

Three Conferences for the Novices Abbey of Gethsemani, August 1962

By **Daniel J. Berrigan, SJ**

In his June 29, 1962 letter to Daniel Berrigan about the Jesuit's upcoming mid-August visit to the Abbey of Gethsemani, Thomas Merton outlines plans for his guest to present some conferences during his stay. He writes:

The talks will be three of them to the novices and students. These are alert and not easily shocked and interested in all that concerns the Church. So give them what you think most important. Father Abbot will certainly want you to say something to the community as a whole: this is a bigger and slower group. Anything that gives a good perspective of the Church's needs today will be appreciated by them, however. In a word, anything that can help them participate more intelligently in the life of the Church today.¹

Merton's own novitiate conferences had begun to be recorded a few months earlier, in late April 1962, a practice that would be maintained throughout the remaining three years of his time as master of novices, and for the Sunday afternoon conferences he continued to present to the community during his final three years in the hermitage. So it was natural that visiting guest speakers would be recorded as well. Consequently Daniel Berrigan's three presentations have been preserved, and the transcribed texts are made available here for the first time as part of this memorial issue commemorating Berrigan's life and legacy and his close relationship with Merton and the Gethsemani community.

Berrigan gave his first talk on Monday, August 13, during the regular morning novitiate conference period. Two days later was the Feast of the Assumption, which followed a different, feastday schedule.



**Thomas Merton, Daniel Berrigan, Tony Walsh and Philip Berrigan
at Gethsemani, August 1962.**

After the Monday presentation, the tape was still running when the novices had left, and Merton can be heard telling Berrigan that his second presentation would take place on Wednesday afternoon, and that because of the special schedule he would have "all the time in the world" to speak. This talk runs a bit longer, close to 45 minutes, followed by a lively discussion, mainly by professed monks who were also present (this material is not included in the transcription below). Merton also mentions to Berrigan that on Tuesday he will speak to the

entire community in chapter. (This presentation was not recorded.) The following day Tony Walsh, the director of a house of hospitality in Montreal, who had accompanied Berrigan to Gethsemani, gave a conference on his work with the poor, and then Berrigan gave his third and final conference to conclude the week, probably on Saturday, August 18.² Merton himself was very impressed by Berrigan's presentations. He writes in his journal for August 21, after his guests had left:

Fr. Dan Berrigan, an altogether convincing and warm intelligence, with a perfect zeal, compassion and understanding. This, certainly, is the spirit of the Church. This is a hope I can believe in, at least in its validity and its spirit. The dimensions of living charity come clear in talks such as he gave and that does much to exorcise the negativism in me. Yet it is deep. I do not mean resistance to this spirit, on the contrary! Yet hopelessness and weariness and resentment from having been so long suppressed and made to look (unwillingly) only to the rigid existing structures. Tony Walsh from the Labre house at Montreal – another utterly fine and good person. Sense that the Abbot mistrusted them and did not really like having them here. Most of the community were delighted with them.³

In the revised version of this passage included in Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* he develops these appreciative comments further, both in their importance for the Church generally and in the impact Berrigan's insights had on him personally:

Father Dan Berrigan was here: an altogether winning and warm intelligence and a man who, I think, has more than anyone I have ever met the true wide-ranging and simple heart of the Jesuit: zeal, compassion, understanding, and uninhibited religious freedom. Just seeing him restores one's hope in the Church. The real dimensions of living charity came out clearly in his talks to the novices. They exorcised my weariness, my suspiciousness, my dark thoughts. The community was delighted with him. But I know too that he is not an acceptable man everywhere.⁴

This reflection on the beginning of their relationship as viewed some four years later makes clear that Berrigan's friendship continued to be an important challenge and consolation for Merton amid the personal, political and religious struggles of the mid-1960s.

1. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 74.
2. The date given in the list of recordings compiled at the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, based on dating found on the original reel-to-reel tapes from Gethsemani, is August 28, which is clearly erroneous, not only because it is clear from Merton's journal that Berrigan had left the abbey a week earlier, but also because a recording of one of Merton's own conferences has been given the same date. Berrigan must have done this final presentation either on Friday August 17 or on the following day, Saturday August 18. It seems more likely that the correct date is the latter and that at some point the first number was either miswritten or misread as "2" rather than as "1".
3. Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960-1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 238.
4. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) 229.

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[Thomas Merton: This is Fr. Berrigan. You know his books; you know his poetry; if you don't know him any more than from reading, you'll soon know him from what he's going to say. He's got

a talk prepared but he doesn't want to just sit here and read it; he wants to get moving in a certain way, and then if you want to interrupt or ask a question or anything, go ahead. He likes discussion. These are novices and students.]

All I could think of last night, coming in here, was this was dragging the biggest sack of coals to Newcastle that have probably ever been brought in here. But anyway, if one can't be capable he can at least kind of be humble about things, and it's certainly a great privilege. As Father says, I'd like to just offer a few ideas on some things I've been working over this summer and working over with very different audiences, and just to sort of see what you would think or what you would like to say or discuss.

It seems to me that maybe there are about five or ten key books that everybody is drawing on and stealing from, you know, and the more we get into Teilhard, the more I guess we're realizing that he seems to be saying about everything that we're trying to say, and that he in turn drew on so many influences that were coming up in the world and in the church before he got to the stage when he was seeing things for himself. But in any case it seems as though the people in the church that are really alive are kind of casting off the idea that we're all looking for normal times. The Republicans still seem to be looking for a normal dollar – that's kind of endemic to the whole thing, but the real life-adjustment, if we want to talk in that horrible language, is not to some permanent condition of life. I suppose that's as true of a monastery as anywhere else. Our real loyalty to the church and to human life is to a process of change – at least I think it is. I don't think there's any return – the snake can't turn on itself – and the instrument of adjustment not to the old times or the stable times or the good old days of God but to this ferment, is nothing but intelligence – that's no news.

But this intelligence has to judge a new world and its first judgment in conclusion is to dwell in it in peace, to make its peace with it and its situations. The people who are old in mind and heart and are trying to make young people old before their time and in that way to destroy the true youthfulness of the risen Christ which is our real evidence and our real excuse for existing at all – these people are trying to consider our own period as a time of transition. There couldn't be any greater mistake. The one great transition has already been made. We're past it; and that transition is from a static order to an order which is going to gather momentum in a continual change.

So you remember Teilhard takes everything from the symbol and reality of evolution. Evolution's kind of a dirty word once we get into theology. They prefer to talk about development, and even Newman was very cagey on the distinction there, but anyway, whatever you want to say, it seems as though we're going to move from one stage of development to another and from problem to problem. The old idea of moving from problem to solution, from less clarity to formula, and all of that, seems to be less and less useful, and the deepest sense at which men are living out life in the way I mean, of discovery and of creative work, there seem to be neither problems nor solutions. That isn't the deepest terminology we can use at all, but a kind of life-process, in which a further investigation will lead one into perhaps a greater darkness, but still into an area of greater freedom, simply because it's moving from life to life and from being to greater being; so this idea of life as a commitment to change, not lived on the surface but change as a manifestation of the dynamism of God in His world – that's the kind of language that will win a hearing, and that will sort of intrigue people who already are living, and we have all sorts of elements of it, certainly, with many of them. It's the arts, it's certainly the living language of philosophy, and the kind of theology that's taking its start from biblical studies and liturgy. All of that, it seems to me, is paying a tribute to life as process and as change and as development.

