SACRAMENTAL SUFFERING

Brother André's Spirituality

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One of the things that makes any account of Brother André's life and work so fascinating is the way in which the most elementary observations seem to contradict each other. For instance, Brother André is celebrated as a miraculous healer, yet he himself suffered physical disabilities and ailments that hampered him all his life. For instance, Brother André left his peculiar mark stamped indelibly on the Oratory that he inspired, yet his favorite statuette has nothing in common with the statuettes of Jesus, St. Joseph, the Blessed Virgin and Brother André himself that are today marketed through the gift shop of the Oratory. For instance, thousands of pilgrims come to the Oratory every year seeking one of the miracles for which it is renowned, and most of them leave bearing the same burden that they brought with them on arrival. Yet their faith, and particularly their faith in the Oratory and Brother André, remains as strong as before, if not stronger. How can these things be?

The contradictions remain if we understand Brother André's life to be shaped by a spirituality of miracles, but they disappear if we see that his life was instead shaped by a spirituality of suffering.

When the Church began its official investigation of the case for the beatification of Brother André four years after his death in 1937 at the age of 91, the investigators prepared a list of questions to be put to those who had known the famous founder of St. Joseph's Oratory of Montréal. Joseph Pichette, the first person to be interviewed, responded to the first 49 questions with answers that provided 20 pages of testimony.[1] The fiftieth question, however, was the one that touched on the miracles associated with Brother André, and the reply to that question alone covered a further 20 pages.[2]

Above all it is the miracles that draw our attention to the story of Brother André. They fascinate and titillate us. Sometimes it is the detailed account of a healing observed by certified physicians, such as that reported in the Annales de St-Joseph in 1927 when a woman suffering multiple afflictions including pyretic fever, a severed spine and tetanus attacks, was cured in the course of performing a novena under the patronage of St. Joseph.[3] Sometimes it is the sheer number of healings attributed to the intercession of St. Joseph by grateful correspondents to the Oratory: for example, more than 15,000 healings claimed for the year 1928.[4] Sometimes it is the bewildering variety of favors acknowledged by the thousands who sent their written testimonies to the staff of the shrine: in 1913 near the beginning of the Oratory's fame notice was taken not only of recovery from illness and wounds, but also of a successful amputation and adjustment to an artificial limb. A heretic was converted, a family saved from a fire, a potential defendant managed to avoid being brought to trial, one man found a job, another managed to hang on to one, a young man earned a degree, a nun's students did well on their examinations, a mother had an easy childbirth, and a businessman made a nice profit in the sale of some real estate.[5]

During the years 1910-1962 the Oratory received about ten million letters.[6] From the first publication of the Annales, the official organ of the Oratory until 1944 when the name of the magazine was changed to L'Oratoire, the editors regularly reported the number of letters received. During the early 1920s about 50,000 letters arrived each year, and in 1928 the total number was 172,549.[7] By 1936, André's last year of life, the number reached the the formidable total of 205,662.[8] But how many of these letters

acknowledged God's gracious granting of a favor, sometimes a healing but more often some other desirable thing? During the 1920s only 9-11% of the letters mentioned a miracle. Still more surprising is the fact that during the years 1933-1937 only 7% of the letters referred to a healing or some other favor miraculously granted to the writers.[9] That is to say, during the worst years of the Great Depression, an economic disaster that weighed with particular heaviness on the urban francophones of Montréal, there was a small but significant reduction in the proportion of letters reporting miracles. Yet the total number of letters increased each year after 1920.

The remarkable fact to which I wish to direct our attention is not the miracles of Brother André but rather the startling effectiveness with which he and his Oratory dealt with the actual experience of human suffering in all its forms during the first half of the twentieth century, primarily among the common people of Québec. The miracles on which Brother André's notoriety is founded ended human suffering among the relatively few pilgrims who were blessed by some divine intervention in their lives, but the vast majority of pilgrims found consolation in Brother André's spirituality. It was not a spirituality mediated by systematic statements, written or spoken, for Brother André was functionally illiterate and theologically unsophisticated. But his practice and encouragement of the cult of St. Joseph were the means by which he undertook to make sense of the fact of human suffering as it was manifested in his own experience, in that of the pilgrims who sought him out, and in the reports of the tribulation of the world as they reached the Oratory resting on the slopes of Mount Royal.

Brother André's practice and encouragement of the cult of St. Joseph constituted his sacramental spirituality of suffering, and it was this contribution to the religious life of the people of Québec, mediated through the Oratory on Mount Royal, that was shaped most directly and clearly by Brother André himself. None of the other contributions of the Oratory to the religious life of the Québécois -- the pilgrimages, the trade union events, even the miracles -- none of these bore his personal stamp unamended by others and none were so dear to his own heart.

Before I can begin to substantiate this claim I need to make clear what I mean by "sacramental spirituality". In particular "spirituality" is a slippery term that has come into vogue in recent years and is generally taken to refer to something more refined than the popular devotions practiced by persons as uncouth as Brother André, known neither for his eloquence nor for his writings, let alone for his theological refinement. In the course of a helpful survey of the historical evolution of the term, however, Walter H. Principe has proposed that "spirituality" be defined in a manner that is both more broad and more precise than its present usage suggests. Like some of the sociological terms that I shall be resorting to elsewhere, Principe's definition purchases some of its precision at the price of becoming ponderous, but it is so apt to my purposes as an historian trying to make sense out of a controversial subject that I would rather quote Principe directly than try to reword him. "Spirituality", then, is

> the way in which any person understands, and lives within his or her historical context according to that aspect of his or her religion, philosophy, or ethic that is viewed as the loftiest, the noblest, the most calculated to lead to the ideal or perfection being sought.[10]

