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4th letter from John S. Stokes, Jr., to Jane A. McLaughlin

John S. Stokes

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Ms Jane A. McLauchlin, Parish Historian  
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Dear Ms McLauchlin,

After catching my breath long enough to read over the three letters with attachments I rushed out to you in July, I discovered that I neglected to type up and to enclose with my letter of July 22nd the cataloging I made of the books in the Tower room library (referred to in my Journal entry for August 21, 1953). I enclose this list herewith (1).

Also, after going through this list, and in general going through all this information about the Tower and Garden "the second time around", I have a number of thoughts I would like to share with you, for their possible pertinence to your developing of ways for people to perceive, understand and appreciate them, in connection with the Centennial.

First, through a recent homily I heard on Leviticus 23, 15-16, I realized that the word I was looking for for the celebration of the 50th year of the St. Joseph's Garden of Our Lady (1932 - 1982) was "Jubilee". I am struck by how fortuitous it is that 1982 is thus a year of double celebration. (This homily was given by Fr. Facey, S.J., whom I mentioned was stationed at St. Joseph's as Assistant in 1952, and who, incidentally told me he had accompanied Fr. Stapleton on several occasions in bringing the Eucharist to Mrs. Lillie, confined to her home. He also mentioned that the word "Jubilee" is derived etymologically from the Hebrew word for the horns which were sounded to proclaim the 50th day.)

My Mary's Gardens partner, Bonnie Roberson, in writing to tell me how much she appreciated Miss Pyne's tile, which I sent her, spoke of the St. Joseph's Garden of Our Lady as the "Mother Garden" of the Mary Garden Movement, which I see as a helpful term. Despite Mrs. Lillie's protestations that she didn't think she had done anything unusual in establishing the Garden, and that there were many books relative to the Flowers of Our Lady and hundreds of convent gardens, and also many ideal illustrations of Mary Gardens in old books... in our thirty-one years in this work we have not learned of a single Mary Garden of "Flowers of Our Lady in modern times anywhere in the world prior to the Garden at St. Joseph's Church, so that historically we can certainly say this Garden is indeed the Mother Garden of the present movement.
Mrs. Roberson also mentioned that to her the three boats pictured on the tile represent all the persons who in person or who in spirit have come to pay homage at the Tower and Garden (and for us she saw them as representing Ed McTave, myself and herself, as we have carried this work forward through the years... which serves to enrich the private meaning of the tile for me).

One practical matter of visualization and artistic taste I wanted to mention has to do with the W.M. Hannell concrete sculpture of Our Lady in the Garden... and my observation that many people are not able to relate to it devotionally because it does not resemble the more customary representations of Our Lady used in devotion (such as the, to me, most beautiful wood carving of Our Lady of Grace to the left of the altar in St. Joseph's, or the even more conventional "Miraculous Medal" Our Lady of Grace between the Rectory and the Church).

I hope to elaborate considerably on the significance I see in Hannell sculpture, especially in this setting, in the course of this letter, but at the outset, and in sum, I would like to propose that it might be helpful to persons seeing this statue to consider it in terms of 1) a simplicity of form, with a minimum of crevices, cavities or extended parts, in order to withstand the ravages of the weather; 2) a natural, earthlike, concrete material which will blend with the soil, grass and plants... devoid of any paint or other artificial coloring which will clash texturally with the natural colors of the flowers; 3) a simple, highly compassionate inclination of the head; 4) the economy of symbolism of the Mantle and Crown; 5) the upwards, column- or tower-like thrust, mirroring the Angelus Tower, as it were, and highly reminiscent of the famous "round towers" of Ireland; and the spiral-like dynamism of the over-all design, particularly of the lower-left border of the mantle, the line of the right arm and mantle fold, and the paralleling of the crown.

The "double-helix", spiral, uplifting, sense of the sculpture was dramatically highlighted or emphasized for my vision by two delphinium plants which were "climbing" it when I first visited the Garden this summer on July 11th, per the attached photo (2),... suggesting the "tower" symbolism of Our Lady ("Tower of Ivory" and "Tower of David" from the Litany of Loreto), and the resemblance to the round towers, and, mystically, symbolizing the double welling of Mary's grace and the drawing of the Holy Spirit as the soul rises to heaven in ecstasy and rapture. Mary has, of course, frequently been seen in visions and represented in art as standing with her feet on earth/her gloriously crowned head in heaven, as the ladder, column, tower or vortex to heaven, but the upwards thrust was shown forth in a special way by the spiraling flowers, mirroring the mantle folds.