Well, of all the people who are using their heads in the world, this is the toughest thing for Catholics,

to talk this way, and the situation's been made tougher by the developments of the last century, when the lid was put on so many movements that perhaps if they had been treated with a little more patience and largeness would have been very helpful. But in any case the idea of the truth as an abiding order of things, which is a great Catholic idea, seems to be at great odds with the idea of human life as change. The very substance of Catholic life seems challenged by new attitudes toward reality, especially by this acceptance of change at the basis of intellectual conceptions of what reality is. Is reality itself a development, or can reality itself be captured in formulas and once and for all be possessed? These are very great and difficult things. So after modernism, Catholics found it even more difficult and more than gave up, I would think, on this process of meeting the world with its own language and its own grounds. There is this real fear that is certainly invading so many of the people in charge of the church, in charge of the council, lest this earthly change – change of mentality – should be challenging and threatening the heavenly communication once given.

So the difficulty is very real, but I think that we're also justified in asking whether or not Catholics have not in a sense misunderstood the whole problem, and whether or not we do not have more to gain – and I'm speaking of ourselves as loyal sons of the church – by accepting and entering into this world of change with a certain sympathy and at-homeness. So one of course risks speaking very humbly but I would think that this attitude which we must develop is one that will have more at least of a generalized sympathy toward the currents of the world, toward the passion of men for diversity, cultural diversity and change in language and concepts of philosophy, an attitude that would keep Catholic thought in relation to contemporary life and enable Catholics at the same time, I would think, to gain a deeper understanding of what it is to be a Catholic, what it is to be in possession of something that we are still very much unpossessed by.

You remember that's the language of Paul. Well, one great return to sources that certainly Fr. Louis has helped us all with is the return to the language of the Fathers and the kind of effort at least to break down the practical divorce between nature and supernature and a return to the idea, for instance, one great key idea of the West, the Greek Fathers: the Logos as the Lord of creation and of redemption, the one whose process was continual and interpenetrating within history, and of course this is very much the language of St. John and of St. Paul, so that they seemed to have sensed some sort of profound continuity between the process of the Lord as Creator and the Lord as the Giver of the Life of the Trinity. There must be a profound continuity, there must be an origin, a unity of origin and of end, creation – redemption: both gifts to be treasured, both appearing mysteriously in this universe, both integrated into an evolving order of reality, neither of them truly static, neither of them. So we remember Augustine, and many of the others too, speaking of both processes as seminal in the universe: the seed as one, the process as one, and the end of things as one triumph, one glory, so that Augustine could say at the end there will be one Christ loving Himself – speaking of humanity in Him.

Well I submit that as monks or priests or laymen or artists or thinkers or those who are in any way trying to be available before mankind, we are destroyed unless we are searching for a fundamental unity between these two worlds – the world of creation, a dynamic, a seething world of creation, and the seething world of the revelation of Christ. There's no such thing as psychological or spiritual health in which the Christian, well, is trying to live these two things out, one of them deeply committed to the world of redemption which he conceives of as a kind of a package deal, over which he's a faithful guardian, and the other the world of man toward which his professional attitude is one of profound suspicion. That is what baptism has done for him, in this view of things; it has

made him a kind of outside judge of a process to which the true Christian cannot be part. Well this schizophrenia within the church I could start a volume on, because it's everywhere, it's everywhere. It's the cause of infinite misunderstandings in regard to human life and in regard to Christian life.

Well anyway, if I could just give the three propositions which are entirely or almost entirely in the order of opinion, but maybe something more too. It seems to me in the first place that human life, or humanism, and Christianity are both universal: there are no non-humanist societies – there never have been any, and there are no non-Christian societies and there never have been any; and this I take from the Fathers. Secondly, humanism and Christianity have not parceled off areas of life into which they alone will enter, and from which the other is excluded, but the proposition that I suggest would be something like this: that humanism and Christianity are both entirely dedicated to man as man. Thirdly, humanism and Christianity do not implicate one another by definition or by some extrinsic agreement or by some treaty by which they will sort of “get along” somehow, but they implicate one another so entirely that to be a humanist is to be a Christian and to be a Christian is to be a humanist, so to use expressions like an unchristian humanism or an unhumanist Christianity, I would say, are contradictory according to our best tradition.

I would say that, to explore those ideas a little bit further, that these two things implicate one another to such an extent that in order for the Christianity to do its job in any real way it has to be the other – it has to be the other. Let humanism be humanist and it will be Christian; let Christianity be Christian and it will be human, or humanist. In either case the norm is within life and evades definition and complication, so I would say the relation between these two great realities, that of man taken as a sacred thing in himself and man taken as Christian, cannot be described as either a relationship of exclusion or mere fusion, but as unity and compenetration and completion. Well, I've gone kind of long here. I would say, if you asked me what are the great enmities that are keeping us from a kind of openness toward these things? I would say it's our tendency toward a narrow cultural exclusivism and standardization, and of course that's reaching its kind of horrible dead-end in the organizational man in the West here, and then the idea within the church more specifically of some sort of universal exclusivism or exclusive universalism. I don't know which is less clumsy there, but the idea that Christianity has a mission of suppressing and assuming all religious and human life, put in that way, is what I would call historic exclusivism, instead of the idea of Paul that the universalism of the church is to be inclusive of all reality and of all culture and of all possible human growth. Christianity can have a claim to be exclusive only because it is first all inclusive – that's its first gesture, and then its exclusivism I would think needn't even be spoken of, because we've already used a much more attractive term in speaking of it as including all things.

Well we're very much afraid of all this, and I would think the toughest thing that we're all facing right now is that our fears are almost coming to a kind of effectual center at the very point when the Council is putting the eyes of the world most fiercely and hopefully upon us, and when men are kind of willing maybe even to forget the past and to say once and for all that we are going to be what we've always said we are. Well I hope so; I hope so; but maybe there has to be a kind of a drawing together of our fears, and of our fear of life, our fear of modern life, our fear of man. Maybe that has to be brought to a head so that it can once and for all be lanced. Maybe that's the problem right now. I guess we can't be too pessimistic about it all.

[Novice: Father, could you give your definition of humanism. It's kind of a broad term.]

It certainly is. I was hoping you wouldn't ask that. I don't know – I guess it's the sum, the living

sum of what Ignatius talks about there in the first week of the *Exercises* when he just puts man at the center of his world and sees him as drawing up his nourishment from all the universe into his community and his person, and then himself becoming in the fullest possible sense a source of life to his present and his future. It's that center of things which is also an enormous circumference embracing the universe. I don't know what else to say – the sum of all his assimilated values, you know, but not as a dead sea but as a source, as a gift in his turn.

[Novice: When people see Christianity and humanism as opposed, or even monasticism and humanity as opposed, it's very largely because they don't have a view beyond humanism.]

Yeah, that's why of course it's never been more important – we can always say never but – when has it been more important that a monk be a human being, you know. Well that's just a conclusion about when has it been more important that a Christian be a human being, you know, because people really don't believe that we are, and as we get more and more into, you might say, the real concentrated service of the church in the priesthood or the religious life, they less and less expect that we're human, less and less, so that by the time you're a bishop, you might just as well be sprayed with some sort of plastic – as far as the hope of man goes. I mean I would think that one of the greatest crosses of a bishop as a human being is to try to show this, in a living way; of course if you're living in a world of formulas and definitions and if Christianity is just sort of a lip-service to that – I don't mean to condemn people – life is very tough for people, but really they do have a very paper view of this whole thing in general. That's a sort of a rarified air where a kind of a pseudo-eternity has already invaded life and we no longer have to even live in time, because this thing has sort of placed us outside of time. This is the final word on all of this.

