APOSTOLIC SPIRITUALITY

By JAMES WALSH

AT THE HEART of the uneasiness with which many apostolic religious are living today is a fear of secularization. The term connotes for them a 'this-worldliness', or a flirting with it, which has made inroads into the external style of life which they believed to be an authentic expression of the evangelical counsels, as these came to be understood in the Church in Europe and its various colonial empires across the face of the globe during the second half of the nineteenth century. In these decades a common style was achieved amongst scores of religious congregations by the turn of the present century, and it suffered scarcely any significant alteration before the outbreak of the second world war. The elements of this style were, to a large extent, medieval and monastic in origin; and the more important of them were believed to reflect the basic structures of the primitive christian community at Jerusalem:

> Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common (Acts 4, 32);

that is, the common ownership of all material goods, which implied little or no commerce between the community and its non-christian neighbours. Other elements were designed to protect the religious community as well as to achieve the physical and moral separation from 'the world'. Such was the mitigated form of cloister common to the new Institutes of the nineteenth century, which would allow a considerable though carefully regulated contact with the world outside, and the rule of never leaving the convent, under normal circumstances, without a companion. Yet other customs were originally symbolic of the separation, but whose symbolism had become obscured across the centuries as Europe, and subsequently its colonies, repudiated the Church as co-extensive with christendom, when the catholic community was forced into various forms of ghetto during two centuries of persecution and oppression. Thus it was with 'religious dress' in the last century in the new congregations of apostolic religious women: its medieval (real or imagined) design and form was passed on from one Institute to another, often only with slight modifications, whose purpose was simply to distinguish the 'Sisters of X' from the

'Sisters of Y'.[1] Other practices again were ritualistic, nor were they confined to the chapel or to liturgical or para-liturgical ceremonial. There were external modes of salutation of and 'approach' to superiors by subjects, strict orders of precedence, refectory penances, and even a ritual for making beds.

Alongside this plethora of customs, but often enough not clearly distinguished from them in order of importance, were practices adopted from monastic life which signalized the Institute as a praying community and which were designed to form individuals as men and women of prayer: the recitation of various substitutes for the monastic office, ranging from Lauds and Vespers sung in latin on feast-days, to the daily recitation in common of the rosary.[2] The ancient practice of *lectio divina* also had its substitute in the form of spiritual reading in common, as well as refectory reading. There were, however, two new elements introduced into this scaled-down version of the monastic horarium, both of which were of great significance in the life of the post-Tridentine Church: the imposition of a specified time for personal 'mental' prayer — the duration of which varied from one Institute to another, the norm being an hour; and the devotions stemming from eucharistic piety — Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. In many congregations these two practices overlapped: communities spent the time of mental prayer together in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The daily community Mass in the convent chapel was the spiritual centre of its life; and often the custom prevailed of a quasi-obligatory attendance at a second Mass, whenever one was celebrated in the convent chapel.

It was the Church in Council which first laid the axe to the root of this external form of apostolic religious life. Quite apart from the rapid and far-reaching liturgical changes of the late 'sixties which has involved a radical shift in eucharistic devotion (and we must remember that adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was built into the religious observance of many communities), the principles of religious renewal laid down in the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* demanded changes far more sweeping than many of the Council Fathers themselves realized; and

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[1] For a concise but comprehensive view of the chequered history of religious dress in monastic life, see Guy, Jean-Claude: 'Religious Costume today and yesterday', in *Supplement to the Way* 4 (1967), pp 66-77.