"Her soul from earth to Heaven lies,
Like the ladder of the vision,
Whereon so
to and fro,
In ascension and demission,
Star-flecked feet of Paradise."

Francis Thompson, Scala Jacobi Portague Eburnea

All of this takes on an added importance and significance when we consider the sculpture in relation to the Tower, in terms of Mrs. Lillie's overall vision and concept. Surely she had in mind more than simply taking conventional indoor Marian devotion outdoors; and we have Fr. Calvin's quote that "It was to remind the scientists who study at the Marine Biological Laboratory across the inlet that there is another and valid aspect of life." A perusal of the list of books in the Tower library discloses a heavy emphasis on intellectual apologetics and conversion, yet it seems that the employment of the Tower, Garden and art was made for the purpose of communicating something more.
That something more, I propose, was to present the truths and Marian devotion of Catholicism in a special, symbolic, way especially directed to biologists concerned with the study of all life.

It seems to me that "from the purview of all life, she must have had the insight that Mary represented the "mutation", as it were, (and I say this without prejudice to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which, from this viewpoint, could be seen as a supernatural mutation), through which all natural life was historically and (if you will) evolutionarily effectively opened up to supernatural life. This of course presumes a faith in supernatural life, but in terms of the Episcopalian intellectual circles in which she spent the "first part of her life, there must have been a "spiritual missing link" between natural and supernatural life which, when she "found it in Mary, must have been a factor in her conversion to Catholicism (although today, as I mentioned in my letter of July 27th, there is a movement towards renewed appreciation of Mary, as in the Society of Mary, etc. in the Episcopal/Anp-lican Church).

From this viewpoint, all life, natural and supernatural, is to be seen as a manifestation of God's love which moves towards "fullness and culmination in angelic praise of and participation in the life of the Trinity. And once it is understood that all life, all Creation, moves towards participation in the supernatural life of God ... then all science is seen as discovering the processes of this, along with the illuminative signs and symbols of eternal life and the divine plan which emerge along the way for "those who have eyes that can see," along with generating technology, entrepreneurship and work which channel, instrument and further the movement of the Divine Plan of Creation and life towards Salvation, Kingdom and Renewal of the Face of the Earth.

The key point at which Mary's spiritual mutation was made effective was at the moment of her fiat in response to the Angel Gabriel's declaration to her at the Annunciation, which we commemorate and honor in praying the Angelus. Hence the Angelus Tower. But as the higher pitched bell rings out the Angelic Salutation and our Aves in response, these are directed, in the concept of the Tower and Garden, to "Our Lady In Her Garden", as Mrs. Lillie termed her ... to Our Lady surrounded by plant life which (together with the animals and insects, and people, who may be in the Garden) symbolize the praises of all life to Mary, their representative, terminal bud or "flower of flowers, who through her assent to cooperation with the redemptive Incarnation of Christ opens the way for to "be freed from its slavery to corruption and share in the glorious "reform of the children of God" (Romans 8, 21). And the inscription on this bell is fittingly, "I will teach you of life and of life eternal." in their purity

And since the essence of Mary's "mutational" attunement to the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit for the conception of Christ was her immaculate purity, "flowers are most fitting representatives of the life of nature to surround Our Lady in Her Garden as she is honored by the Angelus. Moreover, through their religious symbolism and names as "flowers of Our Lady they proclaim the divinity of their liberation from their slavery to their classical names or pagan deities, or to secular, technical, scientific names, to intelligible participation in the Divine Plan of Redemption. Hence, the importance of Mrs. Lillie's list of religious plant names and, through appropriate leaflets of markers of identification, the ability for visitors to the Garden readily to see the actual plants according to their symbolism.

Moreover, as Mary remained perpetually pure and sinless, her every act of motherhood, nurturing, caring and teaching of Christ, as well as accompanying him in his ministry and Passion, and also her participation in Pentecost, and her Assumption and Coronation, are most fitting symbolized by her flowers.

Yet all this is present also in a beautiful mirroring back and forth between the Tower and the Garden. For, as we enter the Tower we first see represented on the bronze Tower door scenes from the joyful mysteries of the life of the Holy Family,
with emphasis on St. Joseph, of whose Church this is the Tower. Then, entering the Tower room, we see (or saw) the library of books of the immortal wisdom of the Incarnation, together with the Stations of the Cross on the walls, depicting the sorrowful mysteries of the Passion of Christ. And, finally, the upwards thrust of the Tower itself is a symbol of the Resurrection and of the subsequent uplifting exchanges of glory between earth and heaven.