Well the consequences of all that – gee, if we could only get a couple of really great psychologists to go into the modern Catholic sensibility – you just take out hatred and fear of risk and as Father was saying, of controversial social action where we really, I think, because of our false view of what time is all about, in the church see no responsibility toward the creation of time, which of course is only made by enlightened decisions, as far as I can see; that's the only real time we're talking about, so we'll leave all of this to the humanists and to the fanatics for justice, and all of that, and the freedom rides and integration and the poor and so much of that, or to the professionals in one way or another, but I think the terrible revenge that this sort of thing takes which is really inhumanity. Humanity will always take its revenge on inhumanity. The revenge here is simply that Christianity is classified, it's just shunted aside like an Eastern form of things that can't stand up against the dynamism of the West any more, and so it becomes a museum piece, because people are either going to be saved by time and in time and by the decisions of people who create time or they'll save themselves. That's what the Negro says: we'll redeem ourselves. I always find it very interesting that a false sense of eternity will corrupt the church from within, because if any people are supposed to live in time the way we're talking about it's ourselves.

[Novice: Father, it seems to be turning around this problem of misunderstanding and split between what you call paper Christianity and eternal life or the experiential life. Wouldn't it then be good to inquire when this split started and when did Christianity lose that vision of unity which would assimilate all these things into one living body, which existed in the middle ages, in the thirteenth century particularly, precisely the period between then and between say the Council of Trent was this losing of this vision; especially Descartes is responsible for formulating this split so wouldn't it be good to inquire on this and seek to return to that vision which is not divided but rather ordered, putting first things first.]

Yeah, I think that's wonderful; it's kind of a huge topic. I don't think there's any real return though, to anything. Do you?

[Novice: I think it's something like the church grows and the number of people in the church in the providence of God but our Lord remains always the head and Our Lady number two; that won't change; that's the essence and if it's understood this way there is no problem of forgetting this because all these manifestations of life that we are experiencing are simply a more diversified understanding of the basic principles.]

I don't know – I think the early church really is kind of the key. Of course that's always open to the risk of becoming very simple and primitive and unreal, but actually didn't the Lord sort of set up these rhythms between a living Eucharist and a time process? The Eucharist was to make the church, and then the church was to make the Eucharist, and in that rhythm she was to make a world too – that was all involved there. But if liturgy is dead and distant and uninterested in itself becoming part of the change and ferment and adaptation, then the Christians will only be at home in this dead atmosphere around an altar. We'll have another sort of evidence of the one great divorce. This will be the divorce between worship and social action or social involvement, all of that. Like I remember seeing the picture – you may have seen it a few years back – really kind of clarified all this for me: it showed a group of young Catholic toughs near Chicago who had come pouring out of Mass on a Sunday morning and on the church steps it made a decision to go and stone this Negro home where this couple moved in, and then the next picture showed them stoning the place and you could see the miraculous medal on them, round their neck, you know, as they were heaving the stones there – and that's kind of the dead end of this thing.

[Novice: Wouldn't the answer to this be, Father, what you pointed out first – that it is the crucifixion of the one who wants to point out the humanist life . . . of men like this living in the society would be the answer because there would never be a unification done without the crucifixion.]

It's all very puzzling.

[Merton: Of course the thing is, this is just started. We're going to be back here. We find that when we have a series like this it takes about one conference for you to get in contact with the person, with the people involved. We'll be coming back to this, in about the third one we'll be really grooving, I think, on this particular thing. It certainly isn't a question for the books. It's a question for life. We got everything in the books. We got all the books we need. We don't need any more books necessarily, although it wouldn't hurt to say things in a different way, I mean. It's a question of expressing differently the basic . . . there's one Christianity. The truth of Christianity isn't going to change. There may be different ways of expressing the application, but what we've got to do is express it in our lives. We're always taking refuge in the books. See – what's paper Christianity? You run back to the paper immediately; as soon as any issue comes up, drag a paper out of the file, see what somebody else has said about it, and we're doing that *ad infinitum*. There's no end to that. We got to stop doing that. I think the Lord might take matters at hand and burn most of the papers. It's an age of wastepaper. When it's all burned up, then we start, maybe.]

This might illustrate what we're talking about: about a week ago my brother and I were involved up at Seton Hall U, where a group of 25 young people are training for a crash program of overseas service, and one night they had the Friday night get-together in one of the homes, and it was very nice. There were about 70 friends of the whole thing came in, and the house was crowded, and my brother gave a very powerful paper on segregation, and it was very thoughtful, I thought, and

everybody was very much in agreement – he spoke for over an hour and there was another hour of all kind of mixed discussion but we both came out of it the next day trying to evaluate a thing like that, and my question to him was, after all that sweat and blood that you went into for that thing and the gathering of those people of good will, how many simple, direct, practical, adult actions will come out of that evening? Very few, very few. It's the thing to do, especially in Catholic life today, to go and hear a good paper, or to sit for an evening's discussion, and of course there are groups doing it all over the country every week and the tremendous proliferation of these discussion groups which hope someday to become action groups, but the real struggle is to get adult people to take a simple action in favor of one neighbor, because everything in modern life is against that. It's all sort of this vaporized approach to life and the best people are infected with it. I didn't know what to say – my experience is that I hope during the week that Tony Walsh – that people almost have to be led like children into some sort of a center where they can gain a little confidence that they can do one thing for one Negro. Let's not talk freedom ride or a lot of big things because people still won't speak or live next to or give a job to or have a kid in school with a Negro, so it really is like turning around in kindergarten in a Pauline view of life – something like that, so I was thinking of like Peter Maurin used to say, if small centers, a few people dedicated full-time maybe even one in each house but where the fearful people of good will could come and give a little in the beginning and get rid of some of their own terrible crippling introspection and fears and then move out to there.

Tony's place ironically enough becomes a place of therapy for the affluent middle-class suburban people. They come there and are cured in the process of serving and helping others. Well I don't know. I'm wondering whether any churchman – talk maybe a little bit more of ourselves – whether any churchman is ever really going to be responsible for the church as Christ would have it, who hasn't had some experience of this kind.

[Merton: Aren't we all sitting around waiting for the Council to tell us what to do next?]

You know what Thomas says in one place in his definition of man? He says that man is mind and hands. Well I sometimes have a nightmare of an endless procession of Catholics who have no hands.

[Merton: Well, we'll be back to this. Thanks very much.]

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Fr. Louis and I thought it might be helpful if I just told you about a plan that Woodstock College has introduced in the last three years here, for a three-days' workshop, and this year the theme is the community aspects of religious life in the modern world; and they're going to run it in three days, with two sessions each day, and I'll leave this general outline with Father so if any of you would like to look at it further. But they've held preliminary sessions in which they have sort of come through with a lot of questions that they want discussed these days, and they've asked me to talk on the idea of poverty, the vow of poverty in the modern life, in the modern world, and I just thought as an introduction to our discussion I'd go through a few of the things that they want to talk about here. These by the way are the seminarians who are coming up to ordination in that theology course. They've divided this into the communal and the personal aspects of the vow. For instance here are some of the questions that they jotted down as a result of these preliminary discussions. Is the witness of our vow of religion, that is, our visible renouncement of temporal goods, an essential element of religious life? And does this aspect of our life have a vital witness value for the world today? Is our standard of community

living such that for the most part, except with certain missionaries, we should hardly be called poor men by outsiders today? To what extent can we afford to tolerate exceptions to the poverty prescribed essentially by our institute without seriously compromising the poverty that we profess? Does poverty ever run the danger of becoming a pious fiction? What is to be said of such founders as St. Ignatius who insisted that no change be made in the poverty of the order except to make it more strict? (We can't build bomb shelters I guess; at least we can't panel them in knotty pine!) Can an individual within an order fulfill the demands of poverty by imposing on himself a program of austerity which will make him different from the members of his community? and so on.

