

THAW

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Of/for Canadian Anglican and Ecumenical Franciscans

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IN THIS ISSUE, AUGUST 1, 2006

The August issue of THAW features a review of Gary Thorne's essay for the Primate's Theological Commission on "Friendship and Marriage", a description of domestic spirituality, "The Stations of My House" a contribution from our new Northern Correspondent and an editorial on sexuality in Francis' spirituality. How's your Latin? There's a motto in Latin which may be quite incorrect. In the meantime the editor begs for your submissions, either as letters or articles. Peace to us all.

Harold TSSF

EDITORIAL

When Francis stripped naked in the square before the Bishop of Assisi, he didn't just proclaim his absolute poverty. He also displayed his sexuality, without shame. And his life of renunciation thereafter was not a form of sexual deprivation. It was an integration of body and soul, without the encumbrances and separations and sexual

pretensions for which finery exists. In him, sexuality was not an activity to which a person could turn, from time to time: a turn-on external to oneself. Sexuality entered his whole being, flooded his subjectivity, became, in his conversion the ecstasy with which he reached out to all life.

Thus we should not be surprised to find Francis as a lover in many ways and roles. The moon became his sister, water his sister, fire his brother, death his brother. He fell in love with them all.

Francis' love, exhilarated by sexuality, also reached out to Jesus and to God. Here is what first comes to mind for Francis when he addresses his brothers.

"We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers to him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven. We are mothers when we carry him in our heart and body through a divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others.

O how glorious it is to have a holy and great Father in heaven! O how holy, consoling to have such a beautiful and wonderful Spouse! O how holy and how loving, gratifying, humbling, peace-giving, sweet, worthy of love, and above all things, desirable to have such a Brother and such a Son, our lord Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for his sheep...."

In our stereotypical sexual bind, it is rather indecent to think of the male Jesus as your spouse, (if you, too, are male). Doesn't that make you just a trifle "homosexual"? Or Jesus as your Son, you carrying him in the womb of your 'sincere conscience'? And "giving birth"? The male mother?

But none of these relationships daunted Francis. He found grace in all of them. He was sexuality unbounded.

There were no gender restrictions in the way he envisaged the plenitude of love's ways. It may be a leap for some to consider same sex relationships as "bless-able". But Francis knew they were means of grace – 800 years ago.

FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE

Gary Thorne, diocesan and university chaplain at the U of Dalhousie and Kings College, has written the third essay on sexuality for the Primate's Theological Commission of which he is a member. Without giving an extensive review here, but just enough to entice you, his paper is novel, surprising and illuminating.

"Novel" because until recently true love has been regarded by scholars as more or less exclusively "agapaic"; the selfless love of God demonstrated on the cross, and a lesser love, (more like a curse than a gift) which is "eros" the much-belauboured love which is twin sister to lust and eroticism.

But this polarization is not good enough for Gary. Along with recent writers, he reintroduces the concept of friendship (philia) and gives it great significant in human

relationships and in marriage.

Friendship, he finds is the pleasure of mutuality, and speciality in one's passion for another. The friend is a beloved person, the unique, significant "other" in our lives. And with this person we can know ourselves as we are and accept ourselves, there being an abundance of mutual respect and affection in our regard for one another. Friendship can express agape, as in "greater love has no one than this, that one lays down one's life for one's friend". But friendship is also a relationship animated by passion, or "eros".

Gary observes that the Anglican theology of marriage, expressed in the later BCP and the BAS uncouples the love of marriage from the act of procreation and so the comfort and help "that the one ought to have of the other" and the "tender acts of love" are no longer focused on nor limited to, the act of copulation. Indeed these pleasures can roam through the whole erogenous region, as if one is walking through an oasis in a Roman desert of mandatory conception. The BAS, in other words, clears the way for oral or anal sex, as significant acts expressing philia, or the intimacies of deep friendship now making its way into the Anglican marriage rite.

Furthermore, Gary takes the final step of sexual logic by saying that if philia or friendship (not sexually restricted, of course), is becoming the soul of marriage, then these tender acts and this loving mutuality can exist between persons of the same sex, just as easily and wonderfully as between heterosexual couples. Same sex marriage, where marriage is based on friendship is God-given and entirely bless-able.

There is much more in his essay. For instance, he writes about the role of the Christian community; how friendship in that community can grow into selfless love, or agape, in the image of divine love.

