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HUMILITY IN THE DOCUMENTS

I want to open our considerations with a prayer from the writings of Father Medaille which situates us in the topic of this morning's presentation:

Lord Jesus, you desire in your supreme goodness
to live in me and have me live in you.
To gain the advantage of so fortunate a life,
I desire above all to die to myself
so that there remain nothing preventing
the coming of your dear life in me.

When the research team was asked to consider themes in the writings of the founder as a part of the weekend workshops of the Summer Institute, I chose the theme of humility because it is one of the dominant notes in the spirituality of the Congregation as it is in all Christian spirituality, but I believe that it has a particular focus in our documents. I wanted to explore that focus. I have felt that my understanding of humility in Medaille was not clear, and I believe that it is very important to have a clear view of so fundamental a thrust in our spirituality. My considerations are tentative, of course, and open to fuller development and interpretation.

I will consider, first, Medaille's treatment of humility in general, and secondly, the progressive development of humility in extent and depth evident in the Maxims of the Little Institute, The Maxims of Perfection, and the Exercise following the Maxims of Perfection.

In the first place, we cannot consider the founder's concept of humility separate from his ideal of love for God and for others. Love is rooted in humility, and Medaille presents a very profound ideal of love. He envisioned a congregation of ardent love of God that would overflow in zealous concern for others--concern for their spiritual welfare, their "salvation and perfection," *the total double union, "that all may be one."* ~~as he termed it and repeated that term so many times in his writings; and at the same time, concern for their material welfare.~~

He directed the sisters to so "live that their congregation may bear the name of the Congregation of the great love of God." He says in the Maxims of Perfection, "Have for God an expansive love which includes all that love is capable of; an exalted love full of purpose and ardor; a profound heart-felt love which is at your heart's center and cannot be uprooted by any created power. . ." (I, IX,2)

This depth of love can be sustained only if it is firmly rooted in an equally profound humility that is lived out in radical detachment from all self-centered concerns. This humility is expressed in the documents as a humility entirely self-emptied. He speaks of having a sentiment of self-emptied humility. Very frequently he couples humility with the French word ^{anéantissement} ~~anéant~~ which, following Phil. 2:6, we have translated "self-emptied." The phrase "self-emptied humility" or the "humility of self-emptying" seems to have been very dear to Medaille and its use in context in the documents connotes a particular emphasis on humility. ^{that} ~~And it~~ is consonant with his ever-repeated thrust toward the more, the deeper, the more profound in his movement toward God.

This expression ^{the French word anéantissement} is a thread running through all of the documents. In the Constitutions he writes: "They shall try to have a humility of complete self-emptying, professing always and everywhere the most lowly, profound and true humility." In the Reglements he speaks of a congregation which "makes the profession of a virtuous life entirely consecrated to the pure and perfect love of God in the exercise of a very deep humility and a perfect self-emptying of the persons who compose it." ^{Notice that he often associates pure and perfect love with a very deep humility.} Medaille seems to have had always before his eyes the mystery of Jesus who, although he was divine, did not cling to his equality before God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are, and being as men are, he was humbler yet, . . . even accepting death on a cross. ^{We find a concise expression of Medaille's thought} In Maxim 3 of the Maxims of the Little Institute

we find a concise expression of his thought:

Empty yourself continually in honor of the Incarnate Word who emptied himself with so much love for you, make your commitment to live in the practice of the most sincere, true and profound humility possible to you

In the documents, the exemplar and model of the humility of self-emptying in the second Person of the Blessed Trinity who in his Incarnation emptied himself, as it were, of his power and his glory in total submission to his Father's will to assume our humanity; it is the Jesus who died to that humanity on the cross; further still, who emptied himself of every vestage ^{every appearance} of divine and human reality in the institution of the Holy Eucharist, *as Medaille points out.* When the founder counsels the "humility of self-emptying", it is the total self-emptying of Jesus in submission to his Father's will that the founder holds before the Sister of St. Joseph to accept and to live out in her own life.

But the question that arises is: WHAT SELF must be totally emptied, died to? *Sometimes this emphasis in the maxims is threatening and puzzling.* Christ gave a law of love which says that I must love my neighbor as my self, so I must love my self with no small degree of love, since that love is the measure of my love for others. Certainly it is not that self to which I must die. No, rather, it is what St. Paul calls my unspiritual self, the self that resists grace, the self that stands in opposition to the Father's will; the self that is hostile to whatever touches upon my own interests, that is centered on self to the disregard of others; the self that is unwilling to generously and courageously take the next step that the Holy Spirit may be urging me to take. That is not my true self.

Medaille does not ~~counsel~~ ^{suggest} a negation of my true self. In Maxim 91 of the Maxims of the Little Institute he says: "Be a person of such greatness that what is not God will be nothing, and embrace gently and eagerly great apostolic

undertakings when the Holy Spirit urges you to this." A person who does not love the self that God loves and has richly gifted is incapable of embracing great apostolic undertakings. If I do not value my true self, I am not living in the in the spirit of the true humility of Medaille. In her autobiography, Teresa of Avila has made this clear;

Some think it humility not to believe that God is bestowing His gifts upon them; . . . God bestows his gifts without any merit on our part . . . If we do not recognize the gifts received at his hands, we shall never be moved to love him. It is a most certain truth that the richer we see ourselves to be, confessing at the same time out poverty, the greater will be our progress, and the more real our humility . . . (true humility) brings calm, sweetness, and light.