Well anyway, the questions are very good; and for instance, Fr. Fichter will be there from New Orleans, and he's going to talk on initiative and conformity to the system of formation; and a Fr. Gerkin from John Carroll in Cleveland: why the religious community life, and the individual versus the community values and the communal aspect of the vows; and then Fr. Elmer O'Brien from London: the fraternal structure of the community – chastity and fraternal love; Fr. Donald Campion on the religious community and the apostolate; and a father from California on the paternal structure of the community – obedience and communication. So I'll leave that with Father and I'd like to talk as simply and really as I can on some ideas that I was forced to sort of work on with regard to the vow of poverty, which I take it is a crucial element no matter where we are, and is a much bigger thing than a juridical, canon-law problem or even a moral theology problem. So anyway, I wish again that any of you will stop me at any point here, because I make a lot of claims and rely a lot on opinion, and if anyone wants to throw any fruit, just make sure it's ripe.

It seems to me that hypostasizing or canonizing any aspect, or any form even, of the religious life, sets that life apart from the reality that Christ intended it for, and those realities are Himself and the human family. I think that when we set for instance the vows apart or canonize them in a way which belongs to their past or belongs to one phase, is reductively an act of irreligion. I think however this separating or canonizing or divorce process is an evident and even destructive phenomenon in many of the orders today. They dissociate from the living Christ and the human community their vows, their work, their rule, their prayer, their conscience; and I think within the religious life these actions of amputation are merely symptoms of a larger divorce mentality that I think is really at work in the church at large; and in the largest aspect I would say this divorce mentality comes down to this: the cutting away of sacramental and sacrificial acts from their immediate implications in the community of Christ. I think we all see examples of that in the myopia, the blindness of Catholics in regard to so many of the great consequences of the Eucharist and of baptism, for these things are to mean anything except in the airy formation of a nascent ghost – pseudo-angelic men. So I think that we perhaps tend to divorce things because the church at large is in the middle of this struggle of trying again to marry the realities of the church, to marry public conscience and Eucharist and so on.

Well anyway, it seems to me that maybe we could be instructed by examining again a bit of history. In the early church we did have a strong understanding, a wedding of these realities. To speak of poverty, the reality as history went on took an experimental form that moved, I think, strongly in two directions that would be worth talking about. One of the directions was toward solitude and the other was toward the urban communities, and in time of course, the formation of a spirit of poverty in urban communities was first, but let me speak of the idea of the man in solitude because I think that's more helpful to begin with.

The solitary was one that saw himself as the center of the drama of redemption in a very special way. He was one who even invited a diabolic combat into his life, and we get that kind of primitive

fierceness and even violence, primitive violence, taking off from the Greek of St. Mark's Gospel, where he says in regard to Christ at the beginning of the public life, that He impelled Himself, He strongly was driven, into the desert. In such a way the church prolonged this experience of Christ. She saw herself as coming up through the Old Testament, where the very special revelation has been in regard to man as creation of God, creature as opposed to the pagan myths of man as part of the godhead. The Savior now perfects the truth of creation by the perfection of the community of sons. We have now the creature who is son, but these sons of God, as the church realized very acutely, must live on in a foreign world, and so men went into the desert in faithful submission to the two truths of sonship and of sin; and there, under the burning days and the fierce deprivations, they had an appropriate setting for the redemptive drama of the sons of God, the men who, as they realized and as they write very honestly, might still revert to acts of rebellion and murder, and revert to the image of Cain and of Adam.

But there was something deeper here, because they realized that even though they lived under the new dispensation of sonship, they were spiritually bankrupt in many ways. They were the race of the enemy that the prophets and the psalmist had spoken of. Essentially man is poor because he is man, because before the prevenient love of the Father he is unable to enter the kingdom. Paul as early as that first century speaks realistically of this poverty as a powerlessness before the call of God, in Colossians and Ephesians, and we remember also that from the beginning the neophytes are received into the church by way of an experience of stripping and of combat, the dramatization of man's hopeless and helpless poverty before the love and the sons of the Father. So that would be, maybe, an aspect of the self-discovery that went on in the solitude by this deliberate drama of deprivation of the monachists.

But long before this renunciation took such a dramatic turn, the church had become aware in the urban communities and setting, mainly because the communities were made up of the poor, as Paul tells about the Corinthians: "not many of you well-born, not many of you wealthy." The church was aware that every poor man was a sacrament of the great Poor Man. I'm speaking now of those early urban communities in Jerusalem and in Corinth especially, and Ephesus. It followed that action on behalf of the poor was a practical, incarnate gesture in favor of Christ: you fed Me; you clothed Me; you visited Me; and so we note that a vital and realistic personalism is circulating immediately in that first generation. Poverty was never in a vacuum. In fact Paul despises that concept. Poverty meant that one deprived himself in the setting of a community. He deprived himself to relieve an immediate need; it worked no benefit, Paul taught, to deprive oneself except in the favor of the poor man whose hand was open before one. To deliver one's goods or even one's most precious good, that of the body, was unavailing when such action was taken in a kind of inhuman vacuum. It was a vanity, a reversion to stoicism; as Paul says in Corinthians, it profited nothing.

No: this Christian poverty was the Christian eye and hand that saw and served a need. You remember this was one of the great key ideas of the religion of St. Luke and it's right through the vocation aspect in the Gospel, and goes on uninterrupted in the experience of the early church. The first call of Christ is one to personal renouncement in favor of the poor: "go, give what you have and then come and follow"; and again Luke links it strongly to the Eucharist, though this is something that is so new that it's old; in the breaking of the bread, as he says, this worship had its natural consequence in the breaking of bread for the hungry, and so Luke and the early fathers play on that idea, which is almost a pun, between communion and community, and both of them translated by the Greek word *koinonia* – the grouping and the group action which is sacred at the altar and sacred in the world.

Now this would be a kind of a footnote, but I think this is also very interesting – that the idea of authority too took its form in the setting of poverty of service. Those in authority had for their credentials the personal choice of the Holy Spirit and this choice armed them by interior gifts, a special excellence, a fullness of mystical gifts, fitting the men of authority for an eminence of service, and we note that in Paul’s vocabulary we search in vain for the word “authority” as some sort of eminence, of privilege, but on the other hand it’s the gifts of those in authority are fuller because those in authority must give a more striking symbolic action for the community, of service to man, and that’s the way the twelve and especially Paul explain it.

Well anyway, when the church expands beyond Israel, beyond Jerusalem, the idea of poverty as this practical *diakonia*, the sharing of goods, is by no means lost, and is one of the, I think, one of the great phenomenal marks of Paul’s genius, that when he left the Jerusalem community, which shared, and had nothing [*sic*] in common, the same economic system which was a kind of a mystical *unum necessarium* was taken into the gentile church, and takes the form, you remember now, of the collection for the churches as we have in 2 Corinthians especially – long chapters to this important subject. *Koinonia*, the community of those who love Christ in one another, is now expressed in a new way because there’s a new geography to deal with.

The gentile churches who are the beneficiaries of the mother church at Jerusalem now show their gratitude by a collection within the household – ecumenical – for the poor of the mother church. Paul is obsessed in two of the letters with long passages to make clear the fact that he regards this as a mystical enterprise. He sees no better way to dramatize within the gentile community the experience first undergone in the flesh of Christ – He being rich became poor for our sake. You see, you had the incarnational poverty of Christ through the community, for our sake. The collection is not to show a painless, or juridical, or automatic unity, which would be untrue to the state of man, whose unity is a constant struggle, and must depend upon the deprivation of those who are more gifted.

The poverty of the church, in Paul’s view, is to be a drama of man’s incompleteness, which only an incompleteness which is so radical that only the flesh and spirit of the neighbor can make us whole; and so the collection joins men of faith by an umbilical of mutual love. You remember, we have one of the great sentences of the New Testament in this regard. Speaking of this kind of quotidian collection, Paul recalls a great statement of Christ otherwise unrecorded. He says: “As Jesus said, it is better to give than to receive.”