"Wisdom hath built herself a house, she hath hewn out seven pillars. She hath slain her victims, mingled her wine, and set forth her table. She hath sent her maids to invite to the tower, and to the walls of the city."

Proverbs 9, 1-3 (Douay)

Then, all this mirrors back on Our Lady In Her Garden, the Tower of Ivory and Ladder to Heaven, surrounded by all her flowers mirroring the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries for our meditational and mystical flights in the Garden, as with the low pitched bell we pray:

"Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may by his passion and cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. Amen."

And in making this petition, we also pray to Mary, Mediatrix of all Grace to all life - through her fiat, that we and all biological scientists, technologists, entrepreneurs and workers will be assisted in our instrumentality in Salvation, Kingdom and Renewal by seeing that life is God's love incarnate in the world; incarnate in Christ; and indwelling in Mary through the Holy Spirit.

Reflecting on the Crown and Mantle of the Hannell sculpture of Our Lady, we are mindful that through her "mutational" opening up of all life to life eternal, Mary is both the Queen of all life, and its mothering Protector and Nurturer. As life's representative, as it were, in being received into and filled with the ocean of grace . . . Mary then becomes the channel or aqueduct (to use St. Bernard's figure) of all this grace for humankind and for all life. Thus, we pray for her intercession with God especially for all matters having to do with life, - to Mary, "Our life, our sweetness and our hope."

Whether or not Mrs. Lillie ever articulated anything like this in writing, I do not know. Perhaps you have something of her writing that makes my inferences unnecessary, as far as she is concerned. But, "The Lord builds the house", and I maintain that the foreseeing is implicit in the Angelus Tower and Mary Garden, regardless of how articulate she may or may not have been . . . and that we have the fact of her valiant deed. In a visit to the Tower and Garden in 1973, after an absence of eight years, I found in the Tower room a book, Frances Crane Lillie (1869 - 1958) A Memoir, by Mary Prentice Lillie Barrows (Daughter). The only mention of the Tower and Garden I could find in it & in the brief time available to me was on page 134:
"At Woods Hole she had a beautiful pink granite bell tower for ringing the Angelus built across the street from St. Joseph's Church, on Eel Pond, facing the Marine Biological Laboratory across the water, 'so that Father and I can look across at each other', she said. For this tower she had Fagpi make a bronze door with scenes from the life of St. Joseph. Also to further the cooperation of science and religion, she bought a house in Woods Hole for the use of priests studying biology in the summer, and had it named 'Mendel House' for the Catholic priest who was the founder of the modern science of genetics."

To me one of the most moving facts I learned from leafing through the pages of this book was that Mrs. Lillie, and was born into new life, on one of the Lady-Days, Candlemas, February 2nd, when spring starts in the Mary Garden (when there is a protected southern exposure and a February thaw) with the blooming of Snowdrops or "Candlemas Bells" ... which one cannot help but see as a kind of sign.

However, there is a whole other dimension to the relationship between religion and science. I have written above of how the Angelus Tower and Garden of Our Lady can be seen as calling persons who have faith in God to a fuller appreciation of the key, pivotal, fulcrum, role of Mary in the movement of all natural life towards its destiny in eternal life.

But then there are those of secular scientific humanistic philosophical persuasion who see scientific inquiry and application in terms of movement towards participation in the cosmic harmony of the universe ... or perhaps towards no harmony at all. In the light of Mrs. Lillie's statement quoted by Father Galvin that the Shrine was established "to remind the scientists who study at the Marine Biological Laboratory across the inlet that there is another and valid aspect of life", and of the titles of the books she placed in the Tower library, it would appear that perhaps she was most concerned with those scientists without belief in a supernatural God.

And it was after recognizing the obligation of Christians to see the place of science in the Divine Plan for the development of the earth: "A Christian faith that ignores or disregards the marvels of scientific technology in agriculture, medicine, and energy is unworthy of the name of religion, and even more unworthy of the mystery of the Incarnation", that Cardinal Medeiros of Boston stated in his remarks to the World Council of Churches conference on "Faith, Science and the Future" at M.I.T. in the summer of 1979:

"A technology that ignores or disregards the question of Christian ethics, especially the value it places on man, will quickly reduce the earth to a desert, the person to an automaton, brotherhood to planned collectivization, and introduce death where God wishes life."

