

Little red book: A blessed rage for order

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [September 4, 2007](#) issue

The press has been making much of 29 binders and 2,400 pages of jottings found among the relics of baseball great Joe DiMaggio. According to Clyde Haberman in the *New York Times* (July 17), no one who reads those jottings will be “stumbling upon Proustian insights.” For one thing, DiMaggio was “notoriously—how to put it kindly?—frugal,” and recorded every taxi fare and tip.

DiMaggio’s teammate Whitey Ford stared at the pile of binders when he saw them. “I didn’t know this stuff existed. . . . He was a very, very private man. I don’t know if Joe would be too tickled about this.”

A typical day: “Monday, December 12, 1983. Up at 7 a.m. Had breakfast in coffee shop at 8 a.m.” He wrote these entries on hotel stationery, bread wrappers or whatever was at hand.

Reading about DiMaggio’s musings sent me back to some little red diary-appointment books that were badges of Lutheran clerical office a half-century ago. They were unearthed not for purposes of auction, but because I packed and unpacked them during a recent move.

My financial notations were as numerous as DiMaggio’s. I also wrote down quotations that I found important enough to use throughout the year. There were some practical items, such as:

1956, April 6: “Evening with Harold Fey.” Fey (pronounced “Fie”) signed me on to a half-century of life with the Century.

1956: “Accept me Lord into Thy School / And graduate me as Thy fool.” I don’t know who wrote that, but I am doing postdoc work now on that project.

While I was writing a dissertation on “infidelity”—free thought in American religion—I entered this from (presumably Edmund) Burke: “Nothing is so fatal to religion as

indifference, which is, at least, half infidelity.” That’s still a useful line in the face of “the new atheism,” which is not the threat to religion that indifference poses.

Exactly 50 years ago I was a judge at two church architecture conferences and scribbled: “He leadeth me, O blessed thought, To air-conditioned chapels fraught / with cushioned pews, where I may see / The minister on closed TV.”

A prayer by my dissertation adviser and friend Sidney E. Mead became my mantra for 35 years of teaching: “God give me the courage to flunk my best friend tomorrow if necessary—and courage sincerely to weep with him afterward—and the ability to communicate to him why it was necessary so that he may become a constructive participant in the action.”

In 1958 my DiMaggio-like note showed that in this year when I was helping charter a new church, I earned \$375 a month, but the Century raised my salary from \$97.75 to \$146.62 a month.

I reached back to 1954, the year I entered graduate school. Two years into marriage I entered lines from a George Eliot poem, which were applicable to my life and relationship at the time: “She had a pensive beauty, yet not sad; / Rather, like minor cadences that glad / the hearts of little birds amid spring boughs.”

Other entries show another side, a blessed rage for order. In 1953, while my mentor Jerry Brauer was having me read the Puritans, I inscribed this from Puritan preacher Richard Sibbes: “If you would see disorder, go to hell. Surely disordered places and companies are rather hells than anything else, nay, in some respects worse; for there is a kind of order even among the devils themselves.”

Scrupulous and ordered Joe DiMaggio would have approved.