

Growing Edges

April, 2000

In my recent letters to you I have been talking about the third Reformation, the “Reformation of the Heart”, which as you may remember is centered in actual obedience to Christ as a result of transformed personality. I would like to continue that conversation with you. My concern in this letter is the uniqueness of Jesus, for if the Reformation of the Heart is to have a genuine impact, it must wrestle seriously with the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

The Head of the Cosmos

The spiritual renaissance coming to birth will focus not on theories of the atonement or of social progress but on the divine/human figure of Jesus. Jesus is Savior, Teacher, Lord, Friend. Even more, he is the Lord of the universe, the Head of the cosmos. Paul says as much in Colossians, “In Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together” (1:16-17).



Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah. Even more, he is the divine Son, the second person of the Trinity. Indeed, in his very person, he is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). John Paul II writes in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, “If Jesus were only a wise man like Socrates, if he were a ‘prophet’ like Muhammad, if he were ‘enlightened’ like Buddha, without any doubt he would not be what he is. He is *the one mediator between God and humanity.*”

The True Exclusivity of the Gospel

This uniqueness of Christ, this exclusivity which says that Jesus is the only way of salvation, does not set well with modern sensibilities. People today wish every way to be valid, every belief to be true, every sincere person to be right. But, the truth be told, we are not in a position to set the rules in these matters. And the law of non-contradiction (the reality that a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time) flies in our face every time we try to have things some way other than the way they are. If Jesus *is* the Way, then those not in his way are not in The Way. Jesus lived, died, rose, and now extends to us, his disciples, the same life and power that he knew when he was among us in the flesh. That is his Way.

The disciple of Jesus actually has a transforming relationship with God which those who are not his disciples simply do not have. This is the true exclusivity of the gospel of Jesus Christ—the reality of people who have turned from darkness to light; turned from fornication and impurity and licentiousness and idolatry and sorcery and enmities and strife and jealousy and anger and quarrels and dissensions and factions and envy and drunkenness and carousing, and turned instead to love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and generosity and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:19-23). It is an exclusivity of those who are truly living and walking in the holiness and power of Jesus Christ.

The Saving Light of Jesus Christ

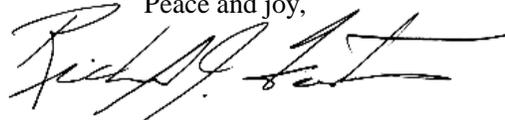
If Jesus is the only Way, as we insist he is, then what of those who have never had an opportunity to know of him or his Way? Ah, here we must understand that Jesus is far bigger than our little conceptions, and that as the divine Logos he is present everywhere and is *not* blotted out or overwhelmed by the powers of darkness (John 1:1-5). He is in truth “the true light which enlightens every person coming into the world” (John 1:9). This is the saving light of Jesus Christ which is reaching out to all peoples, even those who have never heard his name nor know of his Way. Robert Barclay, a seventeenth century Christian theologian, put it well in his *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*: “God, who out of his infinite love sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world, who tasted death for every man, has given to every man, whether Jew or Gentile, Turk or Scythian, Indian or Barbarian, of whatsoever nation, country, or

place, a certain day or time of visitation; during which day or time it is possible for them to be saved, and to partake of the fruit of Christ's death."

This is *not* universalism, which claims that all people will eventually be saved. No, this is the conviction that Jesus has been and is still reaching out to all peoples in ways we do not fully understand, extending to them the opportunity and the choice to turn toward the Light of Christ. Christ, the true Light, was reaching out to Socrates and millions more in the ancient world, and he is reaching out today even to those who have never heard his name. This is why C. S. Lewis in *The Last Battle* had one of the Calormen enter into the true heavenly Narnia. It is also why John Paul II in his 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* clearly states that whoever is saved is saved only through Jesus Christ, whether they have heard of him or not.

If all of this be so then what is the reason for and the place of Christian evangelistic and missionary effort? A crucial question and one I hope to take up in the next *Perspective*.

Peace and joy,



Richard J. Foster

Growing Together

One of the delights of working at RENOVARÉ is to work on books and to get better acquainted with the editors/writers of these products. Our most recently published Resource, *Spiritual Classics*, was co-edited by Emilie Griffin and Richard Foster and is featured in this issue of the *Perspective*. To help you know Emilie better, we asked her a few questions about *Spiritual Classics*.