[2] It is noteworthy that the first effort at reform in community prayer was to replace these substitutes by the divine office. In the early 'sixties, for example, expensive breviaries in latin and english were produced, which had a wide sale among apostolic congregations of women; and their communities were given lessons in antiphonal chanting and its accompanying rubrics by benedictine monks.

they applied with particular force to those Institutes of women dedicated to the apostolic life. It is worth considering them again in their entirety:

> The renewal of religious life best suited to our times will involve at once a constant return to the sources of the christian life which are common to all and to the original spirit of the various institutes, as well as their adaptation to changing times and conditions. Such renewal, which depends on the impulse of the holy Spirit and the Church's guidance, should be carried out in accordance with the following principles:
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> (a) Since the final criterion of the religious life is the call to follow Christ enunciated in the gospel, all institutes must consider this following of Christ as their first and highest rule.
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> (b) It is precisely for the good of the Church that an institute has its own special character and function; and therefore each institute must faithfully acknowledge as its own and preserve its founder's spirit and special aims, and also its sound traditions: for all this constitutes the inheritance of an institute.
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> (c) Each institute must share in the life of the Church: it must make its own and foster as best it can her initiatives and directives in various fields, such as matters biblical and liturgical, dogmatic and pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social, in accordance with its special character.
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> (d) Institutes should see to it that their members acquire an adequate knowledge of human conditions in their various circumstances, as well as of the Church's needs. For they will be able to help mankind more effectively according to the fervour of their apostolic zeal, and their ability to discern wisely, in the light of faith, trends and situations in the world of today.[3]

A substantial majority of the Institutes which responded with vigour and enthusiasm to this call to renewal had been founded at a time when Church and society alike took it wholly for granted that women's place was in the home, and that women such as Florence Nightingale and Sylvia Pankhurst were disturbing the natural order. The Church, however, as it contemplated the plight of its own poverty-stricken masses in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the exploitation of the Industrial Revolution, was able to recognize the action of the holy Spirit. During the first half of the nineteenth century, especially in France, but quickly affecting the British Isles, North America and the european colonial empires, religious men and women entered the field of education in ever-increasing numbers. Their efforts, initially, were wholly christian and religious in emphasis and direction, and suited

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[3] *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2. Cf *Supplement to the Way* 2 (1966), pp 15-16.

their quasi-monastic style; but these soon became more secular, as the proliferating catholic schools strove to compete with their neighbours, whether sectarian or state-directed. In the english-speaking world at least, the promulgation of *Perfectae Caritatis* coincided with a developing crisis in catholic education. In addition to crippling financial burdens and over-commitment of personnel as educational demands increased in the years after the second world war, it became clear that many Institutes were being pulled in opposite directions. The larger and more stable had become professional educators, highly competent in secular fields; and their young religious of the 'fifties and 'sixties were being trained to a similar form of dedication; whilst the smaller and more precarious Institutes, tied firmly to the more traditional parish schools or small secondary schools, were already suffering from decreasing numbers and the onset of ageing communities.[4] All these factors indicated that existing forms of convent-life were becoming less and less suited to the apostolate, whilst at the same time it was still taken for granted that growth in personal holiness — the salvation of the members of the Institute — was inextricably bound up with these forms.

For many, in fact, the call to renewal turned out to be an insupportable burden: the resulting tensions were too great. Professional competence had far outstripped spiritual and theological formation. External adaptation, or the 'dismantling of structures' as it is often more dismally called, merely emphasized the practical dichotomy between interior life and apostolic action. What had happened consistently was that an increasing work-load, often predominantly secular by nature, had been forced into a style which could not contain it. In the first years of renewal, there were sporadic attempts to build a new spirituality around a reformed liturgy and shared community prayer. But it was found that institutional forms had shaped attitudes and crystallized unconscious prejudices in ways that were inimical to such spontaneity and intimate sharing; and, for women's communities, priestly co-operation in new liturgical experiment and expression was often very difficult if not impossible to find. For a time, some apostolic Institutes, especially in North America, embarked on processes of communal deliberation or discernment, according to patterns devised by Ignatius Loyola and his companions at the time of the founding of the Society of Jesus. More recently, numbers of apostolic religious have taken to making the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius in the way in which they

[4] Congregations dedicated to the Medical and the Social Apostolates have experienced similar pressures: the demand for increased professional competence and the coincidental diminution of personnel.