I suspect that it was some such vision that Mrs. Lillie had, too, in establishing the Tower and Garden. And in terms of the Centennial and Jubilee, and looking forward to the future, it behooves us to see what relevance this Shrine has to the unbelieving and destructive sides of science (whereby in addition to the endangering of species, the destruction of topsoil, the pollution of the environment and the release of harmful radioactivity through peacetime pursuits, the M.I.T. conference report states that over 50% of scientists and technologists are currently engaged in working on instruments of war).

What is in question here is the fact that nature cannot "be freed from its slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God" until humankind is freed and shares in this freedom ... which in turn can only come through "the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding" and not through the kind of peace which is sought by making war, or by seeking some sort of natural cosmic harmony with the universe.
The basic fact of the universe is that whatever harmony of the spheres may exist, humankind, through the fall, is unable to attune itself to this harmony, even though this may have been the case in Eden before the fall. With humankind's darkness of the intellect, weakness of the will and disorderly affections, no amount of scientific discovery of the truths of the atom, the cell or interstellar space, or development of electronic computers, is going to be able to restore man to this harmony.

But, as Father Dalzell pointed out in his July 19th homily on the Wheat and the Weeds (Tares), "Christ is the champion of the imperfect."; and the Peace of Christ is something that is built on natural imperfection, not perfection and harmony, (which is why it is something which "surpasses understanding").

Thus, for both those who have believed they can establish peace by making war or by seeking out scientific harmony with the universe, but are increasingly fearful and bewildered as society and nature are increasingly precarious and threatened by the unlocking of ever greater powers of nature, with the consequent development of ever more lethal and numerous weapons, not to mention the release of ever increasing quantities of noxious materials into the earth, water and atmosphere... for those persons there is ever "another and valid aspect of life" awaiting only for them to turn to it.

And, again, as we know from the Gospel, and as we have been lovingly and dramatically reminded by Our Lady of Fatima, this is the Peace of Christ, that comes of loving mutual acceptance of one another's differences, forgiveness of trespasses, returning of good for evil, mercy, reparation, fidelity to one's duties in life, and prayer of the Rosary for intercession with God on behalf of peace, by Mary's Immaculate Heart. Once we act towards one another in this way, and pray to God through Mary, we know that God will give us peace. This, then, is the message of the (former) books of illuminative wisdom, and the Stations of the Cross of the Tower "Room of Peace",... and therefore of the entire Angulus Tower and Garden of Our Lady Shrine, which stands there ever ready to "teach us of life and of life eternal."

Returning to the Garden, we see that the ordering of the flowers peacefully and harmoniously around Our Lady's Sculpture is a challenge to biological scientists, agriculturalists and horticulturalists to achieve social peace and tranquility, so that plants universally can be so ordered. Human peace with justice makes possible harmonious dealing with plants because the rebuilding of organic soils, rotation of crops, fertile seeds etc. re-establishes a general condition of plant health which heightens their resistance to disease and deters their attack by insects... and this peace at the same time promotes the human cooperation which ensures a sufficiency of food for all while rebuilding soils, rotating crops etc., without desperate "soil mining" for cash crops. Thus Mary is the human hope for plant life as Queen of Peace... symbolized for us in the Garden by her Crown of Queenship. In this peace, the nurturing stewardship and tending, symbolized by Mary's Mantle, of God's plant creatures can be according to their biological needs, under Providence; instead of submitting them to the forced requirements of war and short-term financial returns on investments and loans. Thus, we build peace both for ourselves and for creatures. And, likewise for renewing the earth, water and air... in the certainty of faith, hope and love in the coming of the Peaceable Kingdom and renewal of the face of the earth, that God's goodness will be fully sworn forth and shared and his name fittingly hallowed.

These, then, Ms. McLaughlin, are the thoughts which came to mind as I reviewed all the Tower and Garden file materials, and particularly as I typed up the list of books. I hope they will be of some value to you as you develop your descriptions of the Tower and Garden history and significance for the St. Joseph's Centennial Book, from your long-term presence on the scene as a member of the town and parish communities (as contrasted to my brief hit-and-run visits and remote correspondence through the years).

Copies: Fr. Dalzell, Miss Pyne, Mrs. Roberson

Enclosures: 1) Book List, 2) Sculpture photos

Sincerely yours in Our Lady,

John S. Stokes Jr.