Q—In looking over the variety of sources excerpted, it becomes obvious that you have read widely in the “spiritual classics.” How has this reading deepened your spiritual life?

Emilie—I experienced a conversion in my twenties. At that time I discovered spiritual reading, mostly autobiographies like C. S. Lewis’ book, *Surprised by Joy*, and Catherine Marshall’s book, *A Man Called Peter*. As these people recounted their yearnings for God, their struggles, I found it enriched me. I understood my own promptings much better. And I came to see that the experience of God is similar in many different times and places—across the centuries, God speaks to many in a voice of unmistakable clarity.

Q—Why did you decide to use the twelve disciplines as outlined in *Celebration of Discipline* as the framework for *Spiritual Classics*?

Emilie—I think these disciplines are foundational for the spiritual life. They have helped people in many times and

places. The disciplines don’t transform us, but they give a structure to our practice. They dispose us toward spiritual transformation, and grace does the rest.

Q—In the “Introduction” you mention that the “Reflection” by Richard Foster at the end of each selection is meant to become an example of what “reading with the heart” might look like. Could you explain “reading with the heart” or what you also call “spiritual reading”?

Emilie—In our busy society, we may read for many reasons: to gain information; to become experts; to be amused or entertained. But “reading with the heart”—an ancient expression—means that when we read, we open up to what the Lord wants to say to us in the text. The Lord’s voice—one of teaching and encouragement—is speaking to us but we have to be open and listen. It’s something like Mary of Bethany sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to him.

Q—Of the fifty plus writers featured in *Spiritual Classics*, some lived many centuries ago. Why should we read the works of these, as some people call them, “old writers”?

Emilie—Sometimes I think that our worst enemy these days is our sense of sophistication—often we think we have nothing to learn from the past. There are men and women of tremendous spiritual vision in every century. Circumstances may change. But someone like Martin Luther King, Jr. who fixed his eyes on Jesus and was shaped by the Sermon on the Mount can say a lot to us

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almost forty years later, and more than one hundred years ago Phoebe Palmer showed us the “shorter way” of letting go and being led by grace.

Q—Imagine that I’m a single mother with three children who works at Merrill Lynch, the investment firm. How will reading *Spiritual Classics* help me?

Emilie—I’ve been there—well, not exactly, but I first became involved in the spiritual life when I was the mother of three young children and working in a demanding and stressful job—I began to believe that being closer to God could help me as nothing else would. *Spiritual Classics* is one way of getting to know the twelve spiritual disciplines and how they can be practiced with some depth. But it’s bite-sized. So you could read these selections and reflect on them each week . . . with friends and colleagues, in a small group, or by yourself. I believe that we have excerpted some real wisdom but made it accessible to busy, modern people. If you are

working in a major corporation and carrying big responsibilities, I think you can begin to be in touch with such disciplines as guidance and study. Each one of the readings might offer another way of getting to know the Lord, to show him acting in each of fifty-two lives. And that is encouraging in any walk of life.

Q—Which of the readings do you like the most? Why?

Emilie—I like so many of them, it’s really hard to choose. I loved Paul Tournier admitting that he tried to meditate for an hour, and nothing happened! But after some reflection, I decided my favorite is André Louf who writes about prayer. In all his work (as in the selection below) he emphasizes the superabundance of the heart—the way our hearts just overflow when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit. He compares our praying to a musician strumming on a lute. Something about that simple comparison just lifts me up and refreshes me.

Interviewed by Lynda L. Graybeal

Excerpt from Spiritual Classics

BIOGRAPHY AND EDITING BY EMILIE GRIFFIN

André Louf (1929–)

André Louf is an experienced teacher of prayer. He belongs to the Cistercian religious community, which is known both in Europe and America for a life of joyful simplicity. Cistercians (sometimes called Trappists) live carefully regulated lives, doing mostly agricultural work. They observe silence, times of solitude, carefully balanced with times of work. Many people know them for their farm products: jams and jellies, cheeses, and the like. But most often they are known for the depth of their prayer lives.

In the United States, Cistercians Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating are well known as teachers of centering prayer.

In his small book, *Teach Us to Pray: Learning a Little About God*, Father Louf brings a lifetime of experience to us in a way that makes prayer attractively simply. He teaches us how easy and natural prayer can be when he answers the question, “Is Praying Difficult?”