were originally given — during a period of withdrawal, decidedly monastic in character, of about thirty days. The presupposition is presumably that, since the Society of Jesus was founded with a single end, for the service of God and the help of the neighbour,[5] and Jesuit Spirituality is rooted in the Spiritual Exercises, then these should help towards the discovery of a precise apostolic spirituality, suitable for Institutes wholly dedicated to the apostolic life. Yet it is still being argued, and there are no clear signs that the controversy is abating, that the Exercises are primarily a school of contemplative prayer, and only secondarily an instrument of apostolic decision or renewal.[6] From their earliest days, they were given to Carthusians and Dominicans and other contemplatives or followers of the 'mixed life';[7] and the practice still continues. It would seem that the term apostolic spirituality is no more univocal than was the term *Vita vere Apostolica* — 'the truly apostolic life' — which was bandied about with such polemical force in the Western Church of the twelfth century.

The Apostolic Life

In his *La Théologie au douziéme siécle*,[8] M. D. Chenu states that:

> One finds within the unbroken tradition of monastic literature two important themes systematically and simultaneously developed . . . one such theme was the return to evangelical and historical sources as a guarantee of authenticity; the other was the permanent value of the monastic life, face to face with the new society.[9]

It will be immediately apparent that the Council Fathers took Chenu's first theme for their first two principles of renewal and applied them indiscriminately to every form of consecrated life in the modern Church. For the rest, the Council first stressed that:

> by God's guidance, a remarkable variety of religious societies has come into being, and this has been of great service to the Church in helping her to be equipped for every good work (cf 2 Tim 3, 17) and ready to fulfil her ministry for the building up of Christ's body (cf Eph 4, 12), to be

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[5] Cf Courel, François: 'The single aim of the apostolic Institute', in *Supplement to the Way* 14 (1971), pp 46-61.

[6] The classic treatment is that of Louis Peeters, *Vers l'union divine par les Exercises de S. Ignace* (2e édition, Louvain, 1931). A like position has been adopted more recently by William Peters, *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: Exposition and Interpretation* (PASE, 1967).

[7] Cf De Guibert, J.: *The Jesuits, their spiritual doctrine and practice* (Chicago, 1964), pp 306 ff.

[8] An abridged english translation of Père Chenu's study (originally published in Paris in 1957) has appeared under the title *Nature, Man and Society in the twelfth century* (ed. Taylor, Jerome and Little, Lester K., Chicago/London, 1968). Citations are from this edition.

[9] *Ibid.*, p 204.

> arrayed, as well, in that variety of gifts she has received from her children, and to show herself as the bride prepared for the meeting with her bridegroom; so that God's manifold wisdom might be made known through her (cf Eph 2, 10).[10]

It is to all this 'great variety' that the Decree is substantially addressed. It differentiates between the various forms only in four short paragraphs,[11] and even here the monk of the twelfth century might have been surprised to find such a sharp distinction made between the 'Institutes which are entirely given over to contemplation' and 'the monastic form of religious life'.[12]

The 'new society' of which Chenu speaks was that emerging in the West after the collapse of the feudalism of which so many of the great monastic Institutions formed a stable part, because of their economic wealth and civilizing influence, and in spite of constant efforts at reform, including those of Sts Bernard and Bruno. 'The monastic economy', writes Chenu, 'was inextricably bound up with a wide range of temporal services, a normal visible triumphant effect of the implantation of the Church in secular society'.[13] The monastic institution, which had set out on a conversion that would lead the way to the kingdom of God, presenting as its values the poverty and fraternity, the common life of the first christian community, had, to borrow a phrase from Vatican Council II, got 'bogged down in this world'.[14]

Meantime, whilst monks continued to argue that the apostolic life referred simply to the interior fraternal life of the apostles themselves, a spirit characterized by the beatitudes, of which the monastic rule was the authentic reflection,[15] new groups in the Church were facing new demands and striving to meet new needs by bringing to bear the power of gospel-preaching and gospel-poverty to the new poor — those on the fringes of feudal society as well as the economically poor.

