

## *A Charism Given from Above* *Fr. Blaise Berg, S.T.L, S.T.D.,*

Referring to Adrienne von Speyr's *Book of All Saints* while conversing with a journalist friend, Pope John Paul II once wondered aloud how Adrienne might characterize his own prayer life.<sup>1</sup> Further evidence that Pope John Paul II had much personal interest in the life and works of Dr. von Speyr was revealed in the symposium requested by him which took place in September 1985 at the *John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family* at the *Pontifical Lateran University* in Rome. In his "Symposium Greeting," referring to Adrienne von Speyr's contributions, John Paul II noted that "the Church always needs the example of lay men and women, especially those who are profoundly rooted in their professional life and, at the same time, immersed in God."<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, Adrienne von Speyr was immersed in God. Drawing from her life experience as a wife, mother, medical doctor and co-founder of a secular institute, in her writings, she approaches the many challenges of marriage and family, the consecrated state and day to day life with a refreshing matter-of-factness, a profound understanding of the human condition, compassion and piercing astuteness. Because her mode of expression is concrete and down-to-earth, yet deeply spiritual, Adrienne's writings have a broad appeal in households, parishes, universities and seminaries. Furthermore, because her reflections and advice on marriage, the consecrated life, and the spiritual life in general emerge from a dynamic spiritual theology, her theological contributions are universally applicable in changing times and across different cultural boundaries.

An important aspect of Adrienne's theological mission lies in her capacity to give Revelation a contemplative deepening and a new vitalization. In a certain sense, her theology represents a form of John Paul II's understanding of "new evangelization." Adrienne confronts the ancient, indeed, eternal truths of man and woman created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ and articulates them in a new and unique way. In her sense of God's omnipresence, she sheds light on the mysteries of the faith and in the process brings one to its inner realities. Adrienne von Speyr's charism which, in the spirit of St. Thérèse, the Little Flower and Doctor of the Church, is a theological charism "given from above." Although there may exist the temptation to overlook or ignore this type of theology, perhaps it is precisely this "charismatic theology" that must be grappled with by believers.

*Book of all Saints* offers an example of a charism given from above. Each of us prays in one way or another, or more precisely in many ways depending on one's present life circumstances. For the most part, we would like to improve our prayer lives. With its various portraits of the inner spiritual lives of the saints, *Book of all Saints* shows that it is possible to be better "pray-ers." In reading the about struggles experienced by some of the saints in their attempts to pray and in witnessed the profound depths reached by the saints in their prayer, the believer feels challenged and edified to want to grow in the spiritual life. One of the many gifts of *Book of All Saints* is that we know it is possible to be deepen our spiritual lives, because others who have gone before us and are with God in heaven, have done so. This is definitely a book that I would recommend not only to those who come to me for spiritual direction, but also to anyone interested in the lives of the saints and in growing in their faith.

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1 Cf. André Frossard, *Portrait of John Paul II* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988) 73-74.

2 John Paul II, "Discorso del Santo Padre ai partecipanti" in AA.VV., *La missione ecclesiale di Adrienne von Speyr*, Atti del II Colloquio Internazionale del pensiero cattolico, 27-29 settembre 1985 (Milano: Jaca Book, 1986) Ed. H.U. von Balthasar, Georges Chantaine and Angelo Scola. Transl. Maria Tosetto, Luca Doninelli, Carlo Fedeli, 185. John Paul notes: "Infine, mi

rallegrò perché la Chiesa ha continuamente bisogno dell'esempio dei laici, specialmente di laici che siano profondamente radicati nella loro vita professionale ed al tempo stesso immersi in Dio." For some reason, this sentence does not appear in the German edition of the symposium (*Adrienne von Speyr und Ihre Kirchliche Sendung*).

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