When he speaks about “The Superabundance of the Heart” he is drawing on a very ancient tradition of heart prayer that is a precious resource to the whole Christian community.

Father Louf is Belgian; he has broad scholarly knowledge of the Desert Fathers, but always (as you will notice in the following selection) his concern is to invite us into the delight of prayer.

TEACH US TO PRAY

Is Praying Difficult?

A fourteenth-century Byzantine monk, who for a short time was Patriarch of Constantinople with the name of Callixtus II, answers this question with the illustration of the lute-player. “The lute-player bends over his instrument and listens attentively to the tune, while his fingers manipulate the plectrum and make the strings vibrate in full-tone harmony. The lute has turned into music; and the man who strums upon it is taken out of himself, for the music is soft and entrancing.”

Anyone who prays must set about it in the same way. He has a lute and a plectrum at his disposal. The lute is his heart, the strings of which are the inward senses. To get the strings vibrating and the lute playing he needs a plectrum, in this case: the recollection of God, the name of Jesus, the Word.

So the lute-player has to listen attentively and vigilantly to his heart and pluck its strings with the Name of Jesus. Until the senses open up and his heart becomes alert. The person who strums incessantly upon his heart with the Name of Jesus sets his heart a’ singing, “an ineffable happiness flows into his soul, the recollection of Jesus purifies his spirit and makes it sparkle with divine light.”

Is praying difficult?

No one is going to give you the answer to that question. This short book has no answer for you, either. It cannot pretend to be an introduction to prayer, much less a manual of instruction. We have been listening together to the witness of a centuries'-old tradition of prayer in the Church of Jesus. Something may have revealed itself to you on the way. Has the Spirit of Jesus, who never ceases from praying in your heart, suddenly disclosed and avowed Himself? Like the embryo that leapt in the womb of Elizabeth when it encountered Jesus in Mary's womb?

If not, that is no reason to feel discouraged: your Hour is still to come.

If so, then you should give everything you have to the task of catching more clearly the still sound of God within you. For there the field lies, and there the treasure is hidden. The moment you discover the treasure of prayer in the field of your heart, you will go off full of joy and sell all that you possess in order to have that treasure. And the lute is at your disposal, and the plectrum too. These are your heart, and the Word of God. The Word is, after all, very close to you, on your lips and in your heart (Rom. 10:8).

You need only pick up the plectrum and pluck the strings. To persevere in the Word and in your heart, watching and praying. There is no other way of learning how to pray. You must return to yourself and to your true and deepest nature, to the human-being-in-Jesus that you already are, purely and simply by grace. "Nobody can learn how to see. For seeing is something we can do by nature. So too with prayer. *Authentic prayer* can never be learnt from someone else. It has its own instructor within it. Prayer is God's gift to him who prays."

Superabundance of the Heart

We stand now on the threshold of prayer. Our heart has been awakened. It sees Jesus, it hears His voice, it rejoices in His Word. That Word has been turned over and over in our heart. It has purified us, cleansed us, and we have grown familiar with it. Perhaps we are even beginning to resemble this Word. Now too, it can take root in our heart and bear fruit. Now it may even become the Word of God in our flesh.

So long as we ourselves were still intent on the Word of God in our heart, we had come no further than the prelude. There comes a moment when we yield up God's Word to the Spirit within us. Then it is that our heart gives birth to prayer. And then at last the Word of God has become truly ours. We have then discovered and realized our most profound, our true identity. And then the Name of Jesus has become our name also. And together with Jesus we may with one voice call God: Abba, Father!

Prayer is the superabundance of the heart. It is brim-full and running over with love and praise, as once it was with Mary, when the Word took root in her body. So too, our heart breaks out into a Magnificat. Now the Word has achieved its "glorious course" (2 Thess. 3:1): it has gone out from God and been sown in the good soil of the heart. Having now been *chewed over* and assimilated, it is regenerated in the heart, to the praise of God. It has taken root in us and is now bearing its fruit: we in our turn utter the Word and send it back to God. We have become Word; we are prayer.

Thus prayer is the precious fruit of the Word—Word of God that has become wholly our own and in that way has been inscribed deep in our body and our psyche, and that now can become our response to the Love of the Father. The Spirit stammers it out in our heart, without our doing anything about it. It bubbles up, it flows, it runs like living water. It is no longer we who pray, but the prayer prays itself in us. The divine life of the risen Christ ripples softly in our heart.

