

Outdoor altar of St. Mary stands in front of Chapel of Divine Guidance.

M

of Theology, the Reformation in Slavic Countries. In addition, I served my bishop as canon theologian in the diocese of Los Angeles. On the national level I served the Episcopal Church as a member of the Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations for six years, meeting with Orthodox

After three ecstatic visions an Episcopal theology professor abandoned his seminary career to found a new mystical order.

The New Order of Agapé According to ST. MICHAEL

By Enrico S. Molnar

I AM a priest of the Episcopal Church. The last 14 years I was warden (which is an old Anglican name for the office of dean) of the Bloy Episcopal School of Theology in Claremont, Calif. In addition to administrative duties I taught liturgics, comparative religions, ecumenical theology and as a visiting professor at the Claremont School and Roman Catholic theologians. In January 1972 I was elected vice president of the Council of Churches in Southern California. Lest anyone think that I am saying all this to boast let me hasten to add that the above paragraph is simply to provide a frame of reference, to indicate that I have been an ordinary clergyman, fairly successful and

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that with this kind of background, like most seminary professors, I was somewhat critical of charismatic phenomena and paranormal manifestations. I thoroughly enjoyed my work, wrote articles for theological journals, attended conferences in Oxford, Lisbon, Washington and so on. In the 1950's I contributed an essay to the late Bishop James Pike's symposium, *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*. That was before Bishop Pike's interest in parapsychological phenomena.

Now all this pursuit of a normal ecclesiastical career with tenure, seniority and fringe benefits has come to a sudden end. During the last days of September 1971 I had a series of three visions. As a result I resigned as warden of the school, gave up a good salary and although the trustees tried to persuade me to stay on, I have ventured into an entirely new kind of life. If anyone had suggested to me, before that fatal September, that I do what I now am engaged in doing I would have told him, politely but firmly, to go jump in the lake.

What happened?

Here is my story, told just as it happened.

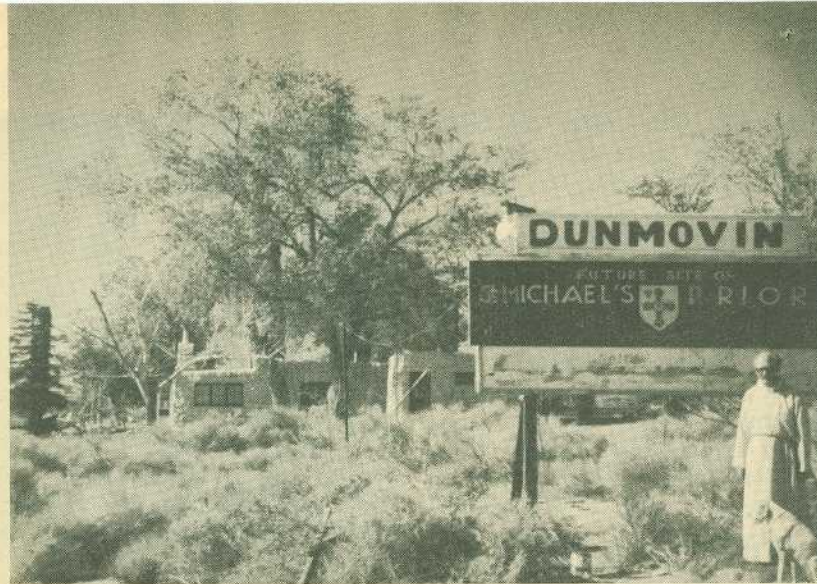
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ON MONDAY, September 27, 1971, I was fast asleep when I suddenly saw with my inner vision dark coiling clouds around



Dr. Enrico Molnar, founder of the Order of Agapé and Reconciliation, sketched St. Michael the Archangel as he appeared to him in his mystical visions.





