

# THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS

The Exponential Growth of the Catholic Church  
In Relation to Monastic Orders

Jeff Lutes

YOU LOOK AT THE IDEAL  
AND YOU LOOK AT THE REAL  
THEN YOU LIVE IN THE GAP

You accept that you are in the gap  
and living in the gap with others.

Professor John Sumarah  
Acadia University

This book is dedicated to Dr. John Sumarah who teaches by what he says as well as by what doesn't say.

#### About the Author and Ministry

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[www.internationalharvestersforchrist.com](http://www.internationalharvestersforchrist.com)

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The author's sister and her husband on a tour of Europe visiting monasteries to meditate, pray and reflect took the pictures in this book. All photos are the property of Kirk and Dar Bartha.

## **Preface**

This is a workbook designed to enhance your spiritual formation in community with others. There is benefit to clergy and lay people alike as they delve into the lives of the Spiritual Masters. Perhaps this can serve as a guide for a weekend retreat to gain an appreciation of the depth of devotion of these amazing men and women chosen by God for extraordinary feats. It is also suggested as a course for the faithful as they meet once a week in various prayer groups. Each registrant should keep notes on what they derive. The spaces allotted may not be large enough to record all your thoughts on a given matter. Hence, a journal would be beneficial. Utilizing this resource will help you go on to further life long spiritual enhancement. Participants should also prepare their own spiritual narratives to be shared with others in the group. In essence a spiritual narrative is an account of how your relationship with Christ began. It connects significant events over your life that relates to what has formed you spiritually and leads up to present day. This workbook or manual will help you reflect and grow in your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Time should be allocated for people to share what the Lord is revealing to them. Sharing with others helps us to grow strong spiritually, because Christ did not mean for us to live our Christian existence in isolation. He has called us to be the Church, which is a collective body. Our society places a high value on rugged individualism. A body is an interconnected unit of parts dependent on one another. Hence, we need to see ourselves in community and not an isolated unit. If it is not practical or feasible for you to be part of a group setting then I would strongly encourage you to find one or two close confidants with whom you can share your spiritual development. In this technological age you may find

a blog where you can share your thoughts. Your finds can be posted on myspace.com or your Facebook page. You can use Skype to connect free over the Internet with friends who will mentor and guide you. The manuscript is available in electronic format for those with home you may be communicating by email.

As the Lord reveals Himself to you, you will want to share with others this wonderful experience. It is important for each of us to have a few very close friends who care about us deeply. They will be able to observe things about our lives that need to be attended to. So I heartily encourage you as you embark upon this spiritual journey to select people who will join this endeavor. A journal is an account of what God is saying to you and your personal thoughts and reflections along life's journey. Some refer to it as a diary. It is very therapeutic. Just as when we travel we like to take pictures, your journal can serve as a slideshow documenting your new spiritual development day by day. We need to evolve from the me generation to see ourselves collectively, as a unit of believers. So share this resource guide with at least two or three friends and encourage them to participate and share with you their new spiritual discoveries as well. This will help the body of Christ to grow and develop. I bless you in this wonderful collective venture taking you ever deeper into a glorious relationship with the magnificent Jesus Christ.

His Decreasing Servant in Weakness

*Jeff Lutes*

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### **Introduction**

A good book is said to be like an old friend. It is hoped that through these pages you will make some new friends. This list of fifty spiritual masters is not exhaustive. It takes us on a journey through the 2,000 years of church history. For myself, there are some particular figures that stood out for me. One is the priest who had such a burden for his people that it touched the whole town and people came from all over the world to visit this remarkable spiritual phenomenon. I especially like the reference to the lady who is called “The Little Flower of Jesus.” These cameos may help to create an aspiration for deeper study. I was impressed by the works of Walter Hilton. They merit deeper reading. I did not borrow from Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* because I did not want to do injustice to them. I would heartily recommend locating a spiritual director and taking the allotted time to go through the exercises. I am sure that it would be a life changing experience. The benefits of spiritual solitude and meditation are greatly overlooked in today's society.

The basic premise of the book is that the monastic movements are greatly responsible for the growth and influence of the Catholic Church. Those who have cloistered themselves away for the cause of the kingdom have done far more good than will ever be realized. Their prayers and intercessions have caused the priests among others who serve in their respective parishes to

make a difference. We underrate the importance of remaining in the presence of God. We rush in and out without proper time for reflection. Then we wonder why our lives are so harried. Our churches are often fraught with problems and many secular people dismiss any thought of attending services for just such a reason. The point being established is down through the centuries there has been those who have secluded themselves away from mainstream society to pray, reflect and meditate. Their spiritual exercises, far from being useless, have caused the inertia of the Roman Catholic Church. Without those who have entered into a monastic way of life, I contend the Church would not have reached the degree of influence and growth that it has today. If we in this postmodern, 21st-century era would go back to rediscover the solitude the spiritual masters practiced we would see remedies for our world's ills. We look to the future for modern technological advances and medical break throughs as a panacea for our present day conundrums. Perhaps the answer is found in looking back to rediscover the simplicity of quietude in the presence of God. To withdraw from secular society is not to disdain it. Perhaps it is the greatest expression of love. One of the most familiar verses in the Bible is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world." If this is foremost on the mind of God it ought to be on ours as well. To love the world is to pray for it.

Nuns, monks, and others have confined themselves away, to pray for the priests, the holy Catholic Church and the Pope. The priest is able to see his parish transformed by the power of Holy Spirit, in large measure because of those who are praying for him. The Church carries out her missionary mandate with great results because of the intercessory lives that give themselves in the service to the Lord Jesus Christ. All of us can be involved

in the great missionary enterprise and the remedy for the world's troubles as we take time in our daily routine to seek the Lord's guidance and pray.

### **1. The Didache**

The Didache is the common name for a brief early Christian treatise. The word means teaching in Greek. It was written somewhere between 50 A.D. and 106 A.D. It is also called *The Teaching Of The Twelve Apostles*. It was probably written in Egypt or Syria. Basically, it was an instruction book for the early Christian churches. In some respects, it was like our modern-day catechisms. How tragic today that many children are entering adulthood without the benefit of catechism or Sunday school classes. What was once a basic understanding of whom Jesus Christ is on the part of most people is becoming increasingly rare. This in and of itself is a matter that should move us to great intercession for the revival of the Church. Europe has been become pagan and North America is not far behind. Perhaps one of the ways to see the church return to her roots is to pick up this second century work. It had three main sections dealing with baptism, the Eucharist and church organization. The Roman Catholic Church considers it to be a part of the Collection of the Apostolic Fathers. The Shepherd of Hermas, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr and Origen all seemed to have used the work. Here is an excerpt;

1:1 There are two paths; one of life and one of death, and the difference is great between the two paths.

1:2 Now the path of life is this -- first, thou shalt love the God who made thee, thy neighbor as thyself, and all things that thou

wouldest not should be done unto thee, do not thou unto another.

1:3 and the doctrine of these maxims are as follows. Bless them that curse you, and pray for your enemies. Fast on behalf of those that persecute you; for what thank is there if ye love them that love you? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? But do ye love them that hate you, and ye will not have an enemy.<sup>1</sup>

Life is all about choices. It takes discipline to follow the narrow road and go through the straight gate instead of the broad path to destruction. M. Scott Peck a psychiatrist wrote a wonderful book entitled, *The Road Less Traveled*. In it he speaks of the need for self-discipline and delayed gratification. These are not popular themes in our culture with microwaves and drive-through service. Nonetheless, they are essential to fulfillment and personal gratification. It certainly is the road less traveled. Christ taught us to enter in at the narrow gate because wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and many there are who go in through it. Narrow is the gate and constricted is the way that leads to eternal life and few find it. Prior to the days of Hollywood, Broadway was a greater draw then it is today. It certainly was a broad way as many were met by destruction. Hollywood is anything but holy. Paul warned us about building with wood, hay and stubble; things that will not stand the fires of judgment. We need to be building our lives with gold, silver and precious stones, which can come through the fire and speak of elements that are of lasting consequence. The Didache helped instruct people in choosing the narrow way of holiness.

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<sup>1</sup> The Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Translated by Charles H. Hoole

Hollywood has become the greater educator of the masses today with its often anti-Christian message.

Robert Frost (1874 – 1963) wrote a marvelous poem entitled, *The Road not Taken*. In the opening verse he writes of two roads that diverged in a yellow wood and was sorry that he could not travel them both. In the closing verse he speaks with a sigh of ages latter and the difference it meant to travel the road less traveled. Our choice may not be the popular one however it is the path of life. The Didache instructed people at the dawn of Christendom to choose the correct path. It is not always easy to follow the path of life. The writer or writers of The Didache possibly had direct contact with the some of the twelve disciples. This makes it extremely interesting. It is a guide to help enhance our spiritual walk. It is like going back two thousand years to experience what it must have been like to be a Christian in the generation immediately following Christ's death. This should invigorate us to have a sense of nearness to the Lord Jesus Christ and be part of the body of believers who have been serving him for two millennia.

What is spirituality but the choice of the path of life over the path of death? To bless those who curse you is a conscious decision that requires discipline. This catechism as it were, serves as a sufficient guide to a holy life and devotion to Christ. As part of the grouping referred to as the works of the Apostolic Fathers who possibly had direct contact with the twelve disciples of Jesus it serves as an authentic guide to enhance our spiritual walk.

How is the Didache relevant for our spiritual development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

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What are some choices you have been faced with of late where it would have been easier to take the road of hating someone, for example but you chose to stay on the course of blessing?

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## **2. The Shepherd of Hermas**

The Shepherd of Hermas is sometimes just called, "The Shepherd." It is a Christian work of the second century, considered a valuable book by many Christians, and occasionally considered part of the Bible. It was cited as Scripture by Irenaeus and Tertullian and was bound with the New Testament in the Codex Sinaiticus listed between the Acts of the Apostles and the Acts of Paul. The Shepherd had great authority in the second and third centuries. The book consists of five visions granted to Hermas, a former slave. This is followed by twelve mandates or commandments, and ten similitudes, or parables. It commences abruptly in the first person: "He who brought me up sold me to a certain Rhoda, who was at Rome. After many years I met her again, and began to love her as a sister." As Hermas was on the road to Cumae, he had a vision of Rhoda, who was presumably dead. She told him that she was his accuser in heaven, on account of an unchaste thought the (married) narrator had once had concerning her, though only in passing. He was to pray for forgiveness for himself and all his house. He is consoled by a

vision of the Church in the form of an aged woman, weak and helpless from the sins of the faithful, who tells him to do penance and to correct the sins of his children. Subsequently he sees her made younger through penance, yet wrinkled and with white hair; then again, as quite young but still with white hair; and lastly, she shows herself as glorious as a Bride.

The reference to Pope Clement I suggests a date between 88 A.D. and 97 A.D. for at least the first two visions. Since Paul sent greetings to a Hermas, a Christian of Rome (Romans 16:14), a minority have followed Origen's opinion that he was the author of this religious allegory. However, textual criticism, the nature of the theology, and the author's apparent familiarity with Revelation and other Johannine texts, set the date of composition securely in the 2nd century.

In reading the Shepherd of Hermas, a person recognizes their personal need to deal seriously with sin. Often flagrant thoughts are excused as natural impulses that have no repercussions. We discover it is not enough to simply discard them; they must be eradicated. This comes about only through meditation and personal reflection whereby the Holy Spirit can lead us into a fully developed relationship with Christ and away from hurtful, disdainful practices.

As in Summer Living Trees are distinguished from Withered by Fruit and Living Leaves, so in the World to Come the Just Differ from the Unjust in Happiness.

He showed me again many trees, some budding, and others withered. And he said to me, "Do you see these trees?" "I see, sir," I replied, "some putting forth buds, and others withered."

"Those," he said, "which are budding are the righteous who are to live in the world to come; for the coming world is the summer of the righteous, but the winter of sinners. When, therefore, the mercy of the Lord shines forth, then shall they be made manifest who are the servants of God, and all men shall be made manifest. For as in summer the fruits of each individual tree appear, and it is ascertained of what sort they are, so also the fruits of the righteous shall be manifest, and all who have been fruitful in that world shall be made known. But the heathen and sinners, like the withered trees which you saw, will be found to be those who have been withered and unfruitful in that world, and shall be burnt as wood, and [so] made manifest, because their actions were evil during their lives. For the sinners shall be consumed because they sinned and did not repent, and the heathen shall be burned because they knew not Him who created them. Do you therefore bear fruit, that in that summer your fruit may be known? And refrain from much business, and you will never sin: for they who are occupied with much business commit also many sins, being distracted about their affairs, and not at all serving their Lord. How, then," he continued, "can such a one ask and obtain anything from the Lord, if he serve Him not? They who serve Him shall obtain their requests, but they who serve Him not shall receive anything. And in the performance even of a single action a man can serve the Lord; for his mind will not be perverted from the Lord, but he will serve Him, having a pure mind. If, therefore, you do these things, you shall be able to bear fruit for the life to come. And every one who will do these things shall bear fruit."<sup>2</sup>

In the above quotation we see his mystical tendency to hear God speaking to him through dreams and visions. This leads a person to be open to the Holy Spirit to reveal Himself in unique ways. Often in the hustle and bustle of life we are too busy to hear God speak. It is generally only as we slow down that we can hear God speak to us in unique ways. It would be beneficial to keep a journal by your bedside in which you can record your dreams. The Holy

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<sup>2</sup> The Shepherd of Hermas

Spirit prompts young people by times with visions. Older people may feel led by the Holy Spirit to have a rest in the middle of the day. They may not be tired. It could be that the Holy Spirit wants to reveal something to them in a dream. If they ignore this impulse they miss an opportunity to receive a revelation from God. In recording your dreams and visions you may discover that God is choosing to reveal Himself to you very powerfully. One word of caution however; dreams and visions must never be put above the canon of Scripture. If an impression from the Holy Spirit is contrary to the Word of God, disregard it. As you grow more mature in your walk with the Holy Spirit, you will recognize the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ speaking to you.

Question: How do you address secret, besetting sins in your life?

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### **3. St. Ignatius of Antioch (50-107)**

He was the Bishop of Antioch and also called Theophorus. He wrote several highly regarded letters and became a prisoner condemned to be executed for his faith. He sought to counteract the false teachings of two groups; the Judaizers who did not accept the authority of the New Testament and the Docetists, who held that Christ's sufferings and death were apparent, but not real. During his lifetime, a shift was taking place whereby the church was drifting from its Jewish roots to assimilate with certain Greco Roman factors. Here is a portion of the Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans.

I GLORIFY God, even Jesus Christ, who has given you such wisdom. For I have observed that you are perfected in an immoveable faith, as if you were nailed to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, both in the flesh and in the spirit, and are established in love through the blood of Christ, being fully persuaded with respect to our Lord, that He was truly of the seed of David according to the flesh, Romans 1:3 and the Son of God according to the will and power of God; that He was truly born of a virgin, was baptized by John, in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled Matthew 3:15 by Him; and was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, nailed [to the cross] for us in His flesh. Of this fruit we are by His divinely blessed passion, that He might set up a standard Isaiah 5:26, Isaiah 49:22 for all ages, through His resurrection, to all His holy and faithful [followers], whether among Jews or Gentiles, in the one body of His Church.<sup>3</sup>

This classic quote enables us to identify with the Lord Jesus. Its orthodoxy and adherence to Scripture serves us faithfully whereby some spiritual guides may lead us in spurious directions because they are not doctrinally grounded.

Question: Imagine Christ hanging on the cross (a crucifix in front of you at this time would be helpful.) What do you feel the Holy Spirit is saying to you? What do you imagine Christ was feeling while on the cross? How does His sufferings speak to you and what implications does it have?

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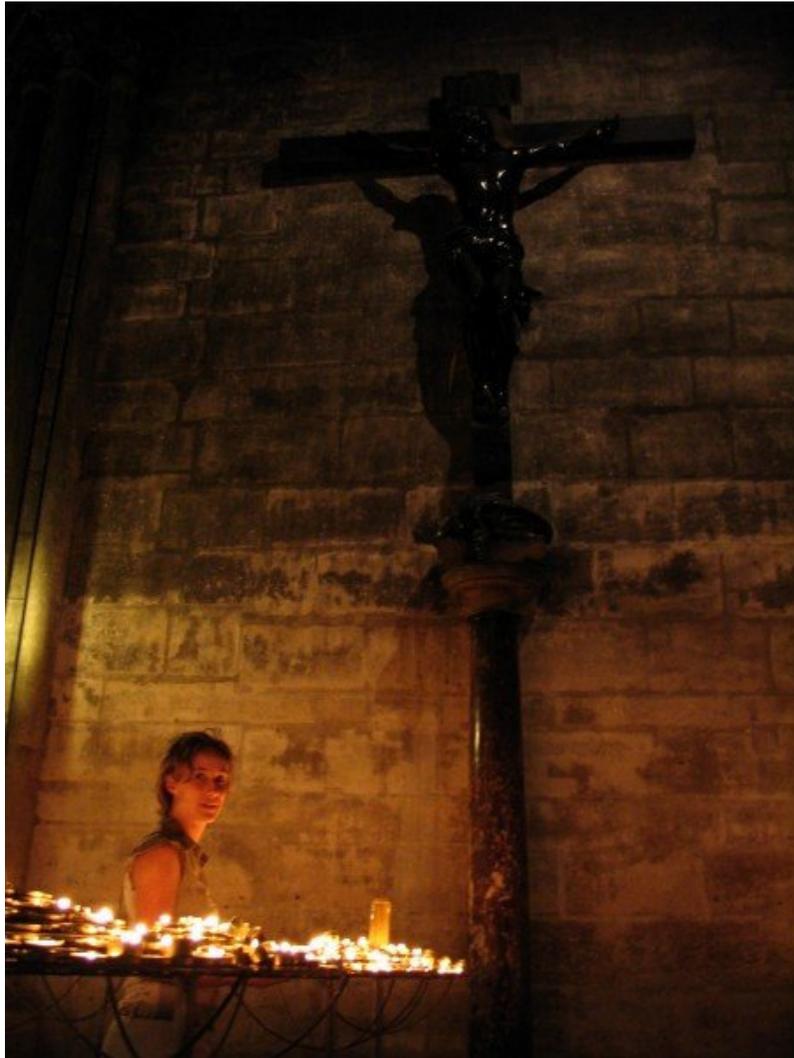


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<sup>3</sup> The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans written by St. Ignatius of Antioch (50-107)



### **Before a Crucifix**

It has been said that a person cannot crucify himself. If he were to take a hammer in one hand and nail his feet to the cross he may succeed in nailing the other hand but one limb would still be free. If with great dexterity he took the hammer up in his toes he could possibly hammer each hand

individually to the cross but he would still have a foot free. The absurdity is readily apparent. In Galatians 2:20 the Apostle Paul speaks of being crucified with Christ. Ironically in the same chapter and verse but in Colossians he relates that we are dead with Christ from the rudiments of this world. Think of a supreme insult that someone could levy against you. If you are truly crucified with Christ they should not be able to get a reaction from you. They may receive a Christ-like response but not a carnal reaction. High school biology students are instructed to spread out a dead frog and lay bare his nerves. An electrical current is attached to the nerve and the bull frog's leg twitches. Spiritually speaking, people should not be able to hit a raw nerve with us. Our lives are hid with Christ. When Christ hung dying on the cross He prayed, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." We need to reckon our sinful nature to be dead to sin. This requires a lot of meditation. It will only come by entering into our prayer closet and reflecting on the majesties and glories of the King. When we emerge to seek only His glory all insults become as nothing. Inversely, any adulation and praise is directed to Christ. The next time you are tempted to react in the flesh to insults and indignities reflect on the scene of Christ's crucifixion. He bore our shame and humiliation in our stead. If Christ went through all of this to redeem us the least we can do is put up with a few taunts from our accusers.

#### **4. Polycarp**

Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna, probably born in A.D 65. There were those living at that time who had actually walked and talked with Jesus on

the earth. Polycarp wrote a letter from Smyrna to the church in Phillipi which the apostle Paul had founded.

Those things, brethren, I write to you concerning righteousness, not because I take anything upon myself, but because you have invited me to do so. For neither I, nor any other such one, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. He, when among you, accurately and steadfastly taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. And when absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building you up in that faith which has been given you, and which, being followed by hope, and preceded by love towards God, and Christ, and our neighbor, is the mother of us all.<sup>4</sup>

We need to be careful with mysticism that we do not neglect the Word of God. There is the tendency to circumvent the canon of Scripture by ecstatic utterances. This can be very dangerous. If revelations contradict the Bible, they most certainly are not from God's Holy Spirit. They often are perpetuated by human emotion and stroke of the ego of the seer. Never neglect the Word of God and daily devotional reading in seeking after dreams and visions. This is a sure and certain recipe for spiritual disaster. Many cults and breakaway splinter groups from the church develop, because people carelessly and vainly elevate supposed revelations over the agreed upon word of God. To seek the supernatural with out being firmly grounded in holy Writt is foolish. Polycarp in the above cited reference stressed the importance of the study of the Apostle Paul's writings for the formation of the spiritual life. There can be a tendency to neglect the plain, old-fashioned

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicen Fathers* (American ed., rev. by A. Cleveland Coxe; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmanns Publishjng Company, 1950-1951, \* Vol. I, p. 33.

hard work of exegesis and study of the doctrines of Scripture for the emotional high of light devotional reading. Even as foundational as they are books such as the *Imitation of Christ*, *The Spiritual Exercises*, etc. must not be a substitute for the actual study of the Bible. These are always to be secondary. After a person has studied a portion of the Word of God for the day he can then go on to the literary works of the spiritual masters. These may be inspired and beneficial to the development of one's spiritual life, but they can never serve as a substitute for the revealed word of God.

Discuss Polycarp's statement, "if you carefully study" in reference to the works of the Apostle Paul. What methods do you utilize for the interpretation and personal application of the Bible?

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## **5. Justin Martyr**

In the relative safety of North America, and Europe it is hard for us to imagine laying down our lives for Christ. However this is not so for many Christians in closed countries to the Gospel, which is similar in some respects to the dangers Christians in the early centuries of the Church faced. The Romans ruled their empire with an iron fist. They looked with great suspicion upon this new religion called The Way. The Emperor was worshiped as a god. People were commanded to acknowledge his lordship. Caesar and Christ are words that are similar in sound. Some Christians in wanting to escape martyrdom might slur the words, Christ is Lord when

forced to say, Caesar is Lord. The debate ensued whether a person could serve the Lord better in life or by death. After all is not a live dog better than a dead lion? There were those and are those today who would rather die than live with a conscience that reminds them they denied the Lord Jesus Christ. Polycarp, for example, when being forced to recant answered, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and he never did me any injury; how then can I blaspheme my King and my savior." He was burned at the stake and stabbed.

Justin was born in or about the year A.D. 110 in Flavia Neapolis, a Roman colony in the Samaritan region of Palestine. He studied the great Greek philosophers. One day he conversed with an old man who was a Christian. Justin was seeking the highest human wisdom. Through the old man, he came to see the revelations given to the Hebrew prophets were fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his search for wisdom was fulfilled in the Savior. He began to read the Old Testament and observed the lives of the Christians. He discovered the meaning of life and became a Christian himself. He was never ordained but he became an untiring lay evangelist. He visited Ephesus, Corinth and Rome. He is noted to have said, "Everyone who can preach the truth and does not preach it incurs the judgment of God." Among his writings which have survived, the most important are the *Apologies* addressed to the authorities of Rome and his *Dialogue with Trypho*. Trypho was an Orthodox Jew who Justin met in Ephesus, and with whom he had a long debate. He sought to convince the Jew that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of all the longings and hopes of the Old Testament. This is quite out of keeping with the teachings of Marcion who divorced the God of Judaism from the New Testament. He basically looked at the God of the Old

Testament as being an inferior deity. He is not inferior. The God revealed in the Old Testament is the same as the God in the New Testament. Our understanding of Him is completed by the New Testament writings. Justin Martyr's writings are orthodox and his life serves as witness even to this day of the value of undying fidelity to Jesus Christ.

Justin Martyr suffered martyrdom around A.D. 165. Ask yourself if you could die for the Lord Jesus Christ, or would you deny Him? What spiritual and mental preparations would you have to make in order to stand trial for Jesus Christ? How would you prepare yourself to be cross examined for your faith?

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## **6. Clement of Alexandria**

Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens), was the first member of the Church of Alexandria. He was one of its most distinguished teachers. He was born about the middle of the 2nd century, and died between 211 A.D. and 216 A.D. Clement of Alexandria had three major works of which *The Stomata* is one that consists of three books. It attempts, on the basis of Scripture and tradition, to give such an account of the Christian faith to answer all the demands of learned men, and conduct the student into the innermost realities of his belief.

Down to the seventeenth century Clement was venerated as a saint. His name was to be found in the list of martyrs and his feast fell on December 4. He emphasized the permanent importance of philosophy for the fullness of Christian knowledge, explained with special predilection the relation between knowledge and faith and sharply criticized those who were unwilling to make any use of philosophy. All truth is God's truth. Ancient Greek Philosophers were engaged in a search for the meaning of life. Plato for example, obviously had glimpses of truth. Clement was quite opposed to Stoic philosophy which distanced itself from emotion. The educated classes of his day often mixed Stoicism and Platonism. Clement would not have us create a hodge podge of secular philosophy and religion. Neither, on the other hand would he have us distance ourselves from philosophy. He venerated knowledge but not in the sense of the Gnostics of his day. Faith not knowledge is the basis of our relationship with Christ. There is great danger in placing special revelation above the Bible. Perhaps what we most learn from Clement of Alexandria is that Christians are not to avoid philosophy. It can help open a door way but it must not be allowed to supersede Christ for He is the crowning revelation of God and in Him is all knowledge and understanding. Prior to Jesus, philosophy was all the Greeks had to direct them in righteousness and piety. It was a kind of preparatory training. "For your foot," it is said, "will not stumble, if you refer what is good, whether belonging to the Greeks or to us, to Providence" (Proverbs 3:23.) The Greeks were well known for their philosophers. They were schoolmasters to the Hellenic mind similar in some respects to the law, which was a schoolmaster to the Jews (Galatians 3:24.) We do not throw out the law now that Christ has come and neither do we throw out philosophy. This is not of course to put philosophy on par with the Old Testament.

Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for the perfect Christ. For more information read *The Stomata* by Clement of Alexandrai, particularly Chapter 5, "Philosophy the Handmaid of Theology." For Clement of Alexandria we see the use of philosophy as a servant to bring us to Christ.

Further, Plato the philosopher says that the end is twofold: that which is communicable, and exists first in the ideal forms themselves, which he also calls "the good;" and that which partakes of it, and receives its likeness from it, as is the case in the men who appropriate virtue and true philosophy. Wherefore also Cleanthes, in the second book, *On Pleasure*, says that Socrates everywhere teaches that the just man and the happy are one and the same, and execrated the first man who separated the just from the useful, as having done an impious thing. For those are in truth impious who separate the useful from that which is right according to the law. Sometimes he calls it a consistent and harmonious life, sometimes the highest perfection in accordance with virtue; and this he places in the knowledge of the Good, and in likeness to God, demonstrating likeness to be justice and holiness with wisdom. For is it not thus that some of our writers have understood that man straightway on his creation received what is "according to the image," but that what is according "to the likeness" he will receive afterwards on his perfection? Plato teaches that the virtuous man shall have this likeness accompanied with humility.<sup>5</sup>

Question: Do you see philosophy and religion as mutually exclusive?

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<sup>5</sup> "The Stomata," by Clement of Alexandria Chapter 22. Plato's Opinion, that the Chief Good Consists in Assimilation to God, and Its Agreement with Scripture

Comment on, “Socrates everywhere teaches that the just man and the happy are one and the same.” Do you find this to be generally true in your life; when you live a righteous life you are happy?

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Differentiate between what it means to be created in the image of God and the likeness of God. All men are created in the image of God with a propensity for fellowship with Him but it is only when we are in communion with His Son that we are transformed into the likeness of God.

