



# Boston Catholic Journal



NIHIL NISI IESUM

Dedicated to Mary, Mother of God

Salus Animarum Suprema Lex Esto (Canon Law 175)

The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church

## **The Agony of a Nun and Our Unspeakable Hypocrisy**



“Jesus lifting up Himself, said to her: Woman, where are they that accused thee?”

**You have been regaled with her shame, her guilt, and her sorrow — her agony** ... smugly and self-righteously you sit back to voyeuristically catch the briefest glimpse of her sin, luxuriating in her humiliation, eager for even more humiliating details to unfold. It may even awaken your own concupiscence! Your lurid imagination may stir and you may be brought to the same sin within yourself ... but *you* will allow no shame or guilt to stain your conscience — the guilt and shame that you so readily heap upon another in her helplessness.

A nun, we are told, succumbs to temptation and sins ... and *we* are aghast, even as *our own sins* cry out against us?

If a towering rage against this hypocrisy does not rise up within you, you have no place in the Fold of the scarred, stained, and repentant — whom Christ came to call! “*I came to call sinners, not the righteous.*”<sup>1</sup> Remember?

Before you cluck your tongue at the thought of a consecrated nun breaking her vow of chastity, *you would do more than well to take a sober assessment of your own life*, steeped in the same sins of weakness, or sins more vile and probably worse: sins of malice! And if uncovered to the world ... what a scandal to the Faithful *you* would be!

On the day when *all* that you have uttered in secrecy and done in darkness will be shouted from the rooftops <sup>2</sup> can you even begin to imagine your own burning shame as you stand, not simply before the world, but before *all men and women of all time* who will be summoned before Christ on that day of *just* and final judgment in which nothing can be hidden.

I will ask you then, who has not fallen victim to sins of weakness? Christ, of course, knew this and warned all of us in the Agony of the Garden: “*Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh weak.*” (St. Matthew 26.41) He was even looking upon St. Peter himself, and the other Apostles as he said this — *because* the flesh is weak and in times of great need, even need of the greatest vigilance ... it fails — and it was in that weakness that they had succumbed to sleep as the Temple guards came to seize Jesus, clap Him in chains, and carry Him off to His Passion! Even when their sleep was broken by the torches of the guards, it was in weakness *again* that they fled in their fear, leaving Christ alone to His tormentors.

But if a cloistered nun, after how *many* years faithfulness, and having heroically resisted how *many* temptations of not one kind but of many kinds: for more and better food, more than four to five hours more unbroken sleep, to refrain from

observing unbroken silence apart from necessity — if such a one falls into sins of weakness ... *you* are scandalized?

You who eat in great variety much and often, sleep 8 unbroken hours (and more on weekends), who enjoy conversations of many types and with many others in uncounted hours, and who (may) pray for fifteen minutes (or less, if at all) each morning, and probably none before bed; you who come and go as often and as far as we wish, who sleep in luxurious beds many times our width, and in rooms well and richly appointed, ... *you* will stand in cold and arrogant judgment over this women? when the very ocean calls you in your shameless hypocrisy to its depths as your judgment binds a millstone around your neck and justice tosses you into the sea?

*You* will judge, *you* will shame, *you* will humiliate, *you* will reproach and scorn a one who has fallen? Only vultures swirl over and feed on the flesh of a wounded sparrow. Pray rather than prey. In the one you yourself will find mercy, and in the other you will find none. How dreadful that prospect looms over you!

## Updated: Part II

You had taken your cue from Tabloid Journalism, and are finally “satisfied” having learned “the truth” about a matter that never concerned you in the first place! A Nun had sinned after all — or so it has been sensationalized ... by her own bishop!

“Unimpeachable” sources, we are assured, have verified this, chief among whom is the apparently less-than-unimpeachable Bishop Michael F. Olson of Fort Worth, Texas, about whom troubling details are now emerging (see below), and for whom we have at least some manly advice.

Even if Bishop Olson is right about what we have come to believe concerning this unfortunate woman, his publicity campaign — even if it was started by another — will likely come back to bite him in the ass. Why? Because he accomplished saving his *own* reputation only by smearing the reputation of another — something a bishop — or even a decent person should never do. Especially if that other person is a woman. And most especially if she is a nun.

It simply is not what a man does.

Every Nun who remains a Nun — even one who had sinned grievously and *repented* — has absolute devotion to Jesus Christ. She had given Him the most precious gift

that she possessed: her absolute and undivided love. In her poverty it was the *only thing that was indefeasibly hers alone to give to God*; everything *else* had been first *given to her* by God: apart from Christ Himself she had no possessions. She strove for perfection, but never reached it, just as she strove to be sinless and never attained to it. Even in that crucible of love, and despite all her divine aspirations, she remained one of us, she was, is, and ever will be, human, and fraught with all that this entails, including a susceptibility to sin. No one escapes this.

No Nun. No priest. No pope. I tell you nothing new. Saint Paul is remorselessly clear about this:

- *“All have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3.23)
- *“I am carnal, sold under sin ... For I do not that good which I will; but the evil which I hate, that I do.”* (Romans 7.14)
- *“I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* (Romans 7.21-24)

Given this sad patrimony, this inclination to sin, from our First Parents, Adam and Eve, are we to expect sinlessness from *anyone*?