Dr. Ernesto Molnar chose Dunmovin, a small ghost town on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, as site for St. Michael's Priory.

me. Out of these dark clouds there emerged a slender and beautiful white hand. Where the wrist disappeared in the somber cotton of a cloud I noticed that for a moment about two inches of a bright blue sleeve was visible. The white hand touched my shoulders and I distinctly heard a sweet yet firm voice say to me, "I will help you."

The vision came to a sudden end. I awoke with a start. There was a glowing warm feeling on my left shoulder where the fingertips of the beautiful hand had touched me. Puzzled, I wondered about the vision and the voice. Who was it? Mother? (My mother had died about a year before.)

It did not sound like her voice. In fact, it was unlike any voice I knew; yet it was distinct and clearly feminine. And it promised help. Help to do what?

About an hour later I fell asleep, still puzzling over the mystery.

The next night, Tuesday, September 28, again I was asleep and again I saw the dark clouds, but all at once I also saw a bright light and a tall figure appeared. He was very tall; his feet touched the ground and his head almost reached the ceiling. He had a beautiful smiling face. His strong masculine head reminded me somewhat of Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran, but this man was younger. I was frightened, taken

aback by his majesty and stature.

"Don't be afraid," he said.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I am the messenger of the Living Lord. And I have been sent by Him to speak to you."

"All right, go on. I am listening."

The messenger continued: "The Living Lord wants you for a mission. He wants you to terminate your present work and to establish a community of *agapé*. This contumacious world of yours is distraught by silly, meaningless and endless wars. Man suffers from overmuch wealth and overmuch poverty. And this beautiful earth which God has given you has been befouled by man's selfish malversations.

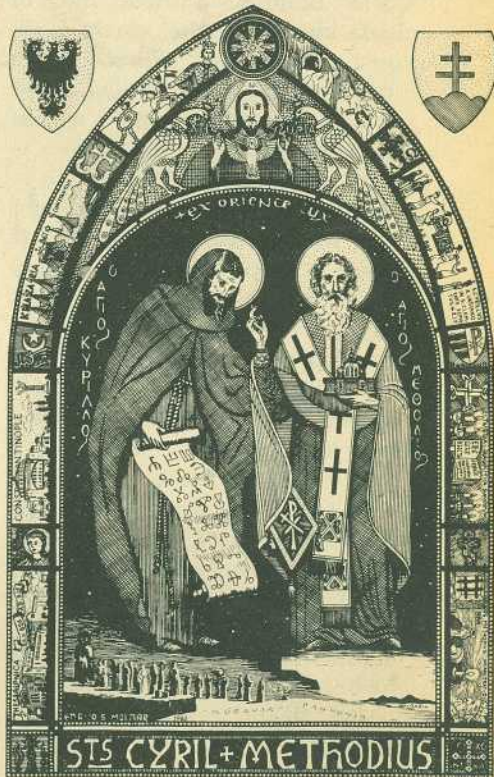
"And look at the church, the vessel of His Grace; she is trying so hard to catch up with the world that she is losing her breath, as one of your students said. You have become such busybodies that you have forgotten what it means to pause for station identification. Remember whose you are! The church is on earth to proclaim salvation to men. Your concern for the world is good. But you have begun dancing to the tune of the marketplace. Liturgical renewal is good but it only scratches the surface. You yourself have heard not long ago someone saying that all this restlessness in the church is like

trying to rearrange furniture on the *Titanic*. The Lord of the Living is calling out for a new remnant. Go out and launch into the deep! Establish a place where the church can catch her breath!"

"But what do you want me to do?"

"After you have resigned from Bloy House go and find a place

SS. Cyril and Methodius, portrayed here in sketch by Prior Molnar, were early church apostles to the Slavic peoples of Europe.



security is to surrender all dependence except the dependence on the Living Lord. Besides, you won't be asked to do this forever. Don't be so conceited; in a few years, when you are tired, you will retire and others will take over. But don't forget that all strength and all inspiration come from God!"

