



# RESOURCES IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Dedicated to Research and Reflection in Formative Spirituality

*Introductory Issue, December 2007*

## FORMATIVE REFLECTION

“Besides, you know ‘the time’ has come; you must wake up now; our salvation is even nearer than it was when we were converted. The night is almost over, it will be daylight soon – let us give up all the things we prefer to do under cover of the dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light.”

Romans 13: 11-12

In these words of St. Paul to which we listen as this Advent Season begins we hear the oft repeated scriptural call to “wake up now.” Much of our ordinary lives are spent struggling to stay awake. Day to day life tends, in a spiritual sense, to lull us to sleep.

This sleep from which the words of Scripture attend to arouse us is not the sleep that comes as the result of a fulfilled tiredness, the result of spending our energies on a work that is a response to our Divine call. It is rather the sleep of the boredom born of the routine and habit of everyday life. It is the tiredness, burnout and restlessness of dysphoria and depression. It is a sleep of avoidance, a distancing of our consciousness from the pain of unfulfilled desire.

So, in the liturgy of the First Sunday of Advent, we pray: “Increase our longing for Christ our Savior and give us the strength to grow in his love. . .” To live in an unfulfilled desire and longing “all our life long,” as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* puts it, becomes wearisome, and even enormously painful. To live in such passion is to live the passion. And so, as the disciples at Gethsemane, we become very tired and fall asleep. Each year as a new Church year begins, we are reminded that we have forgotten the Life that is our life, the awe and wonder that constitute our distinctiveness humanness, because we have fallen asleep to our deepest longings and hopes, and that, once again, we must “wake up now.”

As this Advent begins in the Church of the United States, we know, even more than at other times, a pervasive dissatisfaction and disaffection that have made us weary. Recent polls suggest that a vast majority of Americans think that our country is “heading in the wrong direction” and that life will be more difficult for our children and grandchildren than it has been for us. The value of people’s homes is

diminishing, and it appears as if we as a people are committed to a perpetual state of military conflict. Added to this is the dawning realization that the planet and its inhabitants cannot sustain the level of consumption and waste that has characterized the American way of life for our entire lifetimes.

So the always challenging call to awaken is particularly salient *this* year. If we are to awaken to our desire for “the warmth of God’s love” and our longing for “the light of God’s Word,” we must also awaken to our poverty and pain, personally and as a people. The words of Isaiah that are proclaimed in the first reading about the “days to come” when all nations will stream toward the mountain of the Lord’s house, when all nations “shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” seem so incongruent and unrealistic that they can provoke cynicism on the one hand or be reduced to sentimentality on the other. But what happens to us and to our immediate and larger worlds if we can let the words penetrate our minds and hearts? If we allow them to evoke our deepest desire and longing for love and light?

To “live in desire all our lifelong” is to live the passion of the Lord. It is to live with a desire and longing that is

## WELCOME

This opening issue of the newsletter of Resources in Spiritual Formation contains reflections in poetry and prose that are appropriate to the Advent season, the first in a series of reflections on the meaning and role of charism in our lives, and suggestions for readings, classical and contemporary, which can foster continuing spiritual formation. Each new edition of the newsletter, which will appear seven times during the calendar year, will contain: a reflection intended to serve personal spiritual practice; a topical discussion and review of books in the fields of philosophy, theology, psychology and spirituality; an ongoing discussion of charism as that gift of the Spirit that makes our unique response to the Divine call possible; and a special feature.

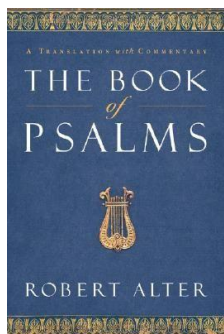
Future issues will appear in January, February, April, May, July-August, October, and December

never fulfilled. It is to live in awareness of our own poverty and lack. And to live mindful of this poverty, of this lack, is to know our profound connection and communion with every poor and suffering member of our race. It is to radically change our mode of presence from that of fear, power, and control of the other to one of recognition, connection, and compassion. As we flee our own unfulfilled longings, our knowledge of our own littleness and incompleteness, we become fearful and resentful of anything that might remind us of our truth. We live in a mode of defensiveness and control. The other is always a threat to us. But in the ground of our own poverty and lack, in the depths of our humility, we know the truth: we know that we are, as George Bernanos has said, one of the “suffering members of Jesus Christ.” We recognize that however different our circumstances and means may look, at the core of our being we share the same aspirations and longing: we are all seekers of the same light.

The fearfulness and anxiety that so permeates our lives is born, in large part, of our illusions, of our dissociation from our own depths. We have confused “the things we prefer to do under the cover of dark” with our deepest needs, and we are mistakenly armed and ready to defend those “values” at all costs. In this way, the other’s needs, even for the basics of life, are a threat to us. But when we awaken, we discover that we are not exempt from the suffering of others but are one with them. At this moment we no longer want or need power over the others, but rather know our longing for connection and our willingness to “suffer with” in compassion.

