

FOUR LETTER WORDS

A Composition with A Preface and Three Connected Themes

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Frontispiece:

Notre Dame de Paris in twilight, view from the southeast, Seine in the foreground lined with fairy-lighted floating restaurants preparing for evening diners; the cathedral is a symphony of stone, bathed in rich incandescence, which brings out the masterful detailing performed by inspired masons centuries ago. Beyond, The City of Light is becoming the city of night, as throngs prepare for another evening of strolling, frolicking, fine cuisine, great wines, and memorable escapades in a city with three times as many chefs as lawyers. Parisian chefs are notorious for their temperament, bravado and rapturous outcomes. Chef is a four letter word.

The photo of Notre Dame hangs in our entry. It was an impulse purchase from² the photographer, Michael C. Davis, at a street fair in Madeira many years ago.

Preface

Fascination with Gothic architecture dates to a boyhood where our busy household (nine of us) had black-and-white framed photos of Gibraltar , the Roman Coliseum and the Cathedral at Rheims, or "Raumps" as I might try in my minimal nasal French. Not sure how the photos were selected, but my father had served with the American Expeditionary Force in France in 1918. His memorabilia included a British style tin hat, a gas mask, insignia of a corporal, plus pictures of Rheims with serious damage caused by German shelling. The emotions of looking at those photos were mixed. The astonishing stone carving which looked as though it had been cast into place of fine metal, and the wanton destruction of something so beautiful. (Incidentally, the Rockefellers paid for restoration of Rheims following World War I.) Looking at artifacts from my dad's youthful adventure and traveling with him to American Legion events in the latter 1930s, I was caught up in a romantic notion of what it must have been like to go to France. I

even told my second grade teacher of service in France with my dad in World War I. When that whopper got back to the family dinner table via my older sisters, the tattle tales, it caused quite stir, much laughter and teasing, and a lot of embarrassment. My dad was actually rather pleased because he continued to take me to various legion posts. I loved going to see the heroic AEF banners, even though the bars had a perpetual odor of stale beer. Beer is a four letter word.

Years later, at dinner with an engineer friend, the talked migrated to architecture. When he asked if there was a favorite building, a pause followed because I had not really considered that question. After a few seconds of flickering images of the Empire State Building by Shreve, Lamb and Harmon, Falling Water by Frank Lloyd Wright, and Cincinnati Union Terminal by Paul Cret, with Fellheimer and Wagner, I impetuously suggested Notre Dame de Paris, though having experienced it only once at that time. In subsequent trips, my choice was affirmed. I could feel the magnetic pull, the setting on the Ile de la Cite, the 300 foot delicate fleche, the twin towers, in one of which I climbed the 387 steps to the top to inhale the fabulous views and recall Quasimodo, Victor Hugo's Hunchback of Notre Dame, dreaming of his Esmerelda. The skillfully carved portals, rose windows, and, of course, on the opposite end, the flying buttresses were powerfully dramatic. My first encounter with the edifice was prior to a cleaning about 30 years ago. The grime of ages, which we call patina, gave a venerable look. On a subsequent visit I was shocked to see it cleaned. Still not sure which I liked better. Notre Dame was begun in 1163, largely completed 72 years later and has been in almost continuous use since that time, a miraculous 776 years. Work on a number of parts of the building continued for many more years, then centuries later damage caused by the French Revolution in 1789 required extensive repairs. Rehabilitation is still done today. Mature buildings like mature men's bodies need regular maintenance.

Theme Number One: Nation Building

The cathedral building era occurred when France was struggling to become a nation distinct from Gaul or the Holy Roman Empire. Some background: Gaul is a four letter word derived from the Celtic Gaeltracdt, our land. Romans applied the name to the vast territory north of the Alps, as in Caesar's Gallic Wars. As the Empire was collapsing, various tribes fought for supremacy. The Franks, descended from Celts and Germanic people, became dominant, in part because of military tactics learned from the Romans, in whose legions many served. Also, they

embraced Christianity in a militant way as the church sought to bring some stability out of the turmoil. Chieftains such as Clovis were early Frankish leaders to establish territorial claims, but most successful was the Carolingian Dynasty established by Pepin in the Eighth century. His illegitimate son, Charles Martel, gained fame by stopping the Moslem invasions of France at the Battle of Tours in 732, a conflict crucial to the development of France as a Christian nation. That encounter is vividly described in David Levering Lewis' book, aptly entitled *God's Crucible*. He places the battle at Moussais-la-Bataille, between Tours and Poitiers. For simplicity, I'll call it the battle of Tours.