> The most telling and most characteristic trait of this poverty was sensitivity to the distress of sinners, the poor among the poor of the Lord; for such sensitivity was an integral part of the evangelical life.[16]

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10 *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1, *loc. cit.*, p 8.

11 *Ibid.*, 7-10, with a special paragraph, following, for secular Institutes.

12 *Ibid.*, 7 and 9.

13 *Loc. cit.*, p 208.

14 *Lumen Gentium*, 42.

15 The main witness is Rupert of Deutz in his treatise *De vita vere apostolica* (PL 170, 609-64). Rupert asserts that all the apostles were truly monks; and that 'if you will consult all the relevant passages of scripture, you will find them all saying that the Church had its origin in the monastic life'. Cf Chenu *loc. cit.*, pp 205-07.

16 Chenu, p 242.

Though the canons regular were chronologically in the forefront of this movement, it was the proliferation of groups of laymen, 'who, though part of the new society, had sufficiently broken with the world to proclaim the absolute and literal value of the gospel',[17] which was its heart. It was on the mission of the apostles that these men had seized, as it was set out in practice in Luke's gospel:

> The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go your way . . . carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. . . . Whenever you enter a town . . . heal the sick in it and say to them, 'the Kingdom of God has come near to you' (Lk 10, 1-11).

These disciples were told on their return that they were to find their evangelical joy in the fact that the Son had revealed the Father to them (Lk 10, 20-22); and in the same context, as recounted in Matthew, this joy and revelation involved the disciple's presence to Jesus, in order to learn his dispositions of heart (Mt 11, 25-30). All this belonged, and still belongs, to the widening definition of the apostolic life — the spirit of Jesus nurtured in the Church by the monastic contemplation and teaching of the gospel. Yet it was a movement which, in its turn, settled and found its institutional form in the mendicant orders. Though Francis of Assisi himself wanted nothing but the gospel, and refused in his early days to allow his brethren even the use of the breviary, the franciscan, dominican and augustinian friaries eventually became the Institutions of the new theological learning; and the Franciscans especially found themselves compromised with the secular movement which conquered, exploited and plundered new worlds in the East and West alike.

Apostolic Spirituality: Compunction and conversion

It was Joseph de Guibert who first drew attention to the neglect in post-Tridentine Spirituality of the close relationship between compunction and conversion in the first apostolic preaching.[18] After him, Irenée Hausherr devoted a whole book to this synonymity of compunction (*penthos*) and conversion (*metanoia*), as summarizing the practical knowledge of the Spiritual Life in the eastern christian tradition.[19] And more recently still, Jean Leclerq has shown its paramount importance in the classical monasticism of the West.[20] De

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17 *Ibid.*, p 241.

18 'La Componction du Coeur', in RAM 15 (1934), pp 225-40.

19 *Penthos: La Doctrine de la componction du coeur dans l'orient chrétien* (Rome, 1944).

20 See the chapter on 'St Gregory, Doctor of Desire', in *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (trans. Catharine Misrahi, New York, 1960), pp 36-44.

Guibert begins by recalling the celebrated sentence in the first chapter of the *Imitation of Christ*, 'I would much rather experience compunction than know its definition', so often cited as typical of the anti-intellectual backlash of the *Devotio Moderna* against the new learning of the renaissance with its secularizing tendencies. However, we do not have to wait until the fifteenth century for such expressions of conservative anti-intellectualism, as it attempted to recapture either a former glory or former simplicity by putting back the clock. Rupert of Deutz had cited St Jerome, 'The monk's duty is not to teach but to mourn';[21] and Hausherr takes it as axiomatic in the East that the monk is by profession an anti-intellectual. The liturgy itself, with its elaborate singing, is an obstacle to this compunction of heart; even more so are discourses on the faith, books of dogmatic theology and especially scriptural exegesis. These pursuits dry up the tears of compunction; and the traditional humility is joined by fear of heresy.[22]