It follows that what distinguishes spirituality from mere piety is not the refinement of the practitioner but her deliberate and persistent effort to live her life according to what is understood to be the best in her tradition. Therefore a highly trained theologian who sets his foot on the mystical path, as John of the Cross did, may commonly be understood to have a spirituality. But John's relatively uneducated mentor, Teresa of Avila, may also be understood to have a spirituality, as Teresa herself argued when she cautioned a would-be spiritual director, armed with his theological credentials, that "the Lord is perhaps making some old woman better versed in this science than himself, even though he be a very learned man."[11]

As I shall demonstrate below, Brother André's encounter with human suffering issued in an authentic spirituality that shaped, more or less effectively, the Oratory and through it the people of Québec. It was a way of life, the product of reflection and practice, not merely a body of ideas; and it was shaped by André's own highest tradition, the imitation of Christ in his passion. Furthermore André's understanding of suffering was that it is properly regarded as sacramental, though "sacramental" is my formulation rather than his. He was an unlettered man, concrete in his expression and inclined to favor practice over analysis, but as an outsider I find it helpful to characterize his position with a word that has played an important though controversial role in the Catholic tradition.

There are seven sacraments celebrated by the Catholic Church. Enumerated by Peter Lombard in the twelfth century and

developed by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, they were subsequently adopted formally by the Councils of Florence (1439) and Trent (1545-63). Not surprisingly they served as a handy reference point by which one could distinguish a Catholic from a Protestant: most Protestants limited the sacraments to precisely two (baptism and the communion meal) while the Council of Trent declared that the true number is "seven, no more and no fewer."[12]

Both Catholics and Protstants made use of Augustine's definition of a sacrament as "the visible form of invisible grace" and held that the sacraments had been instituted by Jesus Christ as he was revealed in the New Testament. The sacraments were understood to be symbolic actions which were effective because they were the sacraments (ex opere operato), not because the ecclesiastical officer who administered them was a worthy person. The only provisos were that the recipient be appropriately repentant and faithful, and that the sacrament be celebrated, as the Council of Trent put it, by those who intend "to do what the Church does."

And so the sacraments were given definitive shape : two among most Protestants, seven among Catholics. Whether a sacrament is symbolic or real, whether there is any difference between "symbolic" and "real" -- these are questions much debated by Christians. There is, however, agreement that each sacrament is or should be a vivid dramatization of a real and important spiritual event. In baptism, for instance, the old life is drowned, the new life is nourished by living waters, and the baptized person emerges from the event, sprinkling or full immersion, as a member of the Church.

Protestants generally observe the sacraments but tend to stress the importance of the Word (in preaching, in Bible study, etc.) in their religious practices. Catholics, on the other hand, tend to cultivate a "sacramental imagination"[13] and have found that seven sacraments are not quite enough. As a result a whole class of ritual objects and practices known as "sacramentals" has arisen among Catholics and been sanctioned and shaped with varying degrees of success by the hierarchy. The sacramentals include the making of the sign of the Cross, the telling of the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, the use of purple vestments during Lent and Advent, etc.. It would not do to draw too clear a distinction between Catholics and Protestants at this point, of course, since Protestants have their own sacramentals (e.g.,the Geneva gown) and they share some sacramentals with Catholics (e.g.,the saying of grace before a meal). But clear or not the distinction is there. Indeed, far from undermining the sacramental imagination of Catholics, Vatican II encouraged this Catholic tradition by urging the faithful to see the Church in Christ as "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity."[14]

Standing as he did in the Catholic tradition it was natural for Brother André to take a sacramental approach to suffering. In particular he fastened on two practices common in Québec: anointing the ill and dying with consecrated oil,and performing the Stations of the Cross.

During the Middle Ages it became Catholic practice to administer the sacrament of Extreme Unction to dying priests: using vegetable oil blessed by an ordained person, preferably a bishop, the priest would ritually anoint the man in the last stage of dying.

Soon the practice was extended to all dying Catholics, but it was not until Vatican II that the sacrament was officially spoken of as the Anointing of the Sick rather than Extreme Unction, recovering its earlier, broader function of conveying God's grace to those who suffer from any illness or injury, not only to those who are close to dying. However the use of consecrated oil in rituals designed to comfort all who suffer some physical ailment continued informally throughout the history of the Catholic Church, side by side with the formal sacrament administered by priests. Brother André was one of those who habitually obtained consecrated oil from a priest, then ritually administered it to those who suffered in the hope that the gesture would serve as a vehicle of God's healing grace, spiritual and physical. Had André cared to formulate what he was doing he would have described it as a humble sacramental, not a sacrament, for only a priest may administer a sacrament. But the impact that his anointing had on those present was generally so extraordinary that André himself frequently and with some asperity reminded people that he was not a priest.

Brother André instituted a still more dramatic ritual of suffering, however, in the Chemin de la Croix that he led at the Oratory every Friday evening in the company of his friends, almost all of them devout Catholic laymen. The English translation is "Stations of the Cross," a phrase which unhappily lacks the French emphasis on dynamic reenactment implied by "chemin" or "way." The Stations of the Cross were not André's personal invention, of course, but he set his peculiar stamp on them at the Oratory.

The Stations of the Cross are a distinctively popular form of devotion in the Catholic tradition, finding their origin in the practice of pilgrims who visited Jerusalem and traced out the path that Jesus took from his condemnation by Pilate through to his entombment. In the later Middle Ages the Franciscans encouraged their urban flocks to practice the devotion in a variety of forms until at last in the nineteenth century the Church standardized it with fourteen Stations. Catholic churches generally feature the fourteen Stations of the Cross in pictorial or sculpted form running around the interior wall but sometimes, particularly where a steep hill is available to recall the climb up Golgotha, the Stations are recreated outdoors as they have been at the Oratory of St. Joseph since 1904. Lent and Advent are seasons when Catholics are most likely to undertake the Stations of the Cross, but under Brother André's leadership it was a weekly event. He himself preferred to make the Stations of the Cross on a daily basis but was not always able to do so.

