

148  
149  
"The more . . ." in gentleness, peace and joy

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It is fitting that the Sisters on the original Research Team which wrote our Consensus Statement should have begun by the words "Stimulated by the Holy Spirit of love and receptive to his inspirations". They themselves were indeed. For their statement of our central ideas was based on an intimate knowledge of the Primitive Constitutions alone, at that point, but it has been supported more and more firmly by our other documents as they surface from the translation process, and I am sure that you are finding more and more as I do, that the Consensus Statement resonates with your lived experience as a CSJ at any given moment.

As is the case with the documents, the point of entry into the Consensus Statement differs with the individual and where she is in the journey. Last summer, 1977, in Springfield, when we were choosing themes to study and pray over during the coming year, the theme which resonated with me was "the more in gentleness, peace and joy". But I hesitated, and I remember asking the group: "Is this theme worth exploring? Is it perhaps too obvious?" A trifle arrogant, wouldn't you say? My exploration of this theme has indeed been personally enriching and the words have since assumed a depth of meaning which comes not only from study but also from confirmation in my lived experience.

My initial assumption about the theme "the more . . . in gentleness, peace and joy" being rather obvious was based, of course, on too superficial an interpretation. For example, when I first heard the Consensus Statement I did identify "the more" with a certain longing of my heart, but I thought of gentleness, peace and joy as rather static qualities or virtues which could be striven for (with the accent on one's own effort) if one did not naturally possess them. (To be honest I prided myself a little, I think, that I resonated with them because I did possess them to a degree - non-violent type, for instance, unless my vulnerabilities<sup>are</sup> exposed.) Now, after limited research into content - and for this I used initially Maxims of Perfection and Exercise but found confirmation then in the other documents - I have rewritten in my own words part of the Consensus Statement to clarify for myself what I think is meant by "the more in gentleness, peace and joy". There are basically three parts to my statement. 1. I am being invited to "the more", to a movement toward total double union which is God's will 2. through imitation of the Word Incarnate in his self-emptying 3. by the initiative of the Holy Spirit of love whose fruits are gentleness, peace and joy in every relationship - 1) self with God 2) self with self 3) self with my sisters 4) self with others.

Some of you may have already come to a similar understanding through your own study or through some intuitive leap. I arrived at it through a process which I would like to outline for you briefly, not simply to support my statement but to encourage you to delve into the documents also and to engage them at whatever the point of entry is for you.

Wishing to be faithful to the thought of the founder, I began by simply listing all the references to gentleness, peace and joy in the Maxims of Perfection. I then searched for commonalities in these references and discovered three. First, gentleness, peace and joy are associated with God's will. For example, Maxim 5 of Ch. X<sup>10</sup> reads: "Always be perfectly predisposed to receive with gentleness and indifference everything that is not contrary to God: to be healthy or sick, happy or dissatisfied, loved or persecuted, to do one thing or the other, to live or to

die; in a word, 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." In Ch. XIII Médaille tells us to desire for the will "the sole freedom to go to God, to love him, to depend on him and to embrace joyfully all the orders of his divine will." In fact, the chapter on gentleness and peace of heart in the Maxims of Perfection, Ch. XIII, follows immediately two chapters focusing on our response to God's will. The second commonality which I discovered is the mentioning of gentleness, peace and joy in the context of imitation of Jesus; e.g. "Being thus dead to nature and the old self, live the life of Jesus Christ, putting on his humility, his gentleness, his simplicity, and his other virtues" (Ch. I, part of Maxim 4) or "Finally, put on and be completely filled with Jesus, interiorly applying his graces, merits, intentions and all the holiness of his virtues and exteriorly manifesting his gentleness, modesty, simplicity and his adorable humility." (Ch. XIV #7) Thirdly, I found that Médaille usually links gentleness, peace and joy with humility and simplicity as you may have noticed from the quotations I just read. I then went to the Primitive Constitutions for references to gentleness, peace and joy and found confirmation regarding these commonalities in a key sentence which connected the will of God and the imitation of Jesus (cf. back of Constitutions, p. 99).

