

WHAT IS CONTEMPLATION?

by Thomas Merton,

Contemplation is the work of the Holy Ghost acting on our souls through His gifts of Wisdom and Understanding with special intensity to increase and perfect our love for Him.

God often measures His gifts by our desire to receive them.

If you desire intimate union with God you must be willing to pay the price for it.

The Discourse of Our Lord Jesus Christ at the Last Supper, His spiritual testament, was a summary of the whole spiritual life.

"For this is eternal life; That they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

That they may be made perfect in one.

Active contemplation prepares the way for love.

The liturgy tends to bring the soul to passive or infused contemplation by the power of that great central action, the Mass.

The Three Divine Persons will manifest themselves TO ALL WHO LOVE HIM.

(Those devoted to Catholic Action) enjoy a kind of "masked" contemplation.

Mystical contemplation is an intuition of God born of pure love. It is a gift of God that absolutely transcends all the natural capacities of the soul and which no man can acquire by any effort of his own.

Contemplation is an intellectual experience of the fact that God is infinite Love, that He has given Himself to us, and that from henceforth, love is all that matters.

A simple attitude of patient waiting in darkness restores order and harmony to the soul.

The surest sign of infused contemplation behind the cloud of darkness is a POWERFUL MYSTERIOUS AND YET SIMPLE ATTRACTION WHICH HOLDS THE SOUL PRISONER IN THIS DARKNESS AND OBSCURITY...IT HAS NO DESIRE TO ESCAPE FROM THIS ARIDITY...BUT AT THE SAME TIME THERE IS A GROWING CONVICTION THAT JOY AND PEACE AND FULFILLMENT ARE ONLY TO BE FOUND SOMEWHERE IN THIS LONELY NIGHT OF ARIDITY AND FAITH.

The soul one day begins to realize, in a manner completely unexpected and surprising, that in this darkness it has found the living God...The darkness remains as dark as ever and yet, somehow, it seems to have become brighter than the brightest day.

From then on its whole life is transformed....It consists of one thought, one love; GOD ALONE.

It is very important to have a competent guidance and instruction in the ways of contemplative prayer.

The most important thing of all is to get some realization of what God is doing in your soul.

You are out of your depth.

Avoid everything that will bring unnecessary complications into your life...Do what you do quietly and without fuss. Seek solitude as much as you can, dwell in the silence of your own soul and rest there in the simple and simplifying light which God is infusing into you.

Do not be too anxious about your advancement in the ways of prayer.... The paths cannot be charted and measured.

Everything becomes a source and occasion of love.

The contemplative finds equal joy in the pleasures and pains of mortal existence.

He uses contemplatives to communicate His love to other men.

The true contemplative suffers from the fact that he thinks he is without desire of God; and that very fact bears witness of his desire...He contradicts his own fears by the very intensity of THE ANGUISH WITH WHICH HE LONGS FOR GOD.

Be content to remain in loneliness and isolation and dryness and anguish waiting upon God in darkness...Do not be anxious or solicitous to perform great works for Him until He leads you Himself by obedience and love and the events which His Providence directs.

PRAYING THE PSALMS

If we are to pray well, we too must discover the Lord to whom we speak, and if we use the Psalms in our prayer we will stand a better chance of sharing in the discovery which lies hidden in their words for all generations. For God has willed to make Himself known to us in the mystery of the Psalms.

There are no songs which better express the Church's soul, her desires, her longing, her sorrows and her joys.

God has given Himself to her in them, as though in a sacrament.

The whole Psalter has always been regarded by the Church, in her liturgy, as though it were a summary and compendium of all that God has revealed.

The Church loves the Psalms because in them she sings of her experience of God, of her union with the Incarnate Word, of her contemplation of God in the Mystery of Christ.

If we really come to know and love the Psalms, we will enter into the Church's own experience of divine things. We will begin to know God as we ought.

It is quite possible that our lack of interest in the Psalms conceals a secret lack of interest in God. For if we have no real interest in praising Him, it shows that we have never realized who He is. Their spontaneity makes them songs without plan, because there are no blueprints for ecstasy.

Yet at the same time, the Psalms are rugged and sober. Their emotions are controlled, and the very control increases their intensity.. The tremendous impact of the Psalm is buried at a very deep spiritual level, and then we must pray on that level in order to feel it at all.

When we praise God, says St. Augustine, there must be order in our praise.... "The best way is to seek the way of praise in the Scriptures of God."

One has to be a healthy, simple person with a lot of faith and enough freedom from the tastes and prejudices of our time to be able to appreciate the imagery of another race and age. We must be, to some extent, "Orientals."

To understand the Psalms, we must experience the sentiments they express, in ~~the~~/our own hearts.

St. Augustine concludes, our eternal life of praise must begin here on earth, in time.

The Psalms lead us to contemplation.

The prayer life of the Church continues on earth the prayer life of the Incarnate Word.

Nowhere can we be more certain that we are praying with the holy Spirit than when we pray the Psalms.

PEACE IN THE WILL OF GOD, this is the foundation on which the psalmists build their edifice of praise.

They all end in peace.

We think of our ordinary experiences in their light and with their words.

Besides our own personal trials, we find in the Psalms the sufferings and struggles of society.

Joy in praising God is the pure essence of the spirit of the Church's prayer.

The Lord becomes our joy.