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## 7. Tertullian

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, anglicized as Tertullian, (ca. 155-230) was a church leader and prolific author of Early Christianity. He also was a notable early defender of the Christian faith. He was born, lived and died in Carthage, in what is today Tunisia. Tertullian denounced Christian doctrines he considered heretical but later in life adopted views that came to be regarded as heretical themselves. He was the first great writer of Latin Christianity, thus sometimes known as the "Father of the Latin Church." He introduced the term “Trinity,” as the Latin *trinitas*, to the Christian vocabulary and also probably of the formula "three Persons, one Substance" as the Latin “tres Personae, una Substantia” (itself from the Koine or common Greek, the language the New Testament was written in “treis

Hypostases, Homousios”) and also the terms *Vetus Testamentum* (“Old Testament”) and *Novum Testamentum* (“New Testament.”) Tertullian left the Church of Rome late in his life and joined the heretical Montanists, thus explaining his failure to attain being recognized as a saint.

According to this model, we subjoin, "Your will be done in the heavens and on the earth;" not that there is some power withstanding to prevent God's will being done, and we pray for Him the successful achievement of His will; but we pray for His will to be done *in all*. For, by figurative interpretation of *flesh* and *spirit*, we are "heaven" and "earth;" albeit, even if it is to be understood simply, still the sense of the petition is the same, that *in us* God's will be done on earth, to make it possible, namely, for it to be done also in the heavens. What, moreover, *does* God will, but that we should walk according to His Discipline? We make petition, then, that He supply us with the substance of His will, and the capacity to do it, that we may be saved both in the heavens and on earth; because the sum of His will is the salvation of them whom He has adopted. There is, too, that will of God which the Lord accomplished in preaching, in working, in enduring: for if He Himself proclaimed that He did not His own, but the Father's will, without doubt those things which He used to do *were* the Father's will; John 6:38 unto which things, as unto exemplars, we are now provoked; to preach, to work, to endure even unto death. And we *need* the will of God, that we may be able to fulfill these duties. Again, in saying, "Your will be done," we are even wishing well to ourselves, in so far that there is nothing in evil in the will of God; even if, proportionally to each one's deserts, somewhat other is imposed on us. So by this expression we premonish our own selves unto patience. The Lord also, when He had wished to demonstrate to us, even in His own flesh, the flesh's infirmity, by the reality of suffering, said, "Father, remove this Your cup;" and remembering Himself, *added*, "save that not my will, but Yours be done." Luke 22:42 Himself *was* the Will and the Power of the Father:

and yet, for the demonstration of the patience, which was due,  
He gave Himself up *to* the Father's will.<sup>6</sup>

Tertullian on prayer gives an exegesis of the Lord's Prayer. Meditation on each phrase can help deepen one's intimacy with Christ. His work for example, on modesty states, "it is the flower of manners." This demonstrates his works have great spiritual benefit in deepening our growth in grace. His work on patience is another example of how he can help us develop Christian graces.

Assignment: Copy out what is referred to as the Lord's Prayer in your journal or notebook and section by section write down your reflections of what you believe it to mean.

Our Father which art in heaven,

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Hallowed be thy name.

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Thy kingdom come.

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Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.

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<sup>6</sup> "*Prayer*," Tertullian Chapter 4. The Third Clause

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Give us this day our daily bread.

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And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

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And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

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For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

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Prayers should not be begging and trying to coax God to do things we think He doesn't want to do. It is not twisting God's arm up His back. Rather, one aspect of prayer is to linger in His presence, growing to know Him and discerning what His will is for our lives. So it is not trying to make God do something rather it is remaining in His presence so that He can mold us and shape us and perform His will through us. This generally cannot be done in a

matter of minutes. Prayer need not be measured by hands on the clock. When we feel supple enough to do His will then we might go from His presence to do His bidding. It is hard to hear God when we are always talking to Him. We need to be silent and simply meditate by times. We should not rush into His presence nor be hurried to leave His presence. Rather, let us follow the example of young Joshua, who after the children of Israel left the tent of meeting would linger for more of God. He was honored with the position of leader of the Jews after Moses passed away because God knew he could trust him.

## 8. Origen

Origen ( Greek *Ōrigénēs*, 185–*ca.* 254) was an early Christian scholar, theologian and one of the most distinguished of the early fathers of the Christian Church. He is thought to have been born at Alexandria and died at Caesarea. His writings are important as one of the first intellectual attempts to describe Christianity.

Such are the prayers, which are really spiritual because the spirit was praying in the heart of the saints, recorded in Scripture, and they are full of unutterably wonderful declarations. In the first book of Kings there is the prayer of Hannah, partially, because the whole of it was not committed to writing since she was ‘speaking in her heart’ when she persevered in prayer before the Lord; and in Psalms, the seventeenth psalm is entitled “A prayer of David,” and the ninetieth “A prayer of Moses, man of God,” and the hundred and second “A prayer of a poor man at a time he is weary and pours forth his supplication before the Lord.”

These are prayers which, because truly prayers made and spoken with the spirit, are also full of the declarations of the wisdom of God, so that one may say of the truths they proclaim “Who is wise that he shall understand them? And understanding, then he shall fully know them.” Since therefore it is so great an undertaking to write about prayer, in order to think and speak worthily of so great a subject, we need the special illumination of the Father, and the teaching of the first born Word himself, and the inward working of the Spirit, I pray as a man—for I by no means attribute to myself any capacity for prayer—that I may obtain the Spirit of prayer before I discourse upon it, and I entreat that a discourse full and spiritual may be granted to us and that the prayers recorded in the Gospels may be elucidated.<sup>7</sup>

Question: What is your understanding of what it means to pray in the Spirit?

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## 9. Saint Cyprian

Saint Cyprian (Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus) (died September 14, 258) was Bishop of Carthage and an important early Christian writer. He was probably born at the beginning of the third century in north Africa, perhaps at Carthage, where he received an excellent classical education. After converting to Christianity, he became a bishop (249 AD) and eventually died a martyr at Carthage.

Moreover, when we stand praying, beloved brethren, we ought to be watchful and earnest with our whole heart, intent on our

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<sup>7</sup> Origen on Prayer Translated by William A. Curtis

prayers. Let all carnal and worldly thoughts pass away, nor let the soul at that time think on anything but the object only of its prayer. For this reason also, the priest, by way of preface before his prayer, prepares the minds of the brethren by saying, "Lift up your hearts," that is so upon the peoples of a response, "we lift them up unto the Lord," he may be reminded that he himself ought to think of nothing but the Lord.<sup>8</sup>

Share with the group how you deal with distractions in prayer? How do you overcome disturbances and hindrances to prayer?

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Can you see the Rosary as way of deepening devotion and an aid to prayer? What helps you to be consistent in your prayer life?

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## **10. Athanasius of Alexandria**

Athanasius of Alexandria (also spelled "Athanasios") (c. 293 – May 2, 373) was a Christian bishop, the Bishop of Alexandria in the fourth century. He is revered as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Church and regarded as a great leader of the Church by the Protestants. Roman Catholics have declared him, earliest living, one of the thirty-three doctors of the Church, and he is counted as one of the four great doctors of the Eastern Church. His feast day is May 15 in

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<sup>8</sup> Tascius Caecilius Cyprianus, On the Lord's prayer

the Oriental Orthodox churches, in the Coptic Orthodox Church, January 18 and May 2 in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches.

Athanasius is also the first person to identify the same twenty-seven books of the New Testament that are in use today. Up until then, various similar lists of works to be read in churches were in use. A milestone in the evolution of the collection or canon of New Testament books, is his Easter letter from Alexandria, written in 367 A.D, usually referred to as his thirty-ninth Festal Letter. Pope Damasus, the Bishop of Rome in 382 A.D. proclaimed a list of books which contained a New Testament canon identical to that of Athanasius. A Synod in Hippone in 393 repeated Athanasius' and Damasus' New Testament list without the epistle to the Hebrews and a synod in Carthage in 397 repeated Athanasius' and Damasus' complete New Testament list.

Discuss how a study of the Spiritual Fathers can foster greater unity and understanding between Protestants and Catholics. Set out your points below. Do you feel the Protestant church has been deprived by and large of this body of rich teaching?

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### **11. Ephrem the Syrian**

Ephrem the Syrian, c. 306- 373 was a deacon and theologian of the fourth century. He is venerated by Christians throughout the world, and especially among Syriac Christians, as a saint. Ephrem wrote a wide variety of hymns,

poems, homilies and Biblical commentaries. These were works of practical theology for the edification of the Church in troubled times. So popular, were his works, that, for centuries after his death, Christian authors wrote hundreds of works pretending to be him. Ephrem's works demonstrate an early vibrant expression of the Christian faith. Much of what we have today is influenced by the European mode of thought. His works depict the Eastern methods of teaching.

- Prayer is a guard of prudence, control of wrath, restraint of pride, cleansing of malice, destruction of envy, righting of impiety.
- Prayer is strength of bodies, prosperity of a household, good order of a city, might of a kingdom, trophy of war, and assurance of peace.
- Prayer is a seal of virginity, fidelity in marriage, weapon of travelers, guardian of sleepers, courage of the wakeful, abundance for farmers, safety of those who sail.
- Prayer is an advocate for those being judged, remission for the bound, consolation for the grieving, gladness for the joyful, comfort for mourners, a feast on birthdays, a crown for the married, a shroud for the dying.
- Prayer is converse with God, equal honour with the Angels, progress in good things, averting of evils, righting of sinners.
- Prayer made the whale a house for Jonas, brought Ezechias back to life from the gates of death, turned the flame to wind of moisture for the Youths in Babylon. Through prayer Elias bound the heaven not to rain for three years and six months.

See, brethren, what strength prayer has. There is no possession more precious than prayer in the whole of human life. Never be parted from it; never abandon it. But, as our Lord said, let us pray that our toil may not be for nothing, 'When you stand in prayer, forgive if you have anything against anyone, that your heavenly Father may forgive you your faults'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ephrem the Syrian on Prayer.

O Lord may the works of your herdsman not be squandered.  
 I will not then have troubled your sheep, but as far as I was able, I will have kept the wolves away from them, and I will have built, as far as I was capable, Enclosures of hymns for the lambs of your flock. I will have made a disciple of the simple and unlearned, and I will have given them a strong hold on the shepherd's staff, the healers' medicine, and the combatants' armour<sup>10</sup>

List what are for you, the personal benefits of prayer:

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## 12. Basil of Caesarea

Basil of Caesarea (ca. 330 – January 1, 379), also called “Saint Basil the Great,” was Bishop of Caesarea, a leading churchmen in the 4th century. The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Eastern Catholic churches consider him a saint and one of the three Holy Hierarchs, together with Gregory Naianzus and John Chrysostom. Basil, Gregory Nazianzus, and Basil's brother Gregory of Nyssa are called the Cappadocian Father. The Roman Catholic Church considers him a saint and a Doctor of the Church.

Share your understanding of the Eastern Orthodox Church. A divide took place over the debate as to whether the Holy Spirit emanated from both the Father and Son or just the Son. Imagine where we would be had such a divide not taken place. Imagine where we would be had there been no Protestant Reformation and no Council of Trent. What would the world say

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<sup>10</sup> Ephrem the Syrian. *Hymns against Heresy*, LVI

if we truly were one as Christ prayed in John 17? How can we develop unity  
without                      sacrificing                      doctrinal                      purity?

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### 13. Jerome

Jerome (ca. 347 – September 30, 420) is best known as the translator of the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin. He also was a defender of the Christian faith (apologist.) Jerome's edition, the Vulgate is still an important Biblical text of the Roman Catholic Church. He is recognized by the Vatican as a doctor of the Church.

In stained-glass windows of the Roman Catholic Church it has been usual to represent him, the patron of theological learning, as a cardinal, by the side of the Bishop Augustine, Archbishop Ambrose and Pope Gregory I.

"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, thou art in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the steep place. Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." Whilst thou coveredst thy countenance like Moses and the veil of the law remained, I neither saw thy face, nor did I condescend to hear thy voice. I said, "Yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear." But now with unveiled face behold my glory, and shelter thyself in the cleft and steep places of the solid rock. On hearing this the bride disclosed the mysteries of chastity: "<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> St Jerome (c. 320-420): On The Song of Songs, From the treatise Against Jovinian

Discuss how the Song of Solomon is a rich teaching on loyalty to Christ and for some has become a beckoning call to a life of chastity and devotion to Christ's Church in a monastic way of life.

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#### **14. Saint Ambrose**

Saint Ambrose (c. 340 – 4 April 397), Catholic Bishop of Milan was one of the most eminent bishops of the 4th century, together with Augustine of Hippo, Jerome, and Gregory I, he is counted as one of the four doctors of the West and of ancient church history.

1. WE have spoken daily upon subjects connected with morals, when the deeds of the Patriarchs or the precepts of the Proverbs were being read, in order that being taught and instructed by these you might grow accustomed to enter the ways of the ancients and to walk in their paths, and obey the divine commands; in order that being renewed by baptism you might hold to that manner of life which beseems those who are washed.
2. The season now warns us to speak of the Mysteries, and to set forth the purport of the sacraments, which if we had thought it well to teach before baptism to those who were not yet initiated, we should be considered rather to have betrayed than to have portrayed the Mysteries. And then, too, another reason is that the light itself of the Mysteries will shed itself with more effect upon those who are expecting they know not what, than if any discourse had come beforehand.
3. Open, then, your ears, inhale the good savour of eternal life which has been breathed upon you by the grace of the sacraments; which was signified to you by us, when, celebrating the mystery of the opening, we said, "Epphatha,

which is, Be opened," Mark 7:34 that whosoever was coming in quest of peace might know what he was asked, and be bound to remember what he answered.<sup>12</sup>

Relate how mediation can take you deeper into the mysteries of God's word and union with Christ yet never fully coming to a complete understanding. Discuss the benefits of meditation and silence. Do you see a difference between meditation and holy silence?

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### **15. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus**

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – January 25, 389), also known as “St. Gregory the Theologian” or “Gregory Nazianzen” was a fourth century Christian bishop of Constantinople. Gregory is widely considered the most accomplished rethorist of the patristic age. He was able to cleverly present the claims of the Gospel in such a way that men would be convinced of their authenticity. He is honored as a saint by the Roman Catholic church, and as a doctor of the Church. He is also a highly regarded as a saint in Eastern orthodoxy and the Eastern Catholic churches.

I will stand upon my watch, saith the venerable Habakkuk [2:1]; and I will take my post beside him today on the authority and observation which was given me of the Spirit; and I will look forth, and will observe what shall be said to me. Well, I have taken my stand, and looked forth; and behold a man riding on the clouds and he is very high, and his countenance is as the

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<sup>12</sup> Ambrose on the Mysteries

countenance of an Angel, and his vesture as the brightness of piercing lightning; and he lifts his hand toward the East, and cries with a loud voice. His voice is like the voice of a trumpet; and round about Him is as it were a multitude of the Heavenly Host; and he saith: <sup>13</sup>

What does it mean for you to be constant in prayer and to stand your watch for Christ? How can you see this making a difference in the Lord's work today?

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## 16. Saint Patrick

Saint Patrick (Latin: Patricius, Irish: Naomh) was a Christian missionary and is the patron saint of Ireland. Patrick was born in Roman Britain. When he was about sixteen he was captured by Irish raiders and taken as a slave to Ireland, where he lived for six years before escaping and returning to his family. His father and grandfather before him had served in the Church. He too entered the Church and became a deacon and the Bishop. He later returned to Ireland as a missionary, working in the north and west of the island, but little is known about the places where he actually worked. Saint Patrick is well beloved even to this day by many of the Irish and venerated. That the effect of his missionary work continues to modern times is a testament to his devotion and love for the Irish people. We do not have

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<sup>13</sup> ST. GREGORY, BISHOP OF NAZIANZEN, CALLED THE THEOLOGIAN: ORATION XLV (Second Paschal Oration) [Circa A.D. 383]. Translated by Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow

verifiable evidence to solidly fix dates to Patrick's life, but it appears he was active as a missionary in Ireland during the second half of the fifth century. Two letters by him survive as well as biographies written from the seventh century onwards. If a work entitled, *Annals of Ulster* is accepted it would appear that he lived from 373 A.D. to 493 A.D. and that he ministered in northern Ireland from 433 A.D onwards. These dates are difficult to establish because writing only arrived in Ireland after the establishment of Christianity.

Patrick recounts that he had a vision a few years after returning home:

I saw a man coming, as it were from Ireland. His name was Victoricus, and he carried many letters, and he gave me one of them. I read the heading: "The Voice of the Irish". As I began the letter, I imagined in that moment that I heard the voice of those very people who were near the wood of Foclut, which is beside the western sea—and they cried out, as with one voice: "We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us."<sup>14</sup>

Do you feel the North American church has deprived itself of spiritual enrichment because of its disdain for visions and special messages from God? What cautions need to be exercised in accounting revelations from the Lord?

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<sup>14</sup> De Paor, Liam, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age*. Four Courts, Dublin, 1993. ISBN 1-85182-144-9

Discuss how difficult it must have been for St. Patrick and what had to occur before he would return from the safety of his own land to go back to the island of his captors where he had spent years in slavery to serve as a missionary?

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### **17. John Chrysostom**

John Chrysostom (349 A.D. to 407 A.D., Greek: Ioannes Chrysostomos) was the Archbishop of Constantinople. He was known for his eloquent preaching and denunciation of the abuse of authority by both ecclesiastical and political leaders. After his death he was given the Greek surname Chrysostomos, which meant “Golden Mouthed.”

The Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches honored him as a saint with a feast day set on November the 13th and count him among the three holy hierarchs together with Saints Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian. He is recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as a saint and a Doctor of the Church. The Roman Catholic Church, the church of England and the Lutheran Church commemorate him on September the 13<sup>th</sup>. His relics were looted from Constantinople by Crusaders in 1204 and brought to Rome, but were returned on November 27, 2004 by Pope John Paul II. Sadly, eight of his sermons were used extensively in the history of Christian anti-Semitism. The Nazis take up on them in their ideological campaign against the Jews. He is sometimes referred to as John of Antioch, but that may more properly

refer to the Bishop of Antioch named John (429 to 441 A.D.) He is also confused with Dio Chrysostom.

O Lord, deprive me not of Thy heavenly blessings;  
O Lord, deliver me from eternal torment;  
O Lord, if I have sinned in my mind or thought, in word deed,  
forgive me.  
O Lord, deliver me from every ignorance and heedlessness,  
from pettiness of the soul and stony hardness of heart;  
O Lord, deliver me from every temptation;  
O Lord, enlighten my heart darkened by evil desires;  
O Lord, I, being a human being, have sinned; do Thou, being  
God, forgive me in Thy loving kindness, for Thou knowest the  
weakness of my soul.  
O Lord, send down Thy grace to help me, that I may glorify  
Thy holy Name;  
Lord Jesus Christ, inscribe me, Thy servant, in the Book of  
Life, and grant me a blessed end;  
O Lord my God, even if I have done nothing good in Thy sight,  
yet grant me, according to Thy grace, that I may make a start in  
doing good.  
O Lord, sprinkle on my heart the dew of Thy grace;  
O Lord of heaven and earth, remember me, Thy sinful servant,  
cold of heart and impure, in Thy Kingdom.  
O Lord, receive me in repentance;  
O Lord, leave me not;  
O Lord, save me from temptation;  
O Lord, grant me pure thoughts;  
O Lord, grant me tears of repentance, remembrance of death,  
and the sense of peace;  
O Lord, grant me mindfulness to confess my sins;  
O Lord, grant me humility, charity, and obedience;  
O Lord, grant me tolerance, magnanimity, and gentleness;  
O Lord, implant in me the root of all blessings: the fear of Thee  
in my heart;  
O Lord, vouchsafe that I may love Thee with all my heart and  
soul, and that I may obey in all things Thy will;  
O Lord, shield me from evil persons and devils and passions

and all other lawless matters;  
 O Lord, Who knowest Thy creation and that which Thou hast  
 willed for it; may Thy will also be fulfilled in me, a sinner, for  
 Thou art blessed forevermore. Amen. <sup>15</sup>

Does prayer always have to be spontaneous? Can scripted daily prayer be of benefit for spiritual development? Share with the group if the Anglican Book of Common prayer holds special meaning for you.

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## 18. The Desert Fathers

The Desert Fathers were Christian hermits, Ascetics and Monks who lived in the Scetes desert of Egypt, beginning about the third century. The Desert Fathers were generally localized in this one area. The original Desert hermits were Christians fleeing the chaos and persecution of the Roman empire in the third century. Diocletian often blamed the Christians creating great unrest. Christians found refuge in communities they formed at the edges of population centers in Egypt. This was far enough away from Imperial Rome to be reasonably safe, but still close enough to civilization. Some of the Christians lived in tombs and trash heaps on the edges of major cities so they could live in relative obscurity and experience protection. In 313 A.D. when Christianity was made legal in Egypt by Diocletian's successor Constantine I, Christians began to leave the obscurity. However, some, particularly young men continued to live in these marginal areas. The

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<sup>15</sup> Prayer of John Chrysostom

solitude allowed them to learn self-discipline. They sought to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who had fasted for forty days in the wilderness. John the Baptist was the model for them as well having disassociated himself from the general populace. The Desert fathers believed that living in the desert would teach them to despise the things of the world and follow the Lord Jesus Christ more closely.



**The Roman Coliseum present day reminiscent of the persecution  
Christians faced in early centuries.**

During the fourth century these areas around Egyptian cities continued to attract Christians from the world over wishing to live in solitude. They developed a reputation for holiness and wisdom. In its early form each

hermit followed more or less an individual program, perhaps learning some basic practices from other monks but by and large it was highly individualistic. Some were rather idiosyncratic. Later monks, notably Anthony the Great, Pachomius and Shenouda Archimandrite, developed a more regular approach to desert life and introduced some aspects of community living. They began to develop common prayer and meals. Many who spent part of their lives in the Egyptian desert went on to become important figures in the Church and society of the fourth and fifth century. Among them Athanasius of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, John Cassian and Augustine of Hippo. Through the work of John Cassian and Augustine of Hippo the spirituality of the Desert fathers emphasized ascent to God through periods of purgation and illumination that led to unity with the divine. This deeply affected the spirituality of the Western Church. For this reason, the writings and spirituality of the Desert fathers is of interest to many people today.

A brother questioned Abba Poemen in this way, 'My thoughts trouble me, making me put my sins aside, and concern myself with my brother's faults'. The old man told him the following story about Abba Dioscorus (the monk), 'in his cell he wept over himself, while his disciple was sitting in another cell. When the latter came to see the old man he asked him, "Father, why are you weeping?" "I am weeping over my sins," the old man answered him. Then his disciple said, "You do not have any sins, Father." The old man replied, "Truly, my child, if I were allowed to see my sins, three or four men would not be enough to weep for them."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Delineate how Elijah, John the Baptist and Jesus spent time in the wilderness for spiritual direction and devotion.

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### **19. Aurelius Augustinus, Augustine of Hippo, or Saint Augustine**

Aurelius Augustinus, Augustine of Hippo, or Saint Augustine (November 13, 354 to August 28, 430 A.D.) is one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity. In Roman Catholicism and the Anglican Communion, he is a saint and preeminent doctor of the Church and the patron of the Augustinian religious order. Many Protestants, especially Calvinists consider him to be one of the theological fountainheads of Reformation teaching on salvation and grace. In Orthodox churches he is considered blessed or even a saint by some while others are of the opinion that he is a heretic primarily for his statements concerning what became known as the, "Filioque Clause." This is a major dividing point between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The Orthodox Church teaches that the Holy Spirit emanated from the Father while the Catholic Church teaches that the Holy Spirit emanated from the Father and the Son. He was born in Africa and had a very godly mother who prayed for his conversion. Her name was Monica. After a life of debauchery he committed his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. One of his best-known works is entitled *The Confessions*, which is often called the first Western autobiography, and still read around the world.

There are so many things that compete for our attention. The advertising industry speaks of impressions. When selling, they speak of the number of times they can get the consumer's attention be it through billboards, TV commercials, magazine ads, etc. The cumulative effect is such that it prompts the buyer to purchase the product. Sin is like that. It is constantly vying for our attention. We need times of personal retreat and solitude so that we can clear our mind of all worldly influences. At such times, we are able to weigh what is positive from the negative. We can begin to take stock over what has captured our attention. As we begin to weed out the good influences from the bad we can grow in fruition to God. Augustine was horrified by the lack of decency in his earlier life. This impression never left him. God has called us to righteousness and holy living. Something went terribly wrong in the human race through the fall. Man became twisted and bent on his own distraction. Left to his own devices, he destroys himself. Horrible stories of families ruined by alcohol abound. People have been known to neglect children in the pursuit of debauchery. Without the influence of godliness, sure and certain disaster is impending, Augustine taught. We can begin to clear out of our minds the influences of the worldly media and overcome the tendencies of the sinful nature by meditation on the word of God and reflection in prayer.

Augustine's world was one of oppression and power. Groups of tribes were rising up to attack the Roman empire. The Romans were doubling and tripling the taxes upon the people to amass armies to suppress their enemies. Augustine was born in 354 in Tagaste in what is modern day Algeria. His father sent him to Carthage to study. While there he entered into a life of revelry and debauchery. As earlier stated, his mother Monica, however,

never ceased to pray for him and eventually he was converted. It began interestingly enough, by his reading Cicero's *Hortensius*. It stimulated in him a thirst for wisdom and knowledge. He was encouraged to seek out the meaning of life. Augustine looked to the Bible in his search for wisdom. What he found was the Word made flesh. The Latin translations of the Bible at that time were poorly written. This caused him to become disenchanted with spiritual matters. However, a group of believers with whom he conversed were intelligent and articulate. They appealed to reason and compelled him to continue his pursuit. They presented Jesus Christ as the teacher of wisdom. Later however, he discovered their inconsistencies and departed from them. He moved to Rome and then to Milan and became intrigued with the skeptics, who taught him truth was elusive. They claimed there were no objective truths, and that each person created his or her own truth. This kind of teaching is very prevalent today. It was only through the preaching of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan that Augustine eventually came to re-appreciate the thought of revelation in the Scriptures. Ambrose's preaching reached deep into the recesses of Augustine's soul. He moved again to Cassiciacum to lead a more reflective life. He decided to become a philosopher. This plan was abandoned through a dramatic conversion experience in a garden that is described very powerfully in his *Confessions*. He sensed he heard a voice saying: "Take up and read. Take up and read." He opened the Scriptures and at random found this passage, "Let us live honorably as in the daylight; not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust, not in quarreling and jealousy. Rather put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh" Romans 13:13-14. This was the turning point in Augustine's life. Within six months he was

baptized and decided to return to Africa as a servant of God. In 391 he was ordained a priest and four years later he was appointed Bishop of Hippo.

In his *Confessions* he laid bare his soul. In his account of his life. He spoke of sins, from his childhood on up, i.e. cheating, stealing, selfishness. He recognized the importance of cultivating the inner life through solitude. Sin distorts the image of God in our lives and prevents us from walking in the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to look at the root underlying causes. Arrogance causes us to hold people in contempt. Hostility causes us to wrong our neighbor. This aggressiveness drives us out of fellowship with God and man. Greed causes us to suppress our fellow man and self-indulgence leads to destruction, as does lust and sloth. Augustine grappled with all of these as do all of us. It is only as we allow God to touch the depths of our being that we begin to make progress in our Christian walk. We need to bring these sins to Jesus Christ and hang them on His cross. Life is a pilgrimage. It is only through the imitation of Christ that His likeness is re-established through us. It is through the teaching of Augustine that we begin to gain an understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God, how it was effaced through the fall and how it can be restored through redemption.

But again one might ask whether we are to pray by words or deeds and what need there is for prayer, if God already knows what is needful for us. But it is because the act of prayer clarifies and purges our heart and makes it more capable of receiving the divine gifts that are poured out for us in the spirit. God does not give heed to the ambitiousness of our prayers, because he is always ready to give to us his light, not a visible light but an intellectual and spiritual one: but we are not always

read to receive it when we turn aside and down to other things out of a desire for temporal things. For in prayer there occurs a turning of the heart to he who is always ready to give if we will but take what he gives: and in that turning is the purification of the inner eye when the things we crave in the temporal world are shut out; so that the vision of the pure heart can bear the pure light that shines divinely without setting or wavering: and not only bear it, but abide in it; not only without difficulty, but even with unspeakable joy, with which the blessed life is truly and genuinely brought to fulfillment.' <sup>17</sup>

What are the reasons Augustine gave for prayer?