The slow work of transfiguring the cosmos has had a beginning in us. The whole creation has been waiting for this moment: the revelation of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:19). It is going on in secret and quite unpretentiously; and yet already in Spirit and truth. We are still in the world, and we dwell already with Jesus near the Father. We still live in the flesh, and the Spirit has already made us wholly captive. For the veil has fallen from our heart, and with unveiled faces we reflect like mirrors the glory and brightness of Jesus, as we ourselves are being recreated in His image, from glory to glory, by His Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

So the word of Christ resides in our heart, in all its richness (Col. 3:16). In it we are rooted, on it we are founded, by it we order our conduct in life, and all the time we overflow with praise and thanksgiving (Col. 2:6-7). This eucharist-thanksgiving has now become our life (Col. 3:15), the superabundance of our heart, the liturgy of the new world that deep within us we already celebrate. We are in fact temples of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19).

A writer, broadcast producer, and marketing consultant, Emilie Griffin has worked extensively in Christian efforts and written several books on the spiritual life: *Turning, Clinging, Chasing the Kingdom, The Reflective Executive, Homeward Voyage, and Wilderness Time*. She speaks about the inner life throughout the U.S. Emilie and Bill live in Alexandria, Louisiana.



Going Deeper

Devotional Classics was the first RENOVARÉ Resource that we started self-publishing in 1989. Jim Smith compiled the first thirteen readings and brought them to Richard who read, edited, and added a reflection to each selection. My job was to typeset, proofread, and get them printed at a Wichita, Kansas, print shop. I also arranged for a large printing company to make plastic three-ring binders in which the first set was inserted and given to everyone who purchased the entire book. When each subsequent thirteen-reading set was done, we mailed it in a manila envelope to the people who had already paid for all fifty-two readings. Each person then had to insert the new set into the three-ring notebook.

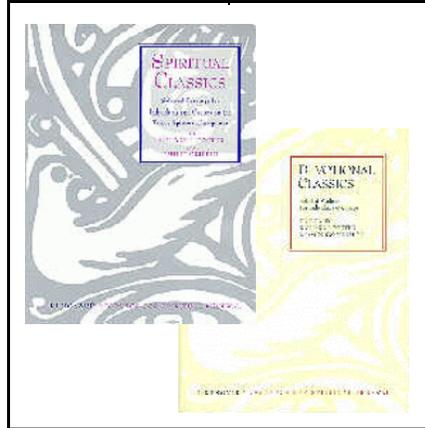
Concurrently with filling the pre-sold orders, we continued to sell *Devotional Classics* that contained less than four sets, but once all of the readings were done, we shipped everything at once. I remember ordering five hundred of the first edition and storing them in a first-floor room of Davis Hall at Friends University in which pigeons were roosting in an opening above the only window. The plastic notebook sets sold well, thank goodness, because after about three months in storage, the boxes had a distinct odor!

In spite of this humble beginning, the publisher at HarperSanFrancisco liked *Devotional Classics* and added it to their list after revising and editing it slightly in which I (thankfully) had very little part other than to proofread the final pass. Since 1993 the second edition has sold

almost one hundred fifty thousand copies and continues to be one of Harpers best sellers.

In fact, *Devotional Classics* has been so popular that we have now added a similar book, *Spiritual Classics*, to our Resource line. But this time

HarperSanFrancisco as well as HarperCollins Religious of London were on board from the beginning along with the editor, Emilie Griffin.



For those familiar with *Devotional Classics*, *Spiritual Classics* is very similar in format. There are fifty-two selections and each selection consists of a short biography of the writer, the reading, a Scripture passage, self-examination questions based on the reading and the Scripture, a reflection by Richard Foster, and a bibliography. Also like *Devotional Classics*, *Spiritual*

Classics has been designed for both individual and group use. It is dissimilar in that it is arranged around the twelve disciplines discussed in *Celebration of Discipline* rather than on the RENOVARÉ traditions.

It has taken us a number of years to compile and get *Spiritual Classics* published after we received the first requests for *DC II* (as we jokingly called it), but I think the wait was worth it. Emilie has done an excellent job of pulling together and editing a variety of readings from both well-known and obscure sources. And Richard's "Reflections" are—for lack of a better description—elucidating. If you're looking for resources that will stimulate the growth of your spirit, look no further. *Devotional Classics* and *Spiritual Classics* fill the bill.

Lynda L. Graybeal



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