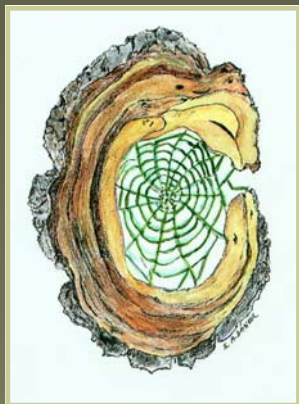


ECOLOGY AND THE MAXIMS

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When I was asked to see what link there might be between ecology and the Maxims, I was faced with a challenge. Nowhere in the maxims is there any direct reference to ecology or cosmology - understandably so because, in the 17th century, ecology didn't seem to be an issue. However, we are told that we should interpret the word from the perspective of our own culture and our own times. So, when I say what I have to say about possible linkage, I don't think I will be misinterpreting **Medaille's** message to us.

Recently, the International Event hosted by the U.S. Federation of CSJ's had as its theme: Seized by Love - Embracing the Neighbourhood of the Universe. In light of this, I have attempted to sift out some Maxims which, I believe, form a link between ecology and our charism.

Let me first introduce you to Chapter I, which, in my opinion, draws us into the real understanding of what the Maxims are for us. The Chapter begins with this heading: "The end which those aspiring to the Great Virtue should envision for themselves." We need first to understand that the Maxims are a spiritual journey. And the goal of that journey is FULLNESS OF LIFE, implying UNION. So the Maxims are all about giving and receiving life. Isn't that the aim of the Universe since the beginning of creation? We are told that "each second, the Sun converts four million tons of its mass into energy in the form of light - and, as a result, all that IS lives.

Judy Cannato says in her book *Radical Amazement*, "Like a loving parent, she (the sun) endlessly gives not only all that she has but all that she is so that her offspring may flourish". Such is the love of our God! St. John identifies light and life in that beautiful prologue to his gospel. So when Medaille speaks of the "end" to which we are to aspire, he is speaking of the fullness of life which can only be found in God. Because there is fullness on the part of God and a lack of it in ourselves, there will always be a tension in the spiritual journey. The life to which we aspire is love poured out, the fullness of life and love - and the openness to receive that life is called "the more". The Maxims are a book which exploits our longing. So the word "aspiring" is a very key word. It is not "hoping", which is more passive, but "aspiring" which implies involvement on our part. We know that to aspire is to breathe - so with

every breath we long for and seek fullness of life.

Joan Weber Laflamme says in the introduction to **James Conlon's** book *'From the Stars to the Street'*: "There are two approaches to a journey. One is to pick the end point and determine the best way - usually the fastest, smoothest, shortest route. The other is to keep the end point in mind, certainly, but to focus as well on the journey." And what do we hear Medaille say? "Keep always in sight the end of your vocation" - and then he goes on to assist us in focusing on the journey itself, giving offering us a means to the end. I want to say something concerning the first three Maxims of Chapter I since they are so important in our understanding of the Maxims as a whole. Maxim 1 says: "Have always in sight the great end of your Christian commitment" - see with the eyes of the heart. In Maxim 2 we read: Take as your life principle to be perfect (whole) as your heavenly Father is perfect". To take as our life principle is to make our longing to be the whole source of our energy. Maxim 3 invites us to "love nothing but God and what can be called (God's)," Jean-Pierre says: "Be wholly given TO God - that gives us direction; wholly FOR God - motive; wholly IN God. What does it mean to be wholly in God? James Conlon says "The spiritual journey becomes an awe-filled and wondrous universe when God is in all things and all things are in God". We know that God IS in all things, and that we ARE wholly in God. Whether we are conscious of it or not, the entire universe is permeated with the Incomprehensible Holy Mystery whom we call God. It is all a matter of awareness on our part, of a growth in consciousness of who we are in this incredible journey of life. As I went through the Maxims, it wasn't long before I found a connection. Chapter II Maxim 5 urges us to "love what the world hates..." Hate is a strong word, yet does anyone abuse what it loves? The "world" today is certainly abusing our beautiful planet - and we sometimes, in our carelessness or thoughtlessness, do the same. We are perhaps invited to look at those words: Love what the world hates, in a whole new way.