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## 20. Saint John Cassian

John Cassian (c. 360 A.D. – 433 A.D.) Latin: Jo(h)annes Eremita Cassianus, Joannus Cassianus or Joannes Massiliensis is a Christian theologian celebrated in the Western and Eastern churches for his mystical writings. He is known as one of the “Scythian monks” and is one of the “Desert fathers.” He was born around 368 A.D. possibly in the Eastern Roman Empire. Whether or not he was a Scythian by a birth, as a young adult he and a friend traveled to Palestine, where they entered a hermitage near Bethlehem. After awhile they journeyed to Egypt, which was torn by Christians struggles and visited a number of monastic foundations. Later, Cassian went to Constantinople where he became a disciple and friend of John Chrysostom the patriarch of Constantinople and participated in his struggles with the Imperial family. When Chrysostom ran into theological trouble Cassian was

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<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount* 2.3.14

sent to Rome to plead his cause before Pope Innocent I. It was possibly when he was in Rome that he accepted the invitation to found an Egyptian style monastery in Southern Gaul near Marseille. His foundation, the abbey of St. Victor, a complex of monasteries for both men and women was one of the first such institutes in the West and served as a model for later monastic development. Cassian's abbey and writings influenced Benedict who incorporated many of the same principles into his monastic rule and recommended to his own monks that they read the works of Cassian. Since Benedict's rule is still used by Benedictine, Cistercian and Trappist monks the thought of John Cassian still guides the spiritual lives of thousands of men and women in the Western Church.

John Cassian died in 433 A.D. He is a saint of the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches. His feast is traditionally celebrated on February the 29. Because this day occurs only once every four years official church calendars often transfer his feast to a different date. In the Roman Catholic Church, his feast is no longer commemorated in the universal calendar but the archdiocese of Marseille and some monastic orders continue to observe his memorial on July 23.

But the contemplation of God is gained in a variety of ways. For we not only discover God by admiring His incomprehensible essence, a thing which still lies hid in the hope of the promise, but we see Him through the greatness of His creation, and the consideration of His justice, and the aid of His daily providence: when with pure minds we contemplate what He has done with His saints in every generation, when with trembling heart we admire His power with which He governs, directs, and rules all things, or the vastness of His knowledge, and that eye of His from which no secrets of the

heart can lie hid, when we consider the sand of the sea, and the number of the waves measured by Him and known to Him, when in our wonder we think that the drops of rain, the days and hours of the ages, and all things past and future are present to His knowledge; when we gaze in unbounded admiration on that ineffable mercy of His, which with unwearied patience endures countless sins which are every moment being committed under His very eyes, or the call with which from no antecedent merits of ours, but by the free grace of His pity He receives us; or again the numberless opportunities of salvation which He grants to those whom He is going to adopt--that He made us be born in such a way as that from our very cradles His grace and the knowledge of His law might be given to us, that He Himself, overcoming our enemy in us simply for the pleasure of His good will, rewards us with eternal bliss and everlasting rewards, when lastly He undertook the dispensation of His Incarnation for our salvation, and extended the marvels of His sacraments to all nations. But there are numberless other considerations of this sort, which arise in our minds according to the character of our life and the purity of our heart, by which God is either seen by pure eyes or embraced: which considerations certainly no one will preserve lastingly, if anything of carnal affections still survives in him, because "thou canst not," saith the Lord, "see My face: for no man shall see Me and live;" to this world and to earthly affections.<sup>18</sup>

Discuss what it means to contemplate on God and list the benefits.

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<sup>18</sup> CASSIAN'S CONFERENCES. CONFERENCE 1. FIRST CONFERENCE OF ABBOT MOSES. ON THE GOAL OR THE AIM OF THE MONK. CHAPTER XV. How we must meditate on God.

## 21. Saint Benedict of Nursia

Benedict of Nursia (c. 480 a.D. – 543 A.D.) was born in Nursia (Norcia) Italy. Tradition gives him a twin sister, Scholastica. Benedict founded twelve monasteries, the best known of which was his first monastery at Monte Cassino in the mountains of southern Italy. Most monasteries of the Middle Ages were of the Benedictine Order. Benedict wrote a set of rules governing his monks, *the Rule of Saint Benedict* which was heavily influenced by the writings of John Cassian. The Benedictine Rule is one of the more influential documents in Western Civilization. Because of this, Benedict is often called “the founder of western Christian monasticism.” Benedict was canonized a saint in 1220.

At the time that Benedict lived, the sixth century, mass movements of tribal peoples continued to invade the Roman provinces. New kingdoms began to develop in England, France, The Lowlands, southern Germany, northern Italy and north Africa. Classes of people began to be distinguished. Half were free and half were slaves. The church was beginning to make strides in evangelization. The Goths had been Christianized in a manner of speaking and the Lombards had been infiltrated peacefully.

Obedience was at the heart and foundation of all of Benedict's guidance. He urged his followers to embrace silence and cultivate a listening heart. He wanted them to be courageous in resisting temptation and to persevere, relying on God for strength. For Benedict obedience was moving from self centeredness to obeying the will of God. He wanted prayer to permeate their lives. Monks were instructed to set aside time for extensive, reflective

reading and to participate in contemplative prayer for hours. After such they were to approach their daily work in an attitude of prayer. Their menial labor was to be a sacrifice of worship to God. For them, everything in the monastery was sacred. Benedict had a profound respect for the role of silence. He was convinced that silence made it possible for evil thoughts to die before leaking out into the speech and poisoning human relations. The heart was to be a repository for the Holy Spirit and from it, kind and gracious words were to proceed. Useless talk undermines a contemplative heart. He considered pride to be a great obstacle to the spiritual life. A person was to focus on the need for humility. He laid out clear steps for the the advancement of spirituality. Sin debilitates the soul. Through contemplation, a person begins to overcome evil tendencies. The incident of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 reminds us that we like Mary need to sit at the feet of Jesus reflecting upon His teaching and beauty that it may be transposed through our souls. A contemplative attitude will help conform us to the will of God. We need a pattern of prayer, Scripture reading and reflection to help develop ourselves spiritually. Progress in the Christian life only happens as we focus on these matters.

Let us do what the Prophet says: "I said, 'I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue. I have set a guard to my mouth.' I was mute and was humbled, and kept silence even from good things" (Ps. 38:2-3). Here the Prophet shows that if the spirit of silence ought to lead us at times to refrain even from good speech, so much the more ought the punishment for sin make us avoid evil words.<sup>19</sup>

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19 The Order of Saint Benedict, The Rule of Benedict, Regula Benedicti (RB), Arranged by Chapter Titles, Chapter 6: On the Spirit of Silence

Consider the implications of Divine Silence and list them:

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## 22. Saint Columba

Saint Columba (December 7, 521 – June 9, 597) not to be confused with St. Columanus, (also Irish and partly his contemporary) is sometimes referred to as “Columba of Iona,” or in Old Irish, as St. Colm Cille or Columcille (meaning “Dove of the church.”) He was the outstanding figure among Gaelic missionary monks who reintroduced Christianity to Scotland during the Dark Ages.

Be alone in a separate place near a chief city, if thy conscience is not prepared to be in common with the crowd. Be always naked in imitation of Christ and the Evangelists. Whatsoever little or much thou possessest of anything, whether clothing, or food, or drink, let it be at the command of the senior and at his disposal, for it is not befitting a religious to have any distinction of property with his own free brother. Let a fast place, with one door, enclose thee. A few religious men to converse with thee of God and his Testament; to visit thee on days of solemnity; to strengthen thee in the Testaments of God, and the narratives of the Scriptures. A person too who would talk with thee in idle words, or of the world; or who murmurs at what he cannot remedy or prevent, but who would distress thee more should he be a tattler between friends and foes, thou shalt not admit him to thee, but at once give him thy benediction should he deserve it. Let thy servant be a discreet, religious, not tale-telling man, who is to attend continually on thee, with moderate labour of

course, but always ready. Yield submission to every rule that is of devotion. A mind prepared for red martyrdom [that is death for the faith]. A mind fortified and steadfast for white martyrdom. [That is ascetic practices] Forgiveness from the heart of every one. Constant prayers for those who trouble thee. Fervour in singing the office for the dead, as if every faithful dead was a particular friend of thine. Hymns for souls to be sung standing. Let thy vigils be constant from eve to eve, under the direction of another person. Three labours in the day, viz., prayers, work, and reading. The work to be divided into three parts, viz., thine own work, and the work of thy place, as regards its real wants; secondly, thy share of the brethren's [work]; lastly, to help the neighbours, viz., by instruction or writing, or sewing garments, or whatever labour they may be in want of, ut Dominus ait, "Non apparebis ante Me vacuus [as the Lord says, "You shall not appear before me empty."]. Everything in its proper order; Nemo enim coronabitur nisi qui legitime certaverit. [For no one is crowned except he who has striven lawfully.] Follow alms giving before all things. Take not of food till thou art hungry. Sleep not till thou feelest desire. Speak not except on business. Every increase which comes to thee in lawful meals, or in wearing apparel, give it for pity to the brethren that want it, or to the poor in like manner. The love of God with all thy heart and all thy strength; the love of thy neighbor as thyself. Abide in the Testament of God throughout all times. Thy measure of prayer shall be until thy tears come; or thy measure of work of labour till thy tears come; Or thy measure of thy work of labour, or of thy genuflexions, until thy perspiration often comes, if thy tears are not free.<sup>20</sup>

In light of what you have been learning what measures or steps will you begin to take to develop piety?

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<sup>20</sup> From A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland II*, i (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1873), pp. 119-121.

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### **23. Pope Gregory I or Gregory the Great**

Pope Gregory I or Gregory the Great (ca. 540 – March 12, 604) was Pope from September 3, 590 A.D. until his death. He is also known as “Gregory Dialogus” (the Dialogist) in Eastern Orthodoxy because of the Dialogues he wrote. He was the first of the Popes from a monastic background. Gregory is a Doctor of the Church and one of the four great Latin Fathers of the Church (the others being Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome.) Of all Popes, Gregory I had the most influence on the early medieval church.

Share with the group what Pope John Paul II meant to you personally and what you believe to be his lasting legacy.

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### **24. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux**

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – August 21, 1153) was a French abbot and the primary builder of the Cistercian monastic order. He has been dubbed the voice of conscience and the dominating figure in the Christian church from 1125 to 1153. His authority helped to end the schism of 1130. Bernard was the main voice of conservatism during the intellectual revival

of Western Europe called the Renaissance of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the main opponent of the rising scholastic theology. He was opposed to synchronizing the Bible with philosophy and the emerging sciences. Devoted to promoting the veneration of the Virgin Mary, he was also the most influential advocate of the Second Crusade. He was canonized as a saint in 1174 and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1830.

“You want me to tell you why God is to be loved and how much. I answer, the reason for loving God is God Himself; and the measure of love due to Him is immeasurable love. Is this plain? Doubtless, to a thoughtful man; but I am debtor to the unwise also. A word to the wise is sufficient; but I must consider simple folk too. Therefore I set myself joyfully to explain more in detail what is meant above.

We are to love God for Himself, because of a twofold reason; nothing is more reasonable, nothing more profitable. When one asks, why should I love God? He may mean, what is lovely in God? Or what shall I gain by loving God? In either case, the same sufficient cause of love exists, namely, God Himself. And first, of His title to our love. Could any title be greater than this, that He gave Himself for us unworthy wretches? And being God, what better gift could He offer than Himself? Hence, if one seeks for God’s claim upon our love here is the chiefest: Because He first loved us (I John 4.19). Ought He not to be loved in return, when we think who loved, whom He loved, and how much He loved? For who is He that loved? The same of whom every spirit testifies: ‘Thou art my God: my goods are nothing unto Thee’ (Ps. 16.2, Vulg.). And is not His love that wonderful charity which ‘seeketh not her own’? (I Cor.13.5). But for whom was such unutterable love made manifest? The apostle tells us: ‘When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son’ (Rom. 5.10). So it was God who loved us, loved us freely, and loved us while yet we were enemies. And how great was this love of His? St. John answers: ‘God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son

that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (John 3.16). St. Paul adds: 'He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all' (Rom. 8.32); and the son says of Himself, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John 15.13).

This is the claim which God the holy, the supreme, the omnipotent, has upon men, defiled and base and weak. Some one may urge that this is true of mankind, but not of angels. True, since for angels it was not needful. He who succored men in their time of need, preserved angels from such need; and even as His love for sinful men wrought wondrously in them so that they should not remain sinful, so that same love which in equal measure He poured out upon angels kept them altogether free from sin."<sup>21</sup>

Discuss this statement, "The chief end of piety is to develop in our love toward God."

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<sup>21</sup> ON LOVING GOD by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Made available to the net by Paul Hals &lt; HALSALL@MURRAY.FORDHAM.EDU



**A bit of Clairvaux's 900 year history. The wall goes around 17 hectares.  
Clairvaux was converted in a prison under Napoleon.**



**Arches in a Bernard de Clairvaux Abbey**



**Ruins of an Abbey Built in 1115**

## **25. Saint Bonaventure**

Saint Bonaventure - Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (ca. 1217 to 15 July 1274), is the religious name of Giovanni di Fidanza. He was a Franciscan friar, Master of Theology at the University of Paris, Minister General of the Franciscan Order, and Cardinal of the Catholic Church. During his lifetime he rose to become one of the most prominent men in Latin Christianity. In 1257 he was put in charge of the Order of Friars Minor (O.F.M.) He steered the Franciscans on a moderate and intellectual course that made them the most prominent order in the Catholic Church until the coming of the Jesuits. His theology was marked by an attempt to integrate faith and reason. He

thought of Christ as the “one true master” who offers humans knowledge that begins in faith, is developed through rational understanding, and is perfected by mystical union with God.

“Therefore to the groan of praying through Christ crucified, through whose Blood we are purged from the filth of vices, I indeed first invite the reader, lest perhaps he believes that reading without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without admiration, circumspection without exultation, industry without piety, knowledge [scientia] without charity, understanding without humility, study apart from divine grace, gaze [speculum] apart from divinely inspired wisdom is sufficient for him. — Anticipated, therefore, by divine grace, for the humble and pious, the compunct and devout, for those anointed *with the oil of gladness* both for the lovers of divine wisdom and for those inflamed with desire for it, I propose the following speculations to be free for those willing to magnify, admire and even take a taste of God, intimating, that too little or nothing is the proposed, exterior gaze [speculum], unless the mirror [speculum] of our mind has been wiped and polished. Exert yourself, therefore, man of God, before [prius ad] the sting of conscience bites again, and before you raise your eyes towards the rays of wisdom glittering in His reflections [speculis], lest by chance from the sight [speculatione] itself of His rays you fall into the graver pit of shadows.<sup>22</sup>

Reflect upon what it means to withdraw for regular seasons of prayer to defeat vices in our lives.

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<sup>22</sup> THE JOURNEY OF THE MIND INTO GOD, St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor, & Doctor of the Universal Church, *Translated from the Quaracchi Edition of the Opera Omnia S. Bonaventurae* Vol. V, 1891, pp. 295-316 with original notes and Scholium, from the prologue.

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## 26. Albertus Magnus

Albertus Magnus (b. 1193/1206 – d. November 15, 1280) also known as “Saint Albert the Great” and “Albert of Cologne,” was a Dominican friar who is remembered for his conviction that science and religion can coexist without contradiction. He is considered to be the greatest German philosopher and theologian of the Middle Ages. He was the first medieval scholar to apply Aristotle’s philosophy to Christian thought at the time. Catholicism honors him as one of the 33 Doctors of the Church.

I have had the idea of writing something for myself on and about the state of complete and full abstraction from everything and of cleaving freely, confidently, nakedly and firmly to God alone, so as to describe it fully (in so far as it is possible in this abode of exile and pilgrimage), especially since the goal of Christian perfection is the love by which we cleave to God. In fact everyone is obligated, to this loving cleaving to God as necessary for salvation, in the form of observing the commandments and conforming to the divine will, and the observation of the commandments excludes everything that is contrary to the nature and habit of love, including mortal sin. Members of religious orders have committed themselves in addition to evangelical perfection, and to the things that constitute a voluntary and counseled perfection by means of which one may arrive more quickly to the supreme goal which is God. The observation of these additional commitments excludes as well the things that hinder the working and fervour of love, and without which one can come to God, and these include the renunciation of all things, of both body and mind,

exactly as one's vow of profession entails. Since indeed the Lord God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth, in other words, by knowledge and love, that is, understanding and desire stripped of all images. This is what is referred to in Matthew 6:6, 'When you pray, enter into your inner chamber,' that is, your inner heart, 'and having closed the door,' that is of your senses, and there with a pure heart and a clear conscience, and with faith unfeigned, 'pray to your Father,' in spirit and in truth, 'in secret.' This can be done best when a man is disengaged and removed from everything else, and completely recollected within himself. There, in the presence of Jesus Christ, with everything, in general and individually, excluded and wiped out, the mind alone turns in security confidently to the Lord its God with its desire. In this way it pours itself forth into him in full sincerity with its whole heart and the yearning of its love, in the most inward part of all its faculties, and is plunged, enlarged, set on fire and dissolved into him.<sup>23</sup>

Discuss what it means to withdraw in prayer and to allow the Holy Spirit to bring forth the character of Christ in your life.

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## 27. Saint Thomas Aquinas

Saint Thomas Aquinas, Thomas of Aquin, or Aquino (ca. 1225 – March 7, 1274) was a philosopher and theologian in the scholastic tradition known as, "Doctor Angelicus, Doctor Universalis." Today we speak of Intelligent Design. This is a more palatable form of Creationism for some in this post-

<sup>23</sup> "On Cleaving to God," by Albert the Great, Chapter 1

modern era. Aquinas was a proponent of the conviction there must be a deity who designed the universe. Natural theology finds evidence for the Creator in the creation. He believed that philosophy would have been a route to discover truth as readily as theology. To his way of thinking logic would not discount faith. He wrote *Summa Theologica* which gives rise to the Thomistic school of philosophy, named after himself. For many Catholics next to the Bible, this is a book of great importance. One of the thirty-three Doctors of the Church, he is considered by many Catholics to be the Church's greatest theologian. There are many institutions of learning that have been named after him for this reason.

Discuss how a knowledge of God (theology) can lead us into a deeper relationship with the Lord.

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## **28. Saint Francis of Assisi**

Saint Francis of Assisi (1182 to October 3, 1226) was a Roman Catholic friar and the founder of the Order of Friars minor more commonly known as the Franciscans. Francis was born to Pietro di Bernardone, a prominent businessman. Little is known about his mother Pica Bourlemont except that she was originally from France. He was one of seven children. Pietro was in France on business when Francis was born, and Pica had him baptized as Giovanni di Bernardone in honor of St. John the Baptist in hope that he would grow to be a great religious leader. When his father returned to Assisi,

he was furious about this, as he did not want his son to be a man of the church. Pietro decided to call him Francisco (Francis), in honor of the child's maternal heritage. Young Francis rebelled against his father's strong emphasis on business and money. He did benefit from his father's wealth that afforded him the opportunity to receive an excellent education that allowed him to read fluently in various languages including Latin. He became known for drinking and enjoying the company of the sons of nobles. The story is told of how one day he was out having fun with his friends and a beggar asked for alms. While his friends ignored the call for money Francis gave him everything he had in his pockets. His friends ridiculed him and his father scolded him when he arrived home.

In 1201 he joined a military expedition and was taken prisoner. While a captive for a year it is possible he began to think about conversion. When he returned in 1203 he went back to his carefree life. However in 1204 a serious illness started a spiritual crisis. In 1205 Francis left for Puglia to enlist in the army of Gualtiero di Brienne. On the way, in Spoleto a strange vision made him return to Assisi deepening his spiritual crisis. It is said that when he began to avoid the sports and the feasts of his former companions they asked him laughingly if he was thinking of marrying. He answered, "Yes, a fairer bride than any of you have ever seen" – meaning his "lady poverty", as he afterward used to say. He spent much time in lonely places, asking God for enlightenment. By degrees he took to nursing lepers, the most repulsive victims in the lazar houses near Assisi. After a pilgrimage to Rome, where he begged at the church doors for the poor, he claimed to have had a mystical experience in the Church of San Damiano just outside Assisi, in which the icon of Christ crucified came alive and said to him three times,

“Francis, Francis, go and repair My house which as you can see is falling in ruins.” He thought this to mean the very ruined church in which he was presently praying, and so sold his horse together with some cloth from his father's store, to assist the priest there for this purpose. His father Pietro, highly indignant, attempted to bring him to his senses, first with threats and then with corporal chastisement. After a final interview in the presence of the bishop, Francis renounced his father and his patrimony, laying aside even the garments he had received from him. For the next couple of months he lived as a beggar in the region of Assisi. Returning to the town for two years this time, he restored several ruined churches, among them the Porziuncola, little chapel of St. Mary of the Angels, just outside the town, which later became his favorite place to meditate. At the end of this period it is reported that Francis heard a sermon that changed his life. The sermon was about Matthew 10:9, in which Christ tells His followers that they should go forth and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven was upon them. They were to take no money, nor even a staff or shoes for the road. This inspired Francis to devote himself wholly to a life of poverty. He wore a rough garment, went barefoot and began to preach repentance. He was soon joined by his first follower, a prominent fellow townsman, the jurist Bernardo D. Quintaville. Others came and within a year there were eleven. Francis chose to never become a priest per se in the community and the group was known as the Lesser Brothers. The Franciscans are sometimes called Friars minor. Friar is a derivative of the Latin word for brother.

According to the historical record, St. Francis was inspired to compose *A Prayer before the Crucifix* after an extraordinary revelation that occurred in the little church of San Damiano,

just outside the walls of Assisi. On that occasion Our Lord, depicted in the large iconic Crucifix above the altar, spoke and commanded St. Francis with the words: "Francis, go and rebuild My Church, which as you can see, is falling into ruin." This was in January of 1206 A.D. and this prayer was written down shortly afterwards.

"Most High, glorious God, enlighten the shadows of my heart, and grant unto me right faith, certain hope and perfect charity, sense and understanding, Lord, so that I may accomplish Thy holy and true mandate."<sup>24</sup>

The first companion of St Francis, Brother Bernard of Assisi, was converted in the following way: St. Francis had not yet taken the religious habit, though he had renounced the world, and had so given himself to penance and mortification that many looked upon him as one out of his mind. He was scoffed at as a madman, was rejected and despised by his relations and by strangers, who threw stones and mud at him when he passed; yet he went on his way, accepting these insults as patiently as if he had been deaf and dumb. Then Bernard of Assisi, one of the richest and most learned nobles of the city, began to consider deeply the conduct of St Francis; how utterly he despised the world, how patiently he suffered injuries, and how his faith remained firm, though he had been for two years an object of contempt and rejected by all. He began to think and say within himself, "It is evident that this brother must have received great graces from God"; and so resolved to invite him to sup and to sleep in his house. St Francis having accepted the invitation, Bernard, who was resolved to contemplate the sanctity of his guest, ordered a bed to be prepared for him in his own room, where a lamp burned all night. Now St Francis, in order to conceal his sanctity, so soon as he entered the room, threw himself upon the bed, pretending to fall asleep. Bernard likewise soon after went to bed, and began to snore as if sleeping soundly. On this, St Francis, thinking that Bernard was

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<sup>24</sup> "The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi," Translated from the Critical Latin Edition, edited by Fr. Kajetan Esser, O.F.M.

really fast asleep, got up and began to pray. Raising his hands and eyes to heaven, he exclaimed with great devotion and fervour, “My God! My God!” at the same time weeping bitterly; and thus he remained on his knees all night, repeating with great love and fervour the words, “My God! My God!” and none others.<sup>25</sup>

Discuss the state of repair of today’s churches in North American and Europe and what can be done to rebuild them.

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<sup>25</sup> “Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi,” by Anonymous Authors (1250-1390) CHAPTER II, “OF BROTHER BERNARD OF QUINTAVALLE, THE FIRST COMPANION OF ST FRANCIS.”



**Notre Dame in Paris, France**



**Inside Notre Dame in Paris**

### **29. Saint Clare of Assisi**

Saint Clare of Assisi, born Chiara Offreduccio, (July 6, 1194 – August 11, 1253) was one of the first followers of Francis of Assisi and founded the Order of Poor Ladies. It was organized to help women who chose to embrace monastic life in the Franciscan way. Clare was born in Assisi, Italy

in 1194. In 1210, Clare heard Francis preaching in the streets of Assisi about his new mendicant order (then newly approved by Pope Innocent III.) She left everything behind to follow this new way of life. She had her hair cut short and put on rough clothes to indicate her acceptance of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. She stayed first near a monastery of Benedictine nuns. Her sister Saint Agnes also fled her home. Later Claire and Agnes moved to San Damiano where they founded the Order of Poor Ladies

Now have come the days of Our Lord's Passion: the most sacred Triduum of the Year! When Christ's whole Mystical Body, scattered upon the Earth, is called to return in spirit and body to the remembrance of all that He did and said and suffered for us.

Our Lord accomplished more by suffering than by acting. This greatest and most mystical of ironies is made manifest at the heart of the Triduum, Good Friday: because Our Lord Jesus Christ did not redeem the world by what He said, though He taught and revealed everything He had heard from the Eternal Father; nor by what He did, though he cured many of their illnesses and raised Lazarus, the son of the Canaanite woman, and the little girl from the dead.

Yet, by suffering, that is not by speaking nor doing, but by silently enduring the torments brought on upon Him by the envy of His peers and people and by the injustice of the Romans, He did redeem the world, and not only this world of men, but the entire universe! <sup>26</sup>

Discuss at some length the statement, "Our Lord did more by His suffering than by His acting" and what the implications are for us today.

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<sup>26</sup> VERBUM SERAPHICUM, Letters of St. Clare of Assisi

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### 30. Dante Alighieri

Durante Degli Alighieri, better known as Dante Alighieri or simply Dante, (May 14/June 13, 1265 – September 13/14, 1321) was an Italian from Florence. His greatest work of *The Divine Comedy* is considered one of the greatest masterpieces of world literature. *The Divine Comedy* describes Dante's journey through hell, purgatory, and paradise guided first by the Roman epic poet Virgil and then by Beatrice, the subject of his love and another of his works. Dante wrote the Comedy in a new language he called Italian based on the regional dialects of Tuscany, Sicilian and some elements of Latin and other regional dialects. By creating such a quirky style he established that the Italian language was suitable for the highest sort of expression. Publishing in this vernacular language placed him as one of the first among others such as Geoffrey Chaucer and Giovanni Boccaccio. It broke from the standards of publishing only in Latin or Greek, the languages of the church and antiquity. This allowed for more books to be published for a wider audience, setting the stage for greater levels of literacy.

People today may be confused by the term, “comedy.” As stated, all serious scholarly works were written in Latin, a tradition that would persist for several hundred years until the Enlightenment. Works written in any other language were presumed to be comedic in nature. Furthermore, the word comedy in the classical sense refers to works which reflect a belief in an

ordered universe in which events not only tended towards a happy or amusing ending but by Divine Providence, worked out to the ultimate good. By this definition then the progress of Dante's pilgrimage from hell to paradise is an expression of comedy since the work begins with the Pilgrim's moral confusion and ends with the vision of God.

To run o'er better waters hoists its sail. The little vessel of my genius now, that leaves behind itself a sea so cruel; And of that second kingdom will I sing. Wherein the human spirit doth purge itself, and to ascend to heaven becometh worthy. But let dead Poesy here rise again. O holy Muses, since that I am yours, And here Calliope somewhat ascend,<sup>27</sup>

Discuss the implications of what it means to purge the human soul and from what must it be purged?

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### **31. Walter Hilton**

Walter Hilton (d. March 24, 1396) was an English Augustinian mystic. Little is known of his life. He was the head of a house of Augustinian canons at Thurgarton Priory near Newark in Nottinghamshire. His spiritual writings were widely influential during the 15th century in England. The most famous of these is *Ladder of Perfection*. It can be likened to a guidebook for

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<sup>27</sup> Purgatorio: Canto I The Divine Comedy, translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

the journey to the virtual Jerusalem. As we contemplate the perfect love of God it helps to conform us to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. We begin in faith, and then in faith and feeling we keep in mind all the time the need for humility. We pass through a mystical dark night, drawing away from earthly things by an increased longing for loving the Lord Jesus Christ. By this gift of love vices are destroyed, uniting us with the softness of the Lord Jesus Christ's love. His presence in our souls becomes the life of the body. We are purified as we come to know His voice and our spiritual eyes are open to see His workings in all things and regard to His blessed nature. The book is described as being beautiful in its simplicity of expression. "A soul", it concludes "that is pure, stirred up by grace to use this working, may see more of such spiritual matter in an hour than can be writ in a great book." It was translated into Latin, as "*Speculum Contemplationis*", or "*Baculum Contemplationis*," by Thomas Fysslawe, a Carmelite.

