THE SPIRITUAL CHARISM OF NAZARETH by • Gisbert Gresh

"In Nazareth, God's Son sanctifies the ordinary, insofar as he recognizes it as a gift offered to him by the Father, whom he must follow in obedience." To anticipate right from the outset: we ought not speak of "the" spirituality of Nazareth, but rather of a variety of spiritual orientation that revolve around the keyword "Nazareth." Moreover, "Nazareth" does not simply represent the "hidden life" of Jesus, since, at least as Luke presents it, one finds elements of public life during this period ("the twelve-year-old in the temple," Lk 2:41ff), just as Jesus' "public life," conversely, contains elements of hiddenness (time spent in the desert, the withdrawal into solitude [Mk 1:35; Jn 5:15], works performed in secret [Jn 7:4], remaining hidden [Jn 7:10; 8:59; 11:54]).

Though there are clearly differing points of emphasis, it nevertheless remains true that if one were to isolate the single perspective of "hiddenness," one would diminish the full significance of "Nazareth" for spirituality. If we turn our attention to three particular spiritual currents, we see a broad spectrum of spiritualities opening up under the heading "Nazareth," which have an immediate bearing on our own age. It is these three currents that we intend to develop more fully in the following pages.
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The Spiritual Charism of Nazareth

1. "Nazareth" as radical presence: Charles de Foucauld

Taking his bearings from Jesus' life in Nazareth is the spiritual nourishment that sustains Charles de Foucauld from the time of his conversion onwards. But this ideal is not at all for him a single, fixed idea with a definitively established content; instead, the word "Nazareth" opens a process, which leads to ever new discoveries and transformations. By the end, these too have acquired features wholly new from what characterized them at their beginning. Let us explore them in some detail.
Reflecting on the first years after his conversion, Foucauld writes on 14 August 1901 to his friend Henry de Castries: Everyone knows that the first effect of love is imitation; from this it followed that I had to enter whatever order would enable me to imitate Jesus in the closest possible way. I did not feel moreover that I was called to imitate his public life in preaching; thus, I wanted to imitate the hidden life of the humble and poor manual laborer of Nazareth. It seemed t me that I would not

encounter this life anywhere better than with the Trappists. . .. I spent six and a half years there. At that point I longed for a deeper and greater humility, to be able to come even closer to Jesus; I . . . received permission from the general of the order to go alone to Nazareth, and to earn a living there by my own work as an unknown laborer. And there I remained, enjoying the poverty and humility for which God had given me such a burning thirst, in order that I might imitate him. As we see in this passage, at the beginning of the "Nazareth" process, what stands in the foreground is the imitation of Jesus in poverty, humility, and laborious work.

It is my calling to imitate the hidden life of Jesus, . . . to make myself the lowest of men through humility, to be a worm and no man, to experience the contempt of the people and the shame of men: the more I descended, the more I would be with Jesus . . .. To live in the greatest poverty; Jesus lived more poorly than the poorest of work- ers; for . . . he worked less than they did so that he could have more time to devote to prayer and Holy Scripture. When one considers the fact that Foucauld came from a noble family and up to this point had spent his life in riotous living, then Nazareth here appears as a total contrast to his previous life. This life is "hidden" insofar as it means total humility. "Be careful to hide everything that could raise you up in the eyes of others," he remarks. "Seek out the work that is most humiliating. . .. If you look like a fool to other people, so much the better."

In this initial phase of the Nazareth ideal, an additional essential element comes to the fore, namely, prayer that continues as uninterruptedly as possible, i.e., continual contemplation. For Brother Charles, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph lived in Nazareth in unity with God, "to lead in common, in a small, lonely house, a life of adoration, of continuous prayer, . . . of uninterrupted contemplation, a life of silence." For this reason, he resolves "to leave the house as seldom as possible, solely for things that are absolutely necessary, . . .to deal with the outer world as little as possible." Brother Charles describes the Nazareth way of life, thus understood, in the following way in his annual retreat in 1987: "To consider my life in Nazareth as a definitive way of life, as a 'resting place for all times.'" Nevertheless, at the very same time he explains his readiness "to throw myself impetuously and without looking back wherever and to whomever God's will calls me." Indeed, he apparently already senses that God has other plans for him

In leaving Nazareth, he does not surrender his former ideal; instead, he now "enacts" it. The important thing now is to go "to the most desperate and lost sheep," in order

"to benefit them through our presence, through our prayer and above all through the presence of the Holy Sacrament." For this reason, he settles down in the Sahara (Beni-Abbès) "to lead a life of solitude, isolation, and silence there in corporeal work and holy poverty, a life that, as far as possible, is in accord with the hidden life of the beloved Jesus in Nazareth."