"O. K., St. Michael, I get you. Of course, you are right. Who am I to argue with you? But what proof do I have that all this vision and all this conversation is not tragic self-delusion or wishful thinking? Or a demonic trick of the subconscious?"

St. Michael replied, "What proof do you need? If this is not of God, this is of the devil; in three months you will be either in the poorhouse or you will humbly return to your bishop, asking him to send you to some small mission, oh, like Trona! If it is of God, you will succeed. People will write and come to you. Other people will send gifts to the community. Support will come for your work from all over America. Someone may even give you the necessary land, someone else the building."

Then I asked him, "Will this sort of monastery or ashram be for Episcopalians only?"

St. Michael frowned again. "Come now, you should know better than to ask such a foolish

question. The *agapé* community will be for all sincere persons of good will. You always have been fond of the two Greek brothers of Thessalonica, SS. Cyril and Methodius. Don't you remember that they tried to serve both churches, in the East and in the West, and are honored by both today? So it must be with the new community — it and similar communities will become the yeasty remnant of many traditions and nations. Our Lord of the Living does not want you to establish an underground church; that's a blind alley, leading nowhere. No, your community will be an aboveground movement. So don't start anything without the knowledge and approval of your bishop. Don't persuade those who will come to you to disobey the rules of their own traditions. Have Roman Catholic priests celebrate the eucharist for their own people, the Orthodox for theirs, and so on. In time unity will come. But use the same altar, as you all share the same baptism. Do away with nonessentials. Simplify! Remember the Lady who spoke to you yesterday? How she said, 'I will help you'? She means it. St. Mary the Virgin — blessed be her name — and the angels will come to the aid of the new community, not for your sake, but for Christ's, provided you trust and obey!"

somewhere in the hills, or near running water, where you can see the stars at night, and there establish a community of married men and women. The rule will be worked out later, based on five foundation stones—agapé, nonviolence, joy, obedience and simplicity. Don't copy medieval rules; you live in a different age. The church of tomorrow must have a deeper faith, rethought to fit the new dimensions of the world. Build an outdoor altar of clean stones of the earth, with your own hands. Work in the garden, pray, write, teach, have retreats and turn the other cheek. To those who would listen—and their number will increase—teach a return to a simpler form of life. Simplify church life! It is easier to proliferate meetings than to deepen the life of prayer. Prayer may be action but action is not prayer. Your assemblies are costly shows where short tempers are more in evidence than simple trust and joyful commitment to the Living Lord! To those who would listen, show the proper use of the earth and its fruits. And you will remember that at one time during the Middle Ages, when conditions are rough, it was the monasteries which preserved and saved and carried on to a better day the light of the faith and civilization. You are entering a similar era

in which such communities as yours, united in intention, will perform the same saving role."

Here I interposed, "But, Michael,* this is ridiculous! I will be 58 years old in a few weeks and my wife is a few years older and frail. And you know I had a heart attack two years ago. Only the other day we discussed plans for what we would do after I retire following my 62nd birthday; I want to do some writing . . . Why not choose someone younger, more vigorous?"

"Enrico, you like to filibuster God! If he did not want you and Georgine he would have chosen someone else. Remember old Jeremiah? He complained he was too young. 'Why pick on me? Choose someone else.' So, be still and listen! He wants you to establish a community of reconciliation. You will accept as novices both men and women, with families living in separate quarters."

"But, Michael, if I resign I will lose my stipend!" And I told him how in four years I would get a small pension, ". . . not too much but still a security compared with total insecurity if I resign now."

St. Michael frowned. "What little faith you have! The only

*I was sure I was talking with Archangel Michael although I did not see any wings as portrayed on icons and traditional paintings. And he did not contradict me so my conviction stands that it was St. Michael.

Then, just as suddenly as he had appeared, St. Michael the Archangel disappeared. Only dark clouds, doubts and puzzlement remained.