We can, and do expect the heroic struggle against sin and the pursuit of sanctity from our priests and Nuns (even as we must pursue it no less within ourselves!). But to expect sinlessness from them is to expect of them something that surpasses human nature — and even *that*, being Angelic, had also been susceptible to sin! Imagine that! And we would hold dust and ashes to a greater account still? That is madness.

If a Nun has stumbled, and fallen short of her lofty vocation through sin — and yet remains in Religious life, we are constrained by charity to understand her as resolutely *refusing* to be defeated by sin, continuing in the hope which Christ offers to everyone who puts their shoulder to the plough, refusing to look back once the blade has turned the soil. What we really witness is the determination *not* to allow sin to prevail, to *define* her in terms of our own lurid imagination; a refusal to succumb to the Mortal Sin of Despair, but a trusting in the unfathomable depths of the love and mercy of Christ. For what other conceivable reason would a Nun choose to remain if not for an overwhelming love of Christ immeasurably greater than the contempt of the world?

I believe this to be true of Mother Teresa Agnes. I have no compelling reason not to believe this. And neither do you.

Do you think that she has she stopped loving Christ because she sinned?

Have *you* in all *your* sins ... who had *never* loved Him with the consuming love of a cloistered nun, and for so long ... ceased loving Christ because *you* have sinned?

Whether you look upon her sternly or compassionately, my question to you is this:

### **What business is it of yours or mine in the first place?**

We are uneasy with Bishop Olson's continued and vigorous efforts to publicly defend his own credibility. Why is it so important to him that he *continues* to sully the reputation of another — *even were it deserved? Cui bono?* Who benefits from it? Not the faithful. And certainly not Mother Teresa Agnes or the Carmelite Nuns in Texas. Apart from the increasing publicity that he instigates we would likely have known nothing of what has now become not newsworthy but simply salacious. It is not by example that he so acts, given Jesus' response to the woman caught in adultery:

*“Woman, where are they that accused thee? Hath no man condemned thee? She said: No man, Lord. And Jesus said: Neither will I condemn thee. Go now and sin no more.”* (St. John 8.10-11)

Given our own sins, *which* should concern us more — the sin of one who is not so much as *remotely* within our acquaintance — or our *own* sins, with which we *are* unquestionably and intimately acquainted?



Of course, every sin, great and small, is to be abhorred as an offense to Almighty God. I am not minimizing the gravity of *any* sin.

Of this alone am I *absolutely certain*: that this unfortunate woman has not so much as *verged* upon my own sins in number, gravity, and magnitude!

But *I* will not extend to *her* the mercy and second (and third, and fourth, and fifth, etc. etc.) chance that I — *every day* — stand in need of?

I am not her judge. Nor are you. Only God is (thank God!). I am in no position to “*forgive* her in my heart” or otherwise: I am not God Who alone can forgive her! She has not sinned against me. And if she did, I would forgive her! I have a real problem with the notion of “scandal to the faithful.” We are a *constant* scandal to *each other*! And if we are not, our priests and bishops daily provide us with ample scandal, to say nothing of our pope!

If *she* is humiliated in her sin, how much greater and more public should our own humiliation be for the *countless sins* concealed within us? Our hypocrisy is breathtaking!

## **Father Philip G. Johnson**

Mother Teresa Agnes has been pilloried in a way that the priest, Father Philip G. Johnson of the Diocese of Raleigh, NC has skillfully avoided. It was he, after all, who had seduced her into sin, and in so doing not only sinned equally, but with *greater gravity* still — for as a priest he is an *alter Christus*, “another Christ” — one who possesses a unique sacramental *character* within himself; one *who participates in the sanctifying power of Christ* in a way that has no analogy between Nuns and Mary whom they emulate but in whom they do not and cannot participate.

To his shame, and in yet another egregious example of failure in manliness, Father Philip G. Johnson has remained aloof throughout this tragedy, leaving Mother Teresa in the pillory alone.

To our growing shame we see in the Church, apparently, what we too often encounter in secular society: the “authorities” “*wink*” at the man ... and abandon the woman to suffer alone in shame. Moreover, the press is every bit in complicity with this mindset, sheltering the man and excoriating the woman. Hypocrisy, it appears, has found a lasting home in each and every shabby public venue.

## **Final note:**

Learn what this means, if only for your own salvation: *“Nolite condemnare et non condemnabimini”*<sup>3</sup>

Carve *that* into your heart — not the sin of another who had fallen in weakness. Your lack of forgiveness and mercy is itself a greater sin still: a sin of malice!

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<sup>1</sup> St. Luke 5.32

<sup>2</sup> *“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed: nor hidden, that shall not be known. For whatsoever things you have spoken in darkness, shall be published in the light: and that which you have spoken in the ear in the chambers, shall be preached on the housetops.”* (St. Luke 12.1-3)

<sup>3</sup> *“Judge not and you shall not be judged.”* (St. Luke 6.37)

[See Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò's blistering letter on this matter](#) (Catholic Family News)

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