Hilton's magnum opus, *The Scale of Perfection* is universally regarded as the most complete and balanced treatise on the interior life that the late Middle Ages produced. The heart of Hilton's teaching is that the answer to the spiritual difficulties that times of change and violent unrest throw up, is to adapt the Church's spiritual teaching to the life of the Christian in the world. He occupies a unique position in the whole tradition of medieval western spirituality.

The 14th century was a century of transition. The whole structure of society was changing. People felt very vulnerable. The Black plague laid claim to the lives of more than a third of the population in Europe. There was a great tension between England and France. Tax money was spent for waging war

and not assisting the poor. The people were becoming disenchanted with their governments. With the emphasis on vernacular languages there was a rise in tension. In England, the peasants revolted in 1381 and insisted that their voice be heard in the government. Strife was developing between the Church and state. An anti-papal feeling could be felt surmounting in England at the time. This was the kind of world that Walter Hilton lived in. He had studied at Cambridge University, and then became a solitary for a period of time. After he emerged from seclusion he entered the Thurgaton Priory as a canon of St. Augustine in the 1380's. Such tumultuous times necessitated a man with a strong constitution. Hilton was such a figure. He resisted the tendencies of Oxford University to intellectualize and explain away the faith. He demonstrated great concern for the poor. He is said to have been marked by prudence and good judgment, as he offered spiritual direction to others. He left behind lengthy letters, a few brief scriptural commentaries, a polemical work in defense of the use of images in prayer and a lengthy manual for solitaries called *The Scale of Perfection*.

Walter Hilton presented in *The Scale of Perfection* a doctrine that is central to the search for holiness in the Christian tradition. It is sometimes called the "image doctrine" because it is an exposition of the meaning of the Scriptural affirmation that human beings have been created in God's image and likeness. This teaching provides an understanding of the human person drawn from sacred Scripture. Hilton expounded that the human person is a creature made with special dignity in the image and likeness of God, tainted by sin but restored by redemption. He described the spiritual journey for the Christian in three stages: that of the beginning soul, the profiting soul and the perfect soul that is reformed in faith and feeling. Hilton described the

initial stage in the Christian life as the transformation of the image of sin, which each of us carries and is reformed in faith. Through baptism the basic image of God in which the human person has been created but which has been distorted by the fall and subsequent personal sin is reformed in the sacrament. A change really takes place even though we do not yet experience it. We know it only by faith. Next the person who takes the spiritual life seriously becomes a profiting soul. As we begin to live our baptismal life more consciously we then move into the spiritual journey. This journey demands a significant purification. It begins with in the livening desire for God and recognizing there is one principle goal in life. Hilton wrote,

A man once wished to go to Jerusalem, and since he did not know the way he called on another man who he hoped knew the way and asked him for information. This other man told him that he would not reach it without great hardship and effort. “The way is long,” he said, “and there is great danger from thieves and bandits, as well as many other difficulties which should be set a man on this journey. Furthermore, there are many different roads which seem to lead towards it but every day men are killed and robbed and never reach their goal. But I can guarantee one road which will lead you to the city of Jerusalem if you will keep to it. On this road your life will be safe, but you will have to undergo robbery, violence and great distress.”<sup>28</sup>

This is in keeping with what was stated earlier in the book concerning the road less traveled. Life can be described in terms of a journey. We need to grow along the way and prayer will help us to know the direction. Often we face great struggles with sin and it is necessary to root out the underlying

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<sup>28</sup> Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, Leo Sherley-Price, Translator (St. Meinrad, Ind.: Abbey Press, 1975.)

causes. This necessitates a mortification of carnal desires. We need to make conscious decisions every day to bypass temptations otherwise we become bogged down in iniquity. This requires great discipline. We need to engage in contemplative exercises. It will result in our gradual spiritual growth and reformation. Our way of thinking needs to be changed from that of the world. Solitude and reflection are the soil for this spiritual plant to take root in.

We are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's son, Romans 8:29 teaches. We are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another, II Corinthians 3:18. Irenaeus taught that all human beings find their ultimate identity in Jesus Christ. Tertullian believed that God's image remains in us, even after the fall but our likeness to Him was lost through sin. Clement and Origen further expanded this teaching. Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus interpreted the spiritual life as a gradual reappropriation of a likeness that is rooted in our creation in the image of God. Augustine located the image of God in the human heart, mind and will. The mind gives us the capacity to know God. The heart gives us the intuition and the will gives us the desire. The Cistercians Bernard, William of St. Thierry, and Alered of Rievaulx further developed this theme. Thomas Aquinas included it in his *Summa Theologiae*. The French school of spirituality of the 17th and 18th centuries developed extensive teaching on this. It is referred to in the Second Vatican Council's, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. It is only as we live in communion with God that we can deny the propensity to evil. When we recognize ourselves to be created in the image of God we see that we are made for much nobler purposes than to be in servitude to sin. Knowing that God has made us for

Himself elevates our thinking and redirects it away from degradation. If we see how noble we are, we will not want to engage in disgusting behavior. Knowing that Jesus Christ is our friend who lives in our heart, by the person of His Holy Spirit we would not want to subjugate Him to immorality that so quickly defiles us. As we meditate on the purposes that God has for our lives we do not want to come up short in any area. Sin always robs and maims. We do not need to be duped continually because God has given us a renewed mind. He is always ready and willing to forgive and we cannot out sin the grace of God. However the point remains to be established do we always want to be taken a fool for the deception of Satan? To make a mistake the first time is understandable, but to continue to live in deliberate deception is questionable. As we reflect upon the riches of God why would we allow ourselves to be continually robbed, maimed and beaten? Through careful meditation on the Scriptures, holy solitude and prayer we begin to become wise to the wiles of satan and the downfalls of our character. This is where having a spiritual mentor and friend can be of great benefit. This person will help check our progress in holiness. We will want to give positive and glowing reports. If life is like a journey and we recognize the difficulty of becoming sidetracked into the swallows of sin we will want to maintain the high and holy pathway of righteousness.

THOU must understand that there are in the holy Church two manner of lives (as saith St. Gregory) in which a Christian is to be saved. The one is called *Active*, the other *Contemplative*; without living one of these two lives no man may be saved. The *Active* consisteth in love and charity exercised exteriorly by good corporal works, in fulfilling of God's commandments and of the seven works of mercy, corporal and spiritual, towards our Christian brethren. This life pertains to all worldly men that

have riches and plenty of worldly goods to dispose of, and to all those (be they learned or unlearned, lay men or spiritual persons) that are in office or state to govern, or have care of others; and generally all worldly men are bound to the practice of this kind of life according to their best knowledge and ability, and as reason and discretion shall require. If he much good have, then much good for to do; if he little have, less may he do; and if he naught have, then must he have a good will. Such works as these (be they corporal or spiritual) are works of the *Active* life. Also a great part of it consists in great bodily deeds, which a man exerciseth upon himself, as great fasting, much watching, and other sharp penance, to chastise the flesh with discretion for sins formerly committed. As also to mortify thereby the lusts and likings of the flesh, and to make it pliable and obedient to the will of the spirit. These works though they be but *Active*, yet they help very much, and dispose a man in the beginning to attain afterwards to contemplation, if they be used with discretion.

### CHAPTER III: Of the Contemplative Life, and the Exercises and Works thereof

CONTEMPLATIVE life consisteth in perfect love and charity, felt inwardly by spiritual virtues; and in a true and certain sight and knowledge of God and spiritual matters. This life belongs to them especially who for the love of God forsake all worldly riches, honours, worships and outward businesses, and wholly give themselves soul and body (according to all the knowledge and ability that is in them) to the service of God, by exercises of the soul.

Now then, since it is so (dear sister) that the quality of thy state requireth of thee to be contemplative (for that is the intent of thy enclosing, that thou mightest more freely and entirely apply thyself to spiritual exercises), it behoveth thee to be right busy both night and day in labour of body and spirit, to attain as nigh as thou canst to that life by such means as thou mayest find to be best for the said end. But before I tell thee of the means, I shall tell thee a little more of this contemplative life, that thou mayest somewhat see what it is, and so set it as a mark in the

sight of thy soul, whereto thou shalt tend, and direct all thy exercises and doings.<sup>29</sup>

Differentiate between an active life and a contemplative one.

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### **32. Julian of Norwich**

Julian of Norwich (c. November 8, 1342 – c. 1416) is considered to be one of the greatest English mystics. Little is known of her life aside from her writings. Even her name is uncertain. The name Julian comes from the church of St. Julian in Norwich where she occupied a cell adjoining the church as an anchoress. At the age of thirty she suffered from a severe illness and it is believed she was on her deathbed. At such time she had a series of intense visions. She overcame her illness. These visions twenty years later became the source of her major work called, “*Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love*” (circa 1393.) This is believed to be the first book written by a woman in the English language. Julian became well known throughout England as a spiritual authority. Julian was an optimistic person who spoke of God's love in terms of joy and compassion as opposed to law and duty.

For Julian suffering was not a punishment but a means God uses to draw us closer to Himself. This was different from the prevailing views of her time. She did not believe in hell and thought that eventually everyone would be reconciled to God. Her great saying, " All shall be well, and all shall be well,

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<sup>29</sup> THE SCALE (or LADDER) of PERFECTION Written by WALTER HILTON

and all manner of things shall be well", reflects this theology. It is also one of the most individually famous lines in all of Catholic theological writing, and certainly one of the most well-known phrases of the literature of her era. It was quoted in T.S. Eliot's "*Little Gidding*." She is commemorated by the Roman Catholic Church on May 13th and by both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as a renewer of the Church and the Anglican Church on May 8.

THIS is a Revelation of Love that Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in Sixteen Shewings, or Revelations particular. Of the which the First is of His precious crowning with thorns; and therewith was comprehended and specified the Trinity, with the Incarnation, and unity betwixt God and man's soul; with many fair shewings of endless wisdom and teachings of love: in which all the Shewings that follow be grounded and oned.<sup>30</sup>

Discuss the matter of sickness as a means of conversion and visions while sick. Are these to be validated as authentic experiences?

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### **33. Saint Catherine of Siena**

Saint Catherine of Siena (March 25, 1347-April 29, 1380) was a Dominican lay affiliate of the Dominican order. Catherine was the twenty-third child of twenty-five and she had a twin sister, the twenty-fourth who died at birth. A native of Siena, Catherine received no formal education. At the age of seven

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<sup>30</sup> "Revelations of Divine Love," by Julian of Norwich (1343-1443)

she consecrated her virginity to Christ despite her family's opposition. In her eighteenth year she took the habit of the Dominican Tertiaries. As a layperson Catherine lived at home rather than in a convent, and she practiced acts of mortification which otherwise might not have been permitted had she been living in a convent. She is especially famous for fasting by living for long periods of time on nothing but the Blessed Sacrament.

In about 1366, Catherine experienced what she described in her letters as a 'Mystical Marriage' with Jesus, after which she began to tend the sick and serve the poor. In 1370 she received a series of visions about hell, purgatory and heaven after which she heard a command to leave her withdrawn life and entered the public life of the world. She began to write letters to men and women in authority, especially begging for peace between the republics and principalities of Italy, and for the return of the papacy from Avignon to Rome. She carried a long correspondence with Pope Gregory XI asking him to reform the clergy and the administration of the papal states.

In June of 1376 Catherine went to Avignon herself as ambassador of Florence to make peace with the Papal States, but was unsuccessful. She impressed the Pope so much, however, that he returned his administration to Rome in January of 1377. During the Western Schism of 1378 she was an adherent of Pope Urban VI, who summoned her to Rome where she lived until her death in 1380.

Catherine's letters are considered one of the great works of early Tuscan literature. More than three hundred letters have survived. In her letters to the

Pope, she often referred to him affectionately as "Papa" or "Daddy" ("Babbo" in Italian). Her major work is the *Dialogue of Divine Providence*.

“Very pleasing to Me, dearest daughter, is the willing desire to bear every pain and fatigue, even unto death, for the salvation of souls, for the more the soul endures, the more she shows that she loves Me; loving Me she comes to know more of My truth, and the more she knows, the more pain and intolerable grief she feels at the offenses committed against Me. You asked Me to sustain you, and to punish the faults of others in you, and you did not remark that you were really asking for love, light, and knowledge of the truth, since I have already told you that, by the increase of love, grows grief and pain, wherefore he that grows in love grows in grief. Therefore, I say to you all, that you should ask, and it will be given you, for I deny nothing to him who asks of Me in truth. Consider that the love of divine charity is so closely joined in the soul with perfect patience, that neither can leave the soul without the other. For this reason (if the soul elect to love Me) she should elect to endure pains for Me in whatever mode or circumstance I may send them to her. Patience cannot be proved in any other way than by suffering, and patience is united with love as has been said. Therefore bear yourselves with manly courage, for, unless you do so, you will not prove yourselves to be spouses of My Truth, and faithful children, nor of the company of those who relish the taste of My honor, and the salvation of souls.”<sup>31</sup>

Discuss the matter of childhood spirituality and from there go into what it means to suffer for the Lord with an intense desire to see reconcilliation and peace. Does God use such in both cases?

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<sup>31</sup> THE DIALOGUE OF THE SERAPHIC VIRGIN CATHERINE OF SIENA DICTATED BY HER, WHILE IN A STATE OF ECSTASY, TO HER SECRETARIES, AND COMPLETED IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1370 Translated by Algar Thorold

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### 34. Margery Kempe

Margery Kempe (ca. 1373 – after 1438) is known for writing *The Book of Marjorie Kempe*, considered by some to be the first autobiography in the English language. It chronicles her extensive pilgrimages to visit holy sites in Europe and Asia. She was born Margery Brunham in King's Lynn (then Bishop's Lynn), Norfolk, England and married at the age of twenty to a local man named John Kempe, with whom she had fourteen children. Her father, John Brunham, was a merchant in Lynn, five-time mayor, Member of Parliament and merchant whose fortunes may have been negatively affected by downturns in the economy, especially in the wool trades, of the 1390's.

Following the birth of her first child, Margery fell ill and feared for her life. After a failed confession that resulted in a bout of self-described "madness," Margery Kempe had a vision that called her to leave aside the "vanities" of this world. Having for many weeks railed against her family, and friends, Kempe reports that she saw a vision of Jesus Christ at her bedside, asking her "Daughter, why hast thou forsaken Me, and I forsook never thee?" From that point forward, Kempe undertook two failed domestic businesses — a brewery and a grain mill — both common home-based businesses for medieval women.

Though she had tried to be more devout after her vision, she was tempted by sexual pleasures and social jealousy for some years. Eventually turning away from what she interpreted as the effect of worldly pride in her vocational choices, Kempe dedicated herself completely to the spiritual calling that she felt her earlier vision required. Striving to live a life of commitment to God Kempe negotiated a chaste marriage with her husband, and began to make pilgrimages around Europe to holy sites — including Rome, Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela. Her book recounts these pilgrimages and a final section includes a series of prayers. The spiritual focus of her book is the mystical conversations she conducts with Christ for more than forty years.

SHE desired many times that her head might be smitten off with an axe upon a block for the love of our Lord Jesu. Then said our Lord Jesu in her mind: "I thank thee, daughter, that thou wouldest die for My love; for as often as thou thinkest so, thou shalt have the same meed in heaven, as if thou suffrest the same death, and yet there shall no man slay thee.

"I assure thee in thy mind, if it were possible for Me to suffer pain again, as I have done before, Me were lever to suffer as much pain as ever I did for thy soul alone, rather than thou shouldest depart from Me everlastingly." "Daughter, thou mayst no better please God, than to think continually in His love."

Then she asked our Lord Jesus Christ, how she should best love Him. And our Lord said: "Have mind of thy wickedness, and think on My goodness. "Daughter, if thou wear the habergeon or the hair, fasting bread and water, and if thou saidest every day a thousand Pater Nosters, thou shalt not please Me so well as thou dost when thou art in silence, and suffrest Me to speak in thy soul."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "The Book of Margery Kempe," Edited by Lynn Staley. Originally Published in *The Book of Margery Kempe* Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996 III. TREATISE OF CONTEMPLATION

Discuss the matter of ordinary people having extraordinary burdens and what it means to bear them well for Christ.

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### **35. Thomas à Kempis**

Thomas à Kempis – (1380 – July 25, 1471) was a Renaissance Roman Catholic monk and author of *Imitation of Christ* one of the best-known Christian books on devotion. He was born at Kempen, Germany forty miles northwest of Cologne. His paternal name was Hemerken or Hämmerlein, "Little Hammer." In 1395 he was sent to the school at Deventer conducted by the Brethren of the Common Life. He became a skillful copyist. Later he was admitted to the Augustinian convent of Mount Sinai Agnes near Zwolle, where his brother John had been before him and had risen to the dignity of prior. Thomas received priest's orders in 1413 and was made subprior in 1429.

The house was disturbed for a time in consequence of the Pope's rejection of the Bishop-elect of Utrecht, Rudolf of Diepholt; otherwise, Thomas' life was a quiet one, his time being spent between devotional exercises, composition, and copying. He copied the Bible no less than four times, one of the copies being preserved at Darmstadt in five volumes. In its teachings he was widely

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read, and his works abound in Biblical quotations, especially from the New Testament.

His life is no doubt fitly characterized by the words under an old picture first referred to by Franciscus Tolensis: "In all things I sought quiet and found it not save in retirement and in books." A monument was dedicated to his memory in the presence of the Archbishop of Utrecht in St. Michael's Church, Zwolle, on November 11, 1897.

Thomas à Kempis belonged to the school of mystics who were scattered along the Rhine from Switzerland to Strasburg and Cologne and in the Netherlands. He was a follower of Geert Groote and Florentius Radewijns, the founders of the Brethren of the Common Life. His writings are all of a devotional character and include tracts and meditations, letters, sermons, a life of Saint Lydwigis, a Christian woman who remained steadfast under great affliction, biographies of Groote, Radewijns, and nine of their companions. *The Imitation of Christ* comes from his meditation on the life and blessings of the Savior. He also wrote a work on the incarnation. Both of these overflow with adoration for Christ.

Christ needs to be the center of our lives. Vanity and fleshly desires need to be hung on Christ's cross. Unruly desires need to be brought into subjugation. Our world is battered, tired, overtaxed and generally in a deplorable condition. People are frantically looking for answers and out of our ordered lives needs to come love and healing. It is only as we align ourselves with Jesus Christ, that we can relay to a distraught world the answers for which they so desperately search. We owe it to our Master to be

the conduits through which He can flow the water of life. We need to imitate Christ in all our actions.

The following quotes are attributed to him:

"If thou wilt receive profit, read with humility, simplicity and faith, and seek not at any time the fame of being learned."

(I have searched for peace everywhere, but have not found it anywhere except for in a corner with a book).

"At the Day of Judgement we shall not be asked what we have read but what we have done."<sup>33</sup>

"If, however, you seek Jesus in all things, you will surely find Him."<sup>34</sup>

Why is it of particular benefit to study the life of Christ to grow in personal piety?

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The Stations of the Cross are usually a series of fourteen pictures or sculptures depicting the following scenes. Imagine each one and write down your reflections being revealed to you by the Holy Spirit:

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<sup>33</sup> "The Imitation of Christ," Book I, ch. 3 THE BRUCE PUBLISHING COMPANY MILWAUKEE, Nihil obstat: H. B. Ries, Censor librorum Imprimatur: Moyses E. Kiley, Archiepiscopus Milwaukiensis November 5, 1940

<sup>34</sup> "The Imitation of Christ," Book II, ch. 7

Jesus is condemned to death

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Jesus receives the cross

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Jesus falls the first time

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Jesus meets His Mother

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Simon of Cyrene carries the cross

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Veronica wipes Jesus' face with her veil

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Jesus falls the second time

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Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

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Jesus falls the third time

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Jesus is stripped of His garments

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Crucifixion: Jesus is nailed to the cross

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Jesus dies on the cross

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Jesus' body is removed from the cross (Pietà)

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Jesus is laid in the tomb

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Please postulate on the following:

What emotions did you feel as you recounted in your mind Christ's death and resurrection?

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Does Christ need our sympathy? What is a more appropriate response to His sufferings and sacrifice?

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What would you have done had you seen Christ stumble under His cross? More appropriately, what can you do to day to help bear the cross?

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Veronica is said to have wiped the face of Christ. Can you think of people today through whom the face of Christ is transposed and would comforting them be consoling the heart of Christ?

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What response do you have today to the injustice and mistreatment of Christ's people today? Christ's mock trial is irreversible but how can you help to ensure such travesties of justice do not occur today?

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How is the ministry of Christ on going through His body the Church today?

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### 36. Girolamo Savonarola

Girolamo Savonarola (September 21, 1452 – May 23, 1498) was an Italian Dominican priest and a leader of Florence from 1494 until his execution in 1498. He was known for religious reformation, anti-Renaissance preaching, book burning and destruction of what he thought was immoral art. He strongly condemned what he saw as the moral corruption of the clergy and his main opponent was Pope Alexander VI. He is sometimes seen as the forerunner of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, though he remained a devout and pious Roman Catholic all his life.

Savonarola was born in Ferrara, then capital of an independent duchy. As a young man, he studied voraciously religion, the Bible, Aquinas and Aristotle. He enrolled at the University of Ferrara and was known for his anticlerical stance as is evidenced by his book entitled *On the Downfall of the World*. He was only twenty when he wrote it. His poem written in 1475 entitled *On the Downfall of the Church*, displayed his contempt of the Roman Curia by calling it a “false, proud whore.” He appeared to be a very intense, fervent and electrifying person. He was like Martin Luther in some respects and had he lived a generation later, some have speculated that he might have achieved the revolution of the Church. Luther focused largely on unsound doctrine, where Savonarola was preoccupied with purging the immorality. He was convinced of the truth of Catholic doctrine, unlike Luther.

Is it better to stay within a congregation and try to reform it or to go outside it and seek reforms?

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### 37. Ignatius of Loyola

Ignatius of Loyola was also known as **Ignacio (Iñigo) López de Loyola** (December 24, 1491 – July 31, 1556), was the principal founder and first Superior General of the Society of Jesus, a religious order of the Catholic Church professing direct service to the Pope in terms of mission. Members of the order are called Jesuits. He compiled what is known as the *Spiritual Exercises* and was a gifted spiritual director. Pope Benedict XVI has described him as being “above all a man of God who gave the first place of his life to God, a man of profound prayer.” He was very active in fighting the Protestant Reformation and promoting the subsequent Counter-reformation. He was beatified and then canonized to receive the title of Saint March 12, 1622. His feast day is July 31 celebrated annually. He is the patron saint of the Society of Jesus.

Iñigo was born at the castle of Loyola, in the municipality of Azpeitia, sixteen miles southwest of San Sebastian in the Basque province of Guipuzcoa, Spain. In 1517 he took service in the army, defending the small town of Pamplona against the recently expelled Navarrese monarchy, who took refuge in the Basse-Navarre, a part of Navarre that did not surrender to the Spanish army and is an actual part of France. Highly outnumbered, the Spaniards wanted to surrender, but Ignatius persuaded them to fight on. One leg wounded, the other broken by a cannonball, Ignatius was returned to

his castle by the Navarrese. During this period of recuperation, Ignatius read a number of religious texts on the life of Jesus and the saints and became spiritually convicted. He resolved to help convert people living in the holy land. After he recuperated from his war injuries he visited a Benedictine monastery and hung up his military uniform in a manner of speaking before an image of the Virgin Mary as a sign that he was leaving that kind of life behind. He then spent several months in a cave where he practiced rigorous asceticism. He had many visions of the Virgin Mary to whom he devoted himself with great fervor as a spiritual soldier. It was during this time that he began to write his *Spiritual Exercises*. People were looking to him as a spiritual director and these were the meditations he encouraged people to engage in. This began to change the church. He was arrested twice during the Spanish Inquisition, because he was accused of teaching the ways of God without the proper education. In 1528 he entered the University of Paris, where he remained for over seven years, gaining an extensive theological education. He received a master's degree in theology, then the highest degree awarded. His name was changed from Íñigo to Ignatius when he enrolled at the university as all records of European universities were at the time kept in Latin. A clerk matriculating him translated the Basque "Íñigo" into Latin as "Ignatius," although Íñigo is actually Basque for Ennecus or Innicus. In later life, he was often called "Master Ignatius" in recognition of his final academic credential.

By 1534 he had six key companions whom he met as students at the University - Francis Xavier, Alfonso Salmeron, Diego Laynez and Nicholas Bobadilla, all Spanish; Peter Faber, a Frenchman; and Simon Rorigues of Portugal. On August 15, 1534 he and this group, founded the Society of

Jesus – “to enter upon the hospital and missionary work in Jerusalem or to go without questioning where ever the Pope might direct.” In 1537 they traveled to Italy to seek papal approval for their order. Pope Paul III confirmed the order through a bull in 1540 but limited the number of its members to 60. The limitation was removed through a bull in 1543. Ignatius was chosen as the first Superior General of this religious order, invested with the title of Father General of the Jesuits. He sent his companions as missionaries around Europe to create schools, colleges and seminaries.

Compare bodily exercise to spiritual exercises. Why is it we think of exercising physically but rarely spiritually? What are the benefits to a spiritual routine? Could it be that discipline in the spiritual is as despised as discipline in the natural? If we were to look at our inner person what shape or condition would it be in?

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### **38. Saint Catherine of Genoa**

Saint Catherine of Genoa was a member of a noble family in Fieschi, Italy and born in 1447. As a little girl she was quiet and especially obedient. She was described as being highly gifted in prayer with a wonderful love of Christ's passion and the penitential practices. She wanted to enter a convent when she was thirteen but the nuns would not allow her because they

thought she was too young. When she was sixteen her parents had her marry a young nobleman of the city. It was a tragedy because her husband proved to be faithless, violent tempered and miserly making her life very difficult. It appears that she spent the first five years of her marriage in silent melancholy submission to her husband. For the next five years after that, she sought consolation from the world for her troubles. Then ten years into the marriage, when she was about twenty-six she began to receive revelations. These were recorded in, "*Dialogues of the Soul and Body*", and the "*Treatise on Purgatory*". She spent her life and wealth in caring for the sick, especially during the plague that ravaged Genoa between 1497 and 1501. She died in that city on September 15, 1510. In her writings, she says

"[The souls in Purgatory] see all things, not in themselves, nor by themselves, but as they are in God, on whom they are more intent than on their own sufferings. . . . For the least vision they have of God overbalances all woes and all joys that can be conceived. Yet their joy in God does by no means abate their pain. . . . This process of purification to which I see the souls in Purgatory subjected, I feel within myself." <sup>35</sup>

For about twenty-five years, Catherine, though frequently making confessions, was unable to open her mind for direction to anyone; but towards the end of her life a Father Marabotti was appointed to be her spiritual guide. To him she explained her states, past and present, and he compiled the "Memoirs" of the saint's outward life. After this great change, her biographies practically tell us but two facts: that she at last converted her husband who died penitent in 1497; and that both before and after his death - - though more entirely after it -- she gave herself to the care of the sick in the

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<sup>35</sup> LIFE AND DOCTRINE OF SAINT CATHERINE OF GENOA  
TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN NEW YORK CHRISTIAN PRESS ASSOCIATION  
PUBLISHING CO. 1907 *Treatise on Purgatory*, xvi, and xvii.

great hospital of Genoa, where she eventually became manager and treasurer. She died worn out with labours of body and soul. She was beatified in 1675 by Clement X and canonized in 1737 by Clement XII. her writings had been examined by the Holy Office and pronounced to contain doctrine that would be enough in itself to prove her sanctity. Her name was placed on the calendar of Saints on the 22nd of July by Benedict XIV.

Discuss how ordinary people can have an extraordinary life of prayer, devotion and intercession for the Lord.

