasing number of training centres for Spiritual Directors.

Throughout the history of the church, there has been a desire for self-giving and the life of communion with God in the heart of many people. This desire for growth in the spiritual life led them to seek the help of other Christians.

In our own day, God has continued to raise up men and women who are interested in knowing God, and who, as a result of that interest in God, and their own listening ability, won the trust of many people who are searching the same

⁴² William A. Barry; *Spiritual Direction and Encounter with God* (New Jersey: 997 Macarthur Boulevard 1987), p11

At the early stages of my religious life, spiritual direction was not emphasised in the manner that it is emphasised now, and there is a big difference in the way spiritual direction is understood then. The lay folk in some part of the world know little about spiritual direction while in some parts of the world they are already very deep in it - What shall we do? In fact, some understood spiritual direction as something possible only within the sacrament of reconciliation.

Thank God, after some rude awakenings, the need for spiritual direction became clearer and urgent. Right now many people are taking seriously the Ministry of Spiritual direction, and many have benefited from that.

UNDERSTANDING DIRECTION WHAT IT IS NOT

Spiritual Direction is not one person telling another person what to do. It is not a forum to discuss another person. From the experience of spiritual direction itself,

it becomes clear that spiritual direction is not a chamber for problem solving.

Spiritual Direction is not counselling, for counselling focuses on issues or problems in the life of an individual. Spiritual direction is not psychotherapy for psychotherapy is concerned with developmental problems and personality disorders.

From the experience of spiritual direction itself, spiritual direction is not a place for problem solving. In other words, spiritual direction is not a place where the directee goes to solve community or family problems, but if that problem is going to be a 'block' for the directee, then it should be discussed during the direction, but the essence of the spiritual direction is not problem solving.

WHAT IT IS

To recognise the voice of the Good Shepherd and to move constantly through the right narrow gate, which will result eventually into following the Good Shepherd with an undivided heart requires a listening ear and a discerning heart.

Shepherd with an undivided heart requires a listening ear and a discerning heart.

Jesuit Priests, Fr. William Barry and Fr. William Connolly, define spiritual direction. They wrote:-

*Christian spiritual direction is a help given by one Christian to another Christian, which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship.*⁴³

Spiritual direction means a Christian sharing with another Christian his or her personal experience of God in prayer. An

⁴³ William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Harper Collins, 10 East 53rd St. N.Y. 10022) p.8

FREQUENCY OF THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND TIME

Experience teaches that at the initial stage, the meeting of the directees should be more frequent so that both of them should have enough time to get to know each other. It is important that this relationship between the directee and director develops so that there will be no block in sharing of experience.

With regard to time, it is difficult to say whether it is going to last one or two hours or more each session, because the director cannot hurry the directee.

Moreover, it is all the work of the Holy Spirit, so it goes as he directs. Therefore, it is difficult to suggest how long a session would last.

MINISTRY OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

The Church is endowed with a variety of gifts and spiritual direction is among those gifts. In other words, the spiritual direction is a ministry in the church and it is a ministry that is not

among those gifts. In other words, the spiritual direction is a ministry in the church and it is a ministry that is not meant for every one. There are people who are by grace naturally gifted for the ministry of spiritual direction. Fr. Barry commenting on this wrote:

*If the church needs shared
experience for its life,
then the church needs people
whom others can trust.
Such people have by grace
and training the gifts needed
to do the ministry of spiritual
direction well. The ministry
of spiritual direction is a
charism in the church.
People who have the charism
are almost naturally grateful
and humble before the gift.
Moreover, they find their
deepest fulfillment in listening
to the experiences of God which
others entrust to them.*⁴⁴

⁴⁴ William A. Barry, *Spiritual Direction and Encounter with God* (New Jersey, 1997) McCarthur Boulevard, Mahwah 1992) p.94

SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS NEED PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

It is appropriate that persons whose tasks are to help people to develop their relationship with God and translate it into everyday life should enter into such relationship with God themselves in order to be authentic, otherwise we get only professionals. Fr. Barry commenting further on this wrote:

For too long divinity schools, seminaries and formation programmes seemed to operate on the assumption that sound theology was all that a minister needed. Again, just as I do not wish to disparage sound psychology, so too, I am not disparaging sound theology. After all, this book is based on the premise that a sound theology is helpful for ministry. Reading a good book about marriage may help a couple, but it does not spare them