I could not sleep. I picked up my New Testament and read into the wee hours of the night. Among the passages my eyes found I read these words of St. Paul, recorded in the 19th verse of the 26th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles: "And so, King Agrippa, I did not disobey the heavenly vision."

I woke up early on the morning of Wednesday, September 29, and looked at the church kalendar. It was the Feast Day of St. Michael and All Angels! I hastened to the School of Theology at Claremont where I celebrated the eucharist in the temporary chapel. Some 14 persons were present. I followed the second order of the *Services for Trial Use* (an experimental rite in the Episcopal Church). My mind was still so full of Saint Michael and the words he had spoken to me earlier that night that I completely forgot to read the Intercession. Fr. Charles Bennison, Jr., rector of St. Mark's Church in Upland, noticed the omission.

This was a busy day. I taught a class and then I had my interviews and telephone calls. Martha

Havermale, my secretary, was away with my wife visiting the Queen Mary in Long Beach where a scholarship benefit party, organized by the School of Theology, was in progress. I had asked them to represent our school. I returned home tired.

That night I had a third vision and again I heard the voice of St. Michael who this time was standing behind me. I saw him in a strange sort of way, with an inner vision. I felt a tremendous strength emanating from his radiant figure.

"Have you made your decision, Enrico?" I heard him ask.

"Oh, Michael," I cried, "I am so confused and it is you who put me into this state. While I always honored St. Mary, I never have made much of her cult. Won't people laugh at me saying, 'What's come over Canon Molnar? In his old age he has become a Mariolater!'"

"You are not and you know it. No one is asking you to become a Mariolater. You can't please everybody and someone will always disagree with you and laugh at you. So what? They did the same to the prophets and apostles. So what's new? And at your age you should no longer concern yourself with the outward success of your time on earth."

"Well, St. Michael, I follow you. But the whole thing sounds

so illogical, really crazy! It doesn't make sense; it doesn't seem to fit into the pattern of church life in this diocese and in this modern age."

Now St. Michael spoke rapidly and with emphasis. "Don't you fool yourself. More people will be ready for this new direction than you think. And remember: what is foolishness in the eyes of men is often wisdom in the understanding of God."

"I know," I replied feebly. "But I am a simple and somewhat skeptical Christian. I have seen the work of religious fanatics in the name of Jesus. Let me go to Mount Calvary for a retreat; there in prayer and meditation and consultation with some wise monk I may discern the will of the Lord for me." (Mount Calvary is a monastery of the Order of the Holy Cross, an Episcopal order of men, in Santa Barbara, Calif.)

"You do that," sighed St. Michael, "and when you come back, persuaded of the truth of my words, go and see your bishop. Tell him what you have seen and heard. And with his permission submit your resignation to the board of trustees of your school, to become effective a month later."

"And what shall I do then?"

St. Michael smiled gently, "Give away most of your posses-

sions; store up some things for the future use of the community; give some books to the theological library and to needy students" — ("It will be difficult to part with books," I complained) — "and keep some books for your community. Then you and Georgine get into your car and for three months pray, study and search for a place for the Community of Agapé. Don't be in a hurry. In due course you will know what to do. You will find people to help you, bishops to support you, lawyers to advise you and funds to provide for all needs. Keep on praying for guidance. Man is now confronted with the evolutionary necessity of developing a higher stage of consciousness. A planetized man must replace the tribal and national man. Your new order must pave the way for this. It is a great thing not to have a place to lay your head if you carry faith in His Word in your heart. Be obedient to your heavenly vision."

During the last sentence he raised his right hand in greeting. Then the voice was still; the vision ended.

On Thursday morning I wrote it all down and told Georgine about the three visions.

I canceled all engagements for the following week and went on a three-day quiet retreat at Mount

came to find out if we could give them support for strengthening a regional third order type of movement. After discussing their problem for a while I felt inclined to divulge to them the content of my three September visions. I asked for their advice in turn. We discussed the pros and cons of the possible options. Then Father M. rose to leave, since he had quite a long way to drive home.