The Stations of the Cross present the Passion of Christ (literally "the suffering of Christ"), unrelieved by a happy ending or even promises of one. The person who undertakes the Stations of the Cross moves slowly from one to the other, pausing each time to meditate on the particular sorrow presented: Jesus being scourged, Jesus stumbling for the first time under the weight of the cross, St. Veronica wiping Jesus' face with her veil, Jesus' death on the cross, etc.. Every effort is made to recapitulate in all its variety the suffering of the Passion, dramatizing it and relating it to the life of the person or persons who have come to meditate, perhaps under the leadership of an exhorter who directs a group along the way.

Neither called nor trained to preach or to officiate at a sacrament, Brother André nevertheless was free to lead people along the Stations of the Cross and to direct their devotions there with his speeches.

As a means of focussing the Christian's imagination on suffering, few religious practices can rival Brother André's weekly public direction of the Stations of the Cross in the Crypt of the Oratory. J.S. Bach's St. Matthew's Passion may be a greater work of art but the people who attended Brother André's hour-long meditation as he circled the dim sanctuary of the Crypt could not have been more stirred by Bach than they were by André. But why should I refer to Bach at all in commenting on Brother André's Stations of the Cross?

It is because both the Stations of the Cross and Bach's St. Matthew's Passion have fallen out of favor in recent times as religious devotions. Both trace the same path in the same way, examining the sufferings of Jesus in his last hours and relating them to the lives of their audience, ending at last with the sombre image of Jesus laid to rest in the tomb, dead. The St. Matthew's Passion is familiar to most lovers of classical music, but how many have heard it performed as part of a religious service rather than as a secular entertainment? or used their recording of the St. Matthew's Passion as a vehicle for their private devotions? The Stations of the Cross are necessarily part of the interior decoration of every Catholic Church, but how many Catholics have recently undertaken the Stations of the Cross, let alone practiced them regularly? The Stations of the Cross focus on the "passion" or suffering of Christ, and they are therefore not a form of meditation to which modern folk are easily drawn.

Technological advances of the past three centuries have given us the means and the inclination to mask suffering. Our funeral practices often create the illusion that the dead one is "only sleeping"; our pain-killers are readily employed to cover the least symptom of distress, and those who disdain pain-killers are suspected of being "masochistic" (at least by those who do not care for precision in their speech). Early Protestants like Mathias Grünewald (whose crucifixion panel on the Isenheim altarpiece has been described as "the most Protestant painting ever achieved"[15]) and J.S. Bach himself lived in an era that preceded our age of technological mastery and it is no accident that they were so successful as artists who, from time to time, focussed on the suffering of Christ and its implications for Christians. But more recently some Protestants have become popular as devotional leaders by virtually ignoring the Crucifixion and its revelation of ultimate suffering: I think, for example, of Bruce Barton's inspirational book, The Man Nobody Knows, continuously[16] in print since 1927, and the various "Christian athlete" movements of the present day.

Anyone who has visited both Protestant and Catholic churches knows that Protestants characteristically prefer to display the Cross rather than the Crucifix, dwelling on the hope of the resurrection implied by the empty Tree rather than on the reminder of suffering that is the twisted form of Jesus nailed cruelly to its place. Nevertheless it is not only modern Protestants whose attention has tended to wander from the Crucifixion as a symbol: I think it fair to claim that the most prominent symbols at gatherings of Catholic charismatics today are soaring doves, white robes of triumph, joyful and happy music. As an

historian who is loathe to say, "Clearly the record shows that the Christian tradition is precisely thus-and-so...," I hesitate to dismiss any of these modern practices as departures from what is legitimately called Christianity, but I note that the historical record is full of persons who have no such scruples. Consider, for example, the words written by Gerard Manley Hopkins to his father: "Those who do not pray to Him in His Passion pray to God but scarcely to Christ."[17]

Of course these are only typically modern inclinations, not absolutes, and I do not mention them in order to sneer at them but rather to emphasize how strange the practices fostered by Brother André must seem to most modern folk, Christian or otherwise. Not only did he draw attention to the suffering of the sick by anointing them and to the suffering of Christ by leading public meditations on the Stations of the Cross, but he also said the Rosary, often several times each day, and urged others to join him. This too is a practice falling out of favor with Catholics of our day, and perhaps it is therefore worth reminding ourselves that the central triad of the simple and repetitive prayers of the Rosary is devoted to a meditation on the Passion.

André's lay followers carried the saying of the Rosary 99 steps further by performing this sacramental on their knees as they ascended the long cement staircase (now mercifully padded with wooden boards) that climbs the mountain from its foot to the entrance of the Oratory. There are other Catholic shrines where pilgrims ascend a staircase on their knees while saying a prayer of one sort or the other, all taking their original inspiration from the Lateran Basilica in Rome where 28 marble steps are popularly understood to be the very steps that

Christ trod following his condemnation by Pilate in Jerusalem.[18] But few Catholic shrines invite pilgrims to such heroic efforts as the 99 steps of the Oratory of St. Joseph. The experience of ritually climbing them on one's knees is bound to draw one's attention to the fact of suffering, no matter what prayers one may choose to recite during the ascent.

In a reminiscence published five years after André's death his Superior, Father Albert Cousineau, C.S.C., made it plain that it was no accident that Brother André's favorite sacramentals dwelt on the theme of suffering.

> He was fond of meditating on the sufferings of Our Lord, particularly while performing the Stations of the Cross in union with St. Joseph... St. Joseph led him to Jesus, to suffering Jesus. And from there to his own meditation on the passion, the performance of the Stations of the Cross, devotion to the holy Face, to the most holy Eucharist...[19]

The holy Face, of course, is the bleeding head of Jesus crowned with thorns, and the Eucharist is the feast in which the bread becomes a body that is broken and the wine becomes blood that is spilt. Serving as a bridge for André between Joseph and Jesus was Mary, Father Cousineau tells us, "particularly under her title of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows... in her life of suffering and sacrifice."[20] The Father Superior expressed doubt that André understood this chain of relationships in a way that was conceptually clear but the Superior was sure that André's practice was correct.