*the pains and joys of actually relating. Likewise, a sound course on God may help a minister, but it cannot take the place of engaging God in a relationship. Thus, if I am to help others with their relationship with God, I must have developed my own relationship, else I will deserve the epithet, "Hypocrite".*⁴⁵

A Jesuit Priest, Fr. Anthony Ciorra, describing what happens between the director and directee during spiritual direction said that the goal of spiritual direction is to keep the directee in relationship with God and to help him or

⁴⁵ William A. Barry, *Spiritual Direction and Encounter with God* (New Jersey 1997 Macarthur Boulevard, Mahwah 1992) p.96

her to develop the relationship and to move it to the next stage.⁴⁶

It is important to note that spiritual directors do not create the relationship between God and the directee, but they help to develop the relationship that is already existing between God and the directee.

In the end what is important is the presence of God in one's life. It does not matter how the presence came. Persons and methods are all a means to our yearnings. When God is present every method is displaced with the relationship of God.

⁴⁶ Anthony J. Ciorra, *Everyday Mysticism* (New York : 370 Lexington Ave, 1995) p.169

CHAPTER TEN

ABANDONMENT OF PRAYER

The more one prays, the more one wants to pray

The less one prays, the less one wants to pray

Fr. Ignacio Larranaga used a powerful illustration to drive home to us what happens when we abandon prayer for seemingly valid reasons. He wrote:-

There is a physical malady called Anaemia. It is a particularly dangerous disease because it had no spectacular symptoms, and death comes silently and painlessly. It consists of this: the less one eats, the less appetite one has; the less appetite one has, the less one eats and the end result is acute Anaemia. The individual

*is caught in a circle, the
circle of death.*⁴⁷

The image of a dreadful disease demonstrated the subtle means through which the self fills our interior with coldness. The dreadful malady begins when we begin to look for the slightest opportunity or invent reasons for missing our personal prayer and our community prayers.

The call of God's children to a life with God is languishing because of abandonment of prayer. These people stopped praying. They abandoned everything.

They abandoned every idea of piety. They even underrated the sacraments. They put aside personal prayer. Fr. Larranaga wrote that some people say that they will search for God in humanity, but while they are looking for God they have abandoned God.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ignacio Larranaga, *Sensing Your Hidden Presence* (Canada: 250 boal St. Francis Nord Sherbrooke Q.C. JPE 2 Bg, 1992) p.23

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.25

PRAYER IN THE EVERYDAY

The more we become interiorly distracted the easier for us to miss our prayer or if we do not miss it altogether, we rattle it out as quickly as possible and disappear. Fr. Karl Rahner called this rattling attitude of prayer: "Prayer in the Everyday". With the prayer in the everyday, Karl Rahner meant that regular prayer which is practised without regard to the desire and mood of the moment, is a prayer that man demands of himself as his own duty, and cherished custom, without being actually bound to it, prayer that is familiar with specific times for prayer, that is connected to particular times of the day and connected with morning and evening, and with meal times.⁴⁹

When the malady sets in, prayer becomes a burden. The heart is filled with boredom and in some cases we lay the whole blame on the person in charge of

⁴⁹ Karl Rahner, *The Need and the Blessing of Prayer*, p.38

liturgy, saying to him or her that we need something alive.

I remember the experience shared by a member of a workshop who visited a community where the members, in order to avoid the monotony devised a method of some kind of official introduction before they start the liturgy of hours. The leader of the prayer for the day comes out in front of the chapel or any prayer corner, and introduced the pattern the prayer will follow. With this method every member was literally jumping up satisfied and thanking God that a Saviour has come, eventually the Divine office has become alive once more.

The community tried this new form and method. There was a variety everyday. There were different Psalm tunes, but after some weeks and months, the monotony came back and the variety became routine.

Karl Rahner lamenting on the routine type of prayer wrote:-

*Oh, how much of our
everyday prayer is really*

*"prayed", and what is only
mouthed? How often
are heart and mind free from
everything we pray, how
often does the word to God,
from heart to heart, because
the recital of a formula during
which one is only concerned
that it is done, during which,
however one is no longer
with him to whom one says
the prayer. It becomes
exterior, mechanical,
heartless, lip-prayer and
consummation of an external
action that one carries out as
quickly as possible in order
to apply oneself once more to
more enjoyable things. This
prayer becomes as it were a
time grudging granted to God.⁵⁰*

There is clear evidence that the problem is not the problem of bringing prayer alive, the vitality of prayer does not

⁵⁰ Karl Rahner The Need and Blessing of Prayer, p.39

come from the external, but within us. When the hearts of the people of prayer are empty the words of the Psalms are empty and the liturgy of the Eucharist lacks richness.