At the door he said, "Enrico, if you decide to resign it will be like a leap into the dark!"

About an hour later Sister D. also made ready to leave. While we were exchanging final courtesies she said, "You know, Father M. was right, but on the other hand, the decision to follow the vision might become a leap into light!"

Thanks be to God! The verification I had been awaiting so long had come. Words almost identical to those I had heard in my dream the night before were spoken by our two visitors in the presence of my wife.

The next morning was Thanksgiving Day. We drove to the desert. At Yucca Valley, near Twentynine Palms, I wrote my letter of resignation to Bishop Bloy. The die was cast. St. Mary and St. Michael, from now on I will need your help. Good Lord of the Living, be merciful to me,

a sinner! I prayed.

In accepting my resignation Bishop Bloy wrote these gracious words on November 30:

"My dear Enrico: In view of our recent conversation, your resignation does not come as a surprise. Nevertheless, it is received with great regret because you are doing such a great job. You are Bloy House. You have touched the lives of many men and have greatly influenced them. To God we give thanks . . . I do hope with all my heart that this is the right decision. Time alone will tell, of course . . ."

A happy chapter in my life had come to a close. A decision had been made. Now I wrote a letter of resignation to the board of trustees. Some members tried to persuade me to stay on but I had to insist on total obedience to the heavenly vision. The board finally accepted my resignation which became effective on February 15. Already in December 1971 we began looking for a place for our future monastic community. We visited suggested sites in Arizona and California. We were offered a portion of an island in British Columbia. The Bishop of Eastern Oregon Diocese offered a site. Finally, after much praying we decided to move to Dunmavin, a small ghost town on the eastern slopes of the Sierra

Calvary Monastery on a hill near Santa Barbara. Never having had a mystical experience before, I felt I needed expert counsel. So, there I was, in silent retreat from October 6 to 8. On the second day I spoke to my spiritual director and told him my story. He listened carefully. Then, after some questioning, he advised, "Don't make hasty decisions. God is never in a hurry. Your visions sound authentic enough. They are extraordinary. But wait for verification."

In accordance with his advice and in obedience to a particular command given me by St. Michael, I went to see the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, the Rev. Francis Eric Bloy. The date was November 4. He was most helpful and understanding. His final words to me were, "The times are ripe for such communities as described in your vision. Wait till you are quite certain. Then be obedient to your vision."

On November 22, 1971, I had another dream. I saw myself and my wife in a dark cave. Ahead of us on the narrow path was a boy about 11 years old. We finally came to the opening of the cave. Bright, dazzling light greeted us. Down below, drenched in sunlight, was a city. I discerned a high tower; it looked a

little like the tower of Stanford University. Its roof was reflecting the sunshine; as if after a rain it sparkled with gold reflections.

I knew we must get out of the cave. The path continued outside the cave and, I supposed, led downwards to the sunlit city. But there was an obstacle! The path, emerging from the cave, fell away, showing a gap several feet wide as if a slide had taken place there. We looked into an abyss several hundred—or was it several thousand—feet deep, at the bottom of which we could discern roofs of houses—the city in the sun. To get out of the cave we would have to jump across the chasm to the other side where the narrow path continued on its way, clinging closely to the steep rocky slope. I hesitated. I thought to myself: if we succeed in jumping to the other side good and fine; if not we will fall several hundred—or thousand—feet and crash on the roofs of the city below.

At that moment the boy said to me, "Make a leap into the dark! It will become a leap into light!"

Then I woke up. I looked at the clock; it was 4:30 in the morning.

Later on that same day two Episcopalians came to see me. One was a priest and the other a laywoman, both from the Diocese of Los Angeles, members of a religious third order. They

Nevada Mountains, in the high Mojave Desert. The nearest other habitation is 11 miles south, at Little Lake, where we get our mail.