Upon further reflection on these commonalities, I began to understand also why one or more of the trio gentleness, peace and joy are usually mentioned in a series which includes humility and simplicity. The linking of gentleness, peace and joy with humility, in the context of modeling, leaves no doubt as to whom we are to imitate. To quote from the Consecration to the Two Trinities (Const. p. 57) "—Offer yourself to GOD THE SON, protesting for love of Him that you humble yourself in everything by professing the most profound and lowly humility and by dying to all your petty and vicious inclinations. In this way, you will imitate the anéantissement which He willed to practice for love of you." As for simplicity in Médaille's vision, gentleness, peace and joy are fruits of the gentle Spirit's working in me with my cooperation. I am gently being drawn to gentleness and am invited to respond gently. The first maxim of Ch. I of the Maxims of Perfection reads: "Have always in sight the great end of your Christian vocation. See your particular call and the movement of divine grace which draws you gently and firmly to live the great virtue, and do nothing which might distance you from or make you undeserving of the graces with which God in his goodness has been favoring you, perhaps for some time and with little fruitfulness". Although gentleness, peace and joy are experienced within, I do act out of these fruits in such a way that my manner becomes gentle, peaceful, joyful, and manifests an inner simplicity. Now, in Médaille simplicity seems to be an exterior manifestation of the interior reality of being centered in God and so we understand why he so often links simplicity with gentleness, peace and joy.

From my reflection of the Médaillian context of gentleness, peace and joy, then, certain key ideas emerged: 1) the will of God as central; 2) imitation of Jesus in his self-emptying; 3) and the fact that the initiative is that of the Holy Spirit whose work in me is recognized by his fruits - gentleness, peace and joy, interiorly experienced, exteriorly manifested - in all my relationships.

But what is God's will for Médaille? In our team exploration of themes we have discussed the insight that, for Médaille, God's will, God's glory, God's contentment all lie in the achieving of the total double union both in process and as ultimate end. That is, God's will is the present uniting of all in him in a final total union. In Chapter I of the Maxims of Perfection, as Phyllis pointed out earlier, every Maxim focuses on this vision of the true reality (all in God) toward

which I am invited to move throughout my life. Maxim 2 particularly accentuates both movement and end: "Take it as your life principle to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Therefore, in each instance courageously choose to live what you will believe to be the more perfect, what will correspond to the greater glory of God your Father what will be more pleasing in his sight and more according to his holy will."

But the path along which I move is the path followed by Jesus in his anéantissement. ~~(In parentheses,~~ (the word "path" is important. Médaille encourages imitation of Jesus not as an end in itself but as the principal means to union with the Father.) After outlining in Chapter I of the Maxims of Perfection the end which those aspiring to the great virtue should envision for themselves, Médaille proceeds immediately, in Chapter II, to insist on self-emptying in imitation of Jesus as the means to arrive at this end and in Chapter III; he leaves no doubt as to the necessity of growing in humility as a more specific means. As Brennan Manning puts it very well: "There is no gentle road to gentleness".

However, we are being invited to move along this road by the Holy Spirit of love whose action in us we recognize in the gentleness, peace and joy which is ours as we cooperate with grace. In no sense does Médaille conceive of our practising these virtues for their own sake nor does he suggest that gentleness, peace and joy may be achieved through one's own efforts. I will taste these fruits of the Spirit and manifest them exteriorly to the extent that my life is consciously becoming more and more central in the Father in the pattern of the Word Incarnate. The significance of gentleness, peace and joy as instruments in the discernment process is obvious. In spiritual direction, inner peace (not an erroneous peace which can result from a choice made by the self not truly centred in God), but true inner peace is a sign of a good decision in the Spirit. In the context of the more, we understand why this is true for me, a Sister of St. Joseph. The choice of the more perfect for me at a given moment in the life process of moving always toward total double union will result in gentleness, peace and joy. But not only does my possessing these fruits of the Spirit signal to me that I made the right choice, but the peace which I experience can be regarded as a sort of meeting place, a potent quiet, in which the Spirit invites me to further response. In Ch. VI of the Maxims of Perfection, the chapter on fidelity to grace, Médaille writes, "Never anticipate grace by any overeagerness. Await its moment in peace, and when grace comes to you, respond with great gentleness and courage".

I would like now to repeat the statement with which I began but which I wrote at the end of the process, coming at it now in the light of all we just discussed. There are basically three parts to my statement. 1. I am being invited to "the more", to a movement toward total double union which is God's will 2. through imitation of the Word Incarnate in his self-emptying 3. by the initiative of the Holy Spirit of love whose fruits are gentleness, peace and joy in every relationship - 1) self with God 2) self with self 3) self with my sisters 4) self with others. My prayer is that this attempt of mine to rewrite in my own words part of the Consensus Statement will spark in some of you the desire to do the same on any given point or theme, either with the Consensus Statement or any one of the documents. I have found it to be a learning experience and a confirming one as well in that it helped me clarify and give expression to certain movements within me over the past year particularly. Médaille, renowned spiritual director that he was, foresaw such a result. In his Preface to the Maxims of Perfection he writes: "Take them (the Maxims) sometimes for your daily meditation and when, through long consideration, you have penetrated and weighed the meaning of each one of them reflect on yourself, see how well you live out their teaching and how you desire to live it out in the future."