Prayer is life, and when it stops being the life it should be, it turns into a huge problem. As it is said at the beginning of this chapter, the less we pray, the less we want to pray, and the less God is God within us. When people allow themselves to be empty of God, they will try to give meaning to their lives by trying to cover the emptiness.

When there is emptiness in the life of an individual, due to abandonment of prayer, she or he feels the need for replacement. According to Fr. Larranaga, the emptiness of God "weights as heavily as a corpse". These are the type that ramble on and on asking for new forms of prayer.

In the life of those whom God has grown weak, Fr. Ignacio Larranaga wrote:

*They will certainly continue
to talk 'about' God, but
they will be incapable of*

*speaking 'with' God. Their
words will be bronze trumpets:
They will make noise but carry
nothing with them, neither
message nor life - Believers
will never see on their
foreheads the radiance
of God (Ex 34 : 29). The
faithful will say, we were
looking for a prophet but
we have found a professional.
Those who are hungry and
thirsty for God will find a
dry spring.*⁵¹

Once this malady of emptiness of God starts, the individual finds herself or himself breaking away from the source of life, and it continues like that until he or she robs himself of God.

⁵¹ Ignacio Larranaga, *Sensing Your Hidden Presence*, p.29

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PRAYER IN ACTION

John Macquarrie of the University of Oxford defined Theology as:

*The study which through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of that faith in the clearest and most coherent language available.*⁵²

Macquarrie insisted that any theologian who should engage in the explanation of faith must have first of all participated in that particular faith before he would be able to explain it to others.

Prayer which is the expression of faith follows the same rule. It is the experience of this faith we have participated in that we would like to share in this chapter.

⁵² John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: S.C.M. Press Ltd 1997) p.1

A Spiritual Theology Professor at the school of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) Rome, commenting on the dichotomy that can sometimes exist between prayer and life gave example of a Theologian at reflection and at prayer:

He said that a Theologian is a Scientist. That problems arise when a Theologian separates theology from devotion. That is, when what a theologian does when he is at his desk thinking about God becomes different from when he is on his knees encountering God. It is at its best when the experience is the same as when he is on his knees. The problem arises when there is a separation between Theology and devotion.

DICHOTOMY BETWEEN PRAYER AND LIFE

It is amazing that there are people who have made their prayer life sterile by living a 'false' devotion. We call this a false devotion because the witness of life that should accompany the life of prayer is not obvious. In fact, in some people, the

dichotomy between prayer and life is so wide that people wonder what could be the explanation for such a contradiction.

I remember my friend, Sister

Fencos sharing with her community her experience after giving a talk on prayer on the topic "Youths at Prayer" to the youths of St. Andrew's Parish in the Eastward of her convent. At the end of the talk, youths went into discussion groups of six with the question: From the explanations within the talk on youths at prayer, is prayer then necessary? They were to give a feedback after discussion.

Sister Fencos said that on coming back the secretary of the first group stood up to report and said that their group did not discuss the necessity of prayer. Rather, they criticised the contradictory behaviour of some prayerful persons they have met.

Sister Fencos became so worried after sharing her experience that she said to the members of her community:

*"I don't know whether
they're referring to me
or to their teachers at school".*

To my mind, on this point, I do not think it mattered what they were referring to; the clear word is that the contradictory behaviour of some prayerful persons they have met created a big worry.

There are many people who dedicate long hours to God in prayer, but they still carry their natural faults with them, always fighting over things that do not matter, very suspicious of others, aggressive and immature. People wonder why such people end up this way, and still search for the explanation why such people end up this way, Fr. Larranaga said:

*Perhaps, instead of adoring
God, they worshipped
themselves. In their lives
there was a subtle phenomenon
without their realising it, these
people replaced their "I" for
what they called God.
That God whom they treated
with so much devotion, was
not the thorough God. He was
a projection of their fears,*

*desires, and ambitions. They sought themselves in God. They served themselves instead of serving God. They never reached out. They seemed to worship God, but they worshipped in God, themselves. They seemed to love God but they loved (in God) only themselves. That God was a false God, an idol, a "god" made according to their desire, interest and fears. Praying, they were always centred in themselves, throughout their lives, they remained within a selfish circle. This is the reason why they did not grow in maturity.*⁵³

PRAAYER MEETS LOVE

Today the word love has become alarmingly ambiguous - perhaps every age suffered the same.