In Maxim 7, we are asked to "practise great interior acts such as adoration, admiration, glorification, reverence, love". As I stand in awe and radical amazement before the mystery and beauty of this universe, do I take the time to



*Never think of tomorrow unless it has
some necessary link with today, but
entrust it entirely to Providence.*

*Maxims of the Little Institute
#69
Jean-Pierre Medaille*

adore, to glorify, to reverence and to love this creation to which I am so intimately connected?

With reference to you as a committee, let me point out something which I think is important. Maxim 6 of Chap. IV says about our good works: "desire only that God be glorified and that the neighbour be enlightened". That's what you try to do as a group - to help us all to become aware (enlightened) so that all of creation is enabled to glorify God. Max. 7 also offers some good spiritual advice: "Seek in everything you do that God is content, and nothing else." Nothing matters, really, except that what we do "contents" God. In French we have the word "contentement" which is difficult to translate. But what helps me to understand it is the passages of the Baptism and Transfiguration of Jesus where God says of Jesus: "This is my Son, in whom I delight." So to content God is to be God's delight. I'm sure God delights in our efforts to restore the beautiful balance that was in the original creation.

Another good Maxim for all of us to keep in mind is found in Chapter VI - it's one of my favourites: "Never anticipate (run ahead of) grace by any imprudent eagerness; await its moment in peace, and, when grace comes to you, follow it with great gentleness and courage." We need to discern our approaches to this work and not be ready to jump onto any bandwagon. This work is closely related to non-violence and peace-making and our respect for all things will speak louder than words.

Chapter VIII is on Charity toward the neighbour. In Maxim I we are urged to "love your neighbour as yourself". We are part of all that is - we share the same matter and the same energy. If I am called to love the neighbour as myself, am I going to do those things that are destructive to my very life and existence? Listen to the words Jean-Pierre uses to describe the KIND of love we ought to have: ardent (on fire) full of zeal, patient, just, beneficent (showing active kindness) unselfish, etc. Then he adds specifically: "Let your charity be filled with the justice of the gospel". It is not only an act of love to care for this beautiful planet of ours, it is an act of justice. I remember the 1972 National Event hosted by the Brentwood Congregation - it has stayed with me all these years. The theme was: The Congregation of the Great Love of God: Implications for Justice. We know that part of love is justice and part of justice is love. These two virtues cannot be separated. And what about this one? "Never think of the future unless it is somehow necessarily related to the present"?

Does not our future and the future of the planet depend on how we treat the earth in our present time? Here, I think, is one of the powerful links - and we probably would never had connected that with ecology in the past! It is a sign that we are evolving and that there is an unfolding of growth in consciousness.

Finally, what does Medaille have to say about the connectedness that is so much a part of the teaching of the new universe story? All of our lives intersect, are inter-related, are connected - humans and non-humans alike. Well, you all know as I do that our lives as Sisters of St. Joseph are all about relationships - so, it shouldn't be much of a stretch to see ourselves and all of the universe as relational. We have only to read what is called in the book of Maxims: Conclusion of the First Part of this Little Work. It is what we claim as our spirituality and is better known as the Consecration to the Two Trinities. Father Medaille asks us to "declare firmly" a relationship with the persons of the Trinity. It is not a devotion that is proposed, but rather an intimate relationship with Father, Son and Spirit who, we believe with all our being, is the Mystery at the heart of the universe. As Judy Cannato says: "We live and move and have our being in the midst of the "Incomprehensible Holy Mystery." As we engage in this awesome relationship with the universe, we encounter the very heart of all relationships. All is one! All is connected!

What about the relationship with Jesus, Mary and Joseph? In all of creation, these three human persons knew more about relationships and connectedness than any other human because they shared that incredible power with the One who is known as the Final Word in our understanding of God. To be in relationship with them is to engage in a cosmic relationship that is at the heart of who we are.

Finally, I leave you with this directive from JPM: "Calmly and energetically continue to the end what you have determined and prudently judged to be in accordance with the greater glory of God". Each of you, in your respective communities, and together as a Federation committee, have undertaken this great task of leading and encouraging our Congregations in the proper use of all that God has seen fit to gift us with in our radically amazing universe. Your task requires the kind of commitment you have made. You put much energy into this work. May you calmly continue, knowing that your task is not only in keeping with our charism, but that, through your work, you indeed give greater glory to God.