Indeed, if we seek only to "get something out of them" we will perhaps get less than we expect, and generous efforts may be frustrated because they are turned in the wrong direction; toward ourselves rather than toward God.

In the last analysis, it is not so much what we get out of the Psalms that rewards us, as what we put into them.

Her MAGNIFICAT sprang from the depths of her soul and gives us a kind of synthesis and summary of all the poetry of the Old Testament.

Our life of prayer will come to reproduce something of the inner life of the Holy Mother of God.

THE SIGN OF JONAS

BY THOMAS MERTON

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Humanly speaking, our efforts to show our love for God by purifying our hearts, refresh and delight Him. It is for this that He thirsts. His SITIO is for the purity of our hearts, the emptiness of our hearts, that His joy, His freedom and His immensity may fill them. If He can be said to thirst it is because He thirsts to do us good, to share His infinite Life with us. But we prevent Him by our selfishness from doing so. Detachment will procure for us the greatest good, the pure love of God for Himself alone because He alone is good: AMOR AMICITIAE. That is the bond of perfection that unites us to Him. "Above all things have charity, which is the bond of perfection ~~that unites us and~~ may the peace of Christ exult in your hearts, in which you are called unto one Body. And be grateful" It seems to me that all mystical theology is contained in those two lines. Super Omnia: this love is above all things because it is the end for which we were created. It is perfection and sanctity. It is the only thing necessary. It is beyond all mode and all law. It is the bond that unites us to God. It unites us immediately to Him and it unites us to one another in Him. And so we become one in Christ and Christ lives in us and His peace exalts us. There is no other true joy.

"Also criticism by itself, even true criticism, does not do much good in a monastery. We stand much more in need of encouragement, of positive and clear direction. We know well enough what is wrong with us, but the monotony of the life sometimes makes us so dejected that we cannot seem to do anything about it. What we need above all are words that will make us love one another and advice that will make us strong as to overcome evil with good. However, when a Superior uses his authority to correct an abuse, the effect is quite different. It is the Superior's business to correct abuses tactfully, of course, but he must correct them. When he does so in the right way the whole community feels cleaner, and there is peace.

"Insomnia can become a form of contemplation. You just lie there, inert, helpless, alone, in the dark, and let yourself be crushed by the inscrutable tyranny of time. The plank bed becomes an altar and you lie there without trying to understand any longer in what sense you can be called a sacrifice. Outside in the world, where it is night, perhaps there is someone who suddenly sees that something he has done is horrible. He is most unexpectedly sorry and finds himself able to pray...

Charles de Foucauld had a terribly hard life in the desert. One look at his picture will tell you all you need to know about it.

All my desires draw me more and more in that direction. To be little, to be nothing, to rejoice in your imperfections, to be glad that you are not worthy of attention, that you are of no account in the universe. This is the only liberation. The only way to true solitude.

"Somehow, I have to give up this thing that I love above everything else on earth BECAUSE THE LOVE OF GOD IS GREATER. It seems like a contradiction: because what I have to give up is, in the last analysis, what I am convinced is the most perfect way I could love and serve God! But that is PER SE. PER ACCIDENS there is something greater: to renounce the purest of all vocations simply

because it is not the one God had chosen for me--to accept something in which it seems likely that my highest personal ideals will be altogether frustrated, purely because of His love, His will. He who loves me prefers it this way, and to accept His love is to send up to Him the incense of the purest prayer, the sweetest praise without pleasure for myself--and yet in the end it is a supreme joy!

"This week, the week full of the Holy Ghost--I found out once more something of the joy there is in being nothing and in depending on Our Lady for everything. This is the key to the simplest and easiest way of the interior life: To have no greatness or holiness or distinction that one can claim as one's own but to rely entirely on her love and her protection--knowing that she will obtain for us, at the right moment, grace to do the good thing that God wills us to do. From then on the whole spiritual life becomes nothing else but a question of looking to her in confidence and faithfully receiving everything that comes to us through her without clinging to it or keeping it as our own, and without reflecting on ourselves.

"No matter how simple discourse may be, it is never simple enough. No matter how simple thought may be, it is never simple enough. No matter how simple love may be, it is never simple enough. The only thing left is the simplicity of the soul in God, or, better, the simplicity of God.

"To belong to God I have to belong to myself. I have to be alone--at least interiorly alone. This means the constant renewal of a decision. I cannot belong to people. None of me belongs to anybody but God. Absolute loneliness of the imagination, the memory, the will. My love for everybody is equal, neutral and clean. No exclusiveness. Simple and free as the sky because I love everybody and am possessed by nobody, not held, not bound. In order to be not remembered or even wanted I have to be a person that nobody knows.

"There are many declarations made only because we think other people are expecting us to make them. The silence of God should teach us when to speak and when not to speak. But we cannot bear the thought of silence lest it cost us the trust and the respect of men.

"Our obedience and even our patience are tasteless and without savor to God unless He be the cause of all our actions and of our acceptance of suffering.

"Yesterday, out in the beginning of a snowstorm, dipped into the spiritual notes of Charles de Foucauld and was moved by their intensity. He speaks to God in a clear and vibrant voice, simple words, sentences of fire. This voice rings in the ears of your heart after you have put the books away and turned to others less saintly, even though they may be religious voices too.