⁵³ Ignacio Larranaga, *Sensing your Hidden Presence*, pp. 248-249

The motto of my congregation is "Caritas Christi Urget Nos".⁵⁴ (The love of Christ urges us on).

The motto of our congregation is written in a most beautiful manner in the Statutes of our Congregation.

Statutes *Basing itself on the Lord's own example:
"The compelling motive force of this institute and of the Sisters who came to it, must be an ardent response to God's call to love himself and our fellow men and women".*⁵⁵

The statutes explained to the members that everything they will do should be done in the feminine quality of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, marked by

⁵⁴ Statutes Avt. 2, (i)

⁵⁵ Ibid Avt. 2

intuitive sympathy, tenderness and motherly solicitude for all God's children.⁵⁶

Love is so fundamental in life and that is why many have seen it from different angles, but what love means in essence will only be understood by those who have already experienced it. St. Paul was much aware of this love when he was writing to the Corinthians:

*If I have all the eloquence
of men and women and of
angels, but speak without
love, I am simply a gong
booming or a cymbal clashing.
If I have the gift of prophecy,
understanding all the mysteries
there are, knowing everything,
and if I have faith in all its
fullness, to move mountains,
but without love, then I am
nothing at all. If I give away
all that I possess, piece by
piece, and if I even let them*

⁵⁶ Ibid Avt. 2, (ii)

*take my body to burn it,
but without love, it will do
me no good whatever.
Love is always patient and
kind; love is never jealous;
love is not boastful or conceited;
it is never rude or selfish;
it does not take offence, and
is not resentful. Love takes
no pleasure in other peoples
wrong-doing but delights in
the truth; it is ready to excuse,
to trust, to hope and endure
whatever comes.*⁵⁷

St. Paul in his description of the qualities of love talked like someone who has really experienced the true nature of love because it was difficult for him to talk about it. When one experiences love, it is difficult to discuss it because it is like an inner reality which takes one over completely.

St. Paul talked like someone who has experienced love because the

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 13 : 1-7

argument and the language he used in the presentation of the contents of love is not the language of the brain. He used the language of heart which love understands.

Paul began with Patience, a life supporting quality. Love is patient depicts the disposition we should have for others, a disposition to be able to relate with others, a disposition that will encourage us to live with others even when the person is a chronic complainer and a bundle of discontentment. Love is patient depicts the patience we should have for others and for ourselves.

A Jesuit Priest, Fr. Ladislaus Boros reflecting on the qualities of love expressed in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians wrote:

*Speaking in tongues are
unimportant here. The
important thing for us is
the basic experience namely:
although you may speak as
beautifully as is possible for
an, even if you speak like an
angel - if you do not have
love, then it is all so much*

*'old iron'. You have not
done nor have you experienced
the essential thing. Your talking
sounds good, it even moves men
and women's hearts, it shatters
them, but what is behind it?
Nothing. Sheer emptiness.
You pronounce words that
do not express the essential
thing. Your language, your
delivery is moving exciting,
even illuminating - it is simply
splendid, but you yourself are
not behind it, and thus your
language becomes meaningless.
If you have never loved how
can you dare to speak about
essentials, because our word
will die away? They are an
enjoyment of yourself and
magnificent display of yourself.
From first that you place the
other person above the
interest of your own existence.
First protect the other person,
struggle for another person
protect him, give him life
and inner growth. Our words*

*are, however, always hollow
and empty. We must first
prove existentially that our
words are honest. It is easy
to fool others - even the
speeches are no use if love
is not behind them.*⁵⁸

For Paul, love is service, and love communicates itself - quietly through simple assistance given to others. It is clear from the reflection that anyone can make beautiful speeches. Love is not an intelligent explanation. The real language of love sounds differently. It is a giving of oneself. It is a divine love. A love for others.