The "Nazareth" ideal thus remains determinative, but is nevertheless actualized in a new way: on the one hand, through a monastic way of life (for which he longs for brothers to join him, a longing that was never satisfied during his lifetime), and, on the other hand, through a clear missionary orientation: He wanted to bring Jesus and his Gospel to others, and, indeed, to do so precisely in and through the "Nazareth" way of life, which means concretely: not through "words" but through a modest life of prayer on their behalf and in their place, through unconditional openness and radical presence among the people that lived around him.

But in this way the original "Nazareth" ideal acquires a new gestalt: to be sure, his life is still filled with long periods of prayer, in which, kneeling before the most holy sacrament, he plunges himself into Jesus' self-offering "for the many." But it is precisely this "for the many" that drives him himself to radical existence for others. "I see myself, in astonishment, pass over from a contemplative life to a life of caring for souls. And, indeed, not because this is what I want to do, but because the people need it." At this point, what "Nazareth" means to him is to be at once closed and open, withdrawn from others and at the same time ready to offer hospitality, to live with Jesus handed over to a life of contemplation and at the same time to break out toward others in mission. In Beni-Abbès he becomes the brother of all who come to him: the inhabitants of the oasis as well as the caravan travelers who honor him as Marabut, the soldiers and the officers of the garrison. "I desire that all the inhabitants—Christians, Muslims, Jews, and pagans—consider me their brother, the brother of all men."12 What provided a model for his own establishment were the so-called "Zaouias," the Islamic centers of hospitality, which offered travelers accommodation and shelter, whether they are pilgrims or beggars, no matter who it is who happens to stand at the door. Thus, the "newly discovered" characteristics of Nazareth come to include hospitality, a variety of relationships, and a missionary presence.

It would be difficult to find a passage that describes this new "enactment" of Nazareth better than the following: I am so overwhelmed with external occupations that I scarcely have a moment any more for reading, and very little for meditation.

The poor soldiers come to me constantly. Slaves fill the poor little house that was built for their sake, travelers come straightaway for "fraternity," the poor are here in droves. . .. Every day there are guests for dinner, a bed, and breakfast; the house has not yet been empty, up to eleven people sleep here in a single night, not counting an elderly invalid who is always here; I have between 60 and 100 visitors a day. . .. A meeting with 20 slaves, taking in 30 or 40 travelers, distributing medicine to 10 or 15 people, alms for more than 75 beggars. . .. I sometimes see up to 60 children in a single day. "Fraternity" . . . lasts from 5 to 9 in the morning and then a beehive from 4 to 8 in the evening. . . . To have a good idea of my life here, you would have to imagine poor, sick, and homeless people knocking on my door at least ten times an hour—usually more often rather than less. . ..

At the same time, he fought for the rights of the poor and the vulnerable and took their side as opposed to the French colonial power, as opposed to the officers who were his former companions. He fought passionately against the injustice of the colonial system, especial against the slavery that was tolerated by the French colonial power, and wrote various petitions on this score to the parliament in Paris. To cite a passage he often repeated, he did not want to be a "mute hound" (Is. 56:10).