So in the light of this collection, among other things, we can say Paul is anxious to show that the superficial differences of race and color and religious background between man and man, all those things which tend to mask the truth of existence from human life, all these things are stripped away: no more Jew or gentile; no more slave or freemen; you are become one in Christ. Men stand in their essential poverty before the Father in the act of giving. Well, what I would submit to you that our vow of poverty then takes us into the existence of man, the profound load of understanding of mankind, if we are truly poor.

Evidently, especially through Paul’s insight the church came to realize that every man is a poor man. The poor man professionally in the church draws this into a dramatic greatness in order to make it publicly evident what man is. This is so true that only Christ, as Paul says, can become poor. He *became* poor for our sake. The rest of us must explore a poverty which from the point of view of God and our neighbor is simply and appallingly what we are: men, that is, are poor in grace, poor in the acceptance of life, poor in the capacity for love. The poverty of men is mysterious and ironic and

universal, according to measure deprives the good pagan and the good Pharisee and the beginning Christian and the perfect Christian. The irony consists in this: that conditions of life and habits of mind deny to each one of us the precise riches we had most counted on: the pagan is deprived of his humanism; the Pharisee is deprived of his God; the beginning Christian is deprived of settling down in his beginnings; the saint is deprived of everything, except God himself.

On the other hand, we note an irony that when a man accepts poverty as his existence, as his drama, as his search, then the very sense of his deficiencies becomes an impelling motive for humility and compassion. He learns mankind because he is true to man. This incompleteness, as all of you realize – the history of every order is filled with this kind of greatness – becomes a source of eruptive life for mankind: men who are artists, men who are great religious figures, men who are great intellectuals, when we find them genuine we find that they are deeply aware of being poor, incomplete – spiritually, intellectually, humanly – and over the centuries the exploration of this is the source of their enrichment of others.

Well I would suggest, without, I hope, being unduly complicated, that I think the deepest meaning of our vow is the exploration it entitles us to undertake, of what we might call the drama of humanity. It is a drama which of course is as historic as Adam and Abraham and the great figures of history, but what I would like to stress and I think is particularly important is that it is our way of entering into man's life now here and now. The man of poverty is designed almost in a laboratory situation by Christ to be a protagonist within the drama of human life, and that drama I would simply define as the struggle implicit in man's search, man's journey toward God and man's journey toward man. It seems to me we can't separate those two.

So what's the outcome of the drama? This particular one to follow through – that rather weak idea: what sort of new man emerges from the man, from the experience of poverty in the way we were speaking of? I would say this: that man emerges from this struggle and this experience, this crisis, in the new form of son and brother, which is the form of the new creation, and is the exact antithesis of the rebel and the murderer which were the form of man in the Book of Genesis: Adam and Cain. This new form which poverty is meant to produce is of course both genetic and final. It's the form which God had willed in the beginning. It's the form postulated by every instinct that we know; He tells us. It is the form which was deformed by sin. It is the form that Christ's victory is aimed at restoring. It's the form finally of the last day, because sonship and community will be the substance of our eternity.

So I really think, you know – I always kind of hesitate to use the word “supernatural,” or to use the word “grace,” in a context that will separate us from our nature – it seems to me in regard to poverty, that we are the people who are exploring a way of life which every human being, if he follows his best instincts, would follow anyway, which of course I think is a great clue to the kind of mass deformation of so much of modern life, where the end of things is away from community and sonship into the vacuum of affluence, which so often, you see, is a sort of a bomb-shelter existence. One is led into this vacuum of luxury at the expense of these sacred instincts which will tell us that we must live in God and must live in one another.

It seems to me that's why the church didn't wait in the early years to introduce a man to the, you might say, the cenobitic form of life, in order to strip him. Why did she strip man at the entrance of the baptismal font? I think it is exactly the clue we are talking about: she was going to restore him in the waters to the form of man which God had willed in the beginning, but in order to do that she

has to dramatize him as poor man and so she leads him into the waters naked, and you remember the great sermons that were built up on that theme of stripping, so that I would think that, you know, that the monastic life or the priestly life is supposed to be a kind of intense and more special and more, you might say, generous form of Christian life, which in itself is supposed to be the ideal form of human life. I don't think you can ever work a separation there. Even though we all admit to the great transcendence of grace, perhaps we're a little slow in admitting to its immanence.

Well this Christian came to enter the living experience of God and man, and the church said to him you must become poor in order to enter into this experience, and then within the life everything within grace, it seems, was to lead him to further experiences of poverty as a way to the entrance into God and the entrance into the life of mankind. Now taking those two as one, again, I would think that was the secret, you might say, of the magnificent eruptive health of a mind like Paul – that he was able to see Christianity as the ideal human form, and he was able to see that further developments can never be at the expense of human instinct.

Much of the discussion with Fr. Louis that I have gained during these days is that idea that very often the religious life, far from trying to amputate what is inhuman in a man, must first create what is human, because so many of us come into religious life already humanly deformed in our sense life, in our instinctual life, and in our life of the passions, and one of the great things that the religious life can do here is to bless and heal what modern life has deformed and has sickened in us. But in any case there are so many aspects of that great Pauline health that we could enter into, but it does seem to me very practical and very true and close to us that he would never allow the Christian as poor man to exhibit his poverty in a vacuum. If you become poor there's an open hand awaiting you, and it's that personalism, I think, which is the secret of a vow which is living, a personalism which is not a pure humanitarianism because there was the mystery of Christ in the neighbor, as announced by Christ Himself: to serve this man is to serve Me.

Well it seems noteworthy to me that the insistence on poverty is a constant theme of the church's periodic need to recover her sense of who she is, and remember she will never do that apart from living men, and it's not in the fact that these men are writing books but it's the fact that their experiences are bombarding the church with vitality. I think that's the first thing. This may take the form of books or may not, but I think the first thing will always be if we ourselves are doing this sort of thing. Well, I don't want to go too long but I think today the question of poverty is, wherever you turn it's striking you. From outside the church of course it's the appalling fact that human society, that's three-quarters of the world, is destitute – destitute, at the marginal level of existence. This thing surrounding and penetrating the church it seems to me ought to be a tremendous pressure upon us to rediscover the living founts of our own poverty in order in some way to illuminate this darkness which is all around us.

Well Tony Walsh will speak to you about the difficult movement, as I think, one of these new vital returns. The more we come closer to the American scene, whether religious or public, in the sense of the condition of the country, we are struck by the responsibility of ourselves to understand what this poverty is all about, because we are the affluent island which is becoming more and more a showcase, from the positive point of view, and a scandal, from the negative point of view.