The value and good of my true self depends upon the emptying of *myself* of *the* false self in order that my true self may be open and responsive to what God wills for me in the living out of my life. The real purpose of Medaille's repeated injunction to self-emptying is that we may be free from the various repressions, subtle prejudices, antipathies, pre-judgments--the false self that is a barrier to the total double union.

Now it is true that we resist the dying process, but as George Maloney says in Nesting on the Rock, "until we let go in perfect surrender to God's indwelling spirit, we will always be in bondage to the dark forces within us." Maxim 18 of the Maxims of the Little Institute states the end of this process:

Make so perfect a sacrifice of self and of will that you are empty of self from this time on, and thus you will no longer be able to choose deliberately anything except that God's will be completely and perfectly accomplished in you, by you, and among all others.

In a prayer in the Exercise, Father Medaille gives an image of the self *that* *is* emptied of all resistance to the creative God drawing life and order out of chaos at the dawn of creation:

So act that in your hands I may be like prime matter devoid of every kind of pre-disposition and of all form and able only to receive whatever disposition and form you will want to create there.

We know that it takes time, sometimes much time, before one can be ready to be ~~the~~ prime matter, ^{that can be} shaped by the purifying events of life and the Spirit of God, ready to accept whatever God brings forth. Medaille ^{continues;} ~~says:~~

Bring forth out of this emptiness, good Jesus, all that is more pleasing to you. Just as from the nothingness of all things, you brought forth beings, great and small, according to your good pleasure, so out of the emptiness in which I establish myself as best I can, bring forth deeds great and small, obscure and hidden, or manifest and brilliant give to my emptiness what is more pleasing in your sight and in the sight of your eternal Father

^{I think} At is evident that viewed in this light the "humility of self-emptying" is not threatening, will not turn me into a "milk-toast" kind of person, rather but that God may become the central reality in my life so that, in the words of Maxim 41, I can tend "solely and lovingly to resemble the dear Savior in all things. . . ." While ^{at times} it may be a painful thing, ^{when in a moment of discernment we see that we must die to,} ~~at times,~~ it becomes at the same time a joyful process that lets God fill our thoughts ^{and} direct our attitudes and relations with others.

Secondly, as we pursue the theme of humility in the documents, we are aware that the found^r is leading us ever more deeply into a life transformed in Christ, enabling us, in his words, "to live more fully the life of the Savior Jesus." ^{There is a progressive development of humility in extent and depth in the documents.} It seems to me that he develops his concept through three stages or degrees of abandonment to God's will. He does not delineate these stages, but they seem evident in the Maxims of the Little Institute, the Maxims of Perfection, and the Exercise. These steps are not sequential but cyclical, for ordinarily we respond to God's love only progressively.

Medaille was concerned with this reality as we see in his advise to the mistress of novices in the primitive Constitutions:

She will carefully urge them along little by little to the perfection proper to the Institute. She should realize that they cannot become holy all at once, nor practice immediately the most sublime maxims of virtue.

In the years from the Exercise, we are listening to Medaille responses to an invitation in grace, of the not how? It is God who comes up with it to go beyond where we are. This

The founder himself inferred a gradation in the demands of the maxims. He realized that we may not be able to live at every moment of our lives the demanding ideals of many of the maxims. We may desire to so live, and we may be tending toward so living, but our movement is according to our understanding at the moment, and he reminds us in Maxim 84 of the Maxims of the Little Institute not to "go ahead of grace by an imprudent eagerness, but quietly await its movements."

So we find
 So ~~Medaille begins~~ with maxims that any person of good will can live by ^{Maxims that} they center on what Francis de Sales called the "little virtues." ~~When one is formed or forms herself with grace in the basic virtues, she can more easily move toward transformation in Christ.~~

↔ There are maxims that deal with

speaking favorably of others, M 11
 not letting oneself be guided by caprice, M 36
 of avoiding judgments, M. 52

There are a number that deal with constancy:

constancy in one's way of life, M 62
 constancy in face of unfortunate events, M 63
 constancy in carrying out one's duties, M 65
 of avoiding jealousy in relation with others more gifted, M 79
And he speaks of these virtues every Christian should strive to make habitual. These are counsels to living out these virtues every Christian should strive to make habitual. These are counsels to living out these virtues every Christian should strive to make habitual.
 On pages 7 and 8 of the Constitutions speaks at length of the obstacles to ^{their growth.}

greater love and he says:

They will mortify completely, gently and courageously all self-love, judgment and self-will as well as the little whims what are opposed, however slightly, to the perfection of charity. This they will do so that only the love of God may reign in them by the pure movement of grace and the total self-emptying of all natural inclinations.

