

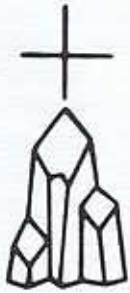


BR. LUKE'S PAINTING OF CHAPEL

Josef Pieper, a German Catholic philosopher, once defined a church as the space surrounding an altar. The Mt. Saviour chapel, designed by Fr. Damasus Winzen, a friend of Pieper, admirably expresses that idea in architecture. Br. Luke, whose career as a painter continues to flourish even in his eighty second year, has captured the interior of the chapel in a recent painting. The arched roof of the octagonal central section of the chapel leading up to the clerestory windows and the lantern create the impression of a large tent of open space dominated by the blue stone altar in the middle. Br. Luke's painting, which captures the soft light of the chapel near evening, has been made into a print which is on sale in the shop for \$6.95. (details on back page.)

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MONKS VISIT DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

For a number of years the brothers of Mt. Saviour have considered establishing some direct contact with a third world country. Numerous priests, religious and lay people who come on retreat at the monastery have told us of the enormous impact on their lives made by getting outside the modern, American environment that they have unconsciously come to regard as "normal." The Benedictine monks of Weston Priory with whom we have close relations have developed a custom every winter of visiting Mexico where they have ties with the Mexican Benedictine Sisters of Christ the King. The American bishops have urged all priests and religious to familiarize themselves with Hispanic culture to be able to respond to the growing number of Hispanics in this country. In addition, official Church teaching has urged and warned that the most serious

problem facing the world is the huge and increasing gap between the "haves" of the Northern hemisphere and the "have nots" of the South.

The Place

By chance Mt. Saviour developed a number of friends in the Dominican Republic who have urged us to visit them. These include the Sisters of St. Mary who have sisters at two locations on the island; the bishop of the diocese of Bani who is founding an order of lay brothers for evangelization and who wishes his men to have contact with an established order; a Rockville Centre diocese priest, Fr. Andrew Connolly, who is a pastor in the town of El Cercado near the Haitian border; and the director of a Jesuit center of evangelization and health care near Santiago.

Early this year Fr. Martin finalized plans for three



Monks, farm family and Bill Vogel S.J., near Santiago.

brothers, himself, Brs. Bruno and Nathan, to spend ten days in the Dominican Republic in mid February visiting people we know and getting a brief experience of a different people, language and culture in the third world.

The Trip

The Dominicans are a handsome, friendly and spirited people who always seemed to be energetic and smiling. Mostly of mixed African and European descent they often combine caucasian features with striking dark brown eyes and brown skin. The island itself at first glance seems a tropical paradise of palm and fruit trees where the earth produces three crops a year and grapefruit grow in February. Despite serious problems with poverty and economic difficulty the country since the sixties has been a nominal democracy and has avoided the extremes of bloodshed and repression that have occurred in other Caribbean and Central American nations. However, our itinerary destined us to come quickly into contact with the dark side of third world economics.

While driving west from the Capital to the town of Bani we passed through long miles of sugar cane fields devoted to growing sugar exclusively for export. On the third evening we spent on the island, while staying with the Diocesan brothers of Bani we celebrated a eucharist in a small chapel in a nearby town called Boca Canasta. While there we visited a resident French Canadian lay missionary who works with Haitian migrant workers who are imported into the country to cut sugar cane, a job the Dominicans are no longer willing to do. Gerard's story of the plight of the Haitian migrants described a dark underside of the Dominican economy that has been denounced by the UN as a form of modern slavery.

The visible surface of Dominican life provided enough of a shock to monks accustomed to an American environment. Beneath the attractive and cheerful veneer of the island, the deep and pervasive poverty of the people soon became apparent.

