

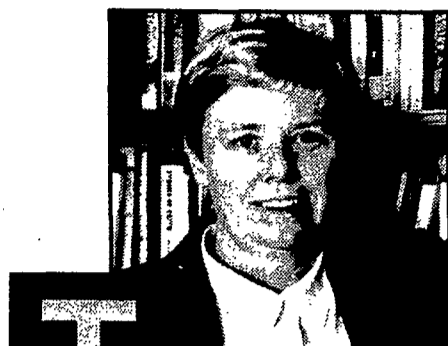
Friendships further our Christian growth

By Dr. Patricia Schoelles, SSJ
Courier columnist

Some people have observed that friendship has never been a particularly important category in Christian preaching or theology. Jesus, for example, didn't use the term often and, when He did, he wasn't very positive about it! At one point he indicated that it isn't really much of an accomplishment at all to "love one's friends." He even implied that Christian love is something other than the kind of "love" that exists between friends (Matthew 5).

Contemporary American society also seems to have little regard for friendship. We do not, for example, easily use the term "love" for the relationships between friends. For us, "love" most often refers to romantic love, or affection among family members. If we want to read something about friendship, our sources seem very limited. A student once pointed out to me that the only "literature" on friendship is to be found in stores that sell greeting cards. And these sources reduce friendship to a kind of sweetly sentimental affiliation between people.

Some cultures seem less disparaging of the relationship between friends as ours seems to be. And some Christians writers have chosen not to ignore friendship as important to the Christian life. Some have even found



THE MORAL LIFE

friendship to be a category suitable for understanding the relationship between ourselves and God!

In speaking about Christian love, for example, Thomas Aquinas wrote that "charity signifies not only the love of God, but also a certain friendship with him" (Summa, I-II, 65,5). In another place, he wrote: "Charity, as we have said, is our friendship with God arising from our sharing in eternal happiness" (Summa II-II, 24,2).

Father Paul Wadell, CP, a former classmate and colleague of mine at Notre Dame, has written a wonderful book titled "Friendship and the Moral Life." He used the statements of Thomas Aquinas as a kind of spring-

board for viewing the Christian life itself as "friendship with God." This may seem like an odd notion, since we most often think of friends as being somehow "equal;" friendship implies a kind of mutuality that surely must be lacking in any relationship between Creator and creature!

But Wadell is serious about friendship and the Christian life. He states: "Friendship is the constitutive moral activity of our life."

For Wadell, as for Aquinas, friendship is the most important relationship through which human beings are changed and transformed. They both see friendship as "a task" in which we learn to receive from another what eventually becomes our own good. In friendship, we begin identifying our own good with the good of our friend. And because friendship is a mutual relationship, our friend begins to identify her good with our well-being.

This is indeed "transforming" because gradually what is good for us has changed. And surely "what is good for us" is at the very center of our being. In friendship, we can't define our own good in terms of ourselves only. It is only in terms of another person that I can name what is good for me!

Wadell thinks that in this way, the friendships of our lives actually determine the selves that we become. Friendships open us to change and growth, and they actually provide the direction for the growth by which we

are continually changing and being transformed. Wadell speaks in terms of our "receiving our very selves from another" in friendship.

It is an odd notion to us individualistic Americans accustomed to "SELF-help" (not OTHER-help!) books to understand Wadell's insight that our growth as human beings happens not by ourselves, but through our relating to others in friendship. But Wadell insists that this is the central task of the moral life — learning to be transformed through friendship with another.

Like Thomas Aquinas, Wadell doesn't stop with talking about our friendships with one another. He goes on to urge Christians to appreciate our relationship with God as a friendship very much like our other friendships. Gradually we learn to care about "what God cares about," and perhaps even to care about the well being of God as our own well-being! Gradually, we become "like God" because we have let God transform us simply by allowing God's good to become our own.

Few people easily associate Christian morality with friendship. Words like duty and obligation, obedience and law come first to our minds when we think about "morals." We might move to a richer, even more traditional, view of the moral life if we reflected a bit about friendship and its transforming power in our lives.

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Holy Cross Parish Annual Retreat October 23-26, 1994 "Feast the Hungry"

Father Arthur Serratelli, Scripture Scholar and Professor of Biblical Studies at Immaculate Conception Seminary in New Jersey will be presenting a Parish Retreat at Holy Cross Church, Charlotte. This retreat will inaugurate the parish's theme for the year, "Feast the Hungry", focusing on the Church as a Eucharistic people.



Each evening will offer opportunities for prayer together with Father Serratelli's presentations:

- Sunday, October 23-7:30PM - Benediction Service
- Monday, October 24-7:30PM - Anointing Service
- Tuesday, October 25-7:30PM - Penance Service
- Wednesday, October 26-7:30PM - Eucharistic Liturgy

For those unable to attend the evening sessions, Fr. Serratelli will be preaching at all weekend Masses October 22 & 23rd, and will celebrate a 9:15AM Mass on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and preach the homily.

Weekend Mass Times: Sat. 5PM & 7PM; Sun. 8AM, 10AM & 12 NOON

All are welcome to join us for this retreat opportunity to grow in their knowledge of the Lord through the unfolding of the Scriptures.

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