"The terrible thing about sickness is that you tend to think you are sick. Your thoughts are narrowed down to your own little rag of a body. And you take care of her. My God, forgive me. I take care of myself too well...

"It is the impurity of immature penance that brings distress, but deep and hidden suffering is joy. Part of this depth and this

hiddenness comes from the fact that such suffering really DIMINISHES you, reduces you to nothing, places you in darkness, and tells you you are nothing and that, as the IMITATION says, 'The old man is not dead.' And yet, love can easily get rid of him--thought not as so much our love as Christ's, which becomes ours.

"Famous but unknown, tired and powerful, a man without virtue and without prayer, impotent, hungry, at peace, unable to speak, looking at the valley: WHO IS LIKE UNTO GOD!

God, my God, here is a traitor who loves You beyond speech!
And yet I have no love. I ~~have~~ no moon. I have no valley.

What is my new desert? The name of it is COMPASSION. There is no wilderness so terrible, so beautiful, so arid and so fruitful as the wilderness of compassion. It is the only desert that shall truly flourish and blossom and rejoice with joy. It is in the desert of compassion that the thirsty land turns into springs of water that the poor possess all things. There are no bounds to contain the inhabitants of this solitude in which I live alone, as isolated as the host on the altar, the food of all men, belonging to all and belonging to none, for God is with me, and He sits in the ruins of my heart, preaching His Gospel to the poor.

Do you suppose I have a spiritual life? I have none, I am indigence. I am silence. I am poverty. I am solitude, for I have renounced spirituality to find God, and He is who preaches loud in the depths of my indigence, saying: 'The place is too strait for me, make me room to dwell in' (Isaias, 49:20) I die of love for you, Compassion: I take you for my Lady, as Francis married poverty I marry you, the Queen of hermits and the Mother of the poor.

".....as is usual, in the Kingdom of Heaven, by giving up what I wanted I ended up by having more than I had thought of wanting.

"WHAT WAS FRAGILE HAS BECOME POWERFUL. I LOVED WHAT WAS MOST FRAIL.
I LOOKED UPON WHAT WAS NOTHING. I TOUCHED WHAT WAS WITHOUT SUB*
STANCE AND WITHIN WHAT WAS NOT; I AM." the voice of God heard in
Paradise.

THE ASCENT TO TRUTH

by Thomas Merton

"...WE MUST KNOW THE TRUTH AND WE MUST LOVE THE TRUTH WE KNOW;
AND WE MUST ACT ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE OF OUR LOVE.

"...The teaching of Christ is the seed of a new life. Reception of the word of God initiates a man's transformation. It elevates him above this world and above his own nature and transports his actse of thought and of desire to a supernatural level. He becomes a partaker of the divine nature, a Son of God, and Christ is living in him. From that moment forward the door to eternity stands open in the depths of his soul and he is capable of becoming a contemplative. Then he can watch at the frontier of an abyss of light, so bright that it is darkness. Then he will burn with desire to see the fulness of Light and will cry out to God like Moses in the cloud on Sinai: "Show me Thy Face!"

"...When faith opens out into a deep spiritual understanding and advances beyond the range of concepts into a darkness which can only be enlightened by the fire of love, ~~man~~ truly begins to know God in the only way that can satisfy his soul.

"...the will plays an integral part in all contemplation since there is, in fact, no contemplation without love. Love is both the starting point of contemplation and its fruition.

"...Discernment and detachment are two characters of the mature Christian soul. They are not yet the mark of a mystic, but they bear witness that one is traveling the right way to mystical contemplation and the stage of beginners is passed.

"...Reason is in fact the path to faith, and faith takes over when reason can say no more.

"...We receive enlightenment only in proportion as we give ourselves more and more completely to God by humble submission and love. We do not first see, then act: we act, then see. It is only by the free submission of our judgement in dark faith that we can advance to the light of understanding:

In order to have pleasure in everything
Desire to have pleasure in nothing.
In order to arrive at possessing everything
Desire to possess nothing.
In order to arrive at being everything
Desire to be nothing.
In order to arrive at knowing everything
Desire to know nothing.
In order to arrive at that wherein thou hast no pleasure
Thou must go by a way in which thou hast no pleasure.
In order to arrive at that which thou knowest not
Thou must go by a way in-which-thou-hast-that thou knowest not.
In order to arrive at that which thou possessest not
Thou must go by a way that thou possessest not.
In order to arrive at that which thou are not
Thou must go through that which thou are not

"Here are the words in which St. Thomas describes the end of this ascent to God. "The final attainment of man's knowledge of God

God consists in knowing that we do not know Him, in so far as we realize that He transcends everything that we understand concerning Him.' 'He ~~is in our life~~ Having arrived at the term of our knowledge we KNOW GOD AS UNKNOWN.'

"It is terrible to know God and not love him...

"...the true path of asceticism is a path of simplicity and obscurity, and there is no true Christian self-denial that does not begin first of all with a wholehearted acceptance and fulfillment of the ordinary duties of one's state in life. Everyone guided by grace will spontaneously desire to add something on his own account to the sacrifices demanded by Providence and by his state of life. But the best of these mortifications will always be the ones that are seen by God alone and do not attract the attention of other men or flatter our own self-complacency. It is very bad in practice to allow ascetics to indulge in penitential rivalries with one another, for this generally fixes their attention upon themselves and gives them a narrow outlook, depriving them of the interior liberty which is absolutely necessary for progress in the ways of prayer.