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### **39. Saint Peter of Alcantara**

Saint Peter of Alcantara, (1499 to October 18, 1562) was a Spanish Franciscan. He was born at Alcantara, Spain. His father was the governor of the place and his mother was of a noble family. After a course in grammar and philosophy in his hometown he was sent at the age of fourteen to the University of Salamanca. Latter after his education he began preaching with much success. He preferred to speak to the poor and his sermons were largely taken from the prophets. He spoke with great sympathy. He entered the order of the "Discalced Friars." Having been elected minister (i.e. superior) of St. Gabriel's religious province in 1538 he drew up the *Constitutions of the Stricter Observance*, but his severe ideas met with much opposition. He renounced his office and retired with John of Avila into the mountains of Arabida Portugal, where he joined Father Martin a Santra

Maria in his life of eremitical solitude. Soon other friars came to join him and several little communities were established. Peter was chosen guardian and master of novices. Returning to Spain in 1553 he spent two more years in solitude. Then he journeyed barefoot to Rome and obtained permission of Julius III to found some poor convents in Spain under the jurisdiction of the General of the Conventuals. Peter had the gift of contemplation and the virtue of penitence. Hardly less remarkable was his love of God, which at times caused pain and at other times ecstasy. He lived a life of poverty. The three enemies of his soul that he fought were named worldliness, the flesh and the devil. His weapons; sacrifices, fasting and prayer. He slept for only 1 1/2 hours each day and his room was only 4 1/2 square feet. He was said to have levitated while in prayer and contemplation. On his deathbed he was offered a glass of water which he refused, saying that "Even my Lord Jesus Christ thirsted on the Cross..." He died while on his knees on October 18, 1562 in a monastery at Arenas. Besides *The Constitutions of the Stricter Observance* and many letters on spiritual subjects he composed the short treatises on prayer, which has been translated into all European languages. It is said that God worked numerous miracles through his prayers.

SINCE this short treatise speaks of prayer and meditation, it will be well to state in a few words what is the fruit which may be derived from this holy exercise, so that men may give themselves to it with more willing heart. It is a well known fact that one of the greatest hindrances we have to attaining our final happiness and blessedness, is the evil inclination of our hearts, the difficulty and dullness of spirit we have in respect to good rules; for, if this was not in the way, it would be the easiest thing possible to run in the path of virtues, and attain to the end for which we were created. Concerning which the Apostle says, "*I delight in the Law of God, according to the inward*

*man; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin."* (Rom. 7:22-23) This, then, is the universal cause of all our evil. One of the most efficacious means for overcoming this dullness and difficulty, and for facilitating this matter, is devotion; for as St. Thomas says, "*Devotion is nothing else than a certain readiness and aptitude for doing good.*" For this takes away from our mind all that difficulty and dullness, and makes us quick and ready for all good. It is a spiritual refection, refreshment, like the dew of Heaven, a breath and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a supernatural affection. It so orders, strengthens, and transforms a man's heart, that it imparts a new taste and inspiration for spiritual things, a new distaste and abhorrence for sensible things. The experience of every day shows us this. For when a spiritually minded person rises from deep devout prayer, then straight away all his good resolutions are renewed, together with fervor and determination to do good; the desire then to please, and to love, a Lord so good and kind as He has then shown Himself to be, a willingness to endure fresh troubles, and chastening, even to shedding blood for His sake, then, finally, all the freshness of soul is renewed and blooms again.<sup>36</sup>

Contemplate your life as a fruit tree. What branches need to be pruned to yield fruit productively?

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What does it mean to have the gift of contemplation and the virtue of penitence and what would be the benefits of such a gift and virtue?

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<sup>36</sup> TREATISE ON PRAYER AND MEDITATION by St. Peter of Alcantara

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Imagine walking to Rome in your bare feet, sleeping only one and a half hours per night and having a bedroom that is only four and half square feet. This man died on his knees. How does such a life of sacrifice move you?

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Discuss St. Thomas' assertion that devotion is, "nothing else than a certain readiness and aptitude for doing good."

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#### **40. Saint Teresa of Ávila**

Saint Teresa of Ávila, Spain (known in religion as Teresa de Jesús) (March 28, 1515 – October 4, 1582) was a major figure of the Catholic Reformation and a prominent Spanish mystic and writer. Theresa Avila is also known as "Teresa of Jesus." Her paternal grandfather was a Jewish converso. The ascetic ideal of the saints and martyrs was instilled in her at a young age by her father, who was a knight and especially by her mother. Teresa was fascinated by accounts of the lives of the saints and ran away from home at age seven with her brother Rodrigo to find martyrdom among the Moors. Her uncle foiled the plans as he was returning to the city and spotted the two youths outside the city walls. Leaving her parents' home secretly one

morning in 1534 at the age of 20 Teresa entered the monastery of the Incarnation of the Carmelite nuns at Avila. In the cloister, she suffered greatly from illness. Early in her sickness, she experienced periods of spiritual ecstasy through the use of the devotional book *Abecedario Espiritual*. This work, following the example of similar writings of medieval mystics, consisted of directions for tests of conscience and for spiritual self concentration and inner contemplation. She also employed other mystical ascetic works such as the *Tractatus de Oratione et Meditatione* of Peter of Alcantara. She claimed that during her illness she rose from the lowest stage, "recollection", to the "devotions of peace" or even to the "devotions of union", which was one of perfect ecstasy. During this final stage, she said she frequently experienced a rich "blessing of tears." As the Roman Catholic distinction between mortal and venial sin became clear upon her, she says she came to understand the awful terror of sin and the inherent nature of original sin. She also became conscious of her own natural impotence in confronting sin, and the necessity of absolute subjection to God.

Around 1556 various friends suggested that her new found knowledge was evil and not divine. She began to inflict various torturers and mortifications on herself but Francis Borgia to whom she made confession, reassured her of the divine inspiration of her thoughts. On St. Peter's Day in 1559, she became firmly convinced that Christ was present to her in bodily form, though invisible. This vision lasted almost uninterruptedly for more than two years. In another vision, a seraph drove the fiery point of a golden lance repeatedly through her heart causing her searing spiritual bodily pain. The memory of this episode served as an inspiration throughout the rest of her life, and which motivated her life-long imitation of the life and suffering of

Jesus, epitomized in the motto usually associated with her: "Lord, either let me suffer or let me die." This last vision was the inspiration for one of Bernini's most famous works, *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa* in Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. St. Theresa founded a Carmelite monastery for nuns in 1562 named St. Joseph's. A friend who was a woman of wealth supplied her with funds. The nuns lived in absolute poverty. She formulated a Constitution in which revived earlier strict rules supplemented by new regulations like the disciplines of ceremonial flagellation prescribed for the divine service every week and substituting leather or wooden sandals for shoes. For the first five years Teresa remained in pious seclusion engaged in writing. At the heart of her mystical writings is the belief that the soul ascends in four stages. The first is the heart's devotion. This is a time of deep contemplation or concentration whereby the soul withdraws to observe the passion of Christ. It involves penitence. The second is the devotion of peace in which the human will is lost in the virtue of God. In this supernatural state one gives oneself to God. One tries to reach a state whereby one's memory, reason and imagination are not distracted by the things of the world. The person spends time in prayer and writing down the spiritual revelations, while they are in quietude. The next is the devotion of union, which is an ecstatic state. The person becomes totally absorbed in God and only the memory and imagination are left to ramble in this state characterized by blissful peace; a kind of sweet slumber. The person is caught up in rapturous love of God. The fourth is called the devotion of ecstasy or rapture. It is a passive state in which the consciousness of being in the body disappears. Paul perhaps referenced this in II Corinthians 12:2-3. At this point, all activity ceases in a person's memory and the imagination is absorbed in God. It is as though the person is spiritually intoxicated. The

body and spirit are in a sweet happy state glowing with a sense of impotence and unconsciousness. After the ecstasy begins to subside is a time of relaxation for a few hours in which the person almost falls into a swoon like consciousness. Some people come out of the trance and begin to cry.

I used sometimes, as I have said, to experience in an elementary form, and very fleetingly, what I shall now describe. When picturing Christ in the way I have mentioned, and sometimes even when reading, I used unexpectedly to experience a consciousness of the presence of God, of such a kind that I could not possibly doubt that He was within me or that I was wholly engulfed in Him. This was in no sense a vision: I believe it is called mystical theology. The soul is suspended in such a way that it seems to be completely outside itself. The will loves; the memory, I think, is almost lost; while the understanding, I believe, though it is not lost, does not reason -- I mean that it does not work, but is amazed at the extent of all it can understand; for God wills it to realize that it understands nothing of what His Majesty represents to it.<sup>37</sup>

Prayer needs to be rooted in Scripture. To prepare for prayer we should quiet ourselves in the presence of God. There is no mistaking the matter; prayer takes discipline. There are many desires that compete with our interest in spiritual matters. These need to be put aside. We need to put aside the temptation to abandon prayer when it seems fruitless. The devil will use every opportunity to dissuade us of its effectiveness. Be assured however there is a great benefit to lingering in the secret place, communing with the

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<sup>37</sup> THE LIFE OF TERESA OF JESUS, The Autobiography of Teresa of Avila  
TRANSLATED & EDITED BY E. ALLISON PEERS FROM THE CRITICAL EDITION OF P.  
SILVERIO DE SANTA TERESA, C. D. To the Gracious Memory of  
P. EDMUND GURDON Sometime Prior of the Carthusian Monastery of Miraflores  
A man of God, Chapter 10

Lord Jesus Christ. When we emerge transformation has taken place; lives are changed, evil is reversed and God's work begins to flourish.

Does logic often stand in the way of the spiritual?

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Do contradictions in the mind prevent the Holy Spirit from revealing Christ to us in mystical experiences?

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How can we be open to hearing from God outside the norm of our daily experience?

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What must we do to prepare ourselves to hear from God?

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How is journalling important in such a process?

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Have there been times when God has wanted to speak to you and you have shut Him down?

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Discuss the difference between vocal prayer and mental prayer. What are the benefits of each?

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**Busloads of youth in Taize, France gathering to seek the Lord.**  
The community was founded in 1940 by Frere Roger (Brother Roger), who remained its leader until his death on August 16, 2005. The ecumenical community is made up of more than a hundred men from many nations

representing Protestant and Catholic branches of Christianity. Life in the community focuses on prayer and Christian meditation. Young people from all over the world visit Taizé each week to join in the community life.

#### **41. John of the Cross**

John of the Cross (June 24, 1542 – December 14, 1591) was a major figure in the Catholic Reformation. He was a Spanish mystic and a Carmelite friar, born at Fontiveros, a small village near Avila. He is renowned for his cooperation with St. Theresa of Avila. His writings and poetry address the growth of the soul. By this it is meant detachment from the things of this world and attachment to God. This is considered the summit of mystical experience. He is one of the thirty-three doctors of the Church. He was born into a Jewish family that had converted to Christianity. His father died when he was young. His widowed mother and two brothers, experienced deep poverty. As he grew older he came to work in a hospital and studied the humanities at the Society of Jesus school from 1559 to 1563. The Society of Jesus was a new organization at the time having been founded a few years earlier by the Spanish saint Ignatius of Loyola. On February 24, 1563 he entered the Carmel order adopting the name Fr. Juan De Santo Matia. Following a refusal to relocate after his superior's orders and allegedly because of his attempts to reform life within the Carmelite order, he was taken prisoner by his superiors, and jailed in Toledo where he was kept under a brutal regimen that included public lashing before the community at least weekly, and severe isolation in a tiny stifling cell barely large enough for his body. He managed to escape nine months after. In the meantime, he had composed a great part of his most famous poem *Spiritual Canticle*

during this imprisonment. His harsh sufferings and spiritual endeavours were then reflected in all of his subsequent writings. After returning to a normal life, he went on with the reformation and the founding of monasteries for the new Discalced Carmelites which he had helped settle along with St. Teresa de Ávila. He died on December 14, 1591. He was canonized by Benedict XIII in 1726. In 1926 he was declared a doctor of the Church by Pope Pius XI. The church of England commemorates him as a “Teacher of the Faith.” St. John of the Cross is considered one of the foremost poets in the Spanish language. The *Dark Night of the Soul* is widely considered to be one of the best poems ever written in Spanish both from its stylistic point of view and rich symbolism and imagery. The *Spiritual Canticle* is a poem in which the bride (representing the soul) searches for the bridegroom (representing Jesus Christ) and is anxious at having lost Him; both are filled with joy upon reuniting. It can be seen as a free-form Spanish version of the Song of Solomon at a time when translations of the Bible into vernacular were forbidden.

*Dark Night of the Soul* (from which the spiritual term “dark night of the soul” takes its name, see Psalm 143:3) narrates the journey of the soul from her bodily home to her union with God. It happens during the night, which represents the hardships and difficulties she meets in detachment from the world and reaching the light of the union with the Creator. There are several steps in this night, which are related in successive stanzas.

St. John also wrote three treatises on a mystical theology, two of them concerning the two poems above, and supposedly explaining the meaning of the poems verse by verse and even word by word. The third work, *Ascent of*

*Mount Carmel* is a more systematic study of the ascetical endeavour of a soul looking for perfect union with God and the mystical events happening along the way. These, together with his *Dichos de Amor y de Paz*, or "Sayings of Love and Peace," and St. Therese's writings, are the most important mystical works in Spanish, and have deeply influenced later spiritual writers all around the world. Among these can be named T.S. Eliot, Therese de Lisieux, Edith Stein and Thomas Merton. John has also influenced philosophers (Jacque Maritain), theologians (Hans Urs von Balthasar,) and pacifists (Dorothy Day, Daniel Berrigan.)

IN this first stanzas the soul sings of the happy fortune and chance which it experienced in going forth from all things that are without, and from the desires and imperfections that are in the sensual part of man because of the disordered state of his reason. For the understanding of this it must be known that, for a soul to attain to the state of perfection, it has ordinarily first to pass through two principal kinds of night, which spiritual persons call purgations or purifications of the soul; and here we call them nights, for in both of them the soul journeys, as it were, by night, in darkness.

2. The first night or purgation is of the sensual part of the soul, which is treated in the present stanza, and will be treated in the first part of this book. And the second is of the spiritual part; of this speaks the second stanza, which follows; and of this we shall treat likewise, in the second and the third part, with respect to the activity of the soul; and in the fourth part, with respect to its passivity.

3. And this first night pertains to beginners, occurring at the time when God begins to bring them into the state of contemplation; in this night the spirit likewise has a part, as we shall say in due course. And the second night, or purification, pertains to those who are already proficient, occurring at the time when God desires to bring them to the state of union with God. And this latter night is a more obscure and dark and terrible purgation, as we shall say afterwards.

4. Briefly, then, the soul means by this stanza that it went forth (being led by God) for love of Him alone, enkindled in love of Him, upon a dark night, which is the privation and purgation of all its sensual desires, with respect to all outward things of the world and to those which were delectable to its flesh, and likewise with respect to the desires of its will. This all comes to pass in this purgation of sense; for which cause the soul says that it went forth while its house was still at rest; which house is its sensual part, the desires being at rest and asleep in it, as it is to them.<sup>38</sup>

What does the term, dark night of the soul mean? Have you passed through a dark night of the soul? Find Scriptural backing for the term, “Dark Night of the Soul”

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## 42. Francis de Sales

Saint Francis de Sales (August 21, 1567 – December 28, 1622) was a Bishop of Geneva and a Roman Catholic saint. He worked to convert Protestants back to Catholicism, was an accomplished preacher and wrote books on religious topics. Francis de Sales was born at Thorens into a noble family. His father was Francois de Boisy and his mother was Francoise de Sionnz. He was the first of twelve children, and as such enjoyed an education in La Roche and Annecy. His father wanted him to attend only the best schools. In

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<sup>38</sup> ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL By Saint John of the Cross DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH  
THIRD REVISED EDITION Translated and edited, with an Introduction, by E. ALLISON PEERS from  
the critical edition of P. SILVERIO DE SANTA TERESA, C.D

1578 at the age of twelve he went to the College de Clermont in Paris. A year later Francis was engulfed in a personal crisis after attending a theological discussion about predestination. He became convinced that he was damned to hell. In December 1586 his despair was so great that he was physically ill and even bed ridden for a time. In January 1587 he visited the Church Saint-Etienne des Gres with great difficulty. There his crisis ended and he decided to dedicate his life to God. Francis came to the conclusion that whatever God had in store for him was good because God is love. This faithful devotion to the God of love not only expelled his doubts but also influenced the rest of his life and his teachings.

In 1588 Francis transferred from Paris to the University of Pardia where he studied law and theology. At the university he made up his mind about becoming a priest. In 1592 he ended his studies with the promotion to doctor certified in both law and theology. Then he made the pilgrimage to Loreto before going home. At home his father had already secured a variety of positions for his son, one of which was a position on the Senate of Chambery. It was difficult for Francis' father to accept that his son had already chosen another career.

Since the Reformation, the seat of the bishops of Geneva had been located at Annecy in Savoy, due to the strong control of Geneva itself. Francis, in his capacity as provost engaged in enthusiastic campaigns of evangelism among the Protestants of Savoy. He won many returns to the old faith. He also traveled to Rome and Paris where he forged alliances with Pope Clement VIII and the French King Henry IV.

In 1602 Bishop Granier died and Francis was consecrated bishop of Geneva. During his years as bishop he garnished a reputation as a powerful preacher and something of an ascetic. In particular, he was known as a friend of the poor. He was a man of almost supernatural affability and understanding. These qualities came through in his famous books. He died on December 28, 1622.

YOU aim at a devout life, dear child, because as a Christian you know that such devotion is most acceptable to God's Divine Majesty. But seeing that the small errors people are wont to commit in the beginning of any under taking are apt to wax greater as they advance, and to become irreparable at last, it is most important that you should thoroughly understand wherein lies the grace of true devotion; —and that because while there undoubtedly is such a true devotion, there are also many spurious and idle semblances thereof; and unless you know which is real, you may mistake, and waste your energy in pursuing an empty, profitless shadow. Arelius was wont to paint all his pictures with the features and expression of the women he loved, and even so we all colour devotion according to our own likings and dispositions. One man sets great value on fasting, and believes himself to be leading a very devout life, so long as he fasts rigorously, although the while his heart is full of bitterness; — and while he will not moisten his lips with wine, perhaps not even with water, in his great abstinence, he does not scruple to steep them in his neighbour's blood, through slander and detraction. Another man reckons himself as devout because he repeats many prayers daily, although at the same time he does not refrain from all manner of angry, irritating, conceited or insulting speeches among his family and neighbours. This man freely opens his purse in almsgiving, but closes his heart to all gentle and forgiving feelings towards those who are opposed to him; while that one is ready enough to forgive his enemies, but will never pay his rightful debts save under pressure. Meanwhile all these people are conventionally called religious, but nevertheless they are in no true sense really

devout. When Saul’s servants sought to take David, Michal induced them to suppose that the lifeless figure lying in his bed, and covered with his garments, was the man they sought; and in like manner many people dress up an exterior with the visible acts expressive of earnest devotion, and the world supposes them to be really devout and spiritual-minded, while all the time they are mere lay figures, mere phantasms of devotion.<sup>39</sup>

Consider how we make a farce of any claims to spirituality if we contradict it by unholy living manifested in a lack of love for our neighbour, bitterness, etc. List vices that are a discredit to supposed close devotion to the Lord Jesus. How will true piety manifest itself in practical ways?

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### **43. François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon**

François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, more commonly known as François Fénelon ( August 6, 1651-January 7, 1715) was a French Roman Catholic theologian and writer. Today he is remembered primarily as one of the main advocates of quietism and as the author of *The Adventures of Telemachus*, a scabrous attack on the French monarchy, first published in 1699.

1. True prayer is only another name for the love of God. Its excellence does not consist in the multitude of our words; for our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask

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<sup>39</sup> “Introduction to the Devout,” Life by St. Francis de Sales

Him. The true prayer is that of the heart, and the heart prays only for what it desires. *To pray*, then is *to desire*—but to desire what God would have us desire. He who asks what he does not from the bottom of his heart desire, is mistaken in thinking that he prays. Let him spend days in reciting prayers, in meditation or in inciting himself to pious exercises, he prays not once truly, if he really desire not the things he pretends to ask.

2. O! How few there are who pray! For how few are they who desire what is truly good! Crosses, external and internal humiliation, renouncement of our own wills, the death of self and the establishment of God's throne upon the ruins of self love, these are indeed good; not to desire these, is not to pray; to desire them seriously, soberly, constantly, and with reference to all the details of life, this is true prayer; not to desire them, and yet to suppose we pray, is an illusion like that of the wretched who dream themselves happy. Alas! How many souls full of self, and of an imaginary desire for perfection in the midst of hosts of voluntary imperfections, have never yet uttered this true prayer of the heart! It is in reference to this that St. Augustine says: *He that loveth little, prayeth little; he that loveth much, prayeth much.*<sup>40</sup>

Discuss the nature of prayer and its ends.

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#### 44. St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort

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<sup>40</sup> SPIRITUAL PROGRESS: or INSTRUCTIONS IN THE DIVINE LIFE OF THE SOUL FROM THE FRENCH OF FENELON AND MADAME GUYON. INTENDED FOR SUCH AS ARE DESIROUS TO COUNT ALL THINGS BUT LOSS THAT THEY MAY WIN CHRIST. EDITED BY JAMES W. METCALF NEW YORK: PUBLISHED BY M. W. DODD, BRICK CHURCH CHAPEL, CITY HALL SQUARE 1853. IV. ON PRAYER AND THE PRINCIPAL EXERCISES OF PIETY.

St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort - Missionary in Brittany and Vendee; born at Montfort, January 31, 1673; died at Saint Laurent sur Sevre, April, 28, 1716. From his childhood, he was indefatigably devoted to a prayer, before the Blessed Sacrament and when from his twelfth year he was sent as a day pupil to the Jesuit College at Rennes, he never failed to visit the church before and after class. He joined a society of young men who during holidays ministered to the poor and the incurables in the hospital and read for them edifying books during their meals. At the age of nineteen he went on foot to Paris to follow the course in theology. On the journey he gave away all his money to the poor and exchanged clothing with them. He made a vow to subsist thenceforth only on alms. He was ordained a priest at the age of twenty-seven, and for some time fulfilled the duties of a chaplain in the hospital. In 1705, when he was thirty-two, he found his true vocation and thereafter devoted himself to preaching to the people. During seventeen years he preached the gospel in countless towns and villages. As an orator he was highly gifted, his language being simple but replete with fire and divine love. His whole life was conspicuous for virtues difficult for modern people to comprehend: constant prayer, love of the poor, poverty carried to an unheard of degree, joy in humiliations and persecutions.

The thought, writings, and example of St. Louis de Montfort, an example of the French school of spirituality, have been singled out in an encyclical by the late Pope John Paul II as a distinctive witness of Marian spirituality in the Catholic tradition. The pontiff also spoke of his reading the saint's work *The True Devotion to Mary* as a "turning point" in his life.

His popular book *The Secret of the Rosary* is approved by the Catholic church and is an easily read, multi-perspective approach to the holy Rosary that has been read by Catholics worldwide for over two centuries. *The True Devotion to Mary* has been called the greatest Marian book of all time.

1. It was through the Blessed Virgin Mary that Jesus came into the world, and it is also through her that he must reign in the world.
2. Because Mary remained hidden during her life she is called by the Holy Spirit and the Church "Alma Mater", Mother hidden and unknown. So great was her humility that she desired nothing more upon earth than to remain unknown to herself and to others, and to be known only to God.<sup>41</sup>

What influences have come to weigh on your devotional life to shape what it is today?

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#### **45. Brother Lawrence**

Brother Lawrence – (c. 1614 – February 12, 1691) was a Carmelite monk who is today most commonly remembered for the closeness of his relationship to God as recorded in the classic Christian text *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Brother Lawrence was born Nicholas Herman in Herimenil, near Luneville in the region of Lorraine, located in modern day eastern France. He received a revelation of the providence and power of God at the age of 18, but it would be another six years before he joined the

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<sup>41</sup> TREATISE ON TRUE DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN by St. Louis de Montfort

Discalced Carmelite Priory in Paris. In this intervening period he fought in the Thirty Years War and later served as a valet. Nicholas entered the priory in Paris as a lay brother not having the education necessary to become a cleric and took the religious name “Lawrence of the Resurrection.” He spent almost all of the rest of his life within the walls of the priory working in the kitchen for most of it and as a repairer of sandals in the later years.

Yet despite, or perhaps because of his somewhat lowly position, his character attracted many to him. He was known for his profound peace and many came to seek spiritual guidance from him. The wisdom that he passed on to them, in conversations and in letters, would later become the basis for the book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. This work was compiled after Brother Lawrence died by one of those whom he inspired, Father Joseph de Beaufort, later vicar general to the Archbishop of Paris. It became popular among Catholics and Protestants alike with John Wesley and A. W. Tozer being among those who recommended it.

SINCE you desire so earnestly that I should communicate to you the method by which I arrived at that habitual sense of GOD’s Presence, which our LORD, of His mercy, has been pleased to vouchsafe to me; I must tell you, that it is with great difficulty that I am prevailed on by your importunities; and now I do it only upon the terms, that you show my letter to nobody. If I knew that you would let it be seen, all the desire that I have for your advancement would not be able to determine me to it. The account I can give you is: Having found in many books different methods of going to GOD, and divers practices of the spiritual life, I thought this would serve rather to puzzle me, than facilitate what I sought after, which was nothing but how to become wholly GOD’s. This made me resolve to give the all for the All: so after having given myself wholly to GOD, to

make all the satisfaction I could for my sins, I renounced, for the love of Him, everything that was not He; and I began to live as if there was none but He and I in the world. Sometimes I considered myself before Him as a poor criminal at the feet of his judge; at other times I beheld Him in my heart as my FATHER, as my GOD: I worshipped Him the oftenest that I could, keeping my mind in His holy Presence, and recalling it as often as I found it wandered from Him. I found no small pain in this exercise, and yet I continued it, notwithstanding all the difficulties that occurred, without troubling or disquieting myself when my mind had wandered involuntarily. I made this my business, as much all the day long as at the appointed times of prayer; for at all times, every hour, every minute, even in the height of my business, I drove away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thought of GOD.<sup>42</sup>

Is it possible to pray without ceasing?

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<sup>42</sup> “The Practice of the Presence of God: The Best Rule of Holy Life being Conversations and Letters of Brother Lawrence.” AUTHENTIC EDITION LONDON THE EPWORTH PRESS (Edgar C Barton) 25-35 City Road, E.C.1



#### **24/7 Prayer Room at London City Boiler Room at Tabernacle St.**

God is raising up many such movements whereby there is “tag-team” praying whereby people take shifts to pray non-stop around the clock.

#### **46. St. Jean Baptiste Marie Vianney**

St. Jean Baptiste Marie Vianney (May 8, 1786 – August 4, 1859) was a French parish priest who became a Catholic saint and the patron saint of parish priests. He is often referred to, even in English, as the "Curé d'Ars" (the parish priest of the village of Ars.) He became famous internationally for his priestly and pastoral work in his parish due to the radical spiritual transformation of the community and its surroundings. This is attributed, according to Catholic leaders, to his saintly life, mortification and preserving ministry in the sacrament of confession. He worked for forty-one years in

his parish. In that time, he transformed it from a community known for laxity to a fervent Christian community. During his time there, he founded an orphanage for girls and became internationally famous for his pastoral care and ability to understand his flock's heart. Some people criticized him for his stringency and emphasis on contrition. He believed that the priest was responsible for expiating the sins he had heard in confession, and so he practiced extreme mortifications, and he revived the penitential practices of the desert monks. Ars became famous for its piety, and in a single year it hosted over one hundred thousand pilgrims. The very obscure town of Ars, France became so visited that a line of train track was laid from Lyon. Now the town has returned to being less frequented (except by those on pilgrimage) in that Ars cannot be reached by train or bus. In 1874, Pius IX declared him Venerable, and he was finally canonized by Pius XI in 1925.

In 1959, Pope John issued *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia*, an encyclical on St. John Vianney. In the encyclical, John XXIII praised Vianney for several things, including:

- his "voluntary affliction of his body" which "led him to abstain almost completely from food and from sleep, to carry out the harshest kinds of penances, and to deny himself with great strength of soul." Vianney engaged in these mortifications as penance on behalf of the sinners he ministered to: "I impose only a small penance on those who confess their sins properly; the rest I perform in their place."

- his life of poverty, "a life that was almost completely detached from the changeable, perishable goods of this world." The encyclical points out that Vianney said "My secret is easy ... give everything away and keep nothing for yourself" and that "There are many people keeping their money hidden away while many others are dying of hunger."