Perhaps this would be a very clumsy attempt at getting this thing a little bit imaginative: poverty as a reality before the American religious in the year '62 might invite our attention to the following consideration: suppose in imagination we could compress the present population of the world which

is now more than two and a half billion, into a group of one thousand persons living in a single town. These are some of the brutal contrasts of affluence and destitution that we would live with, and that we would really be a part of, as indeed we are, in this world-scale. Out of this thousand persons we would consider 60 Americans, taking them in their percentage in world population; the 940 would be the bulk of the surrounding world. These 60 Americans would control half the total income of this town; the other 940 would share the other half, as best they might, with enormous differences among themselves, as we know it especially in Latin America. These 60 Americans would have an average life-expectancy, mainly due to their material affluence, their medical care, their diet, their clothing, their housing, of 71 years; all the other 940 in this town would die on the average before 40. The 60 Americans would enjoy 15½ times as much of all material goods, taken in bulk, as all the rest of the town, on an average. Now if we broke that down these 60 Americans would put to use and control and consume 16% of the town's total food supply; they would produce 16% of it, would consume 14% of it, and would keep most of the remaining 2% in storage – perhaps 1½%, so that ½% of their food would go into the need of the town at large. These 60 Americans would control and use 12 times as much electric power as the whole rest of the town; 21 times as much petroleum; 22 times as much coal; and 50 times as much steel. The lowest income groups among these 60 Americans would be better off than the average in the rest of the town, so if we took the most destitute among the Americans they would represent at the least the average of the rest, so that this material destitution would widen out from the American enclave into ever larger areas of misery as we went outward from their neighborhood into the rest of the town. Literally most of the non-Americans in this town would be poor, hungry, sick and ignorant. Almost half of them would be unable to read and write, so that is, I would think, at least again very clumsily, some kind of attempt to spot and situate our vow of poverty and some sort of impulse I would think for us to recover the living sense of the early church that the poverty of the church arises from the midst of the need of the human community. That is what gives it its form.

I think that really, if we could take an impossible opposite to that, if by an impossible situation, the whole world were affluent, the church herself would have to seek another dramatic way to show her identity in her work, because she couldn't show it through the vow of poverty. It wouldn't have the same impact at all. I'm saying by this not the vow of poverty still wouldn't mean sacred but it couldn't be a dramatic deprivation of religious or even necessary things in order to show this sympathy with those who are without. It would have to seek a radically different form of meeting man in his existence, I would think, but of course Our Lord assures us, and the history of mankind assures us, that poverty will be a reality in the church until the last day, because poverty will be a reality in the world until the last day.

Well I submit to you again that even an attempt such as we have made only begins to uncover the meaning of destitution in the world. Again, this is an opinion. I think that our vow of poverty, joined to the realities of prayer, of an effort toward charity, of our liturgy, of all of the great realities of our life, would grant us this insight: that in the providence of God the destitution of man today is not only material reality. That is only the beginning. It is a sign in the sense in which St. John uses the word. Material destitution among men is a sign of universal spiritual deprivation, and the kind of deprivation we are speaking about, as we tried to say earlier, is supremely and divinely ironic in the sense that it exists perhaps most brutally of all among the affluent. I have had a very limited experience, both among the affluent and among the materially very deprived. It would be hard to

say when one touches the inner vacuum of these human lives, which one is more desperately empty – the destitute materially, who are themselves without any spiritual hope, or the affluent materially, who are themselves in an active despair.

So at the middle of all that stands the consecrated poor man, and that's the thing he must be entering into, I would think, by the experience of this vow: worldwide exploding destitution as the Lord's divine reminder of an absence of Himself within human life, a willed absence or a blind absence – in most cases, an absence based upon ignorance and blindness which is in no sense their fault, and then in a few cases the blindness which is accepted and faced in a kind of diabolic way. But it seems to me that we have a very great task in being poor. We can't *become* poor, because we *are* poor – but to live that out, you know.

Most of us come into religious orders from families that have not known real poverty. Practically all the American congregations today are extraordinarily generous and permissive, so that actually many of us in coming into the order found our station of life – or whatever you want to call it – improved materially. Mine was – the food was better, the housing was better, the comforts were more at hand than I had known in my own youth, so that this again is something I don't have any answers – maybe sometimes just to ask a few questions. But remember, I think that our lack of the experience of poverty within the orders is very strongly related to the static shape of our apostolates, and maybe in speaking of the contemplatives I can put it this way: I think that our lack of the experience of poverty in a real way, I mean in a personalist way, which will join us to humanity, exacts its revenge in the fact that we find ourselves unable to face humanity with viable answers and viable solutions, not to humanity's destitution, but to its spiritual emptiness.

I don't know – I find in my own order, and in many with whom I have contact, a hardening of all hope, in many cases a progressive closure against new methods, or return to radical methods – a kind of deathlike opposition to venturesomeness and to experiment within the order. I don't know and I have no answers, but I suspect, with a suspicion that is very hard to formulate or to track down, that this sort of aged mind and sterile mind is related very strongly to the fact that we have not experienced man, and mankind, in the way we have spoken; that these failures in public are related to the affluent mind in which we grew up and in which we entered the order and in which the order received us and welcomed us and formed us.

So I think that the radical departures and renewals that we're all as sons of the church sort of searching for, cannot take place in a historical vacuum. The processes of grace and history are so mysteriously intermingled that the church herself takes shape from man – she takes shape from man – she takes shape from churchmen. These churchmen are not ideal men. They are human, and what is more they are often fearful and prudential and unconvinced that the realities of change or process that are causing such a ferment in the world have any claim on them. I mean on us. I mean on me. So I think that we would be very fond to claim that the church, whose forms are the hands of men like this, is not herself before all kinds of men of good will considered safe and tardy and unwilling to face history and to give history its blessing by entering it.

This is what we're talking about then, but of course the opposite is a terrible revenge: the revenge against the intention of Christ and against the hopes of mankind. Religious life, life of the Society of Jesus or of the Trappists or of any other order, justify its claim on mature men only when it leads them further into the experience of God and of mankind. Unless we are offering this to our men because we ourselves are exploring it, I don't think we have any right to clutter the landscape of

history, or to call ourselves sons of the church. Nothing is more powerful or useful in this regard of forming real men in a real church than the forces and currents of history themselves. That's why I would to think, to understand our vow today, look at the world, and a look at the world will be of itself if the glance is one of faith, a look at Christ. This is the immanent Christ of history.

This is the shape He has allowed Himself to take so that the community that has an instinctive and searching reverence for history – and by that I mean current history; I mean unfinished and open history, the kind of history that we're supposed to make, that kind of groping will have a double reward. The first reward will be that it will attract gifted men to its ranks, and the second reward is it will form men to be shapers of history themselves. Well anyway, I've gone very long, but I think that this is one of the great pair of realities of the church; and if we are going to talk about renewal, we can very well begin with many things, but maybe we can begin also with an exploration of poverty. I suppose many of these other men would like to speak of the other vows as related to God and His world, but the death of the religious man, I would think, is when the human being dies. You can't have the guy still standing there in his cassock when the human being is collapsed inside.

When does a human being die? Well, let's be a little more hopeful on the feast day and say: when is a human being alive? I would think he's alive when he's relationally and rightly related to God and to his neighbor, and when he is drawing up nourishment from them, and giving nourishment to them within history, so that when does the vow of poverty die? It dies when it cuts its living relationship to God and to man, when it becomes a-personal, or canonical, or moral-theological, and then we start asking, how much can I get away with? These are the questions that kids ask over the nursery fence, really, but the question for us is: is this vow a mode of life, a shape of life, itself shaped by the community of man, and which itself, I would think, is the will of Christ? We don't have to search any further and facing Christ with that face of sonship, which is the face of brotherhood. Well, I don't know.

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Our Lord came, you remember, to bring not peace but the sword, and the only ones who find any true peace in the church which is not some sort of human fog and the death of the human are those who are carrying the sword and are having it turned against themselves in the way we speak of. You remember that in the decadent Rome of Cicero's time, he tells us that the priests used to meet on the street, and as they passed one another they would quietly wink. And Cicero sums up by that sentence the religious situation of the time: these were men who could say to one another, in their private language, we've got it made; we are parties to a gentlemen's agreement; we are the only enlightened ones, who are too enlightened to believe what we're saying. Well, against that background, we turn to the bracing atmosphere and the painful vocabulary of the Acts of the Apostles and we're immediately in the real world, in the midst of which is a real church, a church of living men who themselves have been opened up by the divided sea of the waters of baptism, have been opened up to the real world and have been made capable of their world.