The Moslems or Saracens or Moors had made several forays into Gaul after controlling the Iberian Peninsula. This time they were coming to stay, with an army of 40,000 Arabs, Berbers, Syrians, Persians and various others, plus wives, children and concubines. Intent on jihad, holy war, they proceeded 400 kilometers north of the Pyrenees up the old Roman road, as Charles was organizing his infantry and cavalry, and force marched to intercept. The six day battle climaxed in a frenzied charge by the Moors all shouting the Prophet's name. Mohammed had been dead just a century. Swift Berber cavalry supported the thrust. The stolid Franks held. Then Charles unleashed his own cavalry with devastating effect. The Moslem leader Ab-al-Rahman, took an arrow to the throat, and the stunned Moors, most of whom had never lost an encounter, fell back into the gloaming twilight. During the night, they gathered their dead and retreated down the Roman Road which Moslem poets would commemorate as the "Path of Martyrs." Arab and Moor are four letter words and you can be sure that the Franks had some of their own choice words in their Latinized dialects to describe their intense adversaries. Following the Battle of Tours, Charles the Bastard became Charles the Hammer.

For several decades military face-offs between Christians and Moors occurred on both sides of the Pyrenees, one of which was captured in the epic narrative, *La Chanson de Roland*. Finally both sides decided that the mountain range would divide the two religions, as it did for the next 700 years. Martel's grandson, Charlemagne, became the towering figure of this period and carried the cross north, south, and east, ruthlessly slaughtering any who opposed his missionary zeal. Then he established a culture of inclusion for all who would accept his religion. He administered with great skill, establishing counties as governmental units, encouraging Benedictines and Dominicans to build new monasteries, and using his powerful army to control

the many self-proclaimed nobles in the feudal system of land management. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that Charlemagne was "the man." He ruled a remarkable 45 years, longer than most men lived. Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne Emperor of the Western Empire on Christmas Day in the year 800. This aggregation of real estate eventually became the Holy Roman Empire, as Voltaire would much later label as neither holy, Roman, or an empire. Though not an empire by the standards of Rome, at its height under Charlemagne, it was composed of all or parts of a dozen present countries.

Charlemagne's court at Aachen near the current boundary of Germany with Belgium and the Netherlands was glorious, a gathering place of the best and brightest from throughout the realm, plus the British Isles. But it was too good to last. After the Titan's death, his son, Louis I, continued the Carolingian line with difficulty. He could not control the feuding nobles nor maintain the boundaries of the empire. Northmen from Scandinavia raped and pillaged their way along the northwest coasts, even traveling up the Seine to sack Paris. A few years ago, Gareth Howell in his paper on the Vikings in Wales, stated that you can't rape and pillage all the time. So too, the Northmen were seduced by the beauty, fertility and wine, women and song of northern Gaul, now called Neustria, and settled down into a sector named Normandy to this day.

Meanwhile back at Aachen or Aix-al-Chapelle, as latter-day French prefer, all was not well. Feudal and fratricidal strife climaxed in 843 with a partition of the empire by the Treaty of Verdun. The east Frankish Kingdom morphed into Germany and the west Franks, after more decades of turmoil, established a country called France. Hugh Capet, enthroned in 987, as the first recognized King of France, reigned for only eight years, dying of smallpox, but managed to get his son, Robert, established as King and caused the Capetian dynasty to replace the Carolingians. Robert had little success in uniting the various dukes into a unified whole, as the nobles in Flanders, Burgundy, and Aquitaine steadfastly maintained their independence. Consequently the Capetians actually controlled only the Ile de France, the northeastern section of the country. Nonetheless, the die was cast and France was established as a country separate from the Western Roman Empire. The eastern segment of the empire developed a Teutonic language that eventually became German; the western segment, France, developed a Latinized language which became French.

The boundaries of France remained fluid for several centuries as seemingly constant conflicts inhibited any real progress toward a stable state of affairs. The Capetian Dynasty lasted 341 years during which time occurred the Norman Conquest of Britain, the Crusades, the founding of the Sorbonne and the emergence of Gothic architecture. The Black Death, Hundred Years War and Joan of Arc were yet to come. It was not a tolerant time. Those outside the church were treated with disdain, even persecution. This period could be described by the four letter word, chaos. Oops, five letters.