Personal Reactions

Stories of third world poverty are nothing new to Americans who follow the news media. Dealing with

personal reactions to being in the midst of it is an entirely different experience. Br. Bruno found himself obsessively fantasizing about some quick technological fix or development scheme which would conveniently cause all the poverty to vanish. Br. Nathan found himself uncontrollably replaying in his imagination an episode in Dominican history where President Grant nearly succeeded in annexing the fledgling republic to the US in 1869. He imagined that Grant had succeeded and the Dominicans were now U.S. citizens, as in Puerto Rico, who would not need to bother him for information on visas and immigration to the U.S.

After the escape of fantasy a second reaction that set in was one of anger and frustration. It was galling to witness problems of poverty and malnutrition while the roads were crowded with trucks burdened with crops headed for export; to pass through long, beautiful, fertile valleys and then learn that virtually all the land in them is owned by a handful of wealthy families.

Another reaction that occurred was numbness and fear. "These poor people are a threat to me. They will want what I have. They are dangerous. I do not want to be around them. I want to escape. They will make me feel so guilty that I will not be able to enjoy what I have."

After dealing with successive emotional reactions like this we began to realize why it is important to come and see the third world first hand. Sending money from a safe distance does not mold one's conscience the way personal contact does. While perhaps inevitable, reactions like these are useless and self-centered: a response to our need to feel secure and in control of the situation. Slowly we gave up our delusions of power, our illusions that we could somehow "fix" the situation and learned to relate to Dominicans on their own terms as equals in the uncertain and precarious adventure of life.

A Tale of Two Campos

The most striking part of the trip was the visit to El Cercado where we were in the closest contact with the local people. The Parish of St. Peter the Apostle centered in El Cercado covers an area equal to Nausau County on Long Island and has a population of about 70,000 people,



Prayer Service in Dominican Mountains.

virtually all of them nominal Catholics. There is one priest, Fr. Andrew, who lodged us with local farmers and took us to visit the local villages.

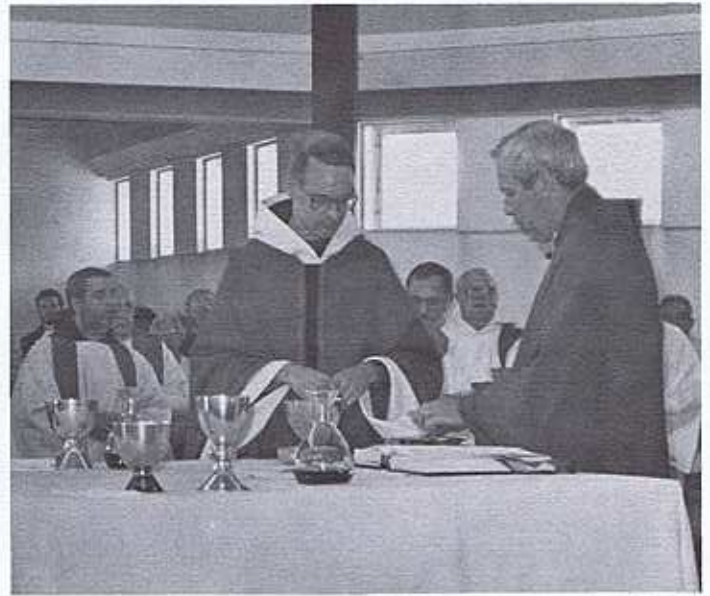
On February 13 we visited the Campo (farm village) of Loma en Medio which lies in a deep valley about eight miles from the border of Haiti. One of about seventy campos in the Parish, Loma en Medio is a place of vibrant hopes and serious problems. A picturesque cluster of 24 cinderblock and brick houses perched on a ledge above a river, the village, home to about a hundred people, is framed by mountains on all sides that soar eight hundred to a thousand feet above the valley. It is quickly apparent that the villagers and their mountains are in serious ecological trouble. Dependent on wood and charcoal to cook their food, the villagers live in an area denuded of trees. The mountains, even the steepest slopes, are cultivated to the very top and the steeper slopes show ominous signs of erosion.