- his life of chastity. The encyclical points out that Vianney said "A soul adorned with the virtue of chastity cannot help loving others; for it has discovered the source and font of love—God."
- his life of obedience, living in such a way that he "burned himself up like a piece of straw being consumed on fiery coals."
- his administration of the sacrament of Penance, which Vianney took so seriously that he said: "So many crimes against God are committed that they sometimes incline us to ask God to end this world! ... You have to come to the town of Ars if you really want to learn what an infinite multitude of serious sins there are... Alas, we do not know what to do, we think that there is nothing else to do than weep and pray to God." The encyclical also notes that Vianney said: "If there were not very innocent souls to please God and make up for our offenses, how many terrible punishments we would have to suffer!" Yet, the encyclical also points out that Vianney said: "God is quicker to forgive than a mother to snatch her child from the fire."

The encyclical also praised Vianney's prayer life, holiness, pastoral skills, exercise of the teaching office, etc.

In speaking to you today, my dear brethren, of the dreadful state of the lukewarm soul, my purpose is not to paint for you a terrifying and despairing picture of the soul which is living in mortal sin without even having the wish to escape from this condition. That poor unfortunate creature can but look forward to the wrath of God in the next life. Alas! These sinners hear me; they know well of whom I am speaking at this very moment.... We will go no further, for all that I would wish to say would serve only to harden them more.

In speaking to you, my brethren, of the lukewarm soul, I do not wish, either, to speak of those who make neither their Easter duty nor their annual Confession. They know very well that in spite of all their prayers and their other good works they will be

lost. Let us leave them in their blindness, since they want to remain that way....

Nor do I understand, brethren, by the lukewarm soul, that soul who would like to be worldly without ceasing to be a child of God. You will see such a one at one moment prostrate before God, his Saviour and his Master, and the next moment similarly prostrate before the world, his idol.

Poor blind creature, who gives one hand to God and the other to the world, so that he can call both to his aid, and promise his heart to each in turn! He loves God, or rather, he would like to love Him, but he would also like to please the world. Then, weary of wanting to give his allegiance to both, he ends by giving it to the world alone. This is an extraordinary life and one, which offers so strange a spectacle that it is hard to persuade oneself that it could be the life of one and the same person. I am going to show you this so clearly that perhaps many among you will be hurt by it. But that will matter little to me, for I am always going to tell you what I ought to tell you, and then you will do what you wish about it....<sup>43</sup>

Discuss the role of parish priest/local minister in the context of the revival of the church and its influence on the local community.

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#### **47. Gerard Manley Hopkins**

Gerard Manley Hopkins (July 28, 1844 – June 8, 1889), a Jesuit priest was an English poet whose posthumous 20th-century fame established him

<sup>43</sup> Sermon, “THE DREADFUL STATE OF THE LUKEWARM SOUL” By Jean

among the finest Victorian poets. Much of Hopkins' historical importance has to do with the changes he brought to the form of poetry, which ran contrary to conventional ideas of meter. Prior to Hopkins, most middle English and modern English poetry was based on a rhythmic structure inherited from the Norman side of English literary heritage. This structure is based on repeating groups of two or three syllables, with the stressed syllable falling in the same place on each repetition. Hopkins called this structure running the rhythm and though he wrote some of his early verse in running rhythm he became fascinated with the older rhythmic structure of the Anglo-Saxon tradition of which *Beowulf* is the most famous example. Hopkins called his own rhythmic structure, "sprung rhythm." Sprung rhythm is structured around feet with a variable number of syllables, generally between one and four syllables per foot, with the stress always falling on the first syllable in a foot.

THOU mastering me  
     God! Giver of breath and bread;  
 World's strand, sway of the sea;  
     Lord of living and dead;  
 Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,  
 And after it almost unmade, what with dread,  
     Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?  
 Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

I did say yes  
 O at lightning and lashed rod;  
 Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess  
     Thy terror, O Christ, O God;  
 Thou knowest the walls, altar and hour and night:  
 The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee trod  
 Hard down with a horror of height:

And the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress.<sup>44</sup>

Consider expressing yourself to God in prose or poetry as a way of deepening your spiritual formation. Try a few lines:

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#### 48. Francis Thompson

Francis Thompson (December 18, 1859–November 13, 1907) was an English poet and ascetic. After attending college, he moved to London to become a writer but in menial work he became addicted to opium and was a street vagrant for years. A married couple read his poetry and rescued him, publishing his first book, *Poems* in 1893. Francis Thompson lived as an unbalanced invalid in Wales and at Storrington but wrote over three books of poetry with other works and essays before dying of tuberculosis in 1907.

“The Hound of Heaven,” by Francis Thompson

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
 I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
 I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways

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<sup>44</sup> **The Wreck of the Deutschland**, *To the happy memory of five Franciscan Nuns exiles by the Falk Laws drowned between midnight and morning of Dec. 7th. 1875* by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89). *Poems*. 1918.

Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
 I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
 Up vistaed hopes I sped;  
 And shot, precipitated,  
 Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,  
 From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
 But with unhurrying chase,  
 And unperturbed pace,  
 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
 They beat - and a Voice beat  
 More instant than the Feet -  
 "All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

Discuss how a seemingly wasted life of torment may be a great tribute to God. How can our seeming failures be turned into glorious exaltations of Christ's majesty?

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#### **49. John Henry Cardinal Newman**

John Henry Cardinal Newman, (February 21, 1801-August 11, 1890) was an English convert to Roman Catholicism, later made a cardinal and in 1991 proclaimed 'Venerable'. In early life he was a major figure in the Oxford movement to bring the church of England back to its Catholic roots. Eventually his studies in history persuaded him to become a Roman Catholic. Both before and after his conversion he wrote a number of influential books, including *Via Media*, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, *Apolgia Pro Vita Sua* and *the Grammar of Assent*.

A Short Road to Perfection

*September 27, 1856*

{285} IT is the saying of holy men that, if we wish to be perfect, we have nothing more to do than to perform the ordinary duties of the day well. A short road to perfection—short, not because easy, but because pertinent and intelligible. There are no short ways to perfection, but there are sure ones.

I think this is an instruction, which may be of great practical use to persons like us. It is easy to have vague ideas what perfection is, which serve well enough to talk about, when we do not intend to aim at it; but as soon as a person really desires and sets about seeking it himself, he is dissatisfied with anything but what is tangible and clear, and constitutes some sort of direction towards the practice of it.

We must bear in mind what is meant by perfection. It does not mean any extraordinary service, anything out of the way, or especially heroic—not all have the opportunity of heroic acts, of sufferings—but it means what the word perfection ordinarily means. By perfect we mean that which has no flaw in it, that which is complete, that which is consistent, that which is sound—we mean the opposite to imperfect. As we know well what *imperfection* in {286} religious service means, we know by the contrast what is meant by perfection.

He, then, is perfect who does the work of the day perfectly, and we need not go beyond this to seek for perfection. You need not go out of the *round* of the day.

I insist on this because I think it will simplify our views, and fix our exertions on a definite aim. If you ask me what you are to do in order to be perfect, I say, first—Do not lie in bed beyond the due time of rising; give your first thoughts to God; make a good visit to the Blessed Sacrament; say the Angelus devoutly; eat and drink to God's glory; say the Rosary well; be recollected; keep out bad thoughts; make your evening meditation well; examine yourself daily; go to bed in good time, and you are already perfect.<sup>45</sup>

Outline what steps you shall begin in your pilgrimage of holiness:

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<sup>45</sup> "A Short Road to Perfection," *September 27, 1856* by John Henry Cardinal Newman

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## 50. Saint Thérèse de Lisieux

Saint Thérèse de Lisieux (January 2, 1873-September 30, 1897), or more properly Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte Face ("Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face"), born Marie-Francoise-Therese Martin, was a Roman Catholic nun who was canonized as a saint and is recognized as a doctor of the Church. She is also known by many as "The Little Flower of Jesus." Therese is known for her "Little Way." In her quest for sanctity, she realized that it was not necessary to accomplish heroic acts or "great deeds" in order to attain holiness and to express her love of God. She wrote,

"Love proves itself by deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love."<sup>46</sup>

This "Little Way" also appeared in her approach to spirituality:

"Sometimes, when I read spiritual treatises, in which perfection is shown with a thousand obstacles in the way and a host of illusions round about it, my poor little mind soon grows weary, I close the learned book, which leaves my head splitting and my

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<sup>46</sup> POEMS of SR. TERESA, Carmelite of Lisieux, known as The "Little Flower of Jesus." Translated by S.L. EMERY, Author of the "Inner Life of the Soul." 12139 Boston ANGEL GUARDIAN PRESS CARMELITE CONVENT RUGGLES STREET MT. PLEASANT AVENUE Copyright, 1907 by CARMELITE CONVENT

heart parched, and I take the Holy Scriptures. Then all seems luminous, a single word opens up infinite horizons to my soul, perfection seems easy; I see that it is enough to realize one's nothingness, and give oneself wholly, like a child, into the arms of the good God. Leaving to great souls, great minds, the fine books I cannot understand, I rejoice to be little because 'only children, and those who are like them, will be admitted to the heavenly banquet'.<sup>47</sup>

Thérèse de Lisieux was most certainly led of the Holy Spirit. She was an authentic person. Part of the secret of her deep devotion to God was her meditation on the Holy Scriptures. In reading the lives of the saints we see our own failures and it moves us to improve our walk with the Lord. We must humble ourselves and become as a little child if we would learn the way of deeper devotion. She humbly sought the face of her Master and she grew in His likeness. The Little Flower has inspired the lives of throngs more than the writings of many great theologians. Thérèse died when she was twenty-four, after having lived as cloistered Carmelite for less than ten years. She never went on missions, never founded a religious order, and never performed great works. The only book of hers, published after her death, was a brief edited version of her journal called "Story of a Soul." (Collections of her letters and restored versions of her journals have been published recently.) But within twenty-eight years of her death, the public demand was so great that she was canonized.

Comment on the phrases, "An ordinary life with an extraordinary soul." Do you concur with Thérèse de Lisieux's statement, "He has no need of our

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<sup>47</sup> Attributed to Thérèse de Lisieux

works but only to love Him.” “For simple souls there must be no complicated ways.”

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### **Conclusion:**

This seems like such a good note on which to conclude. There are Spiritual Masters who have been neglected in this overview. However, perhaps ending with a brief look at the life of Thérèse de Lisieux is appropriate in light of her simplistic and unfeigned love for the Lord Jesus Christ. In all of our studies and methods we must not neglect what is most important; a life lived out to its fullest in adoration to the Lord Jesus Christ for all that He has accomplished on the cross of Calvary is the least we can do.

## **Part 2**

**The Exponential Growth/Influence of the Catholic Church in Relation to the Intercession of Monastic Orders: With special attention to the Benedictines, Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuites, Salesians, Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Congregation of the Holy Cross and other orders known to a lesser degree.**

It is the position of this author that the Catholic Church has grown to be the largest, most influential expression of Christianity down through the ages primarily because of the Monastic orders associated with it. It will be argued that prayer is the work. As goes the root so goes the fruit. One can begin to

deduce that because there are those who have cloistered themselves, for among other reasons primarily the purpose of prayer, the Popes and the Catholic church has exerted great influence. The cohesiveness of the Catholic church under the Holy Father helps among other means to cause it to have influence. Those of the Protestant persuasions would do well to learn from this example of withdrawal from the world for the purpose of effecting a difference in society. This claim will be substantiated by citing various monastic orders and their purposes. This leads to the conclusion that God answers prayer. Our effectiveness in the world appears to be directly related to prayer.

Monasticism is from the Greek word, monachos which means a solitary person. It is the religious practice in which one renounces worldly pursuits in order to fully devote one's life to spiritual work. Those pursuing a monastic life are usually called monks or brothers (male), and nuns or sisters (female). Both monks and nuns may also be called monastics. They live a common life following a religious rule under the leadership of a religious superior. They do so for the purpose of imitating Jesus of Nazareth more closely. They bind themselves in Church Law to this form of Christian living by taking public vows: chastity, poverty and obedience.

#### **A. Adorers of the Blood of Christ**

The Adorers of the Blood of Christ are a Roman Catholic religious order founded by St. Maria De Mattias in 1834, their post-nominal letters are A.S.C. They are a congregation of religious women established by Maria De Mattias to be a reconciling presence to the poor in our midst. They wish to

minister Christ's presence in our world while they grow in their own relationship to God through prayer and community living. In the suffering, dying and rising of Jesus, we find a foundation for a variety of ministries. Adorers are found throughout the world responding to the needs for healthcare, education and community service. To be an Adorer of the Blood of Christ means to be wholly consecrated to the adoring and redeeming love of Jesus Christ, who shed his blood to free us from sin and reconcile us in love. Accordingly, the congregation itself must become "a living image of that divine charity with which this blood was shed, and of which it was and is a sign, expression, measure and pledge."<sup>48</sup>

Adorers can be found in many places throughout the world. More specifically, they are in St. Louis, Missouri, Columbia, Pennsylvania, Ruma, Illinois, Wichita, Kansas, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Korea and in Rome. It is only through adoring Christ and reflecting upon His great sacrifice for the world that we ourselves could ever expect to make any kind of a difference in this world that Christ loves so much. As we meditate upon His sacrifice His love for the world can then be shown through us. One of the greatest ways to reciprocate Christ's love for us is to love His world. Christ asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Peter responded in the affirmative. He was then instructed to feed Christ's sheep. To aid at a local soup kitchen is an example of how one can demonstrate love for Christ.

List practical ways you can demonstrate your love for Christ.

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<sup>48</sup> Constitution of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, #2) see adorers.org

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## **B. Religious of the Assumption**

Blessed Marie Eugenie founded the Religious of the Assumption in Paris in 1839. Her vision was of transforming society through education. She taught that faith in Jesus impels one to love the world and all its peoples. Marie Eugenie believed that all action should flow from a life of love and prayer and asked the Assumption Sisters to respond to the urgent needs of their times. From the first community of five young women, the congregation quickly spread throughout the world. The Religious of the Assumption today is an international congregation of 1,300+ Sisters of over forty nationalities, responding to the challenges and calls of society in thirty-five countries. Assumption Sisters are called to live and love according to the Gospel. Their communities are committed to effecting change in society through prayer and education. They are a diverse group of women from many countries who live together in close-knit, joyful communities. Prayer, the heart of their life, is how they come to know and love Jesus, and with Him, love the world and its people. It is also at the heart of their educational mission.<sup>49</sup>

There is a misconception that cloistered societies do not effect society. Some of the good they have done down through the centuries is seen in their hospital work, establishment of educational institutions, etc. What are ways

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.assumptionsisters.org>

that those who have not taken *Orders* can have a positive impact on society as well?

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### **C. The Assumptionists**

The Assumptionists (more properly called Augustinians of the Assumption) are a Roman Catholic religious order of brothers and priests. They follow the rule of St. Augustine of Hippo, and belong in the broader religious movement called the Augustinians. They were founded by Emmanuel d'Alzon, in Nimes, France, in 1845 as a response to the damage done to the church in Europe after the French Revolution.

The early Assumptionists saw re-Christianizing Europe after the devastation of the French Revolution and fighting the enemies of the Catholic Church as their chief mission. At first they established schools and later inaugurated a press for this purpose. The most famous of their publications was *La Croix*, which enjoyed great popularity in France during the last decades of the 19th century and remains a major French national newspaper to the present day. As sons and disciples of Saint Augustine, the Assumptionists live their faith, prayer and apostolate in community.<sup>50</sup> "*One mind and one heart intent upon God*" (Rule of St Augustine.) The great passion of the Assumptionist Family is the Kingdom of God. It is God's great plan for the entire human race, manifested in Jesus Christ and made present by His Church.

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.assumptio.org/e/index.php>

The Kingdom of God is the password for the Assumption Family, indelibly stamped on its whole life. Study, prayer and action - these form the rhythm of their days, constituting for them three distinct yet mutually interrelated forms of the same passion for the Kingdom. In an apostolic community, mission and prayer continually interact. The mission of each member nourishes fraternal life, which in turn stimulates the mission. Apostolic activities must be concerted, shared and evaluated in a climate of fraternal candor and prayer. This faith sharing is important in an apostolic community. It is thus that the community becomes "one mind and one heart intent on God" (Rule of St Augustine.)

Just as the sea has an ebb and flow so too must our lives. As the moon waxes and wanes, so too must we. If we do not have this rhythm our lives are out of sync. We cannot expect to see sense made out of the chaos of this world until we ourselves are at peace with in. Our hurried and frenzied activity will have little to no positive effect. It is only when we take time to contemplate and intercede that we can begin to expect to see progress made for the Kingdom of God. Perhaps you may never join a monastery or an abbey. However, are there elements from such a life that you could incorporate into your daily routine that would help you to become a more devoted servant of God? You may want to look further into what it means to be an Oblate. These are laypeople affiliated in prayer with an individual House of their choice, who have made a formal private promise (annually renewable or for life) to follow the Rule of St Benedict in their private life at home and at work as closely as their individual circumstances and prior commitments permit.

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## **D. The Augustinians**

The Augustinians, named after Saint Augustine of Hippo (died AD 430), are several Roman Catholic monastic orders and congregations of both men and women living according to a guide to religious life known as the Rule of Saint Augustine. Prominent Augustinians include the only English Pope Adrian IV, Italian Pope Eugene IV, mystic Thomas à Kempis, Dutch Christian humanist Desiderius Erasmus and the German Reformer Martin Luther. The order has made a very significant missionary contribution to Christianity as well as establishing educational and charitable institutions throughout the world.

The Augustinian family worldwide is made up of different branches which includes The Order of the Hermit Friars of Saint Augustine, the friars subject to the jurisdiction of the Prior General (International leader) and Augustinian nuns or sisters of contemplative life (enclosed nuns.) Other Augustinian orders not under the jurisdiction of the Prior General of the Pope are religious congregations of apostolic life (active congregations of men or women) and lay fraternities and societies established under the name and teaching of Saint Augustine.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.augustinians.ca/>

On December 16, 1243, Pope Innocent IV issued the *Bull Incumbit Nobis* calling on several eremitical communities in Tuscany to unite themselves into a single religious order with the Rule and way of life of St. Augustine. The following March 1244, the Hermits held a founding chapter in Rome under the guidance of Cardinal Richard Annibald and put the union into effect. Thus began the history of the Order of St. Augustine. The Pope directed the Tuscan hermits to elect for themselves a prior general and to draw up a set of constitutions. From then on they became known as the Hermits of the Order of St. Augustine.<sup>52</sup>

St. Augustine is recognized as one of the most influential architects of monastic community life in the Western Church. His *Rule* provides the basic principles, which guide not only the Augustinians of the twenty-first century, but hundreds of other contemporary religious communities as well. Prayer - both private prayer and community prayer are needed. Community prayer, from Augustine's time until today, usually includes singing the Psalms (called *Divine Office* or *Liturgy of the Hours*) and celebration of Eucharist. Augustine tells the friars to think in their hearts what their lips are saying. Augustine stresses that private prayer as well should come from the heart. One can pray continually from the heart even while doing other things. One can also keep a brief prayer in mind and heart and return to it frequently. One can practice prayer without words (contemplation, meditation) and prayer with words (vocal prayer). Augustine required that each monastery have a room where the friars could go during free time to pray without being interrupted or distracted by other activities.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup><http://www.osanet.org/howeare/en/default.asp?page=history&language=en&section=who>

<sup>53</sup><http://www.midwestaugustinians.org/prayerreallife.html>

Augustinian monasteries eventually became among the most significant repositories after universities of the knowledge in the world.

The Augustinian Sisters Servants of Jesus and Mary are principally a teaching Congregation founded on the September 23, 1827 by Maria Teresa Spinelli in Frosinone, Italy. Being founded within the Church and for the Church, they have committed themselves to offer witness and be ready to give their service to God's people whoever they are not minding colour and creed. "For this reason we are always ready to open our hearts to the signs of the times and respond generously to the needs they present so as to quench Christ's thirst for souls. It is our aim to embed Christ's Kingdom in the hearts of those people who come in contact with us."<sup>54</sup>

"Augustinian" is the name traditionally given to Catholic religious orders following a rule of community life derived originally from the sermons and teachings of Saint Augustine of Hippo, and especially from a letter he wrote to a community of religious nuns in 423 A.D. After the Lateran Synod of 1059 A.D. the clergy to adopted a common rule to govern their community life. The clergy in many cities of Europe formed local communities with rules less rigid than those of the contemplative monastic orders. During the 12th century, the practice of forming these communities spread throughout the Christian world and especially throughout Western Europe. The Pope, who also united the separate communities into "orders" such as the "Augustinian Canons", unified community rules. These Augustinian Canons were also known as the "Black Canons" because of

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.asjm.org/newlayout/home.htm>

their dress. The name "Augustinian" was also given to various communities of Friars and Nuns who were united as one Order in 1256 A.D. These Friars were called "Austin Friars" (Austin being the English form of Augustine), or the "Hermits of St. Augustine" (because of their contemplative dimension), or "White Friars" because they often wore a white habit. The "Society of Saint Augustine" and the "Oblates of Saint Augustine" exists as a community of Catholic-Christian men and women seeking to live their Christian lives according to the prayers, traditions and spirituality of Saint Augustine and the Holy Rule of life, which he wrote. This *Rule of Life*, the oldest western monastic rule, has been a means of sanctification for Christians since Augustine's time. Augustine's way of life, focusing on love for God and love for one's neighbor, calls the believer to live the Gospel in community, experiencing the truth of Jesus in intense spiritual and human friendships.

We are Christian men and women who have consecrated ourselves to living the Gospel of Jesus according to a particular spiritual school. We do this in order to enrich their Christian lives. We shape our lives by living the love of Christ according to an approved "Rule of Life. As Augustinians we seek God by striving to become holy in their chosen way of life. By integrating their prayer, work, and sense of Christian community, we hope to manifest Christ's presence in society. <sup>55</sup>

It is amazing that Protestants and Catholics equally love Augustine. Perhaps he serves as a good basis point to foster greater appreciation for one another. His teachings on prayer stand us in good stead for 21st-century problems facing our world, i.e. Starvation, A.I.D.S., increasing natural disasters in

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<sup>55</sup> [www.angelfire.com/pa5/augustinian10](http://www.angelfire.com/pa5/augustinian10)

light of the climate change, aggressive behavior on the part of powerful nations, hatred for certain races of people. Our solutions that we propose may only serve to heighten the clamor of today's society, unless we have first learned the secret of withdrawal to contemplate on the love of Christ. It is only when the love of Christ flows through us out of a life of prayer that we can to begin to address these matters that weigh so heavy on our Lord's heart. We cannot expect to speak for Him, unless we have first heard Him speak to us.

Discuss meditation on the Scriptures and contemplative prayer in terms of going deep into the recesses of the heart or reaching upward to God. Do you see it as a combination of the two?

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## **F. Baladites**

Baladites (Order of Lebanese Maronite) - O.L.M. Baladites (or Valadites), from the Arabic *baladiye*, 'country' monk, are one of the two congregations (Pope Clement XIV sanctioned this separation in 1770) of St. Antony monks (the only other order being that of St. Isaia), alongside the Aleppians (monks of Aleppo, a city, antonym of baldiye, in present day Syria), among the Levatine Catholic Maronite Church, which from the beginning has been specially a monastic Church. The eighteenth century witnessed a remarkable

revival of monasticism among the Maronites of Mount Lebanon and Aleppo.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps this vibrant, strong group of Christians in Lebanon holds the key to Middle East peace in their prayers and intercession. They like few others would have keen insights into the mistrust and misunderstanding that enflames and embroils the stymied peace processes.

Psalm 122:6 states, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.” Contemplate what would happen if Christians all over the world made a daily, concerted effort to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Delineate what you see to be the fruit coming out of such an exercise. What is the root causes of unrest in that region of the world? No other city in the world can claim to be a main center for three of the world’s major religions.

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## **F. Benedictine**

A Benedictine is a person who follows the Rule of St. Benedict. Such a person may live the Consecrated Life (that is, as a monk or nun) or not (for example, as an oblate). The Order of Saint Benedict, was founded in the

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<sup>56</sup> Notables and Clergy in Mount Lebanon: The Khzin Sheikhs and the Maronite Church (1736-1840) By Richard “van” Leeuwen, Published 1994, Brill Academic Publishers, ISBN 9004099786, P.

sixth century in the Western Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. The *Rule of St. Benedict* by Benedict of Nursia (fl. 6th century) is a book of precepts written for monks living in community under the authority of an abbot. Since about the 7th century it has been adopted with equal success by communities of women. During the 1500 years of its existence, it has become a leading guide in Western Christianity for monastic living in community, both in Catholicism and (since the time of the Reformation) in the Anglican and Protestant traditions.

The spirit of St. Benedict's Rule is summed up in the motto of the Benedictine Confederation: *pax* ("peace") and the traditional *ora et labora* ("pray and work.") Christian monasticism first appeared in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire a few generations before Benedict, in the Egyptian desert. Under the spiritual inspiration of Saint Anthony the Great (251-356), ascetic monks led by Saint Pachomius (286-346) formed the first Christian monastic communities under what became known as an *Abba* (Egyptian for "Father", from which the term *Abbot* originates).

In the West in about the year 500, Benedict left the comfort of a student's life in Rome and chose the life of an ascetic monk in the pursuit of personal holiness, living as a hermit in a cave near Subiaco. In time, setting a shining example with his zeal, he began to attract disciples. After considerable initial struggles with his first community at Subiaco, he eventually founded the monastery of Monte Cassino, where he wrote his Rule in about 530. St. Benedict's model for the monastic life was the family, with the abbot as father and all the monks as brothers. Priesthood was not initially an important part of Benedictine monasticism – monks used the services of

their local priest. Because of this, almost all the Rule is applicable to communities of women under the authority of an abbess.

St. Benedict's Rule organises the monastic day into regular periods of communal and private prayer, sleep, spiritual reading, and manual labour – *ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus*, "that in all [things] God may be glorified" (cf. Rule ch. 57.9). In later centuries, intellectual work and teaching took the place of farming, crafts, or other forms of manual labour for many – if not for most Benedictines. Traditionally, the daily life of the Benedictine revolved around the eight canonical hours. The monastic timetable or *Horarium* would begin at midnight with the service, or "office", of *Matins* (today also called the *Office of Readings*), followed by the morning office of *Lauds* at 3am. We need to work from our rest and not rest out of our work. In other words, we need to have seasons in our lives when we rest, meditate and pray. When we are exhausted we cannot expect to see the needs of people met. Some often work until they drop from exhaustion. However, if like the Lord Jesus Christ we know what it means to withdraw, then we can reenter the world and be effective.

Discuss the statement, "We need to work from our rest and not rest out of our work" and record your reflections.

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**This is all that is left of the Great Benedictine Abbey in Cluny... a building that was once so vast and extravagant that it birth the revolutionary Cistercians.**

### **G. Carmelites**

The Order of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel -- Carmelite Order, sometimes simply Mount Carmel by synecdoche, or in Latin *Ordo fratrum Beatæ Virginis Mariæ de monte Carmelo* -- is the name of an enclosed Catholic order founded in the 12th century by a group of Europeans led by a man commonly called Saint Bertold (d. after 1185) on Mount Carmel, Israel, whence the order receives its name. The site is believed by Christians, Jews

and Muslims to be where the encounter between the prophet Elijah and the priests of Baal took place (1 Kings ch. 18.)

The charism, or spiritual focus, of the Carmelite Order is contemplative prayer. The Order is under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary and thus has a strong Marian devotion. As in most of the orders dating to medieval times, the First Order is the friars (who are active/contemplative), the Second Order is the nuns (who are cloistered) and the Third Order consists of laypeople who continue to live in the world, and can be married, but participate in the charism of the order by liturgical prayers, apostolates (ministries), and contemplative prayer. There are also offshoots such as active Carmelite sisters.

Carmelite tradition traces the origin of the Order to a community of hermits on Mount Carmel that succeeded the schools of the prophets in ancient Israel, although there are no certain records of monks on this mountain before the ninth decade of the twelfth century. A group of men gathered at the Well of Elijah on Mt. Carmel. These men, who had gone to Palestine from Europe either as pilgrims or as crusaders, chose Mount Carmel in part because it was the traditional home of Elijah. It was but natural that this community of Eastern hermits in the Holy Land should gain constant accessions from pilgrims, and between 1206 and 1214 they received a rule from the patriarch and Papal Legate Albert of Jerusalem. Their orders consisted of sixteen articles, which enjoined strict obedience to their Prior, residence in individual cells, constancy in prayer, the hearing of Mass every morning in the oratory of the community, poverty and toil, daily silence from vespers until terce the next morning, abstinence from all forms of meat

except in cases of severe illness, and fasting from Holy Cross Day (September 14) to Easter of the following year. In 1476 a bull of Pope Sixtus IV founded the Carmelites of the Third Order, who received a special rule in 1635, which was amended in 1678. The 16th century saw a number of short-lived reforms, but it was not until the second half of the same century that a thorough reformation of the Carmelites was carried out by St. Teresa of Avila, who, together with St. John of the Cross, established the Discalced Carmelites.