Let me try to give conceptual clarity to André's most personal expressions of his spirituality of suffering. To do so I must recognize that I am interpreting the non-verbal actions of a man who was not given, so far as we know, to theological reflection of any kind, let alone to

written analysis of his own religious behavior. Furthermore I am personally an alien to this man's religious tradition: I am a liberal Protestant raised in another language by people who have learned to mistrust the Catholic enthusiasm for images, and I am trying to understand with sympathy the religious expression of an illiterate man who was never separated from certain images. And finally I am trying to understand a popular figure whose chief interpreters are themselves influenced by what they wish to find in Brother André's spirituality: I refer not only to the lay people mentioned on the first page of this paper who buy the cheerful statuettes that define the tone of the Oratory's gift shop today, but also to historians of Brother André who are responsible to a hierarchy that has severely modified or forthrightly rejected particular elements of Brother André's spirituality.

The evidence that I want to consider consists of the images and statues that were closest to Brother André, and the use to which he put them. First of all there are the Stations of the Cross that ring the sanctuary in the Crypt of the Oratory. The Crypt has been in use since 1917, and it is here that Brother André led his weekly public meditation on the Stations of the Cross. We have already seen that this particular sacramental is a graphic, dramatic event in which the participants not only focus their attention on the Passion of Jesus Christ, including his painful scourging, his desertion by his friends, his weary ascent of Golgotha and his death, but also make connections between the suffering that the participants have experienced and the suffering that they have inflicted on others.

But the Crypt contains more than the Stations of the Cross. It is dominated by the statue of St. Joseph, a kindly father-figure holding the Christ Child in his arms, standing over the altar. It is

the same image of St. Joseph that stands in the outside niche over the entrance to the original chapel as it was modified in 1910, and it is the same image that dominates the walls of Brother André's private living quarters above the original chapel. There are other ways in which Catholics represent St. Joseph but we know that this particular image was dear to Brother André. What part did it play in his spirituality? For one thing we know that he was often discovered at prayer in the Crypt, on his knees or prostrate on his face below the altar with his hands stretched out towards St. Joseph's image. People occasionally stumbled over him there because the incidents occurred at times when the Crypt was in darkness and supposedly deserted.[21] Before I interpret these facts, let me add one other.

In the display of Brother André's sparse possessions that the museum of the Oratory offers is one statue, no more and no less: a plaster image of Jesus immediately following his scourging before Pilate. Jesus' hands are bound with cords, the crown of thorns is on his head, and blood flows freely from his many wounds. His head is bowed and he is plainly seen to be suffering. The same 35-cm. statue appears in the life-size diorama showing Brother André in the office where he met pilgrims to the Oratory, and this time the statue rests on the counter behind which André stands. We know that it was André's custom to keep this statue concealed beneath the counter or in a desk drawer. When challenged by the obstinacy of an unrepentant sinner he would bring the statue out of hiding and use it to illustrate what sometimes amounted to an hour-long description of Jesus' suffering.[22] We also know that a similar statue, modified only by the addition of chains and a canopy, stood on the table beside Brother André's bed in his

private living quarters.

I think that it is possible that "St. Joseph led him to Jesus, to suffering Jesus," as Father Cousineau said shortly after Brother André's death (see page 13 above), but the pattern of Brother André's possessions and actions suggests an additional possibility. I think it most unlikely that there was no connection between the suffering of Jesus, represented so graphically in André's favorite statue and in the Stations of the Cross, and the nurturant figure of St. Joseph. It is hard to imagine the kind of schizophrenic state of mind that would permit someone to hold these two images simultaneously and constantly before himself without making a connection. But it seems most likely to me that André's frequent practice of the Stations of the Cross, his attachment to the statuette of Jesus Scourged, and his effort to reach others through the proclamation of Jesus' suffering (both during the Stations and during visits to his office) show that he understood suffering to be a fact of life which everyone could recognize. Let them admit their own suffering, then recognize that God too suffers, in the person of Jesus in his Passion, and they could come to see that salvation comes through suffering, not in spite of it.

St. Joseph does not lead Brother André to the suffering Jesus so much as he follows the suffering Jesus. Jesus in his Passion achieves a solidarity with suffering humanity that made it possible for Brother André and his disciples to make a connection between their own suffering lives and God, and this promised that ultimately suffering would be overcome. But the Jesus who heroically accepted suffering has no

energy to end the suffering of himself and of others here and now: Jesus hangs painfully on the Cross, or stands with head bowed before Pilate, or points to the wounded heart within his own breast, but he never takes children on his knee, never opens his arms to sinners, never lays a healing hand on a leper's brow -- at least, not among the icons that Brother André kept near to himself. The role of nurturant comforter is reserved for St. Joseph. When Brother André ended a day in which he had exhorted people time and again to see that Jesus suffers in redemptive solidarity with us, and then crept surreptitiously into the Crypt to prostrate himself for hours before the statue of St. Joseph holding the Christ Child in his arms, I suspect that Brother André was in effect asking St. Joseph for the parental support that would allow André to grow into the kind of person strong enough to follow in the footsteps of Jesus who redeems the world by accepting the world's suffering, just as St. Joseph's parental support for Jesus in his childhood made it possible for Jesus to grow into the man that he did.

