

creed that God lives and is eminently tolerant of what men make of Him and of His demands upon them.

Focus, Joshua urges, on what unites us all under the Father we all acknowledge — the two pristine commandments that undergird all differences in sect: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind ... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Joshua, therefore, has harsh words for nearly every religious leader he encounters. To the Catholic pastor, he says: "It is shepherds like you who have stripped God's people of the freedom and joy they should experience as the children of God and returned them to the status of slaves, no longer free to follow their own consciences, or to listen to their inner voices, or even the voice of God ..." (p. 171)

To the bishop: "Jesus was not interested in religion as you understand it. For you religion is the passing on of finely chiseled doctrines and rigid codes of behavior. For Jesus religion was finding God and enjoying the freedom of being close to God — seeing Him in all creation, especially in God's children" (p. 187).

And to the cardinal: "Jesus gave authority to bind and loose, but it is an authority that is to be used wisely and with solicitude for the flock. It was not intended to be exercised in an arbitrary manner or as the ordinary way of relating to the Christian people ...

"I have never met the Holy Father, but judging by the surroundings I have seen since I came to Rome, it is hard to see how the spirit of humility guides the lives of those who live here" (pp.249-250).

And finally, to the Holy Father, Joshua hazards this: "You have changed greatly, Peter, and it is not all for the good. Remember, it is by humility and meekness that you will win souls for God, not by rising above people in self-glory. Jesus also established twelve apostles, not one. Their identity has been overshadowed and all but lost. That is not right" (p.262).

All of these prelates, and the broader majority to which Girzone gen-



In that essay, published in a 1967 issue of *America* magazine, the German theologian observed: "One who strives toward maturity, toward 'wholeness,' develops both self-control and a rich affectivity. It is a grave error to imagine that a mature person could live without a highly developed affectivity and without strong passions. The absence of passion is rather a striking sign of immaturity, as, on the other hand, is also disorderly passion or constant dissipation of energies without a clear goal or firmness to reach a goal..."

Passion may not be emphasized in the four evangelists' portraits of Christ, but it is there. One has little trouble finding scriptural instances of Christ barring individuals from easy reward: the rich man, the money-changers, the unreformed Pharisees, and even those unborn "of water and the spirit."

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## Novel inspires insights into Jesus' personality

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

The *Joshua* phenomenon continues to spread.

Starting out in 1983 as a self-published novel describing the visit of a controversial Jesus-character to a small, central-New-York town, *Joshua* is now selling approximately 8,000 copies a week, largely through word-of-mouth publicity. Total sales of the book have exceeded 425,000.

Meanwhile, *Joshua's* author, Father Joseph Girzone, a retired priest of the Albany diocese, has been in such constant demand as a speaker and retreat leader over the past few years that his doctor recently ordered him to cut back his commitments.

During the last few months, several individuals and groups have begun to inquire about film rights. And Father Girzone is planning a July release of a sequel, *Joshua and the Children*, which deals with a situation similar to the religious conflict in Northern Ireland.

Father Girzone attributes the success of his novel to the character of Joshua, a Jesus who is open and compassionate, who accepts people of all religions, and who is critical of what churches have done to the faith Jesus set in motion 2,000 years ago. Jo-

shua, Father Girzone said, is a Jesus who makes sense to people and uses authority wisely.

"Jesus calls for an authority based on service and compassion and healing, rather than one based on legislation and ruling and having tight control over people," Father Girzone suggested. "Jesus exercises tremendous authority, yet you never see him exercising authority the way the church exercises authority."

Jesus' leadership, Father Girzone said, is based on "the inspiration of his life and the power of his message so that people would follow him willingly, not because of mandated behavior."

And that message of *Joshua* — and of its author — is apparently one people want to hear.

"People hunger and thirst for God and for goodness, and when they don't find it where they worship, they search for it elsewhere," explained Denise Mack, director of religious education at Corpus Christi Parish, where Father Girzone spoke Feb. 9. "I think they wish we could return to simpler times."

"(The book) certainly made Jesus more approachable to people," observed Father David Faraone,

who led a two-part discussion of the novel at St. Joseph's Parish, Penfield, in January. "Joshua's character brought out some of the joy, some of the ease of laughing that Jesus had."

The character Joshua also inspires others to improve their own lives, noted Father Francis Blighton, parochial vicar at Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish, who presented two talks about the book at the parish last September.

"When people read the book, there's something attractive and rich about (Joshua) that people want to be like him," remarked Father Blighton, who compared *Joshua* to the *Imitation of Christ*, a classic book of devotional literature. The two books, he said, have flaws, but they are "very affective. (They) awake people's desires to follow Christ."

Sister Mary Francis Mary Rossi, SSJ, pastoral assistant at Most Precious Blood Parish in Rochester, where Father Girzone spoke Feb. 12-14, speculated that part of the book's appeal is the personality of Father Girzone himself.

"When I first saw him, I felt as if I should call

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# Insight