However, it is easy for us to deceive ourselves in judging the purity of our intentions when we taste great pleasure in created ~~pleasure-by-frequently~~ things. A devout man can form a habit of attachment to some created pleasure by frequently using it, in good faith, as a motive of prayer. In actual fact, his desire for the pleasure soon becomes greater than his desire to pray. Without his realizing it, he has made prayer the motive for indulging in his pet pleasure. This can very easily happen, for example, in the case of a sentimental friendship.

"...We have to deny ourselves because, in practice, love that is centered in ourselves is stolen from God and from other men. Love can only live by giving...

".....And I may add, parenthetically, that the convert whose faith is emotionally "cold" and is not inflamed with an element of quasi-mystical experience is not therefore less virtuous or less pleasing to God. It may, in spite of temperamental or hereditary disinclination, by force of rational demonstration alone, to an unemotional acceptance of the faith.

"...And by this lifting up of the heart, the heart itself is not exalted--as happens in the case of acquired knowledge, for knowledge puffeth up and the proud heart goes before a fall--but by the Gift of Understanding the heart is lifted up to exalt and praise God and not its own self.

"The soul has such satisfaction in God that although the other two faculties may be distracted, yet, since THE WILL IS IN UNION WITH GOD for as long as the recollection lasts, its quiet and repose are not lost, but the will gradually brings the understanding and memory back to a state of recollection again. For although the will is not completely absorbed it is so well occupied, without knowing how, that, whatever the efforts made by the understanding and memory, they cannot deprive it of its contentment and rejoicing; indeed, WITHOUT ANY LABOR ON ITS PART, it helps to prevent this little spark of love from being quenched.

"...when a soul reaches contemplation, its discursive activity, meditations, particular formal effective acts of the will, and so on must all be greatly simplified and reduced. As a matter of cold fact, they also admit that when contemplation is clearly passive, or infused, the activity of the faculties is at least to some extent impeded by the action of God.

"....All equally agree that as long as the soul finds profit and peace in the ways of meditation and affective prayer, these should not be dropped. Therefore, in practice, no matter what theoretical views a director may hold, he will not encourage an interest in mysticism which produces a proud contempt for the "ordinary ways" of the spiritual life and weakens the soul in its mortifications and devotion to prayer. But he will place no obstacle in the way of a soul who possesses deep humility and a fervent desire to reach union with God, and who is also strongly attracted to silence and solitude and to simple wordless forms of prayer.

"St. John's three signs of the soul called to contemplative prayer are well known...

"First sign: the inability to meditate...

"Second sign: lack of interest in PARTICULAR OBJECTS of thought...

"Third and the surest sign is that the soul takes pleasure in being alone, and waits with loving attentiveness upon God, without making any particular meditation, in inward peace and quietness and rest, and without acts and exercises of the faculties--memory and understanding and will--at least without discursive acts, that is without passing from one thing to another...

"...St. John of the Cross goes on to remind us that mystical contemplation is no other end than to make us perfect in the theological virtues: especially in charity.

"...The activity he requires of the soul must be elicited by the understanding and will together. It is very simple. It has three stages or "moments."

"First: a remote general disposition to receive the inspirations of passive or mystical prayer. The chief care of the soul will be to see that it places no obstacle in the way of the guide, who is the Holy Spirit

"Second step: as soon as the mind is recollected in prayer and the will is centered upon God and able to rest in Him, there remains but one very simple activity to be performed. The soul keeps itself in an attitude of 'simple knowledge or awareness,' so as to receive the infused knowledge and love which come to it from God'...

"Finally, the third moment. As soon as there is a positive indication (which the soul must recognize by experience) that it is being passively drawn by God into deep interior silence and solitude and absorption, the faculties abandon all activity whatever...

"....Mystics are made by the same Holy Ghost, who is the Divine Teacher of the Church, and the life of contemplation is simply the full flowering in the individual soul of the grace which is poured out through the whole Church...

"Conclusion: in the deepest spiritual darkness, in the most profound night of unknowing, in the purity of naked faith, God unites the soul to Himself in mystical union.

"So perfect is this union of Love that the soul actually lives and acts in its substance and in its faculties by the life and activity of God

and feels itself a

and feels itself as it were 'transformed' into God, so that there remains no apparent distinction between itself and God...

"...As Cardinal Newman said: 'A thousand difficulties do not make one doubt.' We cannot expect to understand with clear intrinsic evidence what is essentially obscure to our natural intelligence. St. John of the Cross explains why. Faith makes us believe truths that are beyond all proportion to human understanding and are only known in so far as they are accepted on Divine Revelation.

"...As St. John of the Cross already explained at the beginning of his CANTICLE: 'He that has to find some hidden thing must enter very secretly into that same hidden place where it is, and when he finds it, he too is hidden like that which he has found.'

"...from the moment our contemplation transcends concepts, from the moment the intelligence enters this divine darkness, our knowledge of God is dominated by love and flows from love...

"...The greatest saints in heaven are those who can give God the most love there. Those who can give Him the most love are those who know Him best. And those who know Him best in heaven are those who have best loved Him on earth. Consequently, love is also the most important thing in the contemplative life...