To sum up: To live Nazareth now means to be wholly there for the people of the area by means of a modest monastic existence. But this is not yet the last expression of Nazareth. To the apostolic prefect of the Sahara who was his authority, Msgr. Guérin, he writes: "You ask whether I am ready and willing to leave Beni-Abbès for the sake of spreading the Gospel: yes, I am ready for this, I am ready to go to the ends of the earth and to live until the Judgment Day." Various trips, on which he walks thousands of kilometers by foot, following behind his camel, roaming through the Sahara, lead him farther into the south. On these trips, he also encounters the Tuareg, who had not yet been reached in any way by the Gospel, and who were therefore for him the poorest of the poor. In relation to them, he is struck by the insight: "I can do nothing better for the sanctity of souls than to bring the seed of the divine Word to as many as possible—not through preaching but through my actions. "At the invitation of an earlier comrade in arms, Laperrine, he founded a hermitage in Tamanrasset, which was then a tiny oasis remnant in the middle of the Sahara. More than a few nomads led him to surrounding oases and watering grounds, where he—as he observes at every turn in his journal— "benefits others" (especially through medicine and gifts of alms).

With the Tuareg, the Nazareth ideal to which Foucauld steadfastly adheres even in Tamanrasset, acquires once again a new gestalt (even though Brother Charles not infrequently has a "bad conscience" about this move and at first looks on it as merely an "exception"). At first, as in Beni-Abbès, he forgoes "preparing the nest" for the brothers to come; monastic ideas (a cloister, etc.) fall evermore by the wayside. Thus, the relationship between contemplation and missionary action receives a new determination. To be sure, the contemplative foundation remains, just like the longing for solitude and prayer. He continues to spend many hours before the most holy sacrament, to penetrate ever more deeply into Jesus' disposition, to "sanctify" himself for the people of his surrounding area, to give himself to them, indeed, to carry them before God by representing them to him. But now, it takes the following form: "To pray at night, and to work during the day . . . and thus to do as much spiritual and material good to my neighbor as my meager means allow, . . . just as Jesus did in Nazareth."

Indeed, it is possible, as he himself experiences, to live "Nazareth" in the countless trips that he takes in the Sahara. It is a matter of "walking through the world unknown, as Jesus did in Nazareth, like a person wandering in the night, . . . poor, diligent, modest, gentle, and beneficent, as he was."18 In a certain sense, he translates "the rules of becoming present," i.e., the way he lived Nazareth in Beni-Abbès, "for the situation of the caravan."19 In a word: Nazareth is something a person can "live anywhere." A person ought to live it in whatever way and in whatever place "it is most useful for one's neighbor." And this happens now in a radical "presence" among the Tuareg and for them. He sees ever more clearly that it would not be possible to bring Jesus and his Gospel in a direct way to the Muslim Tuareg, and that it requires instead a preparation period, in which he acquires the trust of the people and their friendship.

Direct evangelization is not possible at this moment; the only possible way to live is the life of Nazareth, in poverty and its humiliations, in worship, in manual or intellectual work. . .. And all of this with the goal of gaining people's trust, to earn their love and in a gentle and friendly manner, through brief conversations, to correct their false ideas about natural morality.

Thus, he is entirely present, as much for the Tuareg as for the members of the military, and for the scientists and technicians of the expanding colonial empire. Of the more than 6,000 letters that have been preserved, nearly 500 were addressed to members of the French military, in which he "mixes himself up" in the colony's

political affairs. He proposes plans for an administrative reform in the Sahara region, and protests against arbitrary confiscations and obstructed or unjust administration of rights. With respect to the Tuareg, he becomes more and more what today could be called an aid worker. He is the advisor of the Amenokal, the most important tribal chief of the Tuareg, in political and economic affairs. He attempts through argument and appeal to raise up the deficient morality of the Tuareg (and, of the French soldiers). He takes an interest in the new technologies that serve to develop the Sahara (railways, roads, the telegraph, meteorological stations) and defends them; he gives advice regarding the economy and the care and control of medicine; he teaches the Tuareg women knitting and crocheting. Above all, he teaches them the language and gathers the Tuareg literary tradition (which by itself amounts to more than 5,000 poetic verses!), and he works to the point of exhaustion on a never yet surpassed four- volume French-Tamashek dictionary, comprising more than 2000 pages, which was first published after his death.