It is not difficult to see the similarities between such reactions and those of many religious today, who, in their middle years, feel quite unable to cope with the Council's call to 'share in the life of the Church . . . to make their own . . . her initiatives and directives . . . in matters biblical and liturgical, dogmatic and pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social'; and to 'acquire an adequate knowledge of human conditions in their various circumstances'.[23] Such a programme is unbelievably daunting, and has led to an obstinate anti-intellectualism amongst those religious who now have grave misgivings about their spiritual and theological formation. It is therefore of immense practical importance to discover where in fact the bulk of apostolic religious find themselves today, when the call to a renewal of theological and pastoral learning leaves them stranded, and only too ready to have recourse to that untutored simplicity of generations of monks who simply dismissed all learning, whether stamped as sacred or secular, on the ground that it was inimical to compunction — the gift of tears for which the Church has from early times prayed for all her members, religious and laity alike.[24] A particular current and striking instance of this traditional

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21 Cf Chenu, *op. cit.*, p 213.

22 *Penthos*, pp 123ff.

23 *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.

24 Amongst the traditional *orationes diversae* in the Roman Missal we find the following *Petition for tears*: 'Almighty and most gentle (*mitissime*) God, you drew forth from the rock, for your thirsty people, a stream of living water; draw forth from the hardness of our hearts tears of compunction, so that we may truly have sorrow for our sins, and seek from your merciful self their forgiveness. Through Christ our Lord'.

tension is the emergence, in the United States of America, of a group of inter-congregational religious (whose members are almost entirely drawn from Institutes dedicated to the apostolic life), self-styled the *Consortium Perfectae Caritatis*; its aim is to restore certain external pre-conciliar elements and practices which the majority of apostolic Institutes have discarded in response to the Council's call to *aggiornamento*.[25]

The capital text on compunction of heart in the Apostolic Preaching is from Peter's first sermon on the morning of Pentecost:

> Now when they heard this they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles. 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy Spirit' (Acts 2, 37-38).

'These words', says de Guibert, 'reflect a profound and complex experience — of remorse, fear, astonishment, but also of confidence, produced by this first public preaching of the christian faith'.[26] The apostle Peter himself, in his own personal relationship with Jesus, aptly illustrates the various elements of the gift of compunction: 'he fell down at Jesus's knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished' (Lk 4, 8); 'and the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord . . . and he went out and wept bitterly' (Lk 22, 61-62); 'Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? and he said to him, Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you' (Jn 21, 17). Compunction is the intense response of mind and heart to the experience of conversion, which is also felt as a call to salutary action, 'What shall we do?'

There can be no doubt, either, that compunction, with its roots in the gospel-understanding of conversion to Christ, and a *sine qua non* for the true living of the monastic life in east and west, describes exactly the inner disposition which Ignatius expects will be the fruit not only of the first week of the Exercises — shame and confusion (Exx 48), great and intense grief and tears for my sins (Exx 55), and 'what shall I do for

[25] Inevitably, the main polemic of this group has been concerned with the vexed question of religious dress. Cf the recent publication, *Religious Life: a mystery in Christ and in the Church* (New York, 1975), pp 119-29.

[26] De Guibert, *art. cit.*, p 226.

Christ?' (Exx 53) — but also of the third week, when the exercitant is normally seeking a confirmation in grace for his apostolic choice or renewal (cf Exx 193, 195, 197). Ignatius is also firmly within the monastic tradition, as well as his personal experience, when he writes of spiritual consolation: 'The name also applies to the state in which the soul sheds tears of grief for its sins or for the passion of our Lord';[27] but then he adds: '*or for other things expressly directed towards his service and praise*, all of which leads to the love of the Lord'.[28] This same compunction of heart, the gift of tears, which, according to St Athanasius demands that we forget the things of earth to the extent that we do not even know the world exists,[29] becomes for Ignatius an apostolic disposition, a motivation for action.