There is negative evidence to support this view of Brother André's spirituality. Not only does Jesus not appear in a nurturant role in André's icons, but neither does the Blessed Virgin Mary. His favorite image of the Virgin shows her, like Jesus, pointing to the wounds in her heart, pierced by seven daggers which represent the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin.[23] This particular devotion achieved its height in the eighteenth century under Pope Benedict XIII but was practically eliminated during the reforms of the 1960s.[24] As a form of meditation

it resembled another of André's favorites, the Rosary of the Holy Wounds, a devotion set out in a pamphlet that Brother André promoted.[25] It is clear that in his spirituality Jesus and Mary demonstrate that suffering is a fact of life and that they enter into it redemptively, but it is St. Joseph who offers to help us grow up, to develop from immature children of weak faith into mature adults who can imitate the Jesus who suffers.

The hierarchy also saw St. Joseph as a powerful protector, but not as the nurturer who strengthens a weak, immature person until that person is ready to play the adult role required of one who would imitate the Christ who suffers bravely. Instead St. Joseph is the Protector of the Church, and his Oratory is the rock against which the enemies of the Church dash themselves in vain. For example, just three months after Brother André's death Mgr. Georges Gauthier, coadjutor archbishop of Montréal, issued a circular to the clergy of his diocese aimed primarily at denouncing the threat of communism in Montréal and abroad, and ending with the words,

> All the cares, all the distresses of our great city have been battering like a wave against the promontory where St. Joseph has chosen to build his house... What an honor and what an encouragement it is to us that St. Joseph stretches out his powerful arms over our city to bless it and to protect it![26]

The basilica that was completed after Brother André's death is dedicated to this St. Joseph who protects and rescues the Church from suffering. To reach the basilica one must leave the Crypt and climb farther up Mount Royal, at last entering the huge space beneath the dome of the Oratory where one discovers stained glass windows commemorating a variety of miraculous deliverances from calamity. St. Joseph turns back a British fleet in 1711 and again in 1776; St. Joseph ends an epidemic of typhoid in 1847 and rescues a ship threatened by icebergs

in 1639; St. Joseph causes the Iroquois to retreat in 1630 and the English to fall back in 1690. Considering the number of times that typhoid, the Iroquois, the English, etc., were victorious in the history of French-speaking Catholics in Canada, one is struck by the fact that St. Joseph is presented as one who ends suffering among Catholics, not as one who prepares Catholics for suffering.

The St. Joseph whom Brother André honored certainly ended suffering for some Catholics: it was to St. Joseph that Brother André gave the credit when people were miraculously healed. But most of those who came to St. Joseph in their suffering, including Brother André himself, did not obtain an end to their suffering. Instead they obtained the paternal care of a saint who would help them to grow into the kind of adult who could imitate Christ in his suffering. In Brother André's spirituality, St. Joseph prepares the faithful for suffering, he does not abolish suffering. That task is reserved for Jesus, and it is not one that we may hope to see accomplished in this world where suffering must be accepted as the fact that it is.

The prominence that has been given to the miracles of healing that are associated with Brother André obscures the central fact of suffering in his spirituality, but his lay friends were quick to point out that he devoted as much attention to the sufferings of Jesus and Mary as he did to the power of St. Joseph in whose name Brother André sought healing. 27
And during the official investigation by the hierarchy undertaken in the period 1941-1949, one of them remarked on a fascinating pattern among those who came to Brother André for relief from suffering:

> Those who are healed quickly are either those who do not have faith or those who have little faith, so that they might have faith; while those who already have a firm faith are not healed quickly, since the good God would rather test them, make them suffer, in order to sanctify them still more.[28]

Brother André himself, who suffered stomach pains constantly, was the most obvious example of the truth of this observation, but it applies as well to people like his friend, Mr. Azarias Claude.

Azarias Claude was a butcher who had come to know Brother André sometime during 1907-1908. His wife had frequently visited the then-primitive Oratory but Azarias himself was openly sceptical of the whole enterprise until Brother André personally prevailed on him to come for a visit. Azarias returned again and again, eventually becoming André's most frequent chauffeur on visits into the nearby towns. Early in their relationship, Brother André noticed that Azarias's hand was partially paralyzed, apparently due to an accident, and the following conversation ensued:

> "Would you like to have this hand work as well as your other?"
>
> "Brother André, if the good God has some favors to do for me, there must be plenty of others more important than this for the salvation of my soul. My arm doesn't bother me, and I can work. Why it's been (like this) for almost fifteen years, and I'm starting to get used to it."
>
> "Do you understand what you are saying? Have you thought about it?"
>
> "No, I've never thought about it, because I've never had any reason to think about it."
>
> "Then in that case you'll keep your arm just as it is now. Later, something else will come up that is more important. You may have some suffering ahead of you; never forget that sometimes suffering is necessary."

And André concluded the conversation with a long reflection on the sufferings

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of Jesus in his Passion. And when, several years later, Azarias suffered an illness that thrust him into a coma for three days, he was to regain consciousness only when Brother André had come to sit beside him. In the days of recovery that followed Brother André shared with his friend the two books of prayers that meant the most to him: the Prayers of Saint Gertrude and The Rosary of the Holy Wounds, both focussed on the sufferings of Jesus. The one miracle that was accorded to this close companion of André was a recovery that permitted him to pursue his meditations on suffering.

While Brother André would never have denied God's sovereign ability to relieve suffering one has the impression that André felt that it is both normal and desirable for an adult to suffer. Consider the following conversation that a well-to-do woman had with Brother André when she complained of her deafness:

> "Madame, you have a good husband?"
>
> "Oh, very good, Brother André!"
>
> "Children?"
>
> "Wonderful children!"
>
> "Money?"
>
> "Certainly, Brother; Providence has permitted us to lack for nothing."
>
> "Then, Madame, you surely are in need of something to put up with, for the love of the good God."