Towards the end of his life, all of these tasks step into the foreground in such a way that in his self-description as a "missionary monk," we ought to underline the word "missionary" —indeed, even in the word "missionary," the "service" element holds pride of place. "My apostolate must be an apostolate of good deeds," he writes repeatedly. In a word: "Nazareth remains; it can be lived everywhere; CdF has discovered it anew in Tamanrasset." "Nazareth" is thus for Foucauld an extremely flexible spiritual keyword. The concept that ties together the various expressions of Nazareth is "présence," presence, a word that Foucauld uses frequently: Humble and lowly presence before God and humble and poor presence among men, just as Jesus himself lived it in Nazareth.

2. "Nazareth" as the guiding image for a poor Church: the "Church of the Poor" group from Vatican II

A revival of the Nazareth spirituality occurred around 1960 in Paul Gauthier, as well as in those he initiated, and the groups approved and supported by Georges Hakim, the Malachite archbishop of Nazareth, called the "Companions of Jesus the Carpenter" ("Compagnons de Jésus Charpentier"), which played a considerable role at the Second Vatican Council. This revival of Nazareth had an accent different from Foucauld's. Fr. Gauthier, originally a professor at the seminary in Dijon, was like many other French Christians sorely grieved that the Church had lost the working class and thus allowed the greater part of the French population (and indeed of Europe's population) to become secularized. The worker priest movement in the middle of the

last century, which would later be banned by Pius XII, was already a reaction to this disturbing state of affairs. In this context, Gauthier heard the reproachful call of Jesus: "I am the poor Jesus, with whom and for whom you do not live," and his response lay in the resolution "to live and to work among the poor and those who work." He resolved to do so "in community with Jesus, the carpenter, to proclaim the Gospel to the poor and to the working world." He felt his resolution was confirmed by the various pronouncements by the popes, who had "repeated for a century: 'Go to the worker. . .. Go to the poor worker' (Divini Redemptoris, Pius XI). 'In your following of the divine master, come to the aid of the poor and the working man . . .' (Menti Nostrae, Pius XII)."

Invited by Msgr. Hakim and accompanied spiritually by the well-known theologian Jean Mouroux, he went to Nazareth with the consent of his own bishop, to live his calling as a worker among workers. Although in doing so he not infrequently made explicit appeal to Charles de Foucauld, his spiritual vision of Nazareth is nevertheless something different, and Gauthier himself was aware of this: "In Nazareth, he [Foucauld] thought that he ought to do only so much work as was necessary for him to live, in order that he might be free for prayer." In comparison to Foucauld, the contemplative element does not stand so much in the foreground for Gauthier (although it is not absent); instead, the emphasis lies on the solidarity with the poor and with those who work, as a precondition (!) for missionary service. For one can bring the Gospel only as a "poor man to the poor," and only thus can the Church take root. For Gauthier, the keyword "Nazareth" represents precisely this:

Before Jesus spoke the word, "Come to me all who are weary and overburdened. . .," he first wanted to live and work in Nazareth with the lowly people, for unpleasant employers. . .. Before Christ called those to himself whom their burden had pressed to the earth, he wanted to share the humiliating, hard, and laborious fate of human existence. To live as a poor man among the poor, to slave away with the workers, to share their lot, which high society refuses all of this is what Jesus did. In this sense, "Nazareth" still represents a spiritual challenge to us today. For it is "precisely our contemporary world that urgently needs apostles, priests, religious, and laypeople, who preach renunciation of the goods of this world and the sovereign freedom of poverty through their life and words in humility and simplicity." This spiritual vision of "Nazareth" had its influence on the Second Vatican Council.32 Msgr. Hakim took Fr. Gauthier with him as
a peritus, and in the very first days the archbishop cooperated with Bishop Charles-Marie Himmer from Tournai in the preparation of an essay by Gauthier, which was

entitled "Jesus, the Church, and the poor." Based on this "prospectus," over 50 bishops and nearly peritii gathered in the Belgian College, to meet regularly thereafter (sometimes weekly!) under the name of the "Church of the poor." This group was presided over by Cardinals Lercaro (Bologna) and Gerlier (Lyon) as well as by the Malachite Patriarch Maximos IV. The bishops Hakim and Himmer remained driving forces of this group, and Gauthier was its secretary. The group was able to connect with a statement from Pope John XXIII, who described the Church at the opening of the council in a "Message to the world" as "the Church of all people, and the Church of the poor." Cardinal Lercaro took up this expression in a speech he made to the council in December 1962, in which he said, "This ought not to be simply one theme among many at the Council, but must become the central question. The theme of the Council is the Church, insofar as she is above all the 'Church of the poor.'"