“Carmel in the contemporary church stands for prayer. The original Carmelites and the saints of Carmel known and unknown were preoccupied with attentiveness to mystery. From this attentiveness flowed identity, community and service to the world. If the tradition of the Carmel has anything to say to the modern world it is a word about prayer. The essays in this book offer its readers some words about prayer in the Carmelite tradition.”<sup>57</sup>

Some may accuse the Carmelite way of life as being useless. In fact, as they are praying for the Pope and priests who are more readily seen on the frontlines, the Catholic Church makes great advancements against the kingdom of darkness.

Describe a prayer schedule you might set for yourself, if you do not already have one and what elements it would entail.

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<sup>57</sup> “Carmelite Prayer: A Tradition for the 21st Century” By Keith J. Egan, Published 2003, Paulist Press, ISBN 0809141930, Page 7.

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## H. Dominican Order

The Dominican Order stands for *Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare* (Praise, Bless, Preach.) Saint Dominic saw the need for a new type of organization to address the needs of his time, one that would bring the dedication and systematic education of the older monastic orders to bear on the religious problems of the burgeoning population of cities, but with more organizational flexibility than either monastic orders or the secular clergy.

The Order of Preachers (*Ordo fratrum Praedicatorum*), after the 15th century became more commonly known as the Dominican Order, or Dominicans is a Catholic religious order, created in the year 1215, when Saint Dominic established a religious community in Toulouse, France. In England and some other countries, the Dominicans are referred to as “Blackfriars” on account of the black *cappa* or cloak they wear over their white habits (for the same reason, Carmelites are known as "Whitefriars" and Franciscans as "Greyfriars"). In Paris, the Dominicans are known as “Jacobins,” because their first convent in Paris was on Rue Saint-Jacques in Paris, and Jacques is *Jacobus* in Latin. The Dominican Order was founded by Saint Dominic in the early 13th century under the Augustinian rule. The Dominican Order is one of the great orders of mendicant friars that revolutionized religious life in Europe during the High Middle Ages. Founded to preach the Gospel and to combat heresy, the Order is famed for

its intellectual tradition, having produced many leading theologians and philosophers. The Dominican Order is headed by the Master of the Order, who is currently Father Carlos Azpiroz Costa. Like his contemporary Francis of Assisi, Dominic saw the need for a new type of organization to address the needs of his time, and the quick growth of the Dominicans and Franciscans during their first century confirms that the orders of mendicant friars met a need.

“Thus it was that the novices were constantly reminded that all of their spiritual, moral and intellectual life had as its end the task of preaching; that preaching was in itself an act of charity growing from a transformed life; that its value lay in the preacher’s being able to teach not only by word but also by example; and that the model for this entire process was their founder Saint Dominic, whose own prayer life was illustrated, so to speak, on the various walls of their cells.”<sup>58</sup>

## **I. Franciscans**

Franciscans - The Order of Friars Minor and other Franciscan movements are disciples of Saint Francis of Assisi. The term Franciscan is used to refer to those Anglican and Roman Catholic religious orders which follow a body of regulations known as "The Rule of St. Francis", or a member of one of these orders. There are also small Old Catholic and Protestant Franciscan communities. The best known group following "The Rule of St. Francis" is the *Order of Friars Minor* (commonly called simply the "Franciscans"). The

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<sup>58</sup> Saint Dominic's Manners of Praying: Gestures in Fra Angelico's Cell Frescoes at S. Marco

by William Hood, P. 201 *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 68, No. 2. (Jun., 1986), pp. 195-206.

Order of Friars Minor is a mendicant religious order of men tracing their origin to Francis of Assisi. The official Latin name of the Orders of Friars Minor is the *Ordo Fratrum Minorum* (literally, "Order of Little Brothers"). St. Francis thus referred to his followers as "Fratricelli", meaning "Little Brothers." Franciscan brothers are informally called friars. The order has historically been known as the Greyfriars. The modern organization of the Friars Minor now comprises three separate branches: the 'Friars Minor' (OFM); the 'Friars Minor Conventuals' (OFM Conv), and the 'Friars Minor Capuchins' (OFM Cap). The Friars Minor Conventual were constituted officially in 1517 and the Capuchins in 1619.

A sermon which Francis heard in 1209 A.D. on Matthew 10:9 made such an impression on him that he decided to devote himself wholly to a life of apostolic poverty. Clad in a rough garment, barefoot, and, after the Evangelical precept, without staff or script, he began to preach repentance.

Given the above mentioned Bible verse and the passage about the rich young ruler who turned away from following Jesus discuss how riches can be a stumbling block to a spiritual life.

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## **J. Jesuits**

The Society of Jesus - (Latin: *Societas Iesu (S.J.)*) is a Christian religious order of the Catholic Church in direct service to the Pope. Its members,

known as Jesuits since the Protestant Reformation, have been called "Soldiers of Christ", first, and "Foot soldiers of the Pope", second, in part because the Society's founder, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, was a soldier before he became a priest. Today, Jesuits number 20,170 (with 14,147 priests), and comprise the largest religious order of men in the Catholic Church (the Franciscan family of OFM's, Capuchins, and Conventuals has approximately 31,899 members, of whom 20,786 are priests; however, the "family" consists of multiple orders). Jesuit priests and brothers are engaged in ministries in 112 nations on six continents. Their works are focused on education and intellectual contributions, primarily at colleges and universities, as well as missionary work and ministry in human rights and social justice.

The Society of Jesus is consecrated under the patronage of Madonna Della Strada, a title of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and is led by a Superior General, currently Peter Hans Kolvenbach. The General Curia of the Society is headquartered in Rome. Its historic complex of buildings includes the Church of the Gesu, the Jesuit Mother Church.

On August 15, 1534, Ignatius (born Iñigo López de Loyola - his first name was incorrectly Latinized when he enrolled in university), a Basque, and six other students at the University of Paris (Francisco Xavier, Alfonso Salmerón, Diego Laínez, and Nicolás Bobadilla, Spaniards, Peter Faber from France and Simon Rodrigues from Portugal) met in Montmartre outside Paris, probably either at Saint Pierre de Montmartre (the local abbey) or near the modern Chapel of St. Denys, Rue Antoinette. This group bound themselves by a vow of poverty and chastity, to "enter upon hospital and

missionary work in Jerusalem, or to go without questioning wherever the Pope might direct". They called themselves the "Company of Jesus," a name that had echoes of the military (as in an infantry "company"), as well as of discipleship (the "companions" of Jesus). The word "company" comes ultimately from Latin, *cum + pane* = "bread with" or a group that shares meals. These initial steps led to the founding of what would be called the "Society of Jesus" later in 1540. The term *societas* in Latin is derived from *socius*, a "partner or comrade." Much is sometimes made of Ignatius' military background, which is reflected in some early Jesuit terminology, but the words also had wider connotations.

Ignatius wrote the Jesuit *Constitutions*, adopted in 1554, which created a tightly centralized organization and stressed absolute self-abnegation and obedience to Pope and superiors (*perinde ac cadaver*, "[well-disciplined] like a corpse" as Ignatius put it). His main principle became the unofficial Jesuit motto: *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam* ("for the greater glory of God"). This phrase is designed to reflect the idea that any work that is not evil can be meritorious for the spiritual life if it is performed with this intention, even things considered normally indifferent.

St. Ignatius and the Jesuits who followed him believed that the reform of the Church had to begin with the conversion of an individual's heart. One of the main tools the Jesuits have used to bring about this conversion has been the Ignatian retreat, called the "Spiritual Exercises." During a four-week period of silence, individuals undergo a series of directed meditations on the life of Christ. During this period, they meet regularly with a spiritual director, who helps them understand whatever call or message God has offered in their

meditations. The retreat follows a Purgative-Illuminative-Unitive pattern in the tradition of the mysticism of John Cassian and the Desert Fathers. Ignatius' innovation was to make this style of contemplative mysticism available to all people in active life, and to use it as a means of rebuilding the spiritual life of the Church. "The Exercises" became both the basis for the training of Jesuits themselves and one of the essential ministries of the order: giving the exercises to others in what became known as retreats.

As with all Catholic spirituality, the spirituality practised by the Jesuits, called Ignatian spirituality, is based on the Catholic faith and the Gospels. Aside from the *Constitutions*, *The Letters*, and *Autobiography*, Ignatian spirituality draws most specially from St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, whose purpose is "to conquer oneself and to regulate one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment." In other words, *The Exercises* are intended, in Ignatius' view, to give the exercitant (the person undertaking them) a greater degree of freedom from his or her own likes, dislikes, comforts, wants, needs, drives, appetites and passions that they may choose based solely on what they discern God's will is for them. In the words of Kolvenbach, *The Exercises* try to "unite two apparently incompatible realities: exercises and spiritual. It invites to "unlimited generosity" in contemplating God, yet going down to the level of many details.<sup>59</sup>

Ignatian spirituality can be described as an active attentiveness to God joined with a prompt responsiveness to God, who is ever active in people's lives. Though it includes many forms of prayer, discernment, and apostolic service, it is the interior

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<sup>59</sup> Discourse given to the Rome Consultation, 16 February 2003.

dispositions of attentiveness and responsiveness that are ultimately crucial. The result is that Ignatian spirituality has a remarkable 'nowness,' both in its attentiveness to God and in its desire to respond to what God is asking of the person now.<sup>60</sup>

As we contemplate on the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, we begin to see ourselves in the Scriptures. We recognize the sins that have been looming sometimes for years. We begin to call out for freedom from these besetting incongruities. We recognize ourselves in the light of God's Word and allow it as a scalpel to remove from us matters we did not think were present in ourselves, but most certainly sought in the lives of others. This form of prayer and meditation guided by the Word of God has great effect in transforming our lives. We are no longer conformed to this world. Neither are we simply reformed. It is an inner transformation by the working of God's Holy Spirit.

Provide reflections on this above given quote, "to conquer oneself and to regulate one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment."

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### **K. The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate**

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (*OMI*) is a religious order of the Roman Catholic Church founded on January 25, 1816 by Saint Eugene

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<sup>60</sup> Charles J. Jackson, *Ignatian Spirituality*.

de Mazenod, a French priest from Marseille. It was first recognized by Pope Leo XII on February 17, 1826. Originally established to revive the Church after devastation by the French Revolution, the religious order now serves in various countries around the world. In 1938, Pope Pius XI called them "specialists in difficult missions". One of the more famous members of the OMI is Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop of Chicago.

The Oblates played the major role in Catholic missionary activity in Western Canada. Famous Oblate missionaries to the native peoples of Northwestern Canada include Father Émile Petitot and Father Adrien-Gabriel Morice. Even today the parish priests in northern British Columbia are Oblates.

#### **L. The Congregation of Holy Cross**

The Congregation of Holy Cross, *Congregatio Sanctae Crucis* (C.S.C.), is a Roman Catholic congregation of priests and brothers founded in 1837 by the Venerable Father Basil Anthony-Marie Moreau, CSC in Le Mans, France. Father Moreau also founded the Marianites of Holy Cross, now divided into three independent congregations of sisters. The Congregations of Women who trace their origins to Father Moreau are the Marianites of Holy Cross (Le Mans, France), the Sisters of the Holy Cross, (Notre Dame, Indiana), and the Sisters of the Holy Cross (Montreal, Canada).

There are many Orders and groups that have been overlooked. It is beyond the scope of this work to provide an exhaustive in depth look at the spiritual masters and monastic orders. Suffice it to say this is a brief hand book to intriduce the subject. Its purpose is to create a thirst for the deeper things of

God and to lead us to give ourselves fully to the service of the kingdom. In keeping with this various subjects pertaining to this objective will now be taken up.

### **Part 3**

#### **Some Key Concepts and Subjects**

##### **I. Quietism**

Quietism is more than just being quiet in the presence of God. In the book of Psalms we are instructed, "Be still and know that I am God" Psalm 46.10. We should never attempt a synchronism of Nirvana for the Buddhists or the tranquil oneness with the pantheistic "all-god," or the Tao. When we try to void our minds we leave ourselves susceptible to evil. The Jesuits have written against Quietism as a heresy. Quietism seeks the suppression of human effort so that divine action may have full play. The individual seeks to be totally absorbed with God. In the quietude the mind seeks to become inactive. This is not advisable for the Christian. God has given us the Holy Scriptures as our guide. To elevate Quietism as the highest form of communion with God is a very dangerous teaching. There are better teachings, which will not lead a person into falsehood. We shall discuss them. We only raise the topic here so Christians are not ignorant of these devices and trappings that can lead us away from God.

Quietism is a false mysticism. As was mentioned earlier Clement was opposed to Stoic philosophy, which distanced itself from emotion. They sought to avoid defilement of the soul along these lines. Our means of cleansing is through the blood of Jesus Christ. Some aspects of New Age

teaching are to see ourselves as god and in part this is through clearing the mind of all distractions and seeking to get back to the inner self. To reiterate, there is nothing of Christ in this. Man does not attain perfection by such methods. Meister Eckhart thought we were transubstantiated into the body of Christ the same as the bread is when it is consecrated. There is no salvation apart from Christ and clearing our minds of evil and outside influences does not erase the fact that the image of God has been marred in us. We can not be conformed to the likeness of Christ through human effort. To disdain the cross, sacraments, the Church, Holy Scriptures only deepens our distance from God. Without Christ man is in a hopeless abyss. Pope Innocent XI condemned the Spaniard Michel de Molinos' sixty-eight propositions as heresy. He thought that anything man did was an abomination to God and that in doing nothing the soul annihilates itself and returns to its source, God and becomes divine. The person is not to think of heaven or hell; reward or judgment or anything to do with human effort. This is a deification of man and an anathema. When people engage in such foolishness they are a sitting target for demons. We are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit. A less than mature teaching of some Christians is that in order to be filled to with the Holy Spirit we must empty ourselves of self. A more mature understanding would be to see that we need to surrender ourselves to the Holy Spirit in order to be filled.

## **II. Meditation**

We move from this subject to the balanced teaching of meditation which contains the element of mental prayer. Vocal prayer is of course praying out loud. In meditations a person may choose various subjects such as the justice

of God, His grace, mercy and other such themes on which to meditate. This is wholesome and positive. A person reflects on these matters over and over. As he does so the Holy Spirit reveals to Him deeper aspects of the theme. This is where sanctified imagination comes into play and the use of our mental faculties. St. Francis de Sales spoke of prayer in terms of a simple committal to God. In doing so, we seek to control our restlessness and reign in our thoughts to concentrate on the goodness of God or some such theme. This is a habit that is to be cultivated because there are so many distractions. Our emotions can be complex and our thoughts jumbled. Our emotions need to be soothed and our thoughts clarified. This takes time. It happens as we begin to center on God. He needs to be undisturbed in our thinking.



**Meditation Can Take Many Forms**

St. Ignatius and other masters in the art of prayer have provided suggestions for passing from meditation to further degrees of prayer. In Isaiah 26:3 we have the promise that God will keep in perfect peace the person whose mind is kept on Him. In meditation we concentrate on a holy theme or better yet on Christ Himself. In meditation we seek to acquire an inner stillness. "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it, then you will be prosperous and successful" (Joshua 1:8.) The Philokalia is a collection of texts by the masters of the Eastern Orthodox hesychast tradition writing from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries. The work was compiled by St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth. Other than the Bible and a handful of writings by Spiritual masters the Philokalia is by far the most influential and widely admired example of Eastern Orthodox piety in print today. Christ instructed us to go into our closet and pray. He means for us to meditate. St John of Sinai describes Hesychast practice as follows:

Take up your seat on a high place and watch, if only you know how, and then you will see in what manner, when, whence, how many and what kind of thieves come to enter and steal your clusters of grapes. When the watchman grows weary, he stands up and prays; and then he sits down again and courageously takes up his former task.

Repeating the Jesus Prayer can be beneficial in taming the thoughts to enter a meditative state; "*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*" One should be discouraged from turning it into a mantra that is just blindly repeated until it is slur of syllables. There is no benefit in that. We need to bring our mind and heart into balance. There are times when the

heart longs to be in the presence of God but the will is lacking. Just as in physical exercise the body is crying out for rest so too in spiritual exercise the mind is crying out to be assuaged with television and other stimuli. We are so prone to have music on in the background that sometimes it is hard to sit down and rest without some form of media. It may be necessary to take a spiritual retreat and use a cottage to get away from all of the distractions. To be under a starlit sky can help to quiet the raging senses that have been over stimulated by car horns blaring, phones ringing and rushed meetings. Some have been known to throw their cell phone into the water to get peace and rest. Our lives become so congested that we cannot enter the presence of God. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" Phillipians 4:7. Our minds need to be guarded against distracting thoughts and temptations in order to meditate.

The Bible teaches clearly the benefit of meditation. "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night" Psalm 1:2. The early monastic practice was to read the Bible slowly and then contemplate on the words. This is also called, divine reading. This would often prompt the monks to begin praying. It is a progression from Bible reading, to meditation, to prayer, to loving regard for God.



**A profound encounter with God at Le Thoronet Abbey. It was a Cistercian monastery in the departement of Var in Provence, France. It was founded in 1120 from Mazan Abbey and was one of the Cistercian abbeys known as the "three sisters" of Provence.**

### **III. Contemplative Prayer**

The root of all prayer is interior silence. Contemplative Prayer is a prayer of silence, an experience of God's presence as the ground in which our being is rooted, the source from whom our life emerges at every moment. After contemplation a person simply moves into prayer. It can be vocal or mental prayer. God infuses in our hearts the theme He wants us to center on or we choose a subject and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. We can either pray

with our understanding or allow the Holy spirit to intercede through us. It is much the same as allowing the buoyancy of water to cause us to float. People refuse to swim because they can not bear the thought of having their head under water. They are so concentrated on the fact that we cannot breathe in water they panic and gasp for air when they enter the water. Swimming provides a good analogy for praying in the Spirit. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to take over. We need to be assured that our bodies can float. We can dodge, dart, dive and be totally immersed in the water. It will not hurt us. When it is time we come to the surface and gain a breath. Similarly, we pray with our understanding and then go back to allowing the Holy Spirit to direct us. A person can remain in the river for hours when he comes to trust the principles of swimming. A Christian can remain for hours in prayer when he understands what it means to allow the Holy Spirit to carry us along. We do not need to gasp or panic. We simply allow the Holy Spirit to bring to our minds themes He wants us to move in. It is a simple principle but foreign to the carnal, natural mind.

St. Teresa of Avila practiced contemplative prayer for periods of one hour at a time, twice a day. In her *Life* she recounts that she found this very difficult for the first several years. She had no one to teach her, and taught herself from the instructions given in a book, *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* by Francisco de Osuna. Her beginning point was the practice of "recollection." Recollection means an effort of the will to keep the senses and the intellect in line and not allow them to wander. We restrict our attention to a single subject, principally the love of God. "It is called recollection because the soul collects together all the faculties and enters within itself to be with God," she says in *The Way of Perfection*. St Teresa, it is said found it

difficult to concentrate, so she would use means such as short readings from an inspiring book, a scene of natural beauty or a religious statue or picture to remind her of her intended focus. In due course, the mind becomes effortlessly still. The initial practice St. Teresa viewed as the voluntary effort of the individual, while the subsequent stillness and joy she saw as gifts from God. Her best-known book on meditation and prayer is *The Interior Castle*.

#### **IV. Centering Prayer**

Centering prayer is a method similar to contemplative prayer, placing a strong emphasis on interior silence. Most authors trace its roots to the contemplative prayer of the Desert Fathers of early Christian monasticism, to the *Lectio Divina* tradition of Benedictine monasticism, and to works like *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the writings of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. "Centering Prayer" is a movement in modern Catholicism and Christianity. There are several books published on the subject by three Trappist monks of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts in the 1970s: Fr. William Meninger, Fr. M. Basil Pennington and Abbot Thomas Keating. This technique, known as *Centering Prayer (CP)*, has been of growing interest for many since the 1970's. Thomas Keating, a Cistercian priest, monk, and abbot in Colorado, is the founder of the Centering Prayer Movement. Father Pennington, another teacher of this technique, is called a "master of centering prayer." The following quotes are attributed to Fr. Pennington;

"Centering Prayer is a simple method of prayer that sets up the ideal conditions to rest in quiet awareness of God's presence.

This way of prayer is alluded to in many passages in the Old and New Testaments and probably dates from then."

"The Greek Fathers referred to it as monologion, "one-word" prayer. The desert father, Abba Isaac taught a similar form of prayer to John Cassian who later wrote of it in France, transmitting it to Benedict of Nursia. Unfortunately, by the time of the 16th century, the prayer form largely went out of use in favor of more discursive modes of prayer."

"When we go to the center of our being and pass through that center into the very center of God we get in immediate touch with this divine creating energy. This is not a new idea. It is the common teaching of the Christian Fathers of the Greek tradition. When we dare with the full assent of love to unleash these energies within us not surprisingly the initial experience is of a flood of chaotic thoughts, memories, emotions and feelings. This is why wise spiritual Fathers and mothers counsel a gentle entering into this experience. Not too much too fast. But it is this release that allows all of this chaos within us with all its imprisoning stress to be brought into harmony so that not only there might be peace and harmony within but that the divine energy may have the freedom to forward the evolution of consciousness in us and through us, as a part of the whole, in the whole of the creation."

Ft. Pennington needs to be very careful about his choice of words. It should raise our concern when he says, "unleash these energies." One would hope he is not speaking of the Holy Spirit as a divine energy. He is a person. Some may take his words the wrong way when he speaks of an, "evolution of consciousness." They could try to synchronize it with the New Age movement or worse yet Yoga and the destroyer goddess. Satan often takes what is good, disguises it and deceives people. Meditation, contemplative and centering prayer is a gift from God for our spiritual renewal and inner healing. We should not discount it altogether because Satan has stolen it and

used it for his purposes. To practice this technique is not compromising with evil. Quite the contrary. It is keeping in God's camp what is a sanctified means to deeper holiness and communion with God. A sharp knife can be used to prepared food or maim someone. Fire can be used to cook our food or burn the house down. Meditation, contemplative or centering prayer can be used to usher us into a deeper consciousness of God or open the door to demonic activity. The keys of the kingdom have been given to open the door to what is good or lock out what is evil. Whatever we bind on earth shall be bound in the heavenlies. Whatever we loose on earth shall be loosed in the heavenlies. We do not throw out all the knives in the kitchen because someone may get cut. We do not take the burners out of the stove because someone may get burned. No. We are careful to ensure that these powerful spiritual tools are used for good and never evil. St. Teresa of Avila found that in times of heightened spirituality there could be the tendency to get off track. To guard against this she insisted meditation always be directed to Christ. Keep in mind the New Age movement is old age lies warmed over. It borrows from Hinduism. When we try to keep the mind open we are opening it to both good and bad. Trying to draw in spiritual energy from the cosmic unknown is very dangerous.

In the then Cardinal Ratzinger's booklet, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, he quotes the then Pope. On p. 34, footnote 12, he writes,

"Pope John Paul II has pointed out to the whole Church the example and doctrine of St. Teresa of Avila who in her life had to reject the temptation of certain methods which proposed a leaving aside of the humanity of Christ in favor of a vague self-immersion in the abyss of divinity. In a homily given on

November 1, 1982, he said that the call of St. Teresa of Jesus advocating a prayer completely centered on Christ "is valid even in our day, against some methods of prayer which are not inspired by the gospel and which in practice tend to set Christ aside in preference for a mental void which makes no sense in Christianity. Any method of prayer is valid insofar as it is inspired by Christ and leads to Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life" [(cf. John 14:6). See *Homilia Abulae habitae in honorem Sanctae Teresiae*: AAS 75 (1983) 256-257].

The purpose of centering prayer is to clear the mind of distracting thoughts in order to focus on the indwelling presence of God. In Centering prayer a person sits in a comfortable position, chooses a word that supports his intention to be in the presence of the Lord. It might be love, shalom, peace, Abba, Father or some other such spiritual theme. As you contemplate on its meaning images come up in the mind. These are to be excused because a person is not using the cognitive faculties per se. God's presence seems to be near you and you shut out stray thoughts. Instead of "doing" a person is "being." You are not trying to earn God's love. You are not striving to be a hard worker for the Lord by forcing yourself to spend hours in prayer. This is simply being in the presence of God. It is not striving for Him. It is allowing Him to be near you and feeling His reassurance. Perhaps you may allow yourself to be a baby in his arms. A baby cannot give to a person other than to smile and snuggle. An infant is so helpless. In fact guard against even trying to imagine that you are a baby and simply remain in His presence. Perhaps as you are contemplating the love of God you might picture a warm, red shawl being placed on your shoulders. Even at that there is the danger of trying to do something for God. Simply allow yourself to be His person.

Centering Prayer is a method of prayer, which prepares us to receive the gift of God's presence. We respond to the Holy Spirit by consenting to what He wants to do in us. Allow yourself to sense His presence and nearness. In this media charged society it is so hard for us to just remain in the presence of God. Our senses are over stimulated. We constantly need to be entertained in this modern era. Colors such as red and yellow are known to stimulate the appetite. We think we need to be constantly eating in this crazed society. Just as there is air pollution so too is there noise pollution. Some of us have such a hard time with silence. We feel awkward when there is a gap in the conversation. Sometimes it is good to just sit in the presence of a good friend and reflect on a sunset. When you love someone and know them well you do not always need to use words. Just being in the same room with that person makes us feel warm inside. We are so conditioned by the Protestant work ethic to produce that we think we have to be constantly chattering in God's presence. The most powerful prayers may be the ones with the least words. Center in on God and do not allow anything to rush you or distract you. Just contemplate on His goodness. We need to learn to rest in His presence. Repeatedly we are told in Scriptures to wait on the Lord. Rest is not a complicated word. We need to be in a receptive mode. God does not need anything from us. So it is all right to just be in His presence. This is sometimes difficult to foster because we think in order to receive love we need to do good works.

God is a mystery. We could never know all there is to know about Him. He is infinite and our minds are finite. Meditate on an aspect of God and allow this to permeate your soul. Open your heart and mind to God and allow the mystery of God pervade you. He is closer than the next breath we are about

to draw. Think ahead a moment in time. God is already there. Think ahead an hour. God already knows what is going to happen. When you become an old person, to feeble to bathe or dress yourself God will be there for you and it will be a wonderful experience to just be helpless in the presence of God. Jesus said to Peter when he was young he went wherever he wanted but when he would become old that would not be the case. Think back to when you were a baby. You needed your mother to change you and feed you. God was there providing someone to care for you. From the cradle to the grave He is God. Allow yourself to contemplate on His greatness. Be encompassed by the magnitude of His love. Unfold the recesses of your heart to take in, even drink in His mercy and love. Perhaps the image of a lake will help you to enrich your Christian walk.

The primal need of the purified soul, then, is the power of Concentration. His whole being must be set towards the Object of his craving if he is to attain to it: "Look that *nothing* live in thy working mind, but a naked intent stretching into God." Any thought of Him is inadequate, and for that reason defeats its own end—a doctrine, of course, directly traceable to the "Mystical Theology" of Dionysius the Areopagite. "Of God Himself can no man think," says the writer of the *Cloud*, "And therefore I would leave all that thing that I can think, and choose to my love that thing that I cannot think. "The universes which are amenable to the intellect can never satisfy the instincts of the heart."<sup>61</sup>

In centering prayer we are not to mindlessly repeat the same word or phrase given to us by the Holy Spirit over and over. Matthew 6:7 says, "But when you pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they

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<sup>61</sup> A BOOK OF CONTEMPLATION THE WHICH IS CALLED THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING, IN THE WHICH A SOUL IS ONED WITH GOD Edited from the British Museum MS. Harl. 674 With an Introduction BY EVELYN UNDERHILL SECOND EDITION London JOHN M. WATKINS 21 Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road 1922

shall be heard for their much speaking.” There is nothing sanctimonious about such a practice. Whipping one’s self up into an emotional frenzy is always to be discouraged. Emotionalism is not to be confused with the moving of the Holy Spirit. This is not a technique to try to reach a state of ecstasy. It is not to be used as a mental relaxation exercise. A person is not trying to make their mind go blank. They are simply resting in the presence of God. It is meditating in the presence of God and allowing Him to minister to us.