The type of love which Paul talked about is not jealous. It does not look for the recognition it deserves. This love has no enemy. Therefore, it does not fight other people or certain persons.

This type of love does not keep the catalogue of shortcomings of others. It

⁵⁸ Ladislaus Bros: *Meeting God in Man* (New York: Herder and Herder

232 Madison Avenue, N.Y. 10016, 1968) pp.70-71

does not destroy the image of other persons.
This love does not push itself forwards, it listens even when the other person talks 'nonsense' or unintelligibly. True love does not fill the atmosphere with its being. It does not emphasise itself.

The sincerity of love is just outstanding in the fact that it is not rude. There is a kind of inner disposition and sensitivity to others, that makes the person to be courteous. Love involves manners, otherwise it degenerates.

Love recognises the good in other persons and lets her or him feel that she or he is valued and respected. Love moderates the violence inborn in human beings. It seeks to remove disagreeable things in order to spare others a tensed life. In other words, love consists simply in making life possible for others, smoothing over painful situations.

Love does not insist on its own way, but this seems infinitely difficult, because we feel it is humiliating to be the person we are, and we like to be pushed to dance in the step of the pushers.

Therefore, we like to get on, often at the cost of the other person. This is a grave danger that threatens the nature of love.

Love does not seek itself.

Love does not push anyone into an attitude of opposition. Love overcomes touchiness.

The relaxed nature of love has nothing in common with the attitude that rejoices at wrong with the inner disposition that sees with satisfaction that the other person has made a mistake, that she or he has failed. Love rejoices in the right.

Love makes itself small. Love is happy to see others enjoying what it may have lacked. Love is happy to see others enjoy what it prepared.

Love can take any form; no matter how insignificant it might seem, it means much in the language of love.

I remember, within my sabbatical, and in the course of re-setting myself, a Dominican Spiritual Theology professor was recommending some readings. It was amazing to observe that the first book he recommended amongst others was a book written by another Spiritual Theology

professor of his Congregation - a Dominican.

One needs to be present in the lecture room to hear the affirmation with which he accompanied the whole process. This might seem little but it is as big as any big thing one can think of. This single gesture of love in terms of affirmation was a sign of God's presence in the life of the individual. A true liberation from self starts this way. This gesture of love was a wonderful lesson for me.

The type of love St. Paul was talking about in its essence, means much detachment from self. It involves much restraint of oneself. Selfishness is very subtle.

I remember my experience within my many journeys. Not too long ago within my sabbatical, I had the opportunity of making many short and long journeys, and I observed with serenity what attachment to self and comfort can expose one too. It was a difficult task for some of those I visited to give up their comfortable rooms, and it was not easy for me to be happy with any

unkept room and unkept environment. So there is still much work on self. The letting go is still a difficult task.

But, it is good to mention that, within the same journeys, thank God, I met many detached persons who made my sabbatical an event to remember with smiles.

The type of love described by Paul required much effort and self-conquest. It means much detachment. It involved much self-restraint. This love St. Paul is talking about is the distinguishing mark of all Christians.

Anyone who takes this type of love St. Paul was talking about seriously in her or his life will be able to endure whatever comes.

CHAPTER TWELVE

LUMINOUS LIFE

Fr. Obiora Ike, in his book was fighting for freedom towards the global recognition of the dignity of human persons created in the image of God.⁵⁹

In this book we are trying to see the possibility of creating an awareness for people who have been living in self-made slavery to wake up and start a journey towards the way of freedom, towards a life that radiates a communion with the living God.

We have been trying to see what constitutes real prayer. The elements of our calling, the intimacy with God and love of our brothers and sisters have been stripped of us by our spiritual possessiveness. It is strange that in religious life for example, where the daily round is characterised by some kind of asceticism and prayer, many people still

⁵⁹ Obiora Ike, *Freedom is More than a Word* (Enugu: CIPJAP Printing Press, 1998)

remain prisoners to themselves. This is a sign that there is something wrong in the way we conceive the effort of renunciation demanded of us by Christ in the Gospel.

To pray is to welcome the Father and to partake of the life he has given through his grace. To welcome the Father, is to allow him to the abode in my heart. It is a matter of total dependence with one's whole being on God.

There is an explicable kind of confidence that fills someone who has rested all his or her whole being on God. The short story of one of My Sons will help to make what I am talking about clearer.