"May I be so transformed in thy beauty that, being alike in beauty, we may both see ourselves in Thy beauty, since I shall have Thine own beauty; so that when one of us looks at the other each may see in the other his beauty, the beauty of both being thy beauty alone, and I being absorbed in Thy beauty...

"Suffering is a means, to the soul, of entering farther into the thicket of the delectable wisdom of God; for the purest suffering brings with it the most intimate and purest knowledge, and, in consequence, the purest and loftiest joy which comes from having penetrated into the deepest knowledge.

"God has created me to do His some definite service, He has committed some work to me, which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good. I shall do His work."

CARDINAL NEWMAN

THE 14 STATIONS OF CHRISTO TOTAL

by David St. Clair

A Pageant based on the Stations of the Cross was presented in Juiz de Fora, Brazil, last Good Friday.

It is probably the best thing of its kind ever done in South or North America. It pulls no punches, doesn't pretend to give all the answers, and doesn't regard blind religious faith as the balm for all ills. What it does do is grab modern men and women by the scruff of their necks and show them their corrupted life. The audience, expecting to see the familiar Christ figure going through the classic Stations of the Cross, gets a rude jolt. Instead of Jesus, the audience itself is on trial, and for a solid hour and 40 minutes the spectators squirm like insects pinned to a board, unhappy to find themselves under a spiritual magnifying glass.

It is called the Christo Total, and Anna wrote and produced it.

"I knew I would either be praised or excommunicated," says Sister Benedita Idefalt in her soft voice, "but I was determined to shake up the people who can't see beyond their own well-fed faces. I wanted to write a pageant that people would remember. I wanted something different.

In the cast of characters there were a prostitute, an unwed mother, a corrupt landowner, and a society woman advocating divorce. There was dancing to twist and cha-cha music.

It was performed on the town soccer field. The cast of 750 paid for their own costumes. Slum folk played unemployed Brazilians, and professional actors worked without pay. The town's police band learned all the popular music and rescored it to full-orchestra style. The 40,000 paying people that packed the stadium were stunned into staying in their seats after the music had died away and the actors had all exited. The usual Brazilian race for the exits did not occur.

The pageant begins in total darkness. Suddenly from four corners of the stadium fireworks and rockets explode in the sky and a voice comes over the many loudspeakers; "Attention Brazil, attention world. Christo Total is on the air." Then while the band plays Exodus, a radio reporter comes onto the field telling the listening audience that he is there to broadcast a judgment on humanity. He reminds them that 1,930 years ago Christ was on trial for man's sins and suffered for them. "Today's pain, tragedy, Calvary and cross, are found in the hunger of the unemployed worker, in his oppression by tyrannical political powers. The figure of the crucified Christ is being used to justify what is antisocial and anti-Christian. Behold Christ carrying his cross, being nailed to it, agonizing and dying! Christ is every one of us! He is all of us! He is Christo Total!"

After this, 42 white-robed girls come onto the field to a slow funeral march. They carry flaming torches and by three's take their place as the core of each of the 14 Stations of the Cross. Around each station move three other girls in blue representing truth, soon joined by three more in deep purple representing humanity.

Pontius Pilate comes onto the field in a white Cadillac, waves to the crowd, and takes his place at the 1st Station.

The reporter sees people he knows in the audience, and asks of them one at a time whether Christ should be condemned and made to suffer anew. Shouts one man, "Condemn Him!"

Him! He preaches an idiot's revolution. You can't change things by love. You need bombs like they had in Russia and Spain.. He talks of love in the atomic age! He is a fascist."

A wealthy landowner answers that this Christ-Humanity should be condemned because "He wants me to divide my lands with the poor." A society woman thinks He is out of date because "He is against divorce. Against divorce in an age when nobody belongs to anybody!" A politician refuses to commit himself. An industrialist is against Christ because "He believes in profit sharing and a shorter work week." Then the reporter asks Pontius what the judgment decision to the people. It was not I who condemned that Man the first time. I'm washing my hands again."

And the suffering Christ (that is, humanity) judged guilty, starts on the road to Calvary, and girls dance to High Noon while He goes to the 2nd Station. The reporter announces, "He carries on his shoulders all our pains, our misunderstandings, our crimes, our anguish. How we weigh upon Him, we the condemned." Then to a fast jazz dance the prisoner moves on to the 3rd Station, where He falls for the first time. Ragged newsboys race around the torches, waving papers and shouting, "Police arrest 200 Beggars!" "Horrible Suicide!" "Milk and Bread Prices Up!" adds the reporter. "We think that these dramas are not ours, that headlines in newspapers don't talk about us. In truth, all of us are suffering the first fall." Then to an Argentine tango, Humanity dances.

The 4th Station is reserved for mothers who find the weight of too much of a burden, and the 5th Station is for the poor farmers of Brazil who are struggling for a decent land reform. They ask for just laws and not communist demagoguery so as to live "by the land and not suffer for it."

At the 6th Station, a voice is heard; "I am Veronica. I am here to wipe the sweat of those who carry the cross." Then out rushes a convict who kneels in front of one of the girls, and cries, "Wipe my face, I have paid my debt to society behind bars. I have no job." A young woman runs out and falls on her knees. "Wipe my face, I am an unwed mother. I carry a child who is nobody." Then comes a prostitute. "Don't cast me away! Why won't humanity let me up out of the mud?" Veronica wipes each face, holds up the cloths she used; and on each is the bleeding face of Christ. The vand plays I Believe.