There is much more in his essay. For instance, he writes about the role of the Christian community, how friendship in that community can grow into selfless love, or agape in the image of divine love. Read it for yourself.

Most intriguing; he identifies a change in our understanding of love, by placing friendship at its centre, a change which has been taking place subliminally, and has altered the wording and theology of the marriage rite. He makes us aware of a mighty resource to be reclaimed, a sea shift in our understanding and acquisition of love, and, by the by, a new theological centre for marriage.

THE STATIONS OF MY HOUSE

(Worshipping God body and soul at 40 below)

My house has stations.

The first faces east directly into the rising sun through the patio door. (Closed). It is about God the Source of all being. And of me. Here I do rising up exercises. Up on the toes three times. Raise the arms above the head. Jump a bit. Maybe jump with the legs apart, together apart together. Soon I am breathing hard. I am also saying "God raises me up, God lifts me into the day". Then I go to the second station, marching

with knees up. Up! Up! Up! Up!

The second station is at the computer desk, There is a step down into an adjoining bedroom. This is the station of the Word. (processor ! Get it?) Here I step up and down six times then six times more. I am announcing that God is communication; God speaks through the Word who is Jesus Christ. The Word is the full expression of the nature of God, the outgoing God so to speak. I celebrate that there is speaking, meaning, in the world. And language, thus we are made in the image of the speaking God. Up down, up down, up down. Wisdom. All things where made by Him. Or Her. All things are intelligible.

The third station is over by the stereo. I think of music, rhythm, dancing. I dance before the stereo, like David danced before the ark. Less furiously. Slide to the left, slide to the right. Move the neck, bend the wrists, splay the fingers. This is the station of the Spirit, animating me. The Spirit is uniting me to the Word and the Source. I am resting up from the rigours of the earlier stations. I practice my golf swing, slow, beautiful, secretly powerful, the rhythm of Tiger Woods. Well, a rhythm anyway. The fourth station to which I march, knees up, up up, is at the back of the house; another step up, step down. This is my play station. Six up and six down while I throw the ball for the dog. The dog has come from nowhere for station four. He careens through the house, or into the TV room after the ball, which he returns thinking this station is it. But no; knees up to station five.

Station five is in the kitchen. I used to place a glass of water on the counter, half filled. Here I hop, feet together, 10 or 20 times and then again. I am praying for the hungry of the world. I am looking at my shelves and the plenty they hold. I am thinking of what's in the fridge. I am thinking that millions have no fridge; their food just rots. If they have food. I am thinking of flies. None here. Of malaria; none here. Of mosquitoes, none here. Billions of them expired at the first frost. I am renewing my sense of shame at the plight of millions while I am snug and well fed. Less enthused, I march off to station six.

It's station six alright. It's the station of sickness. I am falling down. It is located at the door to my bedroom. I am down on my chest doing push-ups; on my back doing the bicycle; lifting legs, testing my flabby abs. I am showing God my weakness, my need for oxygen, good air, I am failing. Oh dear, what a terrible admission. But that's not all – wait 'til station seven.

Here I am facing north; the "back of the north wind". Here is my moment of death. I am doing "going down" exercises. Knee bends, Bowing down. Touching one's toes. And then, whaddya know. I'm right back to station one. The resurrection.

The six stations take 20 minutes. I can start again. Take the tour more than once. I always end with station one.

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Pax ad pacem sola via est.

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FROM OUR NORTHERN CORRESPONDENT

Starting with this issue we will be hearing from our new Northern Correspondent, Father Weir Shivering of Chesterfield Inlet. For his first message, Archdemon Shivering has chosen what he calls "a typically northern hymn" to a familiar tune. Here it is.

This is my Father's world
its blizzards and its storms
the icy street, the frozen feet,
the kitchen stove that warms!

This is my Father's world
And in it I will praise.
Him I will crown, throughout the town
In all these wintry days.

This is my Father's world
Beneath the snow it sleeps!
As still as dead, in winter's bed
No rendezvous it keeps.

This is my Father's world
He knows my ruddy face
His cold so clean, His spirit, lean
I feel the sting of grace!

This is my Father's world
it puts me to the test
My little spark lights up the dark
The cheerful fire, my guest.

This is my Father's world
My frame, great coats enfold
With skill I'll last 'til winter's past:
Withstand the bitter cold.

This is my Father's world
In time there comes the morn
When from its tomb as from the womb
The earth will be reborn!

This is my Father's world
It rises over death!
When Easter's here and spring is near
I'll praise with every breath

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