Three years ago, one of My Sons wrote to me on the verge of his Diaconate ordination. In his letter he told me that he was in trouble; that a member of the prayer meeting group he formed during his parish out reach wrote a letter to their Director that he (My Son) proposed marriage to her and for that reason, his Diaconate ordination was postponed indefinitely.

After reading the letter, I called My Son up. It was a long international telephone discussion of an hour. Our discussion gave me a clear picture of the situation.

Knowing My Son well, and knowing what he is capable of doing, and knowing him as someone who knows how to talk to God in prayer, I had confidence and I waited.

After three months, another letter came. In this letter, My Son told me that the member of the prayer meeting apologised saying that she made up the story in the letter because of the hidden intentions she had. She said that the letter was only a strategy she used to get her wish through, because she had hoped that the embarrassment of such a letter would make My Son abandon his vocation to priesthood in order to give her, her wish. Thank God, My Son, has been ordained a Priest, three years ago.

This confirmed the freedom and confidence that accompany someone who has centred her life or his life on the Lord.

SPIRITUAL POWER

Throughout this book we have been trying to figure out what life should look like in the life of those who must have freed themselves of idols of selfishness and security.

Here we are concerned with what a life looks like that has liberated itself from those dreams that falsified reality.

Here we shall recognise that there are people who have made much effort towards liberating themselves from all self-centredness and have advanced towards dependence on God.

These luminous people radiate a joy that speaks of an inner strength. These luminous people have allowed Jesus Christ to teach them the lesson of selflessness.

About these luminous people Larranaga wrote:

*There are people who
have worked for many
years to liberate themselves
from their self-interests and
have advanced in the poverty*

*and humility of Jesus Christ.
The first thing they acquire is
objectivity. Flowers, do not
over-excite them, stones do
not bother them much.
If they rise to the throne they
do not die of pain. Their
mood remains stable, before
applause and before
criticism, and the more
liberated from themselves
they are, the more unbreakable
they feel, and if liberation from
themselves is total, we find
ourselves faced with people
who feel the imperturbable
severity of one who is above
the ups and downs of life.*⁶⁰

In the liberated people that is, those men and women who have allowed God to be present in their life, their mood remains stable before applause and before criticism, and the more liberated from themselves they are, the more unbreakable

⁶⁰ Ignacio Larranaga: *Sensing Your Hidden Presence*, 1992, p.246

they feel, and if liberation from themselves is total, we find in them, people who feel the imperturbable serenity.

In these liberated people, the luminous ones, we see hearts imbued with the spirit of beautitudes; they are full of kindness, softness, patience and sweetness, strength, mercy and balance. In fact, they are full of divine love.

Often these luminous people have no particular interest in money. For them, money has its place, and its place is just simple exchange and nothing more. Such people trust those around them.

They have no time for suspicions. These liberated people are full of fearlessness, because they are filled with the freedom that emanated from the arrival of God in their lives. It is this presence of the spirit of God in their lives that gives them the spiritual power.

Wherever they go, the spiritual power goes with them, because their life, that is full of God, keeps on reminding whoever they meet, of God.

When God is present in the life of a person, life becomes different. The arrival

of God in the life of someone generates freedom, and where the spirit of God is, there is freedom.

God, you are Great!

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Sr. Chilota Elochukwu

Lord, you know me through and through. The Good Shepherd you are, is outstanding in me, in the way you have carried me all along. On my part, you know my disposition for you; but my love for you is still weak, full of unfaithfulness. In spite of this, you have carried me in your shepherding hands all these years. Your love, Lord is eternal. I thank you. Oh my living God.

**SISTER CHILOTA
ON SABBATICAL**



**SISTER CHILOTA AND
SOME SISTERS IN THE PLACES
SHE VISITED ON SABBATICAL.**











Freedom in God's Arrival

Remembering

My sabbatical has offered me an opportunity to reflect on my life journey, and on my service in my congregation, a service in which the closeness of God was outstanding.

Many people ask questions about the meaning of life, the ways and means in which a life with God is possible. In this small book with short chapters, I tried to create an awareness of life with God, and what life looks like when it robes itself of God.

When one experiences love, it is difficult to keep quiet. Therefore, the purpose of this small book, too, is to remember the Graciousness of God.

£5.00

Chilota Elochukwu