At the 7th Station the condemned falls for the second time because, as is explained, of unjust conditions imposed on workers. The 8th Station has the reporter asking those in the audience to examine their consciences and find out why their crosses weigh so much. To a fast cha-cha-cha, Humanity gets up and dances wildly.

The condemned falls again at the 9th Station. The explanation; The world of political tyranny places its foot on his back." Negroes singing Old Black Joe, children representing undeveloped nations and workers, obviously penniless, march across the field.

The 10th Station shows starving Brazilians and those who spend hundreds of dollars on fabulous carnival costumes just for one night's merriment. (To many Brazilians ~~and this~~ this was really hitting below the belt) Twist music leads the condemned to the 11th Station, where Humanity is nailed to the cross.

A drum is beating slowly and 14 girls dressed in red come onto the field, each bound to one another by ropes around their wrists. They represent the Church of Silence, in the nations where the Church is persecuted.

At the 12th Station the condemned dies. The torches there go out. From the 13th Station race out eight black clad demons with red ragged sashes. They carry a huge gauze sheet, the body of Humanity, and dance around it until they realize what they have done, and roll away in terror. The voice of the reporter continues to blame the uncharitable audience for it all.

Now the torchbearers spread out and form a mammoth cross, and all 750 players come on with candles lit from the torches. They file into the arms and trunks of the cross, and mill around. The reporter offers solace for the first time at the 14th Station. "The human-divine tragedy of the Stations has resulted in an immense cross. A cross that unites and redeems humanity. A cross that shelters us, all of us. A cross where there is room for brothers who have become separated. All humanity has this symbol of its resurrection. The resurrection in Christ."

The band plays, the actors leave, and the audience finds itself unsure whether to applaud or just go away.

There have been many conversions in Juiz de Fora because of this pageant and hundreds have renewed their interest in Church activities. Men have told Sister Benedita that they shed tears while they watched it.

Request to produce Sister Benedita's play in Argentina and Chile have come in and even the Vatican has asked for a copy. She says "Lots of people laughed at the idea before they saw the pageant. Having twist dancing and cha-cha-cha was regarded as sacrilegious by many, but the pageant needs this modern touch. After all, we are in the jet age, sending men to the moon. Why should I try to reach modern souls with music out of camel caravans? One man told me 'If this is what is happening in churches today, then I'm going more often.' That's the result I wanted, and I think that's the result Christ wanted, too."

Sister Benedita was born 43 years ago/ in Finland of middle-class Lutheran parents. She became a Catholic and entered a convent in Berlin in 1939. "I stayed for nine years in Germany, during the worst battle-possible-time. The war ended in a battle between the Russians and the nazis right in our convent garden. There were screams and curses and guns and bullets. When it was over I tried to identify the dead. There were mounds of corpses, some without heads, and I went through their pockets looking for information about them. Soldiers of both sides carried religious medals and both sides were human. For the first time in my life I became indignant at man's stupid inhumanity to man."

In 1948 she asked for a transfer to Brazil and after a brief stay at Sao Paulo was sent to her present teaching post in Juiz de Fora, in the state of Minas Gerais. Her high-school subjects are English, mathematics, religion, and social doctrine. "I'm afraid my religion classes are rather unconventional, and sometimes I say things that shock the students' parents, but the kids themselves never cut my classes."

The tall and fair sister also has a group of students who work in the town's (slums) on week-ends. "We've gone in there and taught them to read and write and set up co-operative stores. Every Sunday I wait outside church after Mass, grab a couple of rich Christians, and take them to the slum district. I tell them that their dinner tables can wait a few minutes. What they see opens their eyes and almost always they open their pocketbooks. I try to raise the standards of living of the poor and lower the standards of living of the rich."

Planning the pageant, she started thinking of torches. "I like torches because they symbolize the burning away of old things to make way for new. The more I thought the madder I got, and soon I had all of Brazil's old social injustices rattling around in my brain at once. I knew I had to get it on paper, because it was giving me such a headache."

She called in two businessmen to help her with the Portuguese phrasing and started to work. "It was all done in less than two weeks. We would think of things to say faster than our pens could write them. Whenever one of us had a good line we would try it out on the others. If it gave us goose bumps we left it in. I wanted to shake the complacent out of their idea of what Christ's sufferings meant. I wanted to show them that Christ is alive and with us today in every place and every event. He suffers or triumphs, wins or loses together with every human creature. That's why Christ doesn't appear in this theatrical version of the Stations of the Cross. He is represented by all humanity. The personalities, words, ideas, and music are of our days. Christ's total is all of us, and we must all suffer because we all are guilty."

The script written, Sister Benedicte took it "with my heart in my hands" to the Bishop of Juiz de Fora. "I watched him read it, and he kept glancing up at me from behind his thick glasses. I thought, 'Oh brother, I've had it.' Then when he finished he told me he liked it very much but thought it could be stronger. It was then that I added the prostitute."