However, the people are not simply passive victims of ecology and economics. An evangelization team and a Christian Base community has been active in the village for over a decade. Every week, the villagers gather in a community center, built with their own hands, to read the gospel, to listen, pray and discuss what God is saying to them and calling them to. In that time they organized a community project and constructed properly designed latrines which help keep the Campo free of parasites and diseases. Then they organized a building project and built new houses for themselves out of cinder block and brick. These things may seem inconsequential to Americans who take such things for granted but they are of enormous importance to the campesinos who learned that they are active agents who can take responsibility for their own lives and that this is what God is calling them to.

A few miles west of El Cercado lies the Campo of Monte Mayor. The Campo consists of a cluster of wooden houses with dirt floors on a small plateau overlooking a fertile valley floor, backed up against a mountain towering up several hundred feet. On February 14, Fr. Andrew and we visited the village and sat and sipped strong, native grown coffee with the villagers. They proudly took us for a tour of their fertile fields in the valley and then led us to a huge, solitary mahogany tree at the edge of the village, a lonely survivor of the mahogany and ebony forests which once blanketed much of the island. Once a week for over a decade the Basic Christian Community of Monte Mayor has met beneath the shade of its mahogany tree to read and discuss the scriptures, to discover that the power of Jesus is in their midst and that they are called to take responsibility for their lives and their land.

One of the great virtues of visiting a third world country is realizing that the worst form of oppression is for people to consider themselves helpless and passive, for this is a form of oppression that outside money and development schemes cannot cure. By contrast, after our visit to the Dominican Republic we cannot help but think with optimism and hope of the Christian communities of Loma en Medio and Monte Mayor as they weekly read and pray the scriptures and discover the power Christ gives them to act as a group.

The most powerful memory of our journey is of having



Br. Nathan and Bishop Clark at ordination mass.

met wonderful, vibrant people whose lives contain joy and hope and who cannot be reduced to dire statistics of the the American media. Personal contact is a gift we hope we returned in some small way to our hosts. Fr. Andrew insisted that one of the worst trials the country folk of his parish endure is to feel they are pariahs because of their poverty who are unfit for normal social contact with other Dominicans, much less with rich Gringos. Taking the time and energy to befriend people across economic and cultural boundaries is a mutual gift worth much philanthropy. All of our hosts extended invitations to return next year and we hope to accept with a different group of monks.

COMMUNITY NEWS

The events mentioned in the letter written last May came and went joyfully. On June 29, Br. Nathan was ordained in the Mt. Saviour chapel by Matthew Clark, the bishop of Rochester amid a gathering of his natural family, monastic family and friends. Br. Bruno celebrated his twenty fifth anniversary of profession and his fiftieth birthday in a similar joyful gathering. Brs. James Cronen and Pierre Pratte passed in quieter circumstances the twenty fifth anniversaries of their arrivals at Mt. Saviour.

The summer program in 1991 with students to whom we endeavor to give a sense of the Church from a monastic viewpoint was again a most blessed viewpoint. We intend to do it again this summer of '92 for young men roughly 20-30 years of age. It is not intended as a vocation experience but an opportunity to be in a "Base Community" of Catholic Christians from 1 July until 7 August. If you know someone who would profit from the experience do have him get in touch with us. We have a brochure describing the program which will be mailed on request.

The community Retreat in February of last year was given by Mother Gail Fitzpatrick, OCSO, the Trappistine Abbess of Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey near Dubuque, Iowa. Besides profiting from her delightful monastic presence and experience, she introduced us to Br. Ronald

Fogarty, a Marist brother from Australia who gave us a workshop on the role of emotions in religious life. There has been a notion in both religious and American secular culture to get emotions off to the margins, to "control them", so that they won't interfere with our work or thinking. The result has been an emotional illiteracy especially among the male of the species that leaves us unable to read the message the Spirit speaks to us in non-propositional ways and unaware of the motivation offered by an important dimension of our very selves. We can become quite like Cain, though that is the subject of another essay.