Of particular interest is the Norman invasion by William, Duke of Normandy, or as British scholars insist, William the Bastard. (Interesting how that title keeps popping up.) The Battle of Hastings swung to the Normans in 1066 when Saxon King Harold received an arrow in the eye (that really must have smarted). Deja vu, individual arrows had impacts in two epic battles, Tours and Hastings. The Norman victory paved the way for their domination of the Anglo-Saxons and gradual impingement on the language of King Alfred to produce the language of Shakespeare.

Edward W. Merkel, in his delightful 1979 budget piece, described the process of a French word morphing into English. An old Middle French word, *bouge*, meaning leather bag or valise, became *bougette*, then the English *bowgette*, finally to *budget* meaning a leather pouch or bag for carrying such articles as a financial budget, as does the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to this day, in his annual trips to Parliament--and as a term for the Literary Club's monthly multi-part papers.

Thirty years after the invasion of England, Normans and miscellaneous other European nobles embarked on the first of eight crusades. These largely disastrous ventures resulted from religious zeal which gripped Western Europe, plus political intrigues involving Popes, Venetian merchants, and well-meaning people who wished to have access to the Holy Lands. The Crusades lasted in fit and starts for 200 years and brought Christian warriors into bloody confrontations with Moslems 360 years after Tours. When concluded, the Crusades left things pretty much as they had been before they started, but the behavior of the Europeans in sacking Constantinople and slaughtering the inhabitants of Jerusalem gave the term, "crusades", an enduring bad name. When George W. Bush launched his war against Iraq, he initially called it a crusade. Then on the guidance of wiser advisors, he used the term, *a war on terror*.

An experience occurred in Israel at Caesarea, on the Mediterranean Coast south of Haifa. That city was established in 22 BCE by Herod who, being politically adroit, named it for Caesar Augustus. While touring ruins there, we were informed by the guide that the pointed arches and groin vaults originated in the area and then were carried back to France by the Crusaders to become Gothic architecture. A fascinating story, but not one supported by history, although one theory is that the pointed arch is derived from Assyrian examples. Surely Gothic design grew out of Romanesque. The rounded arches gradually become more elongated and then pointed. ARCH is a four letter word.

So the development of Gothic architecture is parallel to the crusades, both linked to strong religious movements in Medieval times. Prior to Gothic, in the preceding eighth to eleventh centuries, religious orders had been doing much of the building of churches, monasteries, hospitals and schools. The styles have been labeled Early Christian and Romanesque. Construction techniques brought north from Italy used heavy stone walls with small openings to restrict the strong Mediterranean sun. As the Benedictines and Dominicans moved northward into what was to become France, the frequently dark skies demanded more light in building interiors. Gradually openings became larger and ceilings higher. Buttressing was required to stabilize the walls, and glass was needed for the enlarged openings. Social changes were brewing. Rural life was becoming increasingly unbearable as the Feudal system kept serfs bound to the soil in dismal living conditions. French youth migrated to towns and cities. Influence flowed from monastic orders to diocesan bishops who wished to build grand churches. The setting was in place for age of the great cathedrals. Incidentally, the term *cathedral* means *place of the chair* as in *bishop's chair*.

Theme Number Two: The Glory of Gothic

Goth is a four letter word. It refers to a Teutonic people who originated in the Baltic region and spread throughout Gaul. There was a Gothic language, now dead. The Goths were a

constant menace to Rome and to rival tribes, and migrated to many parts of Europe. They were eventually absorbed into the Burgundians and Franks, and into the Roman Legions. To the Romans and later Italians, Goth meant barbarian, those who did not shave, and Gothic was a term of derision. During the Renaissance, scholars and architects from Palladio to Sir Christopher Wren chided what they saw as crude sculpture, literature and buildings. The French prefer the term "Style Ogivale," but Gothic has stuck to describe the glory of Medieval Europe, which has outlived its detractors.

