The priests marched across the square with their hands carefully folded, their eyes straight ahead. Their long black robes camouflaged the preciseness of their movements, making it appear that they glided smoothly across the square. They advanced in rows, meticulously arranged in the form of a pyramid. Across from them, as rising high into a sky which reflected its pale gold coloring, appeared the steeple of the church called St. Mary Le Port. It dwarfed the priests below as a child dwarfs his tin soldiers. The priests remained unmoved in the face of the warm greens and blues and the fiery oranges that clustered about them, creating a rainbow of color that bounced from building to building and ended at the door of the steepled church. The priests turned and marched through the arched doorway. Their light, muffled tread seemed to say, “This is the greatest church that ever was or ever will be. Men search all their lives for what it holds, for happiness, for perfection. This is the greatest church that ever was or ever will be,” murmured the slippered feet. “This is the greatest church; this is the greatest church.” The buildings around them, where they slept and ate, echoed with the words. The gold-plated bell above the entrance rang them out gleefully. The rainbow that ended at the door shimmered and glowed at the words carved above the narrow, pointed entrance. “Men search all their lives for what it holds.”

As each priest entered St. Mary Le Port, his heart pounded, and his blood rushed to his head. Covering the entire left wall of the church was a painting of Christ with His twelve disciples. They were seated around an immense block of granite inside four invisible walls supported by golden beams which suggested the steeple of St. Mary Le Port. Beyond these beams were mountains tinted a silver-blue by the setting sun and gently caressed by a silver-blue lake, which, though fathomless, appeared at first glance shallow. Two rowboats lay becalmed on the lake. The setting sun directed its pale light upon the figure of Christ. In front of Him stood a glass of wine and two pieces of torn bread. The disciples knelt in prayer, their heads pillowed on their hands. Jesus of Nazareth, one hand directed toward Himself, raised the other hand upward to where the arms of God stretched over them all. As Christ pointed His thumb and index finger at God, he seemed also to point with pride at the steeple of St. Mary Le Port, the greatest church that ever was or ever will be.

The priests padded silently out of the church, their annual visit over. They paused briefly to read again the inscription over the doorway. “This is the greatest church that ever was or ever will be. Men search all their lives for what it holds, for happiness, for perfection. This is the greatest church.” Their awed eyes avidly fol-
followed the outlines of rubble and debris heaped beside the door. The exterior walls were scarred by fire, severed by violence, marred by deep cracks. The steeple which Christ raised His hand to when He reached toward God, the steeple where the rainbow ended, sprawled on the hollowed ground. “This is the greatest church that ever was or ever will be. Men search all their lives for what it holds.” The priests left the door ajar. St. Mary Le Port was only an empty shell.

For the Sake of Self

Deborah Staiger

E ver since man first formulated morals by which he felt he was intended to live, he has held selflessness to be a primary characteristic and goal of the worthwhile existence. We are condoned in seeking our own interests toward the end of self-preservation, but all our other efforts are supposed to be directed at helping our fellow man. Fine as this doctrine may sound, I regard it as inherently hypocritical. I find it increasingly disturbing to try to discern anything but self-satisfaction in mankind’s seemingly altruistic actions; for men, even in their relations with others, have one basic drive—gratification of their own needs. Admittedly, the person who is centered upon others will find more of a welcome by society than a person who revolves about himself. As Benjamin Franklin said, “He that falls in love with himself will have no rivals.” But I am concerned with the cause of generous deeds, not their effect. Herein lies one of life’s greatest paradoxes: generous deeds are rooted in selfishness.

Some overt acts of kindness obviously have as their motives personal ego-raising; other benevolent efforts stem from more subtle desires to be accepted by humanity. In viewing the former we may look to the multimillionaire who donates thousands of dollars to an orphanage. This gesture is not only good public relations for him (assisting a helpless child is an infallible way to the public heart) but also a reassurance to his conscience. Such a philanthropist might reason, “Since I have patronized my fellow man so magnanimously, I must be quite a noble person.” In contrast we could scrutinize the intentions of an unselfish missionary in Africa who sacrifices and toils so that the natives may lead fuller lives. When the veils of “Christian duty” and kindness to one’s brother are brushed aside, a basic personality need shines dully beneath. The missionary’s soul thrives on love gleaned from his work; it sustains his mind as food does his body. Such a personality need, which is satisfied by observance of the Golden Rule in humble and benevolent service, is, of course, more desirable than a need which requires the crushing of another’s ego to elevate one’s own. Yet we all act because of inner drives to preserve not only our bodies but also our morales. Spinoza