## **V. Lectio Divina**

Lectio Divina is Latin for divine reading, spiritual reading or holy reading. It combines prayer with Bible reading in a way that wonderously deepens our fellowship with God. In other words it is praying the Scriptures. When we do so we study, ponder and listen to what the Word of God is saying to us. The principles of Lectio Divina date back to around the year 220 AD by Origen. He taught that to read the Bible profitably we need to give careful attention to the words with prayer and meditation. God reveals himself in marvelous ways when we do so. He also believed that one could go into deeper meanings of the Scripture by such a means.

The monastic rules of Sts. Pachomius, Augustine, Basil, and Benedict utilized this practice of divine reading. They combined it with manual labor and participation in liturgical life. This is the triple base of the monastic life. A systematic reading of the Scriptures in four steps dates back to the 12th century. Around 1150, Guigo II, a Carthusian monk, wrote a book entitled

*The Monk's Ladder* (Scala Claustralium) presenting the theory of the four rungs: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation.

In September 2005, Pope Benedict XVI stated:

"I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church - I am convinced of it - a new spiritual springtime."

Lectio is typically practiced daily for one continuous hour. A selection from the Holy Scriptures is chosen ahead of time, often as a daily progression through a particular book of the Bible.

### The Time

Selecting a time for Lectio Divina is important. Typical methods are to pray for one hour in the morning, or to divide it into two half-hour periods, one in the morning and one in the evening. The key is to pre-select the time that will be devoted to the prayer, and to keep it. Using the same time every day leads to a daily habit of prayer that becomes highly effective. After twenty-one days it is said that a daily practice becomes a habit.

### The Place

Choose a place for prayer that will be free from distractions. This means it should be away from other people, telephones, visual distractions, etc. Some find a religious icon to be helpful. The same place should be used for Lectio if possible, especially as you are just beginning to practice it. Familiarity with a location reduces the possibility of distraction away from the prayer.

One person was known to have put up a small building in his backyard just for praying. In it he had a map of the world which helped him to pray for the Church all over the world. He would use it for devotional praying and Scripture reading for at least an hour every day.

### Preparation

Before you begin to read engage in an activity to make the transition from your regular day-to-day menial tasks to a more contemplative and prayerful state. It might take a few moments to get comfortable, take deep breaths, and perhaps begin praying light short prayer asking the Holy Spirit to guide your time and to set the mood for effective reading.

There are four phases of the prayer, which do not necessarily progress in an ordered fashion. One may move between different phases of the prayer very freely as the Spirit guides.

The Four Moments:

### Lectio

Read the passage slowly several times.

### Meditatio

Reflect on the text of the passage, thinking about how to apply it to your own life. If there is a particular section or word in the Bible passage you are reading that seems to attract your attention that could be the Holy Spirit speaking to you. So begin to focus in on that passage or word. In this exercise, you are not so much seeking to interpret the Bible as you are

seeking to make an application of it. God's Word is living, and it speaks to us in our present circumstances.

Once we feel that God has given to us a special passage, phrase or individual word we roll it over in our mind, so to speak. Perhaps we just keep reading it over and over to see what else God is saying to us through it. Ruminare is a descriptive word for this practice. A cow chews its cud, and in antiquity it was a symbol of Christians pondering the word of God. It is as though we are ingesting the Word of God. In Luke 2: 19 we have the example of the Virgin Mary “pondering in her heart” what has been revealed to her. It is helpful to gently repeat the passage over and over until it is virtually memorized. We allow it to interact with our thoughts, hopes, memories and desires. This is the second step in *Lectio Divina* - meditation. Through meditation we allow God's word to become His word for us. A rhema word touches us and affects us to the core of our being. God's recorded word is the logos. It is a rhema word when it intersects our life is the sharp two-edged sword that it is.

### Oratio

Respond to the passage by opening your heart to God. This is not primarily an intellectual exercise, but more the beginning of a conversation with God.

### Contemplatio

Listen to God. Wait for impressions the Holy Spirit is placing on your heart. Trying to clear out old thoughts that are being carried over from the day and the focus in on what is holy. Begin to wait on God and open your mind heart

and soul to His influence. Remember that conversation is a two-way path. Listen for his voice.

It is an art that begins with cultivating the ability to listen deeply, to hear “with the ear of our hearts” as St. Benedict encourages us in the prologue to the *Rule*. So in a sense, there is no right way and wrong way. When we read the Scriptures we remember the account of the prophet Elijah and how God was not in the wind, the fire or the earthquake that passed in front of him. According to I Kings 19:12 God spoke in a still small voice. We can become too anxious or hurried and we miss hearing the impression of God’s voice in our hearts. This gentle listening is an “atunement” to the presence of God.

The Sh’ma Israel: Hear O Israel is very important in Judaism. It means, “Listen!” In *Lectio Divina* we, too, heed that command and turn to the Scriptures, knowing that we must “hear” - listen - to the voice of God, which often speaks very softly. In order to hear someone speaking softly we must learn to be silent. We must become comfortable with silence. Some people need to be constantly talking. If we do, so we may not hear God. The practice of *Lectio Divina* requires that we first quiet our hearts and minds in order to hear God's word to us. This is the first step of *Lectio Divina*, appropriately called *Lectio*, which means reading.

The Reading or listening, which is the first step in *Lectio Divina*, is very different from the speed-reading that modern Christians apply to newspapers, books and even to the Bible. We like to skim through reading material. *Lectio* is reverential listening. It is listening both in a spirit of silence and of awe. We are listening for the still, small voice of God that will

speak to us personally - not loudly, but intimately. In *Lectio* we read slowly, attentively, gently listening to hear a word or phrase that is God's word for us this day.

### Prayer

The third step in *Lectio Divina* is *oratio* – prayer. We understand prayer to be a conversation with God. He has invited us into His presence and embraced us. Our response is to consecrate our hearts to Him. There may be aspects of our lives that we have never fully dedicated to him to this point. Perhaps there is a painful memory in the recesses of our mind. We allow the Holy Spirit to gently opened the door to a painful experience and bring the emotional healing. It begins with forgiving the person who has hurt us. Perhaps we need to begin by forgiving ourselves. Maybe we thought of ourselves as unlovely, and that God does not want us. Through this meditation on the Scriptures we may come to the realization of how deeply we are loved by God and that most certainly He wants us. In this consecration-prayer we allow the Word that we have taken in and on which we are pondering to touch and change our deepest selves. God invites us in *Lectio Divina* to hold up our most difficult and pain-filled experiences to Him, and to gently recite over them the healing word or phrase He has given us in our *lectio* and *meditatio*. In this *oratio*, this consecration-prayer, we allow our real selves to be touched and changed by the word of God.

### Contemplation

Lastly, we simply rest in the presence of the One who has used His Word as a means of inviting us to accept His transforming embrace. No one who has

ever been in love needs to be reminded that there are moments in loving relationships when words are unnecessary. It is the same in our relationship with God. Wordless, we quietly rest in the presence of the One Who loves us. This has a name in the Christian tradition - *contemplatio*, contemplation. Once again we practice silence, letting go of our own words, this time simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God.

To practice the presence of Christ means to contemplate on Him. There is a gentle rhythm, an oscillating if you will, going back and forth between us responding to God and Him touching us. We allow God in the privacy of our meditation to root out vices in our lives and cultivate virtues in our heart. It is not so much outward as it is inward; going down deep into the depths of the soul. We allow Him to transform us after the likeness of Christ. We are refashioned if you will. Prior, we were a bent tool for destruction. Now we have become a useful instrument in His hands for good. We are being remade to become what Christ intended for us to be.

In the early monastic tradition contemplation was understood in two ways. First was *theoria physike*, the contemplation of God in creation - God in “the many.” Second was *theologia*, the contemplation of God in Him without images or words - God as “The One.” From this perspective *Lectio Divina* serves as a training-ground for the contemplation of God in His creation.

In contemplation we cease from interior spiritual *doing* and learn simply to *be*, that is to rest in the presence of our loving Father. Just as we constantly move back and forth in our exterior lives between speaking and listening, between questioning and reflecting, so in our spiritual lives we must learn to

enjoy the refreshment of simply *being* in God's presence, an experience that naturally alternates (if we let it!) with our spiritual practice.

In ancient times contemplation was not regarded as a goal to be achieved through some method of prayer, but was simply accepted with gratitude as God's recurring gift. At intervals the Lord invites us to cease from speaking so that we can simply rest in His embrace. There needs to be an inner spiritual rhythm. How different this ancient understanding is from our modern approach! Instead of recognizing that we all gently oscillate back and forth between spiritual activity and receptivity, between practice and contemplation, we today tend to set contemplation before ourselves as a goal - something we imagine we can achieve through some spiritual technique. We must be willing to sacrifice our "goal-oriented" approach if we are to practice *Lectio Divina*, because *Lectio Divina* has no other goal than spending time with God through the means of His word. The amount of time we spend in any aspect of *Lectio Divina*, whether it is rumination, consecration or contemplation depends on God's Spirit, not on us. *Lectio Divina* teaches us to savor and delight in all the different manifestations of God's presence, whether they are active or receptive modes of experiencing Him.

In *Lectio Divina* we offer ourselves to God; and we are a people in motion. In ancient times this inner spiritual motion was described as a helix - an ascending spiral. Viewed in only two dimensions it appears as a circular motion back and forth; seen with the added dimension of time it becomes a helix, an ascending spiral by means of which we are drawn ever closer to God. The whole of our spiritual lives were viewed in this way, as a gentle

oscillation between spiritual activity and receptivity by means of which God unites us ever closer to Him. In just the same way the steps or stages of *Lectio Divina* represent an oscillation back and forth between these spiritual poles. In *Lectio Divina* we recognize our underlying spiritual rhythm and discover many different ways of experiencing God's presence in many different ways of praying.

To reiterate the practice, choose a text of the Scriptures that you wish to pray. Many Christians use in their daily *Lectio Divina* one of the readings from the Eucharistic liturgy for the day; others prefer to slowly work through a particular book of the Bible. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as one has no set goal of “covering” a certain amount of text: the amount of text “covered” is in God's hands, not yours. Place yourself in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become silent. Some Christians focus for a few moments on their breathing; others have a beloved “prayer word” or “prayer phrase” they gently recite in order to become silent. For some the practice known as “centering prayer” makes a good, brief introduction to *Lectio Divina*. Use whatever method is best for you and allow yourself to enjoy silence for a few moments. Then turn to the text and read it slowly and gently. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the “still, small voice” of a word or phrase that somehow says, “I am for you today.” Do not expect lightening or ecstasies. In *Lectio Divina* God is teaching us to listen to Him, to seek Him in silence. He does not often reach out and grab us; rather, He softly, gently invites us ever more deeply into His presence.

Next take the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories and ideas. Do not be afraid of “distractions.” Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself which, when they rise up during *Lectio Divina*, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this musing, to invite you into dialogue with God.

Then speak to God. Whether you use words, ideas, images or all three is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Give to Him what you have discovered in yourself during your experience of *meditatio*. Think of yourself as the priest that you are. I Peter 2:9, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Experience God using the word or phrase that He has given you as a means of blessing, of transforming the ideas and memories, which your pondering on His Word has awakened. Give to God what you have found within your heart.

Finally and simply rest in God's embrace. When He invites you to return to your contemplation of His word or to your inner dialogue with Him do so. Learn to use words when words are helpful, and to let go of words when they no longer are necessary. Rejoice in the understanding that God is with you in both words and silence, in spiritual activity and inner openness.

Sometimes in *Lectio Divina* one will return several times to the printed text, either to relish the literary context of the word or phrase that God has given,

or to seek a new word or phrase to ponder. At other times only a single word or phrase will fill the whole time set aside for *Lectio Divina*. It is not necessary to apprehensively assess the quality of one's *Lectio Divina* as if one were “performing” or seeking some target: *Lectio Divina* has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures.

The most authentic and traditional form of Christian *Lectio Divina* is the solitary or “personal” practice described to this point. In recent years, however, many different forms of so-called “group lectio” have become popular and are now widely practiced. These group exercises can be very helpful means of introducing and encouraging the practice of *Lectio Divina*; but they should not become a substitute for an encounter and relationship with the Living God that can only take place in that privileged privacy where the Biblical Word of God becomes transparent to the very Word Himself - namely private *Lectio Divina*.

In churches of the Third World where books are rare, a form of corporate *Lectio Divina* is becoming common in which Christians praying together in a group think over a text from the Scriptures. The method of group *Lectio Divina* described here was introduced at St. Andrew's Abbey by oblates Doug and Norvene Vest: it is used as part of the Benedictine Spirituality for Laity workshops conducted at the Abbey each summer. This form of *Lectio Divina* works best in a group of between four and eight people. A group leader coordinates the process and facilitates sharing. The same text from the Scriptures is read out three times, followed each time by a period of silence and an opportunity for each member of the group to share the fruit of her or his *lectio*. The first reading (the text is actually read twice on this occasion)

is for the purpose of hearing a word or passage that touches the spirit. When the word or phrase is found, it is silently taken in, and gently recited and pondered during the silence that follows. After the silence each person shares which word or phrase has touched his or her heart. The second reading (by a member of the opposite sex from the first reader) is for the purpose of “hearing” or “seeing” Christ in the text. Each ponders the word that has touched the heart and asks where the word or phrase touches his or her life that day. In other words, how is Christ the Word touching his own experience, his own life? How are the various members of the group seeing or hearing Christ reach out to them through the text? Then, after the silence, each member of the group shares what he or she has “heard” or “seen.” The third and final reading is for the purpose of experiencing Christ “calling us forth” into *doing* or *being*. Members ask themselves what Christ in the text is calling them to *do* or to *become* today or this week. After the stillness, each shares for the last time; and the exercise concludes with each person praying for the person on the right. Those who regularly practice this technique of praying and sharing the Scriptures regularly find it to be an excellent way of increasing trust within a group; it also is an superb way of consecrating projects and hopes to Christ before more formal group meetings. The role of group facilitators or leaders is important, since they will be guiding the group through several periods of silence and reflection without the disruption of individual sharing until the end of the exercise. Since the experiences we choose to “read” or “listen to” may be intensely private, it is important in this group exercise to safeguard confidentiality by making sharing completely optional.

*Lectio Divina* is an ancient spiritual art that is being rediscovered in our day. It is a way of allowing the Scriptures to become again what God intended that they should be - a means of uniting us to Him. In *Lectio Divina* we discover our own underlying spiritual rhythm. We experience God in a gentle oscillation back and forth between spiritual activity and receptivity, in the movement from practice into contemplation and back again into spiritual practice. *Lectio Divina* teaches us about the God who truly loves us. In *Lectio Divina* we dare to believe that our loving Father continues to extend His embrace to us today and His embrace is real. In His word we experience ourselves as personally loved by God; as the recipients of a word that He gives uniquely to each of us whenever we turn to Him in the Scriptures.

In conclusion *Lectio Divina* teaches us about ourselves. In *Lectio Divina* we discover that there is no place in our hearts, no bad memory locked away that cannot be opened and offered to God. God teaches us in *Lectio Divina* what it means to be members of His royal priesthood - a people called to consecrate all of our memories, our hopes and our dreams to Christ.

Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." We are to feed our minds on what is good. *Lectio Divina* most certainly is all of the above.

## **VI. Mysticism**

In mysticism we feel ourselves wonderfully joined to God. Ecstasy ensues as we are taken up into heavenly realms. The nearness of God is felt intimately. Words often fail to describe the magnificence of His presence. We sense Him to be speaking to us in ways never before thought of. It can happen without a moments notice. It may come after protracted periods prayer or meditation. It is entirely up to God and how He chooses to reveal Himself is His prerogative as well. It can last for days, weeks or even years. It might be over in less than a minute. Sometimes a carnal action or thought can dissuade God or sometimes it is nothing we have done that causes His presence to lift. We need to be prepared for Him. At such time there may be visions or dreams. God manifests Himself supernatural outside the norm of our day-to-day existence. It is a mystery.

Often God will reveal Himself to us after extended periods of fasting, meditation or contemplation on the Holy Scriptures. In II Corinthians 12:2-4 Paul describes a mystical experience,

2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) 4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful <sup>F34</sup> for a man to utter.

Perhaps a similar experience occurred at the transfiguration of Jesus. Peter wanted to build three booths and stay on the mountaintop. Christ however knew that He was needed down below. We may have a tendency like Peter

to want to remain in the past continually reliving the moment after a mystical experience. However, we need to move on from mystical experiences to every day living.

Mysticism, as the word depicts speaks of mysteries. In general mysticism is a spiritual quest for hidden truth. The goal of mysticism is union with the divine. It is unpredictable. We forget that rationalism is not the only way to know God. He also made us emotional beings. If He did not intend for us to know Him on an emotional level then He would not have created us with feelings. Some vainly discount all ecstatic utterances and revelations as not being from God and only being a figment of the imagination. This is to limit God and prevent Him from revealing Himself as He wills. We must not limit God. We are instructed by Him to love Him not just with our minds but also with our hearts. It is a mystery. From Proverbs 30:18,19 we read, “*18* There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: *19* The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.” God should not be expected to always act according to the dictates of man’s logic any more than young man who is in love with a young lady be expected to always do what is expedient and sensible. Mysticism is by times the romantic exchange of an extravagant God with His bride. Some are too dull of heart to realize such matters. Their hard head prevents them from knowing God in all of His fullness. Do not limit God. Allow Him to be God in your life. It is not a matter of allowing your mind to go blank. It is a matter of allowing God to lead you and reveal Himself to you. If you sense an impression let the Holy Spirit direct you.



**A Prayer Station in Taizé, France**

## **VII. Asceticism**

Asceticism describes a life characterized by abstinence from worldly pleasures (austerity.) People who chose this believe it will help them to be more virtuous and grow in spirituality. They think it will give them a closer relationship with the Lord. They seek to mortify their sinful passions by cutting themselves off from temptation. These self-imposed constraints will help them to abound in charitable deeds and become more like Christ. *Askesis* is a Greek Christian term; the practice of spiritual exercises; rooted in the philosophical tradition of antiquity. *Askesis* is the discipline of repressing lust. Originally introduced as the spiritual struggle of the Greek Orthodox Church as the style of life where meat, alcohol, sex, and comfortable clothing are avoided, the term is now used in several other relations. Many warriors and athletes, in Greek society, applied the discipline of *askēsis* to attain optimal bodily fitness and grace. The manner of life, the doctrine, or principles of someone who engages in *askēsis* is referred to as an ascetic.

Monks live in communes or monasteries so as to shut themselves in more completely in service to the Lord. Hermits live alone. Some however do not withdraw from everyday society and they are referred to as “Worldly” ascetics. They live apart from worldly pleasure but still in mainstream society for the most part.

The history of Jewish asceticism goes back thousands of years to the references of the Nazirite (Numbers 6) and the Wilderness Tradition that evolved out of the forty years in the desert. The prophets and their disciples were ascetic to the extreme including many examples of fasting and hermitic living conditions. The Essenes, latter in Jewish history was a sect separated

under the Teacher of Righteousness and they took the banner of asceticism culminating in the Dead Sea Sect.



A rare find, an Ethiopian Coptic Bible

To the uninformed modern reader, early monastic asceticism may seem to be only about sexual renunciation. However, sexual abstinence was merely one aspect of ascetic renunciation. The ancient monks and nuns had other, equally weighty concerns: pride, humility, compassion, discernment, patience, judging others, prayer, hospitality, and almsgiving. For some early Christians, gluttony represented a more primordial problem than sex, and as such the reduced intake of food is also a facet of asceticism. As an illustration, the systematic collection of the *Apophthegmata*, or Sayings of the desert fathers and mothers has more than twenty chapters divided by theme; only one chapter is devoted to *porneia* ("sexual lust"). (See Elizabeth

A. Clark. *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.)

### **VIII. Monasticism**

Monasticism (from Greek: *monachos* — a solitary person) is the religious practice in which one renounces worldly pursuits in order to fully devote one's life to spiritual work. People living in seclusion from the world, under religious vows and subject to a fixed rule are known as monks, friars, nuns, or in general as religious. Monastic asceticism then means the removal of obstacles to loving God. Both monks and nuns may also be called *monastics*. The Monastery of Saint Anthony is a Coptic Orthodox monastery located in an oasis in the Eastern Desert, hidden deep in the Red Sea mountains. It is located 155 km (100 miles) southeast of Cairo. It is the oldest inhabited Christian monastery in the world. The monastery of Saint Anthony was built around 356 on the burial site of Saint Anthony. Little is known about the monastery's early period. During the sixth and seventh centuries, many monks from the monasteries of Scetes went to the monastery of Saint Anthony, in order to escape the frequent attacks by the Bedouins and Berbers. The monastery itself was plundered a number of times by the Bedouins of the Eastern Desert, who partly destroyed it in the 11th century. The modern monastery is a self-contained village with gardens, a mill, a bakery and five churches. The walls are adorned with paintings of knights in bright colors and hermits in more subdued colors. The wall paintings have been worn over the centuries by soot, candle grease, oil and dust. In a collaborative effort between the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the American Research Center in Egypt, restoration has been

undertaken on the paintings. The oldest paintings in the monastery date to the 7th and 8th centuries, while the newest date to the 13th. There is also a woodwork inside Saint Anthony's Church that has been restored. The monastery also has a library with over 1,700 handwritten manuscripts. The library probably contained many more volumes, but was significantly reduced by the Bedouins who plundered the monastery and used many of the manuscripts as cooking fuel. The cave where Saint Anthony lived as a hermit is a two kilometer hike from the monastery, and 680 meters above the Red Sea level. In 2005, the monks' cells dating to the 4th century - the oldest ever found - were discovered beneath the Church of the Apostles. Like all of Egypt's monasteries, the monastery of Saint Anthony is experiencing a renaissance and a growth in the number of its monks. Today, the monastery is accessible from Cairo, Suez or Hurghada.

The three Evangelical Counsels or Counsels of Perfection in Christianity are chastity, poverty (or perfect charity), and obedience. As Jesus of Nazareth expressly stated (cf. Matthew 19:10-12; Matthew 19:16-22,) they are counsels for those who desire to become "perfect" (τέλειος, cf. Matthew 19:21.) This means they are not binding upon all, hence not necessary conditions to go to heaven. Rather they are "acts of supererogation" that exceed the minimum stipulated in the Commandments in the Bible. Christians that have made a public profession to order their life by the evangelical counsels, and confirmed this by a public religious vow before their respective church authority (the act of religious commitment is called "profession,") are recognised as members of the consecrated life.

There are early precedents of religious vows in the Christian monastic traditions, for example the Rule of St Benedict (ch. 58.17) stipulates for its adherents what has come to be known as the "Benedictine vow" promising "stability, conversion of manners and obedience," which to this day is made by the candidates joining Benedictine communities. However, specifically in the form of the three evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience religious vows were first made in the twelfth century by Francis of Assisi and his followers, the first of the mendicant orders. Mendicant means they asked for donations. It could be said that, not only those wishing to dedicate their life to God in the consecrated life, but every one of Jesus's followers is invited to observe poverty, chastity and obedience, since He exhorted all to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (cf. Matthew 5:48). Nevertheless, only the members of the consecrated life confirm their intention to observe the evangelical counsels by making a public vow before the respective church authority. Outside the consecrated life Christians are free to make a private vow to observe one or more of the evangelical counsels; but a private vow does not have the same binding and other effects in church law as a public vow. Those who support the distinction point to the young man in the Gospel, who asked what he should do to obtain eternal life, and Jesus told him to "keep the commandments," but when the young man pressed further, Christ told him: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor". It is from this passage that the term "counsel of perfection" comes. Again in the Gospels, Jesus speaks of "eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven", and added, "He that can receive it, let him receive it". The Apostle Paul sated in I Corinthinas 7:32 But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may

please the Lord: 33 But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.” It is not wrong to be married. Those who choose not are able to give undivided allegiance to God.

## **IX. Religious Vows**

Religious vows are the public vows taken by members of religious communities of the Catholic, Anglican and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

Under the Rule of Saint Benedict, used by most monks and nuns, properly so called, in the Western Church, the vows are obedience (placing oneself under the direction of the abbot/abbess or prior/prioress), stability (committing oneself to a particular monastery), and conversion of life (which includes within it the notions of poverty, or forgoing private ownership, and celibate chastity). The *Rule of St Benedict* (fl. 6th century) is a book of precepts written for monks living in community under the authority of an abbot. Since about the 7th century it has been adopted with equal success by communities of women. During the 1500 years of its existence, it has become the leading guide in Western Christianity for monastic living in community in Orthodoxy, Catholicism and (since the time of the Reformation) in the Anglican and Protestant traditions. The spirit of St Benedict's Rule is summed up in the motto of the Benedictine Confederation: *pax* ("peace") and the traditional *ora et labora* ("pray and work").



**Prayer Station outside Taize, France**

## **X. Liturgy of the Hours**

The Liturgy of the Hours (Latin: *Liturgia Horarum*) is the title given to the four-volume breviary (a prayer book recording among other matters the Psalms) containing the official prayer of the canonical hours by which a day is consecrated to God. This set of books is issued by the Church of Rome. A similar prayer service has formed part of the Christian Church's public

worship from the earliest times, and Christians of both Eastern and Western tradition celebrate such services under various names. In Greek the corresponding services are found in the Book of Hours. The Liturgy of the Hours of the Latin Rite is also called the *Divine Office* (the Duty for God). The hours at which the Liturgy of the Hours is celebrated are known as the Canonical hours. The Psalter, or Book of Psalms, is by tradition the heart of the Liturgy of the Hours.

The early Christians continued the Jewish practice of reciting prayers at certain hours of the day or night. In the Psalms we find expressions like "in the morning I offer you my prayer"; "At midnight I will rise and thank you" ; "Evening, morning and at noon I will cry and lament"; "Seven times a day I praise you"( Ps. 119:164.) The Apostles observed the Jewish custom of praying at the third, sixth and ninth hour and at midnight (Acts 10:3, 9; 16:25; etc.). The Christian prayer of that time consisted of almost the same elements as the Jewish: recital or chanting of psalms, reading of the Old Testament, to which were soon added readings of the Gospels, Acts, and epistles, and canticles such as the Gloria in Excelsis Deo. Other elements were added later in the course of the centuries.

By the end of the fifth century, the Liturgy of the Hours was composed of a Vigil or Night Service and seven day offices, of which Prime and Compline seem to be the last to appear, since the fourth-century Apostolic Constitutions VIII, iv, 34 does not mention them in the exhortation: "Offer up your prayers in the morning, at the third hour, the sixth, the ninth, the evening, and at cock-crowing". These eight hours were known by the following names:

*Matins* (during the night), sometimes referred to as Vigils or Nocturns; it is now called the Office of Readings.

*Lauds* or Dawn Prayer (at Dawn)

*Prime* or Early Morning Prayer (First Hour = 6 a.m.)

*Terce* or Mid-Morning Prayer (Third Hour = 9 a.m.)

*Sext* or Midday Prayer (Sixth Hour = 12 noon)

*None* or Mid-Afternoon Prayer (Ninth Hour = 3 p.m.)

*Vespers* or Evening Prayer ("at the lighting of the lamps")

*Compline* or Night Prayer (before retiring)

## **Conclusion**

A study of these orders reveals they did not simply live irrelevant lives cloistered away in some cave or monastery. Rather their work was very practical in operating educational institutions, hospitals and especially today in addressing social injustice. A true life of prayer will bear itself out in the fruitfulness of practical assistance to those who are in need. One cannot remain for long in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has such a love for His world without being compelled to help carry out the missionary mandate. So we have seen through this study of monastic orders that far from being impractical it is most practical to be contemplative and prayerful. It is only as we have these times of withdrawal and a daily routine of spiritual discipline and prayer that we can expect to help fulfill Christ's mandate for this world. To sense His heart of love for the world, compels us to make a difference. These men and women who devote themselves to praying for the Pope and the holy Catholic Church are the secret behind its great effect, numbers and influence. The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ

moves ahead on her knees in prayer. We do well to constantly remind ourselves that activity should only come out of solitude, contemplation and resting in the presence of God.