WOMANHOOD

Webster defines womanhood, as the condition of being a woman. The female human being as distinguished from man. Of all the creatures in the world woman is made by God, the most beautiful. She is an image, a spark of divinity given to us in life as a preview of things to come. She is yielding, helpless, yet divine. To whom God has given much, from her much is expected. Of no other creature is so much demanded. Let us first of all consider some of the differences between the nature of man and woman, by so doing we will have a better understanding of woman's nature. One of the very noticeable differences between them is---women are much more observant of details--a man seems content to use his senses so as to arrive at general impressions, while the woman takes in every minute particular. A woman is sensitive to color, taste and arrangement. Woman is more passive, more dependent than man. She is the needy one. Her physical make-up is less robust than that of man, yet the virtues of endurance and courage are often more marked in her. Man has strength but woman has the more important quality of beauty. Man can be rough but he instinctively recognizes the superiority of gentleness in woman. A woman's feelings are closer to the surface and more often expressed than a man's. Her heart is easily moved, she is quick of sympathy, quick to tears, sensitive and easily hurt. A man says what he means, but a woman thinks what she means. A woman is "predominantly intuitional" whereas a man is "predominantly logical". In marriage a woman and not man is the bearer of life. She is a helpmate to man, equal but different, equality but not identity. Man and woman together form a functional whole, rather like our right and left hand, which can clasp so firmly precisely because they are opposites. A mother is closer to her child than is a father. In war, man is the aggressor, the one who kills, woman helps the wounded and weeps for the dead. She tries to restore the life that has been wiped out. Woman reflects the virtues of the heart such as love, compassion, filial fear and sympathy. Man is concerned with the organization of society, he is body conscious and therefore interested in things. Woman is more concerned with the life within the organization, or soul conscious, and therefore, interested in people. Woman is more profoundly mystical, that is to say she is more in harmony with things hoped for than with things to be achieved here below. She is more aware of the invisible world; undercurrents, presences, symbols and the voices that are beyond the grasp of reason. Quicker than man she interprets the will of God; quicker than man she responds to it with her whole being. It is in this sense we can speak of woman as the religious sex. The whole meaning of her personality, is to have reference to another, to want another, to submit to another. In the measure that she submits to the Creator, in the measure that she fulfills the purpose for which she was given life. Here lies a paradox, our inferiority is our only real superiority. Our strength lies entirely in an avowal of our weakness. As someone has put it, surrender to God is the only absolute power a creature possesses. When we touch upon the matter of submission and dedication we touch upon the very essence of our faith. A complete concept of woman's nature must take into account all the levels of reality, not only the physical, but the riches of her intelligence, her intuition for mystery, her tendency to inwardness and contemplation, her capacity for selfless love, the hunger of her being for a total dedication.

Let us further consider the "role of a woman". A woman is first and foremost a mother, the keystone of home and family. You cannot understand a woman apart from her motherhood--From all eternity God destined women to be mothers and for that reason prepared them physically and psychologically for this role. Every woman is a potential mother. Woman's place will always be the home, but today in our modern world, she must go beyond the threshold of the home. Motherhood is by no means her only task, because her home is the world. Many other tasks are waiting for her in public, political, social and cultural life. Where ever there are human relationships and they are every where, women are destined to create the right atmosphere. Mankind needs more motherliness today and less masculine thought for its happiness. We need women capable of regarding foreign ways not only without prejudice but with love. To respect the dignity of each man regardless of our differences. Where the gentle motherly qualities are missing, men's dealings with each other will be devoid of charity. Woman's role in history has always been a redemptive one. In the Old Testament great crisis were averted and the struggling race of Jews saved by women---by Anna, Esther, Judith and Ruth. The physical beauty of these women was enlisted in the service of sanctity. So it must still be. Beauty and sanctity are twin notions, A woman can always attract a man. She can always make herself wanted--she must see to it that man will want her not only to fulfill some partial aspect of her life but to complete the image of God in him. She must make man desire her to give himself unity, purpose, and inspiration; she must see to it that her presence is a reminder to him of the more--thanphysical. As such, woman is the image of ~~God-in-him~~ the humanity God created--beautiful and hopeful, yet dependent upon Him. In this modern age there is a great temptation to refuse our femininity, to reject our womanhood. Such writers warn us that modern women are becoming dangerously neurotic, because of their divorce from motherhood. These writers hold up for admiration the feminine woman with her deep emotional life, her great capacity for real love, her intuitive grasp of right and wrong. They call for a return to the mother "who accepts herself fully as a woman and regards having children as the most natural event possible. Educators are questioning whether much of modern education is not "unfitting women for life", and ~~whether-much-of-modern-education-is~~ ~~not~~ point out they are training women for freedom, competition and a cash salary, and then expecting them to succeed in marriage and home making. "A girl definitely needs some spiritual orientation toward that role, a philosophy which does not belittle the home as a place worthy of her best". Women of this generation are searching for fulfillment as women. When we fail to contribute to the world the those values of goodness, piety and warmth of heart that are so conspicuously absent from our industrialized society, we fail in our womanhood. A woman is a mystery of light or a mystery of darkness. She stands in the human drama as a sign of damnation or a sign of salvation. When women as women learn to know their nature and their role and accept it, then can they utilize it to the fullest service of God and man. God depends upon the FIAT of His creatures for the realization of His divine plan and woman's role in history is the guarantee that the FIAT will always be uttered. Pope Pius XII talking on "The Role of Young Women", said, "To give to dedicate yourself is one of the most beautiful aspirations of your sex--to dedicate herself to God and her neighbor, her husband, her children, her friends, her relatives and even distant peoples, she has never met--THIS IS WOMAN'S LIFE. Man's regard for his fellow men may be governed by a distant impersonal philanthropy, Woman's care for her neighbor has a warm human touch, including some times generous personal sacrifice "Woman is

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the last fortress of every people. If the man falls, God punishes the man, but if the woman falls, God will punish the whole people. As a woman goes, so goes the family, community, state, nation, world. The world is quite a bit what women make it.