Recalling the incident later in an interview with Archbishop Gauthier of Montréal, the woman remarked, "If it had been anyone else who'd said such things to me, I'd have been driven into a rage!"[30]

Furthermore there are hints that Brother André understood there to be a "givenness" to suffering that fixed the amount of it that exists in the world. Jesus recognized that the devils that he drove out of the

madman had to go somewhere, and so he sent them into the herd of Gadarene swine. In a more sinister story that nevertheless affirms the same law of conservation of suffering, a man who was ill came to Brother André and demanded a cure "at any price." "Ah," replied Brother André, "At that price you shall be cured. Go." The man was healed, but his young daughter suddenly and inexplicably went insane.[31]

Lest it seem that Brother André was calloused in his perception of the suffering about him, let me stress that he sought to offer what consolation he could whenever he could. To some he would say, "God will have all His eternity in which to comfort you." And his friend Azarias Claude reports one of André's comments that suggests that André was sensitive to the incomprehension of those who continued to suffer because a healing miracle was denied to them.

> The people who think they are the most unhappy are the happiest. Those who suffer have something to offer to God... And when they manage to endure successfully, that is a miracle that keeps repeating.[32]

Nor did he spare himself. He denied that he asked Saint Joseph to put an end to the stomach pains that plagued him, insisting, "It's a good thing to suffer. It makes you think. You feel better after suffering."[33]

In the strict meaning of the term, "masochism" is sexual pleasure stimulated by pain. André's love of suffering was not masochistic: what he treasured was suffering with the power to transform because it is related to the transforming power of the Passion of Jesus Christ. When a sufferer complained to Brother André of a head ailment, André would point to the crown of thorns. If someone's legs were injured, André drew attention to Christ's staggering under the weight of the Cross. Was it a heart attack that one feared? Remember the lance that pierced the side of Jesus.[34] His motives were the same as those of the sixteenth-

century physicians who paraded their patients before Grünewald's painting of the Crucifixion before admitting them to hospital for treatment and, according to the testimony of André's lay friend, Joseph Pichette, the approach was efficacious:

> I never brought a sick person before Brother André who did not return satisfied. Some were healed. Others died a short while later, but Brother André had given them comfort. [35]

The persistent pattern of Brother André's life reveals a genuine spirituality of suffering; that is, an effort to live according to what he understood to be the Catholic understanding of suffering, conditioned as it was by the times in which he lived. But it was also a spirituality in the larger sense: a pathway that he explored himself and then successfully invited others to tread. His spirituality was a spirituality that others embraced, albeit one that the modifications of others sometimes obscured. We may conclude by comparing his spirituality to that of others who have shaped the ways in which twentieth-century westerners have confronted suffering. In particular I want to consider the so-called "positive thinkers", as well as St. Thérèse de Lisieux and Martin Luther King, Jr., all of whom have had a profound effect on large numbers of people in our era because they have persuasively addressed suffering as a practical, religious problem. Like Brother André they have all initiated popular movements in our day. To see him in their context is to sharpen our perception of what is peculiar about his contribution to modern religious living.

For an understanding of the practitioners of "mind cure" I am indebted to The Positive Thinkers. Religion as Pop Psychology from Mary Baker Eddy to Oral Roberts by Donald Meyer. [36] Here Meyer

argues that the practitioners of "mind cure" are members of a school that developed in response to the needs of those in the nineteenth century who felt helpless to overcome or even grapple with the suffering that they experienced. The practitioners include Mary Baker Eddy and the Fillmores in the early years, Bruce Barton and Norman Vincent Peale in more recent days. In ways whose differences reflected the experiences and contexts peculiar to each they all invited people to recognize their weakness in the face of suffering (usually a generalized malaise, not a specific crisis) and to rise above the suffering by immersing themselves in a power that transcends the chaotic world. Meyer sees this as a form of "religion as therapy, as cult of reassurance, as psychology of peace and positive thinking."[37] People become patients who must seek relief by giving up the struggle for wholeness, thus collaborating "willingly in the process of self-disintegration, under the highest of auspices, God."[37]

Certainly Brother André attracted a wide, popular following similar in many respects to the Victorian housewives and petit bourgeois who responded to "mind cure", and Brother André practiced a resort to a kind of therapy: the nurturant protection of St. Joseph. But this was never intended by Brother André to be a permanent refuge. The sheltering arms of St. Joseph were meant to cradle the child who has not yet reached adulthood; and they were meant to welcome back the adult who had been, for the moment, overwhelmed by the suffering that existence brings. But St. Joseph's task was to strengthen the Christian so that he or she might return to the world to live as one who walks in the way of Christ in his Passion. As Meyer reminds us, the positive thinkers

have often harked back to William James as one of their founders, but James could scarcely be called an advocate of "mind cure". He described two kinds of people: the "healthy-minded", including the positive thinkers, who deny the reality of suffering; and the "sick souls" whose understanding of reality is broad enough to include the fact of suffering, and who know that that fact must be faced rather than denied.[38] Surely Brother André must be grouped with the "sick souls", the ones who know more of reality than do the positive thinkers.

To see Brother André's spirituality contrasted with that of the positive thinkers is to make more acceptable the gruesome object that is the most notorious and the least celebrated relic of the Oratory: his heart, the ancient organ that kept his frail, pain-ridden body alive for almost 92 years, cut from his chest shortly after his death in 1937, and now reverently displayed in a glass container mounted on a somberly decorated pedestal in the museum above the Crypt. Uncouth though it be, the heart is a vivid reminder that Brother André's way was a way that grappled with suffering.

St. Thérèse de Lisieux (1873-1897) lived the obscure life of a Carmelite nun in northwestern France but the publication of her Autobiography swiftly made her the most popular saint in twentieth-century France.[39] Brother André was much drawn to her story, and his admirers have frequently compared the two. Both were renowned for their miracles, though both put greater stock in the propagation of their particular devotions (André to St. Joseph, Thérèse to Jesus) than in the miracles. Both advocated a "little way" that was apt for the

humble who might find it hard to identify with heroic practitioners of the Christian faith whose qualities set them apart from most people. Both practiced a spirituality that could be followed in everyday settings, as opposed to spiritualities that belonged in the desert, on the mountain top, in the palace, on the battlefield, etc.. Both understood that miracles might be worked to attract those who lacked a strong faith, and both expected trials rather than miracles for those whose strength was strong and mature. Yet there is at least one important difference between their spiritualities.