There is a passage in John 12:24 that is an apt image of the self-emptying of ^{hindrances} ~~the obstacles~~ to grace: *(Natural inclinations that draw one away from greater loves)*

I solemnly assure you
 unless the grain of wheat falls
 to the earth and dies,
 it remains just a grain of wheat.
 But if it dies, it produces much fruit.

Before there is a harvest, something has to die--the little grain of wheat--but not all of it--not the little germ in the heart of the wheat--but only the hard, brown husk that is an impediment to the developing of the wheat germ so that new life may reach up toward the light and warmth of the sun to produce a fruitful harvest.

In my own life, the hard, brown husks stemming from pride and inordinate concern for my own excellence and opinions that impede my movement toward greater love must die. They are subtle, and the founder warns us in maxim 94, ". . .take care not to be deceived in living out your life by the devil masquerading as an angel of light . . ." The hard brown husks are not the same for all of us for we are unique persons, but there are certain constants of self-seeking and self-centeredness in all of us which stand in the way of fuller development of our spiritual life and in ~~discerning~~ ^{discerning} and surrendering to the Father's will. In Maxims of Perfection Medaille says:

Begin by a total purifying of your heart and your conscience. . . uproot any bad habits . . . until a heart is wholly purified, it will not readily receive the great communications of grace necessary for the practice of the great virtue.

But the founder does not rest here, and that is not surprising because for all of us there comes a time ^{of grace} when we say, "What more, Lord? I have tried to do all this from my youth." It is a time when we seem urged toward a more profound detachment from all natural tendencies toward self-centeredness when there comes a greater desire to discern and follow the Father's will, to be more closely united with Jesus.

The "more " to which one feels called may be a deeper entrance into the mystery of God's love, a greater centering of one's life in G od. Medaille ^{now} counsels indifference to all that is opposed to God's will, or to all that implies a deliberate choice in living out one's life:

Be always ready to obey peacefully, indifferent to all that is not against God's will: to live or to die, to be healthy or ill, happy or unhappy, loved or persecuted, finding always your complete contentment solely in fulfilling God's will. M 72

Doesn't this recall the "First Principle & Foundation" of the Sp. Ex. of Ignatius? He develops this idea more fully in Maxims of Perfection and concludes:

Be always perfectly predisposed to receive with gentleness and indifference everything that is not contrary to God . . . predisposed to receive the whole of God's will for you which you ought to love tenderly whatever it may be. All that comes from the hand of God is very beneficial when we receive it properly.

Now, it is true that in the past this aspect of self-emptying may have been emphasized out of context and not seen in relation to the totality of Medaille's thought; but hope - the - less - hard brown husks stemming from pride do impede movement toward greater love.

Indifference is not apathy or unconcern, but rather it is a mental state of holding oneself open to move freely toward whatever God's will indicates. It is a refusal to act upon mere natural drawing or desire, and it places one completely at the disposition of God. It is a freeing of self from predecisions and judgments. In maxim 53, Medaille says, "Keep an ever free heart which clings to nothing terrestrial whatever might be the appearances of good." It is in so living that one may become, as he says in Maxims of Perfection, "the person God wills in nature, in grace, in glory, for time and eternity." The element of indifference appears frequently in the documents.

Note maxims 11, 20, 34, 37, 50, 72, and others. It is well to ponder maxim 95 - the "Pearl," as Fr. Nepper said - with its interesting concluding line relating to perfection.

A third aspect of humility in the documents is a contemplative stance of abandonment, of very profound self-emptiness before God. It is an abandonment that embraces all temporal things and all spiritual good. Medaille is led to this stance through dwelling upon the humility, the gentleness, the total surrender of Jesus. His model is Jesus, totally self-emptied, totally unselfcentered, centered only in his Father. ^{Medaille} He prays: "Remain before me, my dear Jesus, like a great exemplar on whom I model all my works from the greatest to the least."

Love is the key word in abandonment, which can be defined as the "bringing together of all Christian virtue in one elan of love toward the Heavenly Father." It would have been in such a burst of love that Medaille would ^{in his own prayer in the Exercise:} cry out, "Grant that through this stripping and dying I may be an eternal holocaust in the presence of your supreme majesty." The Exercise ^{probably} seems to reveal such a moment in Medaille's spiritual journey and/was never intended for publication, but overtones of its content appear in both sets of maxims, as ^{for example,} we see in maxim 24 of the Maxims of the Little Institute:

Be utterly given to God by a holy self-surrender,
utterly for God by a love pure and completely unselfish,
utterly in God by a continuing effort to be more conscious
of his presence,
utterly according to God by a will, a life and everything
conformed to him.

Marie of the Incarnation, a French Ursuline nun and a mystic of Medaille's time, says that

(in abandonment) the soul surrenders in so total a yielding that it becomes infused knowledge of one's true self, something we could never achieve of ourselves, and which is one of the most precious experiences we can have in this life, humbling us more than we can ever say."

If Medaille became the "mystic apostle" such as Sister Connie spoke about in her presentation two weeks ago - and such as our pondering the documents has led us to believe - it is not surprising that from his total