Entirely in line with Gauthier's initiative, the "Church of the poor" group translated into action the analysis of our situation as a "schism," i.e., a schism between the incarnation of Jesus Christ in his visible Church and the other mysterious incarnation of the poor Jesus in the poor . . .. If sanctity and poverty are synonymous expressions in the Old Testament, if Jesus, the Holy One, appeared as poor among men, then the holy Church on earth can only be the poor Church, and conversely only the poor Church can be the holy Church. The danger—the schism and the Heresy consists here, as it always does, in the fact that that which is a unity becomes separated: the mystical body, in which the poor have a privileged place through Christ's will, is on earth no other Church but the Catholic and apostolic Church. . ..

And thus the "Church of the poor" group did not concern itself merely with Jesus' presence among the poor, with the evangelization of the poor and the workers and with the development of poor nations, but also and above all with the return to the "poor face" of the Church and to the Church's practice of poverty. And precisely these themes were represented in the "Nazareth" perspective, especially for Msgr. Hakim and Fr. Gauthier. To be sure, despite all these efforts, this theme remained at the margins of the council. Still, one reads in Lumen Gentium: "Just as this account, the rich will always have priests to help relieve them of their burdens,' as Fr. Chevrier tastefully put it" (ibid., 204).

Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and obedience, so too is the Church called to follow the same path." But Gustavo Gutiérrez was right to observe that, nevertheless, it "was not the theme of Vatican II. Perhaps it was still too

early." It was only Latin American liberation theology that took up some of these ideas once again, while Gauthier, because of disappointment with the path the Church followed the council and because of conflicts with ecclesial officials, sought a new path of his own. Nevertheless, "Nazareth" remained a "thorn in the side" of the Church from Vatican II on. To what extent is she truly the "Church of the poor," and the poor, defenseless and lowly Church during society's power struggles?

3. "Nazareth" as the significance of the ordinary: a challenge for our age

For the third expression of Nazareth, we must first look once again at what Scripture offers: Nazareth is a wholly insignificant speck at the corner of the world, which receives no mention anywhere else. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46). Moreover, this insignificant little town lay in the province of Galilee, which was completely underdeveloped in relation to the surrounding Hellenistic republics of the Decapolis in the East and the Mediterranean capitals
in the West. In this altogether inconsequential place and in this absolutely marginal region, Jesus grew up—in obedience to his parents (Lk 2:51), but not only in relation to them, but through and with them in relation to the mores and customs, the duties and common practices of his environment. Completely embedded in this tiny world, in which everyone knew everyone else (cf. Jn 6:42; Mt 13:55f), there is nothing said about Jesus for the space of thirty years other than that he immersed himself in this life indistinguishably from the others, as a presence among the small and lowly. Apparently, apart from the twelve-year-old's pilgrimage to Jerusalem (about which we will have more to say), there is nothing serious to report, contrary to all the attempts of later apocryphal Christian texts to wrest something "remarkable" from this time spent in Nazareth. Today, we would call such a way of life ordinary. An ordinary life is:
—a life that adapts itself to common practices and customs;
—a life in the daily, monthly, and yearly "round," i.e., in the inescapable routine without any special events or new perspectives;
—a life that, in its obviousness, often passes into a boring, meaningless, and empty monotony.

It is precisely this that forms the innermost mystery of Nazareth: God's Son lived a human ordinary life for thirty years. To put it with emphasis, God's incarnate Son had "nothing better to do" for thirty years than to lead a life of the most banal ordinariness. Can we not say in the light of the hymn in the Letter to the Philippians that this is an intensification of the radical kenosis undergone by the "One who was

like God" (Phil 2:6ff)? There seems to be yet something absolutely "special" about the Most High emptying himself to the point of the humiliation of the cross, as the hymn expresses it. Just as in the popular fairytale, the king's son becomes a beggar to love a poor maiden on the same level. In recounting this venture, the fairytale seeks to provoke surprise and wonderment. But God's "becoming ordinary" in Nazareth eliminates even the radiance of the spectacular from the event of the kenosis: God becomes man, and this occurs at first in the empty ebb and flow of thirty long years, during which (considered on the surface) "nothing" happens. But what happens, as the scriptures tell us, is a growing, that is, an increase not only in age and strength of life, but also in wisdom and a ripening in God's grace and love (cf. Lk 2:39; 2:51).