Gothic flourished in the Ile de France for three centuries while spreading throughout Europe and to much of the French and English speaking world. The first true Gothic church was at Abbe Saint Denis, built near Paris in 1132 to 44. Then after a couple of other small examples, came Notre Dame Paris in 1163 as the first heroic use of the style. It was placed on a site once containing settlements of ancient Parisii and their worship buildings. Then came a Roman Temple, an early Christian Basilica, and a Romanesque church. Beneath the current plaza is a crypt with artifacts from the earlier buildings. The west elevation or plaza side features the three huge portals honoring the Virgin Mary, the provocative last judgment, and Mary's mother, Saint Anne. Above is the gallery of kings, then the great 42 foot rose window with the marvelous stone tracery. Around the building are the series of buttresses which support the lofty walls and allow light to filter to the interior. The choir end of the apse features Viollet-le-Duc's dramatic flying buttresses, the most recognizable idioms of Gothic. It is also the best vantage to appreciate the concept of elasticity, the great contribution of the master builders to construction technology. Whereas Romans for centuries built massive structures of huge stones, the Gothic builders used relatively small stones with joints of lime based mortar to erect graceful, thin walls with large glazed openings all supported by a web of buttresses. It is a fabulous exposed structure. A curious viewer can trace the forces of thrust and counter-thrust and understand the structural concepts involved. Additionally astonishing is the fact that mathematics and engineering were largely undeveloped sciences and most cathedrals took three generations to build. The master builders, most names lost to history, combined the skills of mason, planner, architect, engineer, trainer, and overall coordinator. They were indeed masters. The workforce was a hierarchy from master down through journeyman to a multitude of laborers, many of them new to the growing towns. Just as remarkable was the financing of the cathedrals. Religious frenzy could go only so far. Bishops became adroit at encouraging the new commercial class to donate cash and services.

The church was so powerful that it was unwise to refuse to participate. Still most projects had pauses in schedules when funds lagged. Further, there was the growing competition among the growing cities seeking to build the largest and most opulent buildings. Thus northern France became the locus of increasingly daring projects, and some colossal collapses, as at Beauvais, where high walls plunged twice, and after the third try, only part of the cathedral building was completed.

The science of glass-making responded to the ever enlarged spaces, and beautiful stained glass became a lasting trademark of Gothic. Notre Dame de Paris, as one of the early cathedrals, is sometimes criticized for its dark interiors. La Sainte Chapelle, also in Paris, much smaller than Notre Dame, and built in the remarkably short time of 1244-47, has very high beautiful windows that allow a wonderfully light filled space. Most experts consider Chartes to have the best glass. This project was initially conceived as Romanesque but converted to Gothic in 1194. Walter Netsch, designer of the chapel at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, was inspired by Chartes. Veteran listeners to WGUC will recall that John Birge annually on Thanksgiving played a tape of Charles Laughton describing a visit to Chartes with a French painter and glorying in the reds, yellows, and cobalt blues of biblical scenes. Alas, John left WGUC and took his tape with him. Tape is a four letter word.

Over a period of three centuries some 300 cathedrals and major churches were built of Gothic style in France alone. During that period, Gothic jumped the English Channel, and spread throughout much of Europe. As with any style whether of buildings, automobiles, or clothing, the initial concepts were basic, while later iterations became more and more florid. One of the lasting virtues of Notre Dame de Paris is that, while it is indeed decorative, it is less so than later cathedrals. Each country added local idioms and by the time of the Renaissance, Gothic was considered distinctly out of style. Yet with various revivals over the centuries, thousands of Gothic re-creations exist all over the world, basically wherever Christianity has set foot. One notable local example is St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption in Covington, an approximate replication of Abbey Saint Denis, with a west front inspired by Notre Dame de Paris. While much of the carving in Covington is less developed than the original, the stained glass is quite brilliant, worth a visit. When there, enjoy the large murals by Club member, Frank Duveneck.

With the Renaissance, came a flowering of French culture and prestige. By the 16th century it was the most advanced country in Europe and in the Age of Exploration became an international power. As with all empires, over-extension, over-confidence, bad fiscal planning, and military disasters, led to decline to a second tier nation. (Is there a lesson here for the United States?) Today France is predominantly secular, the cathedrals are largely empty except for tourists, and the country struggles to keep up with long-time Frankish rival, Germany, particularly in economic matters. The natives are restless, immigration is a concern, and governmental attempts to cut back on services are met with rioting in the streets. But through it all, France, year after year, remains the top tourist destination on the Globe. Spain and the U.S. vie for second place. With all the attractions in France, the heart and soul of the country remains Gothic Architecture.

Theme Number Three: Our Lady

In my framed photo of Notre Dame, a small insect burrowed its way under the glass and to within a couple of inches of the cathedral. Not a bed bug, its more like a silverfish. I left it in the frame as a reminder that everything is flawed to some degree. Photos are flawed, buildings are flawed, and as Augustine said, all people are flawed--save two. Augustine certainly was candid about his flaws. A wild child, as a teenager he sired a son with a concubine. As he considered Christianity, he said, "Lord make me holy and chaste, but not just yet." Nonetheless he grew into the greatest philosopher of early Christianity. It is worth noting that Martin Luther became an Augustinian monk a couple of centuries later. Both Augustine and Luther believed that Our Lady, Mary, was without flaw.