Thérèse lived her brief life among Carmelites devoted to the strenuous way of perfection that could only be followed by one prepared to make heroic efforts of self-denial. That this strenuous asceticism may legitimately be criticized as an unfortunate exaggeration of the reforms that Teresa of Avila introduced among the Carmelites in the seventeenth century does not change the fact that by the 1890s it had come to be seen as a barrier to salvation, at least in the eyes of young Thérèse de Lisieux. "I am too small for the hard stairway of perfection," she said. She spoke instead of having found a spiritual elevator: abandon yourself to Jesus and he will lift you to heaven itself with no effort on your part.[41] Some may judge her metaphor to be a bit precious, but it should not blind us to her revolutionary insistence that the way of perfection is within the reach of everyone, not reserved for spiritual athletes alone.

Brother André too knew that the way of perfection is meant for everyone, but it is significant that the only elevators at the Oratory begin above the Crypt, that portion of the Oratory that was completed during André's life and which bears most clearly the stamp of

his spirituality. The Crypt is reached by 99 steps which pilgrims have learned to mount on their knees, and there is certainly no elevator available. Both Thérèse of Lisieux and her seventeenth-century predecessor, Teresa of Avila, spoke of the possibility that God might exercise his prerogative to raise a soul swiftly through many degrees of perfection at once, but there is no record that Brother André ever discussed this option with any of the people whom he counselled. One did not have to be a spiritual athlete in order to follow the way that Brother André mapped out, and one might frequently have recourse to St. Joseph in order to catch one's spiritual breath, but one should not expect Jesus to provide a shortcut on the way to perfection.

Of course, Thérèse of Lisieux knew suffering in her short life. Both she and Brother André were orphaned early in life and suffered serious physical ailments, but other elements in their respective biographies combined to create significant differences in their prayer life, their friendships and their spiritualities, as I show elsewhere.[41] It is sufficient to say at this point that Thérèse walked the way of suffering because she was secure in Jesus; André walked the way of suffering so that he might approach Jesus, with the help of St. Joseph to prepare him for the long, difficult way and to renew his strength when the way became oppressive.

Thérèse and André valued suffering because they could learn what they thought were valuable lessons from it and because they could offer their suffering to God as a way of enlightening the religious ignorance of others or of relieving the sufferings of others. In short, they saw suffering as redemptive, and in this respect they were like Martin Luther King, Jr..

Dr. King fashioned a mass movement that used passive non-violence as an instrument of political and social change, training his followers to set their health and lives at risk so that the American public conscience might be moved to alter the conditions that deprived American blacks of their rights. Speaking to a crowd of 250,000 gathered at the Washington Monument on 28 August 1963, he said,

> I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations, some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells, some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the victims of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.[42]

But this did not mean that King saw all suffering as something to be borne willingly because it may be turned to redemptive purposes. The sufferings of which he spoke in the lines given above was suffering that had been deliberately sought out by those who had thoughtfully and deliberately embraced passive non-violence as the best means by which social reform might be obtained. On the other hand, the suffering imposed on black Americans by racist laws and traditions was not redemptive suffering. When the white clergy of Birmingham, Alabama, publicly urged the blacks of that city to avoid confrontation and to endure a little longer the injustices inflicted on them, King responded with his best remembered piece of writing, the classic "Letter from Birmingham Jail" of 16 April 1963.

> There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair.[43]

Suffering of this kind must be rejected, not endured.

Another important difference between Dr. King and Brother André is that King expected to see the fruits of redemptive suffering harvested in this world, "on this side of Jordan" as the spirituals of his people put it. He told the crowd at the Washington Monument that he aimed to see at least some of the suffering in this world transformed:

> I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its viscious racists, with its Governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification — one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.[44]
>
> I have a dream today.

One is tempted to explain the difference by arguing that King was involved in politics while André had nothing to do with politics, but in fact it is not true that André understood spirituality to be a purely individualistic affair divorced from politics. It is true that he was much less sophisticated about politics than King was, and as a result he was occasionally used by politicians who were shrewder than he in such matters.[45] And it is true that Brother André revealed no personal interest in the ultramontanist movements of his day that sought certain political reforms from religious motives. But he spoke of political matters in both the narrowest and the broadest senses of that term, and he did so at important junctures in his life.

In his dying hours Brother André spoke sadly of the sufferings of the Pope in the face of world events, of the social disruption caused by Communists, of the disastrous civil war in Spain. The "positive thinkers" mentioned on pages 23-25 above never referred to such matters and may be said to be genuinely and completely apolitical, but not so

Brother André. He also spoke of institutional matters (which I consider to be "political" in the broadest sense), including the needs of his own Congregation of Holy Cross and the plans to complete the physical structure of the Oratory. But in only one instance did he say that he expected an end to difficulties, this side of the Second Coming: he announced that he was sure that the Oratory would be completed.[46] And why not? The Oratory was the place to which weary Christians might repair in order to become the kind of adults who might imitate Christ in his suffering. The Oratory was not meant to end suffering.