The "ordinariness" of Nazareth, however it might look in its details, is thus not a dark prison, not an absurd emptiness, not a meaningless, mechanical, marching-in-step. Instead, whenever this gift that God offers is accepted and embraced; it becomes a time of absolute significance, a genuine growing in love. The apparent closed off inescapability of the ordinary, in which nothing happens, thus has a "window," which opens into another, higher reality. These "windows" become explicit especially in those moments that belong essentially to the complex reality of the ordinary, namely, in moments of feasting and celebration. It is for this reason that the pericope of the twelve-year-old Jesus' pilgrimage to Jerusalem is just as indispensably a part of the reality of the ordinariness of Nazareth as the (indirectly mentioned) regular celebration of the Sabbath ("In Nazareth, . . . he went, as was the custom (!), to the synagogue on the Sabbath," Lk 4:16).

It is precisely the feast that interrupts the ebb and flow of time; it "breaks the ordinary open and brings it into the light of an unconditional meaning, which is visibly proclaimed through the feast day's symbols." Thus, both things belong to human life: the ordinary in its ordinariness and the celebration, through which the ordinary receives its meaning. Seen from the perspective of the celebration, the ordinary is transformed into a time that points to eternity, into a space in which one fulfills the Father's will as Jesus did, and into an opportunity, in which we "prepare the material of the heavenly kingdom" (GS 38: materiam regni caelestis parantes). This message of the ordinary as sacred time, sacred space, and sacred matter for perfection ought to be—at least in Western countries—the most urgent form of a "Nazareth spirituality." For, already in the past few generations, the ordinary has increasingly become an experience of meaninglessness. Martin Heidegger already captured this

situation about seventy years ago in the notion of "the mode of being of average-everydayness," as a falling away of Dasein "from himself to itself." This means that, for him, the ordinary is a deficient mode of human being, insofar as it is a situation of inescapable and enslaving givenness, which produces narrowness, routine, emptiness, boredom, indeed, a feeling of absurdity, disgust, and surfeit; these in turn generate a longing for escape and revolt. Stuck in the mill of compelling forces that cannot be questioned (the "obligation" of daily work, the "they" of customs and fashions, the "anonymity" and "mechanicity" of relationships and authorities), which depersonalize human existence, turning it into putty to be molded, man, caught up in the ordinary, must become the subject of his own history, he must take his own life in his hands. As Heidegger thus called man to "be wholly himself" in the resolute "being-towards-death" and against the "in-authenticity" of Dasein, the meaninglessness of the ordinary, toward which the past generation was heading, only deepened.

Today, ordinariness is something we experience for the most part simply as negative (basically as an opportunity to make money and practice self-improvement). But at the same time, we cannot escape the sense that the meaning of life lies somehow precisely outside the ordinary, i.e., in extra-ordinary experiences, in the experience of the most extreme possible series of "events." It is not for nothing that Gerhard Schulze's standard work analyzing contemporary society bears the suggestive title, "The experience-society." Consequently, the criterion of a full and meaningful life is a fullness of subjective experiences—in all things, and in every area. Thomas Pröpper recently pointed to the following witty and extremely revealing example: previously, advertisements for soap pointed to its "effective cleaning power," then, to its "fragrant scent," and now the advertisement says that this or that bar of soap "caresses your skin." In other words: Even something so banal as the process of cleaning is today presented in the horizon of a subjective experience. But something similar happens with everything else: whether it concerns a car wash, meditation lessons, a disco, or Beethoven's Ninth. Everything is translated into a particular experience, which can be had or enacted, and which fascinates and allows a person to "feel" something. In short, even the most ordinary and banal must be turned into a special event. One could also say that we are trying to make everyday life a constant celebration.