## BOOKS

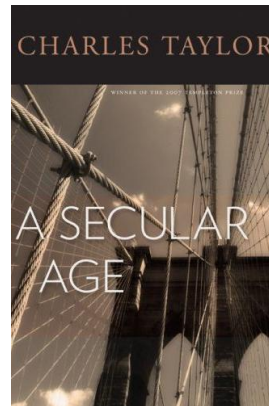
In this section, we will review books relating to specific topics of spiritual formation. Each issue will consider one or more books from each of the following disciplines: theology-philosophy, the literature of spirituality and spiritual life, and psychology/social sciences. Beginning with the coming January 2008 issue, we will present reviews on the subject of Spirituality and the Aging Process.



In the meantime, a few recent publications are worth mentioning for suggested reading, study and reflection during this Advent season. Robert Alter’s *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (W. W. Norton & Company; \$35.00) has received splendid reviews and is delightful reading. The timeless poetry of the

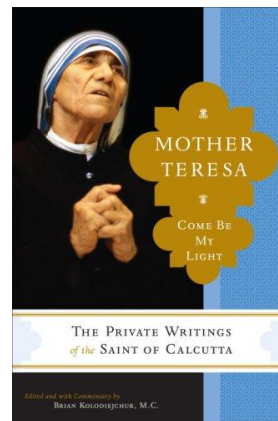
Psalms is captured in “vigorous English that restores the eloquence and coiled power of the original.”

Charles Taylor is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at McGill University and winner of the 2007 Templeton Prize. In *A Secular Age* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; \$39.95) he offers a historical perspective on the question of what it means to live in a secular age. Building on his previous studies of religion and philosophy, this book is a major contribution to our understanding of secularism. Robert N. Bellah (*Habits of the Heart*) calls it a breakthrough



book, “one of the most important books written in my lifetime.” Taylor demonstrates that “today’s secular world is characterized not by an absence of religion – although in some societies religious belief and practice have markedly declined – but rather by the continuing multiplications of new options, religious, spiritual, and anti-religious, which individuals and groups seize on in order to make sense of their lives and give shape to their spiritual aspirations.”

The inner life and experience of Mother Teresa of Calcutta’s spiritual journey is presented in *Mother*



*Teresa: Come Be My Light, the Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta”* (Doubleday; \$22.95), Edited and with Commentary by Brian Kolodiejchuk, M.C. After succeeding in establishing the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa entered into a true dark night of the soul. The letters in this volume, written to a succession of spiritual directors over

several decades, testify to the intense trial of faith to which she was submitted during her lifetime. “If ever I become a Saint,” she wrote, “I will surely be one of ‘darkness.’ I will continually be absent from Heaven – to light the way of those in darkness on earth.”



## CHARISM STUDIES (1)

What's your charism?" I get this question from several Catholics – of various ages, nationalities, cultures, and religio-political leanings – after I introduce myself as a member of a religious congregation. There was a time when my immediate impulse would be to reply with a one- or two-word answer like "education" or "youth ministry." But much has changed in the way I understand my life as a religious, so much so that I now react guardedly when someone poses that question. In the past few years, I have responded to the inquiry differently, "Are you asking about the work we do?" In most cases, I get a "yes." There are, however, a few instances when the inquirer's response is different. On those rare occasions, I answer back with another question: "How much time have you got to sit down with me on this?"

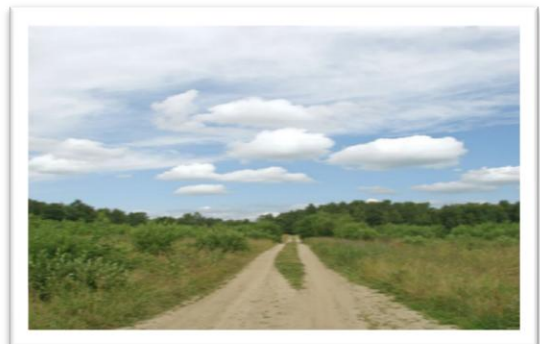
No serious, meaningful and promising discussion of the charism of a religious congregation can take place hurriedly. In societies where citizens are engrossed in a highly functional and hyperactive mode of living – where soundbytes are preferred to nuance – this poses a tremendous challenge. During a conference I attended in Las Vegas, the media director of a non-profit organization told the assembly, "In a culture inundated by a 24-hour news cycle, people don't have time for complex discussions. You either give them a memorable one-liner or lose them. The point is to be direct and to the point... boom!" Religious working within such attention-deficient loci run the risk of presenting the vital spirit of their congregation – to oneself, themselves, and others – in its most minimal form. The issue becomes more disconcerting when religious become satisfied with a reductionist presentation. Condensing the charism of a religious congregation into bullet-form statements perverts it. If we accept that this form of life is an organic reality within the Church, any religious congregation that claims it has fully articulated its charism risks both hubris and self-deception.