Well we have some extremely significant words here that I would like just very briefly to explore with you in the beginning of chapter 1 here. It takes us to the Ascension scene and a very interesting little dialogue is sort of summarized by Luke as a kind of, you might say, verbal interpretation of the Pentecost event which is to follow. In chapter 1, verse 6: "They came together and questioned

him. ‘Lord is it at this time that You are going to restore the kingdom of Israel?’ But He answered them, ‘It does not belong to you to know the time and the moment which the Father has fixed with his sole authority, but you are going to receive a new power, that of the Holy Spirit who will come upon you, and then you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.’” Well, again there is the old, senile question of a dying religious tradition, summarized by the men who are not yet new men: “Lord, are You going to restore at this time our political hopes and the boundaries of our dreams, and codify them and bless them from above, so that we can dwell on in this political conclusion to the great adventure of the Old Testament?” And we note in verse 7 how He brushes aside the question: there’s no question of the patience that will give a direct answer because the question can only be answered by the irony of its own opposite. And so He pushes it aside and enters into the mainstream of a new event, the new creation, in verse 8: “You are going to receive a new power, that of the Holy Spirit, and then the new creation will be a community of witnesses, an inclusive universal community.”

The three words that appeal to me as being particularly kind of resonant with Old Testament implication here – the first of them, the new power – *dunamis* in the Greek, and our English word dynamics, that we’re very fond of today, especially regarding youthful people and youthful nations and groups, and perhaps a youthful church too. I think that without stretching the thing at all, we can see here an insistence of Our Lord as a contrast with the old political hope, the old, tired structure which His coming has meant to tumble. We can see an insistence on the interiority of the new kingdom: everything, every human hope, is to be placed in the utterly unpredictable mystery of God’s gift, the new interior power which alone can transform human lives and can alone create the community and can alone give the church the tools, the human and sacred tools, with which to deal with herself – such is to say, to deal with humanity. Well it’s quite clear that we’re at the heart of the Pentecostal mystery, the new power which the Holy Spirit is about to give. Human hopes could not have predicted it or brought it to pass. All the accumulation of the greatness of the Old Testament, whether prophetic or kingly, or the greatness of martyrdom, could not have deserved this; in the gift which is to be immanent to mankind God will declare His transcendence and this will be the irony: that the gift will remain the Giver, that the gift will never be ploughed into human history in a way which will lose it or which will make the religious (as we have been saying and as Fr. Louis has said so often and so well) will make the religious a mere armature or tool or extension or blessing upon the human processes or the organic and natural process.

No: God by being His gift declares its continuing sacredness and transcendence even while the gift is the most interior mystery conceivable within human life; and so the gift remains outside the community and within it, because the gift is both the new life and it is the Trinitarian life. Well, I would think again, to take our stand upon the gift of God, what free men this creates: the church in the accumulation of sacred history and everything she has to offer us in the magnificent cultural and spiritual traditions of our own order is declaring a new freedom on behalf of the individuals who come to her and our traditions and our way of life and everything that allows us to have impact upon our communities and upon the shape of providence in our own world, every one of those things is a new form of freedom, a kind of verbalization or an exteriorizing or a visible symbol of the interior freedom which the gift of God is creating and recreating, which is giving and renewing in ever greater measure as humanity itself takes on the greater measure of the fullness of Christ. Well, the new power is what the church must always return to and draw from and declare, and just because

this new power creates a new humanity we have the conclusion that the most relevant force in any situation will always be the full Christian, will always be ourselves, and outside of that renewing force which creates new minds and new hearts and new senses and new passions and new hands, there is no hope, except that the prisoners will be let into a larger prison yard by some sort of humanly fabricated freedom which is not of God and therefore cannot be of man in any deep sense.

So I would think that to look upon our orders and our communities and our priesthood as Pentecostal events, as continuations of a new life which is never ceasing being given because it is the sacred overflow of the Trinity itself, not meant to create tired men, not meant to create disillusioned men, not meant to create men who are quietly and desperately embittered, not meant to create men who conceive of life in terms of the package deal or the finished process, but an unassailable and undefeatable, unbreakable gift as we have in the hymn of Pentecost day, in that marvelous nuanced development of, you might say, the life force, as it hits the channels of human life, issued in the network of the body and the heart of man: heal what is wounded; make flexible once more all that which has grown old and stiff in its way of thought; warm again that which has grown cold toward You, and so on.

But this new power is the only thing that will make the difference in the lives of our communities. We need to do, as we speak of the life, we must speak of it, I would think, with the nuance of the human and the divine, the human which does not come in order to suppress or suffocate because itself has been renewed with the divine bloodstream; its blood is heavy with the blood of Christ the Risen One and with His Spirit, and so we find this penetration of the new life with the old life, or the divine life with the human life, to the point where our categories of the natural and supernatural tend to disappear, and the one life-force and the one potential for action and for prayer, for the profound interiority and for the profound shattering public difference which we are supposed to make, so the new life issues in the new men and it makes them capable of the new action, well and so on.

Our Lord puts the term in the context, as you recall, here in verse 8, of witnessing – witnessing: the greatest public proof (if we want to talk about proofs, which are never very helpful) that the new life is truly operative within the individual or the community is the witnessing. “You shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.” It’s a favorite rhetorical tactic dealing in these verses and they’re coming toward the end of Luke, to start talking in rather crude geographical terms which of course is always very defeating. The witnessing in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth is only a figure of the interior process whereby everything in man has been won and transformed. We’re not talking about a geographical extension of the church as though the herd were merely reproducing itself. We are talking about a mystery whereby everything in man is now Christ and therefore more deeply human. We’re talking about the transcendence which is immanent; about the gift which is the Giver, about that which is the only possible form of humanity even while it is the only possible elevation of humanity. So you remember the word “witness” again has the profound, marvelous history throughout the Old Testament and is very closely joined to the notion of the prophetic – the prophetic which led to the martyr; and in the deepest Hebrew sense “*dabar*” – you remember, the word was that which was the natural radiance, the surrounding effulgence of the person. It was his spiritual resonance, so that one never really got to the point where his word was beyond himself, or where he could send in the Hebrew sense of the word into the void and he would stand himself at some distance from it. No: the word was the very extension of his being, and he had to stand by it, and he stood by it even to death, and so the idea of prophetic witness went into the idea of our rather larger sense of martyrdom.

Well, in the contemplative life one stands by his word in a very special sense. In the world there is – not I would think generally, but maybe by way of blindness – there is a corruptive power which can destroy both the radiance of the word and the radiance of silence, and so we find even within churchmen a contempt for the word and a usage of the word and a positive deformation of the word to the point where we coin our own special bureaucratic vocabulary, our own doubletalk, and our own brand of rhetoric, which is only a way of evasion; or on the other hand, if you want to speak about the purity and the infinite power of silence, we find that deformed and discolored too, because when words are crucial, the churchman who is a coward resorts to silence, and so we have a kind of pall of silence over the church about the main issues where only the word will save the honor of Christ and the situation. But within the contemplative life we have the witnessing, exploring, I would think, very profoundly, into both areas, and we could play, I would think, seriously with the ironies implicit, in that almost endlessly, the man of silence who, when he does speak, speaks out of the depths, and whose word therefore you might say is the drawing forth of his own vitals, still warm and still with its own blood upon the word, so that in public this becomes the great nourishment of the adult church. The body and blood of man is joined to his work and then we have the kind of silence which in no sense is an evasion but which is an exploration of the reality of God with the surrounding radiance and darkness and ironies of humanity into which we are all plunged, so the contemplative life in the deepest sense becomes a passionate activity, a passionate act in favor of life and a sharing of life.