At Dunmovin*, most of which is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Leslie Cooper, we made our home. Mr. and Mrs. Cooper, both of whom are lawyers, years ago told Bishop Victor M. Rivera of the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin that they intended to give some 20 acres to a religious community. When Bishop Rivera, as one of the school's trustees, received my letter of resignation he immediately telephoned me from Fresno and put me in touch with the Coopers. The words St. Michael the Archangel spoke to me on the last day of his visitation have been realized with marked rapidity. He said, "You will find people to help you, bishops to support you, lawyers to advise you and funds to provide for all needs."

Things have come about in precisely that sequence. People from all walks of life have come to help us. Two bishops, the Bishop of Los Angeles and the Bishop of San Joaquin, have given

us their moral support (they now are the official visitors to our Order). Lawyers Les and Ruth Cooper have helped us with their legal advice and in getting our Order incorporated.

Known as the Order of Agapé and Reconciliation it is open to men and women, married and single, clergymen and lay people. The membership of the O.A.R. is ecumenical (we are accepting Christians from various traditions) although the sponsorship is Anglican. In contrast to medieval orders, the membership vows of the Order of Agapé and Reconciliation are temporary—for one year and renewable. After completing one year members, who are called Companions, may choose to return to life "in the world" and follow a modified rule. The Companions live either in their monastic community, Saint Michael's Priory at Dunmovin near Little Lake, or as Associate Companions "in the world," with a simplified rule and pledge.

Following St. Michael's recommendation the Five Notes or vows of the Order are agapé (a New Testament Greek word signifying totally unselfish redemptive love), nonviolence, joy, obedience and simplicity.

The O.A.R. requires each Companion to dedicate himself to a special field of study or research

* The headquarters was moved about the middle of November 1972, at the invitation of Bishop Rivera, to Oakhurst, a beautiful wooded mountain area (3000 feet elevation) near the southern entrance to Yosemite National Park. (Telephone: 209-683-7875). Dunmovin will be developed as a study center.

such as biblical studies, Teilhardian explorations of space theology, theocology, parapsychology, the publication of mystical literature, popularization of ancient religious texts, etc. The order also requires that each Companion make at least one pilgrimage to one of the great spiritual centers of the world such as Iona, Edessa, Rome, Glastonbury, Vadstena, Alexandria, Mount Athos, Qumran, Assisi, Monte Albán, Jerusalem, Canterbury, Athens and so on. Of course, the major emphasis of the order is prayer, especially mystical prayer. At a meeting of the Associate Companions at Christ Church, Episcopal, in Ontario, Calif., on February 20, 1972, a Rule for Trial Use was adopted, providing for renewability, change and adaptation to new conditions through the active participation of the entire membership. The Order now has over 40 Associate Companions besides more than 100 supporters.

Here at Dunmovin we have converted a former sulphur mill into the Chapel of Divine Guidance and a library. The former Dunmovin café has become our refectory. In time we hope to make a further portion of the old sulphur mill into an arts and crafts workshop.

Help comes to us from unexpected quarters. A rabbi wrote me, "You know, before St. Michael was written about in the New Testament he appeared in the Old Testament and in the Apocrypha; so you see, he was a Jew. Hence the enclosed check."

If anyone had told me before September 1971 that I would become a prior of a monastic community I would have said, "You are out of your mind!" Yet, here I am, a year later, a prior.

People come to St. Michael's Priory from all over the western states, for a visit, for a retreat or, as someone said, "to recharge their spiritually run-down batteries." My wife and I have made many new friends and our horizon has been extended immeasurably.

All this is the result of a heavenly vision. I heard St. Mary with my own ears. And I heard and saw St. Michael the Archangel so distinctly I was able to notice the wrinkles in his white alb. I saw him as clearly as I now am seeing my wife who is writing a letter across the table.

My heavenly vision made as profound a difference in my life as that historical event which forever divided time into B.C. and A.D.