Martin Luther King, Jr., initiated a popular religious movement that aimed to end or at least to reduce suffering in the world. "Free at last!" is what they said at his funeral, and it is true that both he and his followers expected full freedom to be possible only in an existence that transcends this one. But "Free at last!" was also King's rallying call in a spiritual struggle that expected to see some empirical results, an end to much of the suffering in this world. As I show elsewhere,[47] there were some who saw the Oratory as a place from which social reform might begin, but that was not apparently Brother André's vision. The last words that he uttered on his deathbed illustrate his conviction that the Christian is called to suffer. They reflect a character shaped for the imitation of the suffering Christ by the nurturant care of St. Joseph, but they are the words of an adult who walks that pathway without the shield of St. Joseph to protect him from life as it really is. And they do not promise that the result of suffering will be a better world or a better existence in the here-and-now. They are words that simply summarize Brother André's spirituality, the way of living that a Christian must follow:

"Que je souffre! Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!"[48]

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NOTES

1. Neither the Summarium (1084 pages), the later Summarium suppletivum (56 pages), the Mémoire Claude nor the archdiocesan file on the Oratory were made available to me in the course of preparing this study. But Étienne Catta has quoted directly and extensively from them in his monumental work, Le Frère André (1845-1937) et l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal (Montréal: Fides, 1965) and I have made grateful use of his study without necessarily drawing the same conclusions. I am, of course, grateful to both the Oratory and to the Archdiocese of Montréal for their patient and generous assistance to me while I consulted the holdings in their archives that are open to the general public.

2. Bernard Lafrenière, C.S.C., vice-postulator of André's cause, in a paper presented at the Oratory in 1976 as part of the preparations for the fortieth anniversary of Brother André's death. Copy made available to me through the courtesy of the author.

3. Annales de Saint Joseph, 16e, no. 3 (février 1927), pp. 67-9.

4. Annales de Saint Joseph, 18e, no. 3 (mars 1929), pp. 92-3.

5. Annales de Saint Joseph, 2e (1913), passim.

6. Catta, Le Frère André, p, xxiii.

7. Annales de Saint Joseph, 18e, no. 3 (mars 1929), pp. 92-3.

8. Annales de Saint Joseph, 26e, no. 2 (février 1937), p. 72.

9. My calculations are based on figures published annually in the monthly issue of the Annales de Saint Joseph for February or March of each year.

10. Walter H. Principe, C.S.B., "Toward defining spirituality," a paper presented to the XIVth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religion (University of Manitoba, 19 August 1980), p. 8.

11. The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1960), p. 326.

12. The material on the sacraments is drawn principally from Raphael Schulte, "Sacraments," in Karl Rahner (ed.), Encyclopedia of Theology (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 1477-85, and "Sacrament" in F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (eds.), The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (ODCC) (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 1213-9.

13. See David Tracey, Blessed Rage for Order, chapter 9, and Langdon Gilkey, Catholicism Confronts Modernity, chapter VII, both published by The Seabury Press in New York in 1975.

14. See Lumen Gentium, chapter I, article 1, in Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (General Editor), The Documents of Vatican II (New York: America Press, 1966).

15. Ronald Goetz, "The Creature's Creation: Is Art 'Helpful' to Faith?" The Christian Century, Vol. 99, No. 11 (31 March 1982), p. 369.

16. Bruce Barton, The Man Nobody Knows (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1924).

17. Letter to his father (16 Oct. 1866) in Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins, edited by W.H. Gardner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 167.

18. Tradition has it that the mother of the Emperor Constantine found the steps in Jerusalem and brought them to Rome.

19. Annales de Saint Joseph, 31e, no. 1 (janvier 1942), p. 12.

20. Ibid..

21. See the testimony of witnesses entered in the Summarium or reported from private interviews by Father Catta in Le Frère André, pp. 637-47.

22. Summarium (Catta, Le Frère André, p. 638).

23. Father Cousineau's testimony describes this picture as André's favorite representation of the Virgin. See note 19 and page 13 above.

24. ODCC, p. 1265.

25. Testimony of P. Corbeil in the Summarium (Catta, Le Frère André, p. 530).

26. No. 78, circulaire de Mgr l'archêveque-coadjuteur au clergé du diocèse (14 avril 1937), Mandements, lettres pastorales, circulaires, et autres documents publiés dans le Diocèse de Montréal depuis son érection, tome 18e (1940), p. 535.

27. See, for example, Mme. Guérin in L'Oratoire, 38e, no. 7 (juillet-août 1949), p. 238.

28. M. Robert's testimony in the Summarium (Catta, Le Frère André, p. 602).

29. From the Mémoire deposited by M. Azarius Claude in the confidential archives of the Oratory, and quoted extensively in Catta, Le Frère André, pp. 706-18.

30. Reported in two different versions by Catta, Le Frère André, p. 600, based on interviews conducted in 1958 and 1962.

31. Annales de Saint Joseph, 30e, no. 10 (octobre 1941), pp. 300-1.

32. Quoted by Catta, Le Frère André, p. 589. The emphasis appears in the original: "un miracle de chaque jour."

33. From reports by Pere Deguire and A. Claude cited in Catta, Le Frère André, p. 865.

34. Summarium (Catta, Le Frère André), p. 599.

35. Ibid..

36. Donald Meyer, The Positive Thinkers. Religion as Pop Psychology from Mary Baker Eddy to Oral Roberts, revised edition (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

37. Ibid., pp. xii and xix.

38. Ibid., p. 317.

39. The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, translated by John Beevers (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Image Books, 1957).

40. Jean-François Six, Vie de Thérèse de Lisieux (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), pp. 307-9.

41. See my manuscript, "The Shaping of Brother André's Spirituality of Suffering."

42. "I Have a Dream," in The Negro in Twentieth Century America, edited by John Hope Franklin and Isidore Starr (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 145.

43. "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in Franklin and Starr, p. 198.

44. "I Have a Dream," p. 146.

45. See my manuscript, "Brother André and the Politics of Labor."

46. Albert Cousineau, "Derniers moments du Frère André," Annales de Saint Joseph, 26e, no. 13 (mars 1937), p. 99.

47. See note 45 above.

48. Cousineau, "Derniers moments du Frère André," p. 100.

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