Well, this witnessing takes almost as many forms as you might say the genuine takes, and the genuine is always infinitely unique and ever renewing of itself; and so we have the witnessing within lay life today of the sufferings of families; we have a constantly growing awareness of witnessing on the part of intellectual young Catholics, which so often takes a bitter turn, and that is necessary too, because it is a protest and we find that the witness of the intellectual is particularly misunderstood when he criticizes the powers that are, because the powers that are have not yet realized the drift of history which is declaring that for the first time in a thousand years, we are going to face an educated laity, who are not supposed to leave their power of witnessing at the church door in order to take their place in the pews like so many faceless zombies, to be tagged and counted and shuffled forward to eternity. No: this is not going to be it at all – but we could go on and on.

There is this infinite richness of witnessing which is growing within the church and which the church herself in many official capacities will have to face, and it is going to be a very painful facing indeed, because in so many quarters plain speech is becoming the rule, thank God, so the witnessing is by silence and by speech; it's by action and it is by passion; it is by patience and by courage, because you see, it is only in the living suspension of all these ironies that we are going to find life at all. Courage without patience veers off into bitterness and disillusionment and a complete inactivity and uselessness. Then we have a kind of patience which is cowardly and which bends its neck beneath yokes that Christ thought never to be laid upon and which one courageous word would cast off, and so on, and it is as Fr. de Lubac in one place quotes, I think, Pascal in saying that the greatness of a life of witnessing is simply this: that it is holding in living suspension the ironies which in their very extremity define greatness, so that within one life we will find the strong contemplative and active bent and the strong articulation of courage and of patience and of the will to dig into a hidden life in order to issue into public life, and so on – the sense of what we might call

the organic statement in the organism, so that one realizes that the riches of life must be contained within each life, and yet the riches of the organism will always surpass my contribution, even though the organism would be poorer without me.

Well, the departing message of the Lord plays upon those great realities of the interior force which creates men of strength, men who are unbreakable before their world, men who are interiorly ready in a kind of active watching and sixth sense for opportunities and for points of crucial import, when the church must act, must not act, etc.; so the question of the externals of course will be so secondary that it is not even brought up in, you might say, the departing structure, which He speaks of just before the Ascension and of course leading directly into the Pentecostal event. We must always begin from within human life as Pentecost indicates. I think Jung says in one very powerful passage in that book *Modern Man in Search of His Soul* – he says that one of the betrayals of the churches of humanity today, betrayals of humanity by the churches, has been that they have fallen prey to the illusion that a million zeroes joined together will add up to one integral life, instead of realizing – and I think it’s really a sublime commentary on what we’re speaking of here – that unless we will begin with respect for the gift of God and we will take, you might say, our tactic in the church from the idea that when we have changed one human life, beginning with our own, we have done everything, and until that has occurred nothing has occurred. “You shall receive a new power which is that of the Holy Spirit who will come upon you and then and only then, will you be witnesses to Me.” So the public impact waits upon the utter mystery of God’s visitation.

Now, I would think, that a source of great confidence to us would be the undeniable truth that the church is a continuing Pentecostal event, that God has already shown His hand in that marvelous sense of the iconography of the early church, where the Father’s hand would declare His gift and His power. He has shown His hand as at least one of those early mosaics showed, in the issuing forth from His hand of the Holy Spirit, and this was the symbol of the one event which would never be done with, which was now part of the process of a history that deserved the name sacred, without being undeserving of the name human, and so I would think for ourselves this sometimes is the only thing we can turn back to or renew ourselves within, not to turn back to a closed book of the Pentecostal event but to allow ourselves interiorly to be renewed by the fact and the truth that Pentecost is the church, and that the outpouring of Pentecost is the history and the presence of the church. If these things mean anything, the creation which was once worked in humanity and which we call the church has never declared itself finished and never can, so that in the midst of the turmoil, in the midst of, I would think, the tremendous pressures that are upon all of us to be faithful, this would be a great thing: “If any man believe in Me, out of him shall flow streams of living water,” you see. The gift of the sacred waters makes of all of us a sacred overflow in the direction of mankind; this is never done with. The Pentecostal event is the church, and as Pius XII said in that magnificent footnote, we must have a sense not merely of being in the church but of *being* the church.

Well, the Lord departs, as He says, “If I do not depart the Holy Spirit will not come.” That is, there has to be a dramatization of the completeness of the redemptive event, and the departure of the Lord will be the crown of the event. As you know, in the early liturgies the Ascension and Pentecost were not separated events at all. But in any case I would like very briefly to point to one phrase here in chapter 1 which is very meaningful again to me. They were talking at the election of Matthias of what the qualifications for apostolate were, and Peter addressed them before the election, and

in verse 22 he ends his little talk this way: he says, “It is expedient then that of the men who have accompanied us through the whole time that the Lord Jesus was in our midst, beginning from the baptism of John even to the present day, when He was taken from us – it is expedient that there be one who may become with us a witness of the resurrection.” (This is a phrase I hope that someone perhaps sends to Bishop Sheen, because I really don’t think the man has discovered the resurrection yet! That’s undoubtedly unfair, but he really does talk as though we were all keepers of the tomb. No, no, not at all, not at all.) “It is necessary that one should become with us a witness of the resurrection.” It is not a point of having been there and seeing the rock blast out. All the accounts tell us that no one was there, and of course that’s a little beside the point anyway because there was nothing to see. It was all strictly in the realm of mystery. No, no, there’s a much subtler and more magnificent truth here. There’s a truth that simply sweeps the resurrection into the mainstream of history and ourselves along with it and within it. The apostolate is a witnessing of the resurrection, and we are immediately involved in all of those rich ironies that the scripture delights in because God Himself is the master of irony. It’s only in the oppositions of life that life itself can understand itself.

Well, the witnessing of the resurrection of which we are speaking here is first of all a matter of existence. Every Christian in undergoing the death-victory experience of the Savior in baptism is recreated in this image, but it is given a rather special tone here as we understand by the apostolic setting: that is, the graces of baptism are further actuated and more finely tooled now in favor of a very special meaning, a very special adult vocation – witnesses of the resurrection. What we would note, I think, is the supreme irony by which this witnessing led not precisely to public preaching, though of course that was a very important element in it, but to death, and to the experience of death within the church. I’m not speaking about the physical event now, I’m speaking in the Pauline sense of “I die daily” and again “I bear about in my body the *stigmata Jesu* – the marks of the Lord Jesus,” and then he speaks in another place, you remember, of simply his obsessive concern for the churches, and out of this kind of concatenation of texts we get the idea of the Pauline witnessing, which was an experience of the life of the church and the constant interior death that is required in order to be faithful to that scene in any real way, so that the witnessing of the resurrection becomes the deepest possible involvement in the life of man.

I think we keep coming back to a few very, very profound scriptural ideas – that have been detaining us all this week long; the witnessing of the resurrection was this public life of the church, the emerging of the few out of the Pentecostal event into the mainstream of the world, which is not exactly a waiting world, of the deeply corrupt and hostile world, as we find; and within that the experience of the Lord Jesus, renewed interiorly in each one of them. You may call it a baptismal experience, a priestly experience, an apostolic experience. We are talking about the same thing. It is that interior death which is never done with, any more than life is done with, because life at its deepest is a constant putting to death, in its deepest understanding, so that if we are talking about the apostolic man we are talking about the one who in favor of the church, the Christ who is immanent to humanity, is constantly undergoing the experience of the death of Christ, in favor of new life. To be witnesses of the resurrection is to be contemplative and public all at once. And thank you again. Pray for us all.

[Merton: Thank you very much, Father. It’s really been tremendous. I wish we could have a half hour to tell you how tremendous it’s been.]