Renovation of the west, stone portion of St. Peter's guest house was completed under Br. Gabriel's supervision. Renovation is hardly the word for since it seems a new creation. We are now about to take on the wood-frame, east part of the house. It is intended to meet the need of guests desiring longer time with us, especially people on sabbatical, students before beginning careers or young men out of the armed services. It will also provide a place for candidates to the monastic life and quarters closer to the monastery for short term guests. It will cost time and money in planning and execution on our part and it will be an eternal blessing. We know this from past experience of those who spent longer times here on sabbaticals or re-orientation/refocusing tasks.

We are happy to welcome Br. Anthony Ciotti and Br. Christopher LeBarr as postulants. In early January we were blessed with our four year "visitation" with Abbot Brian Clarke of St. Mary's Abbey, Morristown, NJ; Br. John Hammond of Weston Priory and Abbot Nicholas Marcone of Glastonbury Abbey near Boston. After conducting a review of our life together and the events of the past four years we felt greatly encouraged in the way God has been leading us together.



Monks and 1991 summer retreat group.

Shannon. \$22.95 cloth. This just published biography of Merton by an oblate of Mt. Saviour and first president of the Thomas Merton Society is the best yet. Readable and not overly long, Shannon captures a warm, personal dimension of this much chronicled monk.

SPIRITUAL GUIDES FOR TODAY: DOROTHY DAY, KARL RAHNER, THOMAS MERTON, SIMONE WEIL, HENRI NOUWEN, EVELYN UNDERHILL: by Sr. Annice Callahan. \$11.95, paper. Introductions to six of the leading Catholic spiritual writers of the modern period with bibliographies for further reading.

SIMPLICITY, THE ART OF LIVING: by Richard Rohr. \$16.95, cloth. New book by the well known Franciscan writer on the art of living simply and well in a world where we are often defined by what we own or do instead of what we are.

THE LAST PRIESTS IN AMERICA, CONVERSATIONS WITH REMARKABLE MEN: by Tim Unsworth. \$19.95, cloth. Interviews with forty five diocesan priests who have lived through one of the greatest periods of change in Church history.

STORIES FOR THE TELLING, A TREASURY OF CHRISTIAN STORYTELLERS: by William R. White. \$8.95, paper. This book can help your search for God by stimulating your use of stories and metaphors.

PARABLES AND FABLES FOR MODERN MAN: by Peter Ribes S.S. \$13.95, paper. By a Spanish Jesuit missionary long resident in India, this book contains thirty stories with accompanying questions for analysis and discussion and comparisons with the gospel parables. Excellent for catechists, teachers, and discussion leaders.

THE AWAKENED HEART: by Gerald May. \$16.95, cloth. May's latest book analyzes the deep need for love in the human heart and how it is often suppressed by a modern preoccupation with efficiency.

Books Recommended by Fr. Martin:

A MARGINAL JEW, RETHINKING THE HISTORICAL JESUS: by Fr. John Meier. \$25.00, cloth. This is a dense, scholarly book recommended only for the hardy, however it is important and accessible to an interested lay reader. Though some of the details may startle you, Fr. Meier analyses over a century of scholarship to show that, contrary to popular impressions, modern scholarship has produced a view of Jesus that is quite consonant with traditional Christian understandings.

THE REVELATORY TEXT, INTERPRETING THE NEW TESTAMENT by Sr. Sandra Schneiders. \$20.00, paper. In this study, Schneiders, a Catholic scholar, sets out to read the Bible "not merely for information but transformation". Difficult but rewarding reading, an excellent book for those who pray, study or teach the Bible.

BELONGING TO THE UNIVERSE, EXPLORATIONS ON THE FRONTIERS OF SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY: by Br. David Steindl-Rast and Fritof Capra. \$18.95, cloth. This book consists of conversations between our own Br. David and an Austrian physicist on the fast changing nature of the relationship between science and religion.

SILENT LAMP, THE THOMAS MERTON STORY: by Msgr. William

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