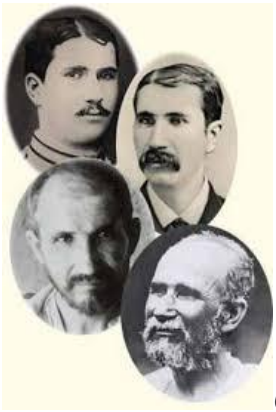
This attitude, which is so widespread today, has already provoked objections from (non-Catholic) philosophers. Thus, Odo Marquard writes that we must "defend the ordinary against celebration." "Because even celebration . . . would thus cease to be

a celebration, if it were to take the place of the ordinary and thus eliminate the ordinary. . .. The feast day instead of the everyday: this
is problematic and will inevitably turn out ill." Why? Because wherever one strives after celebration as a total "moratorium on the ordinary," there arises the inclination to "break away" from concrete life altogether, and this can bear horrific masks. In connection with Manès Sperber, Marquard suggests that even war, as the total upheaval of everyday relationships, can be seen as one of these horrifying consequences:

Though people fear war, they also have a certain desire for it, at least unconsciously, to escape their everyday lives their stressful and burdensome everyday lives. Any warning against war remains too ineffectual insofar as it fails to recognize and warn against this source of the war-wish: War is not only something that horrifies people, it is also in a horrifying way something people want: as an escape from the everyday, as a moratorium on the everyday. Other forms of such a "totalitarian moratorium" are the radical aestheticization of the world which seeks to make of it a "total work of art," and which thereby "deprives the present reality, such as it is, of any value"; the escape into an "alternative way of life," which "as a completely different and novel way of life negates the present one, it intends to take the place of the reality before us and eliminate both its ordinariness and its celebrations through a great exodus from them; [and thus] it too tends to acquire, in spite of itself, materialistic traits." Concerning all these and other forms, which negate the ordinary and seek to make life a constant celebration, we can only say with Marquard: "Nothing sustainable in a human way can come out of all this, for we can trust that whoever wants to make earth into heaven—and this is indeed the intention of the absolute celebration—will end up making it hell." From the perspective of the disastrous consequences that follow from the attempt to flee the ordinary as a "meaningless picture of things," the significance of the spirituality of Nazareth stands out in stark contrast: in Nazareth, God's Son sanctifies the ordinary, insofar as he recognizes it as a gift offered to him by the Father, whom he must follow in obedience. By accepting this ordinariness, he assumes the finitude that compels human beings to recognize that earth is not yet heaven, that time is not yet eternity, and that their own freedom is not yet capable of fashioning that which is given according to their own desires and inclinations, but that—as feast days reveal (the Sabbath, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem)—our hope is ordered to something meaningful. Faith invites us to discover the traces of the infinite in the ordinariness that often appears as an unbearable burden.

Two things follow from this. First, it is necessary "to overcome the evident closedness of the seemingly endless world of the ordinary and to understand everything that is given as an unconditional gift, i.e., as creation," so that even the simplest things and everyday relationships "can become an occasion for trust in the giver of all gifts." Secondly, however, it is important to recognize God's call and his task in the givenness of the ordinary. Precisely because the everyday world is the world we share in common, in which I am bound to and am intertwined with others in a way that is in a certain sense predetermined, we must take responsibility for one another, practice solidarity, walk with one another along the path toward the improvement of our everyday
relationships, and keep our eyes open for the "great hope" that is promised us. It is ultimately not the feast as the "moratorium on the ordinary" that opens the perspective of community. For the fact that one can never celebrate a feast alone points to the fact that we must also affirm the ordinary in common.

Thus, Nazareth spirituality presents a vast spiritual spectrum:
—to be wholly present (for God and for others) wherever one
is placed;
—to live in a modest way (both personally and as Church);
—to discover in one's own ordinary circumstances the pregnant moments of eternal significance hidden within, the presence of God and his Christ. Wherever this occurs, one can say about these ordinary circumstances: "We have seen his glory [even here], the glory of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). — Translated by D. C. Schindler.



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