Woman's vacation is "to love" woman's responsibility to the world is to love, and that love must extend to every body. God created women to be a companion to man, a help-mate in his living and a mother to the human race. We are capable of a great and pure and a disinterested love and our task is to radiate that love to the world.

God has given to women a mysterious power of bringing out the best or the worst there is in a man. Women have tremendous gifts of love to give whether or not she recognizes them. She has the gift of a body that can conceive and bring a child to life, (she must always give of herself to form life in another) The gift of emotional equipment that enable her to share the joys and sorrows of others with compassion and understanding; she has the gift of intelligence that permits her to discover and serve the "things of God". It is not only a privilege but a duty to first discover love for ourselves. That can be done by knowledge, when the gifts are discovered, then they can be given to another. Christ's great gift to woman-kind was her true freedom as a child of God. Before the time of Christ, woman was not truly valued as a human being. Our mission in the world is to be for man kind a living witness of the spirit of total dedication to God. Woman stands not in the foreground but as a silent power influencing human destinies. It is a fact frequently noted that great men almost always have great mothers.

"The essence of maternal love," is that it demands nothing sets no limits, makes no reservations. For the mother does not value her child primarily for his talents or achievements. She accepts him as he is. He may disappoint her hopes, wound her, live in sin and be guilty of crime too terrible to be named---but the real mother never recoils from her child.

We know what we are--we know not what we may be--we see an ideal and have only the desire to reach it. To reach this ideal we must have the key and the key of course is "The Woman," "The Mother", "Our Blessed Mother". Woman is in a sense the door of heaven and if we find the key we will be able to unlock the door and become the woman God intended us to be. Without our Blessed Mother we can never get to Our Lord. He came down to us through Her. We, in our turn, must go back to Him through Her. If we lose Her, we cannot get to Him. If we throw away the key, we will never unlock the door. This is why we pay so much attention to Our Blessed Mother. Our Lord had need of Her, we must have need of Her also. He gave us His mother to be our mother on that Friday men call Good. And as our love does not start with Mary, so neither does it stop with Mary. Mary is like a magnifying glass that intensifies our love of Her Son. Mary, the new Eve the lover and the mother par-excellence.

In whatever age of the world she may live, what ever state of life she may choose, every woman is called by God to be the lover, reechoing the fiat, embodying the total assent to God's will and every woman is meant to be the helpmate, encouraging, supporting, and aiding humanity in its search for God. New life is born only out of suffering. Woman is called to be a giver of life, not physical life alone, but life on the psychological and spiritual planes as well. "Life to man is personal," "Life to woman is otherness".

Who shall find a valiant woman? Far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he shall have no need of spoils. She will render him good, and not evil, all the days of her life. She has sought wool and flax, and has wrought by the counsel of her hands. She is like the merchants ship, she brings her bread from afar. And she has risen in the night, and she ~~brings her bread from afar, and she has~~ has given a prey to her household, and victuals to her maidens. She has considered a field, and bought it; with the fruit of her hands she has planted a vine yard. She has girded her loins with strength, and has strengthened her arm. She has tasted and seen that her traffic is good; her lamp shall not be put out in the night. She has put out her hand to strong things, and her fingers have taken hold of the spindle. She has opened her hand to the needy, and stretched out her hands to the poor. She shall not fear for her house in the cold of snow, for all her domestics are clothed with double garments. She has made for herself clothing of tapestry, fine linen and purple are her covering. Her husband is honorable in the gates, when he sits among the senators of the land. She made fine linen and sold it, and delivered a girdle to the Chanaanite. Strength and beauty are her clothing, and she shall laugh in the latter day. She has opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue. She has looked well to the paths of her house, and has not eaten her bread idle. Her children rose up, and call her blessed; her husband, and he praised her. Many daughters have gathered together riches; you have surpassed them all. Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; the woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

Lady of Sorrows and He is simply making you move and move in her Image
It is a cross. It is ~~g~~gift. "God writes strait with crooked lines."
The temptation to actively show your resentment and your moods are
means God is using to ① allow you to be more like Him and His Mother
by allowing you to participate in a special way in His Passion, and
② purify you to make you more pleasing in His sight. So do not fight
it "this cross, but accept it. It is a precious gift and a further
mark of His love for you. Accept it with gratitude--and a sense of
humor.

Sacrifice is the only language Love can speak and Love is the only
means of filling the human heart.

Pius XII said; "God is with you (catholic laymen). You are His instru-
ments; you must spend yourselves for His glory. Look---to Mary and
repeat her act of faith and humility--hehold the hand-maid of the
Lord; be it done according to thy word." Besides faith and humility
we ask of God understanding--; "I am but a child and I know not how
to go out and to come in---give therefore to thy servant an under-
standing heart." III Kings

This is a sacrament of holiness through mutual love.