As we admire these magnificent cathedrals, we frequently lose sight of the namesake of many of them. Most of the cathedrals in Northern France were named for Our Lady, as in Notre Dame de Paris, Notre Dame de Rheims, and on and on. Devotion to the mother of Jesus is one of the great phenomena of Western Civilization, beginning in the first century and continuing to gain strength with the spread of Christianity. There was surely a high point in Medieval France. King Louis XIII promised to dedicate his whole kingdom to Our Lady if she would grant him a son. When Louis the XIV was born, he kept his promise. Cult-like devotions grew in many segments of the population which worried church leaders, but most regular Christians were undeterred.

The scholastics could argue at length about the concept of the trinity, but to ordinary people, many of whom were just a few generations from pagan beliefs, the concept of a pure mother figure was more appealing. After all, they all had mothers. Often lost in this phenomena was just who was Our Lady. She came, of course, out of the tradition of Abraham, Isaac and Moses. Born in Galilee in about 20 BCE to an observant family in an agricultural setting, Mary, or Miryam in Hebrew, lived a typical traditional life until, in Christian lore, she received the annunciation from the Angel Gabriel that she would conceive the son of God. Then her quiet life changed dramatically. Her parents, Joachim and Anna, or Anne, probably knew of Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin would bear a son called Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." Still they were not pleased at this surprise pregnancy. Her betrothed, Joseph, from the House of David, was also chagrined but was instructed by an angel to remain faithful. Most of these events are carried in the first century gospels and are relived every December as the Nativity is observed.

Relatively little is known of Mary factually and the perceptions of her life are held differently by different believers and non-believers. The notions of the Immaculate Conception, virgin birth, and eternal piety can be debated at length, but it is not the purpose of this paper to enter these debates, rather to discuss the lasting phenomenon of Mary.

One set of beliefs is that Mary bore Jesus in Bethlehem in about the year 4 BCE at the age of about 15. That year is based on some factual occurrences such as events in Herod's life. The creators of the Christian calendar some years later didn't have all the facts and thus had Jesus born in the year one. I'll let that to religious scholars. In any case, Mary, at the Nativity, was about the age of Anne Frank when Anne died in 1945 in Belsen. It is interesting to compare their lives. Both had loving parents, both experienced dire circumstances. Anne contended with Hitler, Mary with Herod. While Anne was obviously quite literate and left a remarkable record of her young life, Mary was probably not literate since in her agricultural setting, learning to read was a precious time-consuming process not wasted on girls who must get ready for motherhood at a young age, to assure continuity of the family. Presumably she had siblings since families were typically large. Only one sibling is mentioned in scriptures, a sister also named Mary, whom John places at the crucifixion with the Mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Speculation is that Martha and Lazarus were part of the extended family.

The subject of religious depictions through the ages, Mary the Madonna is usually pictured in the expressions of beauty in the culture of the artist. Thus French painters saw her as a pale, fair-haired figure; Eastern Orthodox painters show her as slavish. A particularly striking depiction is the iconography in a fresco in the abandoned cathedral, Santa Maria Della Assunta, on the Island of Torcello in the Venetian lagoon C1350. Mary is 25 feet tall, a willowy figure in dark Byzantine robes with the countenance of the celebrated gentle woman holding the infant Jesus. She appears to be 25 years old.

In the midst of all the portrayals, I think Mary probably looked like Anne Frank, small of stature, slender, pale olive skin, dark hair, and large dark eyes full of both wonder and fear. The mature Mary, Mater Delorosa, grieving the death of her son, is captured with poignant beauty in Michelangelo's Pieta, in Saint Peter's, The Vatican.

Mary was not without detractors. In the wake of the Reformation, many Protestants abandoned her--but Martin Luther remained faithful. However, Henry the VIII in his hostility toward Rome, ordered the statue of Mary publicly burned in Walsingham. Henry really had a way with women.

At least a hundred Ave Maria's have been written and there are many Marian performances each Advent such as by our Chris Miller's Camarata. Over two millennia, at least a half billion girls have been named Mary, Marie, Maria and many variation there-of. (I have a sister named Mary Jane.) Men have been named Marion, Mario, etc. Mary's mother was Anne, Saint Anne, also a name that has ranked high on popularity lists. (My wife is named Anne. My mother was Anna.) Today, names such as Mary have lost their popularity in our increasingly secular society.