The essays that will appear on this part of the website hope to initiate a deeper conversation about charism among vowed religious and their collaborators. Forty years have passed since women and men religious received the summons from Vatican II to hold faithfully "their founders' spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 2b). The norms for implementing this directive further called these institutes to "strive for a genuine knowledge of their original spirit" so they "may thus be purified of alien elements and freed from those which are obsolete" (*Ecclesiae Sanctae*, 16c). While several of us have done our homework, a far

greater number of religious communities continue to wrestle with both the understanding and the articulation of their respective charisms. In my researches, I have observed that the struggle is more pronounced among religious congregations founded during the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries than those established earlier. Some of the radical causes for these difficulties arise from the historical accidents which gave birth to these communities. However, discussions concerning the existential, sociological, and ecclesial facets of the dilemma also have to unfold in these pages in order that we may comprehend both the complexities of the religious life we have been called to and chosen to embrace and the inexhaustible spirit that sustains and fashions our communities.

To whom are these essays addressed? First and foremost, these pages are written with fellow Catholic religious in mind. The reader will discern that I am writing and reflecting on the histories and experiences of vowed women and men who belong to communities once labeled as "institutes of simple vows." Apart from my membership in one such group and an academic familiarity with their collective histories, the underlying reason for this leaning is a desire to address the dearth of substantive studies of these congregations – most especially of non-clerical institutes of men. However, because the collective history of these institutes can never be extricated from the wider history of religious life in Catholicism, I will make frequent references to the histories of orders, societies, and congregations founded earlier than they were. The essays are also intended for clerics and laypersons collaborating in the works of these religious communities and/or connected to them is some form of formal affiliation. It is my hope that this will help to clarify the muddled assumptions that many may have about religious congregations, especially concerning the spiritual patrimony they are passing on, the parameters of their adaptation to the late modern world, and the decline in the number and diversification of their memberships.

~ Reginald D. Cruz, cfx



## ADVENT JOURNEY

I searched everywhere  
to find and feel your presence...  
in darkness of night.

In prayer and elsewhere  
everything fell short of you,  
of true encounter.

I looked finally -  
With the help of grace - *at you*.  
With my heart I looked.

Then did I observe:  
You, surrounding me with care,  
entering deep within.

Blinded by striving,  
I had not *waited* enough,  
nor had I let go.

When my efforts ceased,  
I began to hope in you  
and to live anew.

~ Romeo J. Bonsaint

## IN MEMORIAM



ADRIAN van KAAM  
\* 19 April 1920  
+ 17 November 2007

It is with sadness that we note the passing of Fr. Adrian van Kaam, CSSp, founder of Formative Spirituality as an academic discipline.

Author of over 50 books, including a seminal series of volumes on Formative Spirituality, Fr. van Kaam taught and published in the field throughout his career, which began in the Netherlands and continued at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

We will feature an extended essay on Father van Kaam's life and work in our first complete issue of this newsletter in January 2008.

### NEWSLETTER STAFF/CONTRIBUTORS

*Resources in Spiritual Formation* is co-directed by Romeo J. Bonsaint, SC and John D. Hamilton, CFX. **Romeo J. Bonsaint, SC, PhD**, is a member of the New England Province of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. He holds a masters degree and a doctorate in Formative Spirituality from the Institute of Formative Spirituality of Duquesne University. He has taught in spirituality programs in Rome, at Duquesne and Creighton Universities, and at various sites throughout New England. Along with John D. Hamilton, he develops courses in Formative Spirituality and is available for formative spiritual direction at Xavier Center, where *Resources in Spiritual Formation* is located. **John D. Hamilton, CFX, MA**, is a member of the Xaverian Brothers. He holds graduate degrees in English from Wesleyan University and in Formative Spirituality from Duquesne University. In addition to his work at *Resources in Spiritual Formation*, he is also General Councilor for Formation for the Xaverian Brothers. **Reginald D. Cruz, CFX, PhD (cand.)** is also a member of the Xaverian Brothers. He is currently completing his Doctorate in History at the University of the Philippines. He has served on the faculty of Maryhill School of Theology and the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia, both in Manila. He is general coordinator of the *Hagiography Circle*, an online research center on Contemporary Hagiography.

### Resources in Spiritual Formation

21 Spring St.  
Danvers, Massachusetts 01923  
USA

email: [webmaster@resourcesf.com](mailto:webmaster@resourcesf.com)  
website: [www.resourcesf.com](http://www.resourcesf.com)