The Council, in its principles for religious renewal, has called for experiential knowledge, a wise discernment of trends and situations in the world of today. The response to the call has frequently been temerarious as well as truly courageous; and the experience acquired has not always been spiritually and apostolically profitable. One of the most profound prayers of petition in the Spiritual Exercises is one 'for a knowledge of the world, so that I may have a loathing for it and separate myself off from worldly and vain things': the things, that is, which lead to sin and disorder (Exx 63). The prayer will be developed in the exercise which is the preamble to the considerations on choice of, and response to, the apostolic vocation — the meditation on Two Standards (Exx 135ff); and it will receive its final form in the examination of prospective candidates for his Society, who are to be asked whether they find in themselves the desire 'to abhor in its totality and not in part whatever the world loves and embraces, and to accept and desire with all possible energy whatever Christ our Lord has desired and embraced'.[30] All this, in the abstract, is four-square with the traditional monastic spirit, and the constant current in its literature on the theme of contempt for the world. But, as Fr Ganss has noticed:

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[27] Cassian, for example, writes in his *Collationes*: 'There is one kind of weeping which flows from our heart when it is pierced by the thorns of its sins, another which has its origin in the contemplation of eternal blessedness and the desire of future glory' (*Collatio IX, De Oratione*, cited in de Guibert, *art. cit.*, pp 227-28).

[28] Exx 316. Italics ours.

[29] *Penthos*, p 64.

[30] *Constitutions* [101.] For a more lengthy treatment of compunction understood as the basic apostolic disposition, see my article 'Continual Mortification', in *Supplement to the Way* 19 (1973), pp 126-37.

> Ignatius intended a new form of apostolic living which would be spent largely in mingling with men in hospitals, villages and cities . . . hence he devised his 'experiences' for his novices which would be an apprenticeship in such living out (of the religious life) in the world.[31]

The essential spiritual dispositions for a life of total attachment to Christ are common to the monastic and apostolic lives, and indeed to all who would be truly christian in their living, as the Council has emphasized in its chapter on the call of the whole Church to holiness.[32] But compunction of heart and the constant call to conversion which it implies takes on a different colour and moves in a new direction when that call is seen, not primarily in terms of personal perfection, nor even simply as a form of witness, 'a sign which can and ought to attract all members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfilment of their vocation',[33] but as drawing the apostle down into the world of men, to foster all genuinely human progress.[34] According to Ignatius, the apostolic religious is called to travel about and to 'associate with men and women both good and bad. Such associations require greater strength and experiences, as well as greater graces and gifts from our Creator and Lord'.[35] Protective spiritual devices do not have any essential part to play in the life of the apostolic religious, and are thus not integral to apostolic spirituality as conceived by Ignatius Loyola. What is integral to it is discernment: a discernment which always relates directly to the apostolate. To reach and to keep in touch with this level of discernment[36] requires not only a solid formation in that ascetical life and contemplative growth which the true spirit of monasticism has always imparted, and which has been very aptly described as 'the love of learning and the desire for God'; it demands a quality of presence to the neighbour which is impossible without a constant presence to oneself and to Christ: that is, compunction of heart and a repeated conversion.

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31 Ganss, George (ed.): *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis, 1970), p 96, n 7.

32 *Lumen Gentium*, 39ff.

33 *Ibid.*, 44.

34 On this point, see Ivens, Michael: 'Ministry and Secularity', in *Supplement to the Way* 13 (1971), pp 52-54.

35 Ganss, *ibid.* The comparatives 'greater strength', 'greater gifts and graces' are in contrast to one who 'enters a well-ordered and organized monastery and will be more separated from occasions of sin because of the cloister, tranquillity and good order there'.

36 I have attempted to describe it in a previous article, 'The Discernment of Spirits', in *Supplement to the Way* 16 (1972), p 61.