As devotion to Mary crossed the Atlantic, first on Columbus' flag ship, the Santa Maria, later with waves of emigrants, a multitude of churches, schools, hospitals and colleges were founded in her name. The Catholic Church in the United States is dedicated to The Immaculate of Heart of Mary. Reading, Ohio has Mount Notre Dame High School, where incidentally, William Tecumseh Sherman sent his daughters when it was Mount Notre Dame Academy. As with all themes in the United States, Mary eventually entered the vernacular. Notre Dame University near South Bend, Indiana, is more known for football than for devotion to its

namesake. Yet in recorded sports lore is a trip to Norman on November 16, 1957 when Notre Dame faced mighty, unbeaten Oklahoma, a week after being pummeled 34-6 by Michigan State. After shocking the Sooners 7-0, many players said simply, "We did it for Our Lady." Another event was a Pittsburgh Steelers game against Oakland many years ago, featuring a busted pass play that resulted in Franco Harris' *Immaculate Reception*. The term was probably concocted by a sports writer, but the Pittsburgh coach at the time was Chuck Noll, a graduate of the University of Dayton, a Marianist school. Hail Mary passes are now routinely mentioned. The origin of this piece of vernacular is uncertain, but one possibility is Roger Staubach who used the term to describe a desperation last-second heave to Drew Pearson in a crucial Dallas Cowboys game. Roger attended Purcell High School, now called Purcell Marian. Another possibility is Doug Flutie's famous pass against the University of Miami. Doug played for Boston College, a Jesuit school. The Jesuits, always circumspect about Mary, resisted the cult-like devotion.

In March, 2005, Mary really arrived in the United States by appearing on the cover of Time Magazine, which featured an article about the Reverend Brian Maguire, a Presbyterian minister in Xenia, Ohio, and his growing acceptance of the sanctity of Mary. The main article featured Doctor Beverly Gaventa on faculty at Princeton Theological Seminary. Dr. Gaventa argues that Mary should be considered a prophet. Last year, a column in The Wall Street Journal was entitled, President Obama's Hail Mary, describing his desperate attempt to reach agreement with foreign governments on banking rules. The whole notion of Mary transcends the mystical and rational and crosses religious lines. She is mentioned admirably in the Koran. She is about redemption, always a theme in worship, literature and sports. If the quarterback completes the desperate last-minute pass for a touchdown, he is redeemed.

What does Mary think about all this. Of the thousands of people who have talked to Mary, none report her interest in sports. Yes, people around the world report visions, apparitions, and conversations. Miraculous cures have been attributed. The Catholic Church has recognized only a handful--Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima. Yet, the faithful are steadfast in their belief and thousand flock to shrines.

Only one apparition in The United States has been acknowledged by the Church, an appearance near Green Bay in 1859, sanctioned just this past December. Though the apparition

occurred 60 years prior to the establishment of The Packers, some faithful in Green Bay surely connect it to the recent Super Bowl Victory.

I've had personal contact with one visionary and find her to be credible. The woman had regular conversations with Mary for a decade. The instructions were to develop a retreat center on her farm in Indiana (that happened); then to build a large chapel on a prominent hill (that happened); then attract a group of Franciscans and build a friary attached to the chapel. I was chosen to design the friary; construction is now half complete. Currently there are three friars. The building will house 30. That's faith. The hundreds of donors who support the effort also have faith. Do I fully believe that this is all because of conversations with Mary? I certainly do not disbelieve.

Occasionally something happens that at least makes one ponder mystical forces. During the rescue of the Chilean miners last year, a combined American/Chilean team using U.S. made equipment were able to reach the trapped miners against all odds. Two competing rigs failed. After the successful rescue, a foreman on the team, a man from Texas, was interviewed on the Nightly News on public television and said that they could not have been successful without divine guidance. Further, the American crew graciously stepped aside and allowed Chileans, including the President to accept the limelight. That's diplomacy. Fortunately no members of the U.S. Department of State were there.

Remarkably in Anne Frank's diary entry for July 21, 1944, regarding the British radio report of Hitler's escaping an attempt on his life, she wrote that it must be Divine Providence. Later, she wished him a bottomless pit. She was, after all, human.

What does all this mean in our increasingly secular society? On the one hand, we have marvelous scientific achievements; on the other there are increasing violent behaviors. Religion seems irrelevant to a large chunk of the population. This is not a value judgment, just an observation. Yet, devotion to Mary, at least in the United States, continues unabated. It may well be that, like the broad admiration of Anne Frank, Mary continues to be seen as a symbol of loving relationships in a difficult time. After all, love, Anne, and Mary are all four letter words.

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