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THE CORD
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1. MSS should be submitted on disk or typed on 8 1/2 x 11 paper, one side only, double spaced.
2. The University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 13 ed., is to be consulted on general questions of style.
3. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized or, in typed manuscripts, underlined.
Titles of articles should be enclosed in quotation marks and not underlined or italicized.
4. References to Scripture sources or to basic Franciscan sources should not be footnoted, but entered within parenthesis immediately after the cited text, with period following the closed parenthesis. For example:
(1Cor. 13:6).
(RegNB 23:2).
(2Cel 5:8).
(4LAG 2:13).

A list of standard abbreviations used in *The Cord* can be found inside the back cover. The edition of the Franciscan sources used should be noted in the first reference in a mss.

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The Cord, 46.1 (1996)

Editorial



January is traditionally a month when we consider hope. There is something about beginning a new year that allows us to expect new possibilities for ourselves, for others, for our world. Surely it is a sign of the presence of the Spirit among us that we continue to believe we can get better, our world can get better, there is always a new chance for all of us. The "getting better" often has to do with relationships. In our families, in our communities, in our societies, we are deeply and painfully aware of how much misery is caused by our inability to get along with each other, to exercise, sometimes, even the most basic kindness, to enjoy the blessing of peace.

In this issue of *The Cord*, we share with you an article by Zachary Hayes, OFM, reflecting on Franciscan Christocentrism and what it means for us today. Contemplating the Incarnation is an experience of learning how to be truly human. Christ is God's way of being human with us. Moreover, the entire universe participates in this transformative event. It has profound implications for our way of being together.

Christine Pecoraro, OSF, reflects on the Franciscan mission to the world by meditating "aloud" on Jesus in action. Hers is a practical Christology which develops the implications of Christological understandings for contemporary mission.

Philippe Yates, OFM, traces the Franciscan hermitage tradition, drawing out implications for the contemplative undergirdings of our way of life today.

A brief account of Hermann Schaluck's visit with the Patriarch of the Eastern Church reminds us of the broadness of our Franciscan vision of the Church and world. With the celebration of Church Unity this month, we grieve over the divisions that the Church itself experiences and rejoice over any signs of healing and reconciliation.

If it is in Christ that we are all reconciled and made one, then surely this is the time to seek ever greater understanding of what it means that God came to live in our very world as one of us. Our Franciscan tradition has much to teach us about this extraordinary reality.

With this month's issue we are happy to announce a new editorial board. The following persons have generously agreed to serve as advisors and evaluators for our publication: Marie Beha, OSC, Julian Davies, OFM, Patricia Hutchison, OSF, Frances Ann Thom, OSF, Dominic Scotto, TOR,

and Ed and Mary Zablocki, SFO. We are grateful for their support in making *The Cord* a vehicle for "effecting among us a deeper knowledge and more ardent love of the Franciscan way of life" (mission statement).

And finally, a word of apology. The beautiful design depicting Clare with the infant Jesus on page 2 of the November/December, 1995, *Cord*, is the creation of Clairvaux McFarland, OSF, Franciscan Sister of Rochester, MN. We regret not giving her the proper acknowledgement.



The Cord, 46.1 (1996)

Christ, Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity

*The roots of Franciscan Christocentrism and
its implications for today*

Zachary Hayes, OFM

[This presentation was given to the joint meeting of the Franciscan Federation and the Friars' Conference, Anaheim, CA, August, 1995.]

I. Introduction and elements of St. Francis's spirituality.

There are many ways in which we might approach the spirituality of St. Francis. We could begin, for example, with the issue of poverty and move from there. Or we might attempt to reconstruct the chronological sequence of crucial experiences in his life. In this case, we might begin with the dream at Spoleto and move on through subsequent experiences of his conversion process.

I would like to suggest another approach. There are a number of crucial insights to be discovered in the spirituality of Francis. Regardless of how or when they appeared, it is possible in retrospect to see a significant relation between them. The discovery of such a relationship is, I believe, what happened in the early writers of the Franciscan movement, both in the case of the *Legenda* and in the case of the theological tradition associated more explicitly with the universities of the Middle Ages.

There are at least three such insights that may be discerned in the spirituality of Francis, and these three were developed into distinctive theological perspectives by the authors of the Order. The first of these insights is the tendency of Francis to focus his spirituality on the figure of Christ. The second is his sense of God as a loving Father. The third is his sense of creation as a mirror and image of God.

Regardless of the chronological sequence of events in the life of Francis, one can perceive a certain logic connecting the scene before the cross at San Damiano and the scene with his father before the Bishop of Assisi. There is also a certain sort of logic that connects the scene before the crucifix, the incident of the crib at Greccio, the intense eucharistic sensitivity, and the

scene on Alverna. Similarly, there is a sort of logic that connects all of these with the *Salutation of the Virtues* and the *Canticle of Brother Sun*.

I would like to focus on the sort of logic that connects these elements. I believe it is this issue that connects the tradition of Franciscan spirituality with the tradition of Franciscan theology, and specifically, with the tradition of Franciscan Christology. Put simply, while Francis was not a professional academic theologian, his spirituality was such that it led with an inner logic to a style of Christology that became distinctive of the Franciscan tradition. This Christology, in turn, is cast against the background of a distinctive style of trinitarian theology. And all of this finds expression in a rich theological understanding of creation.

The first point I would like to single out is the way in which the spirituality of Francis focuses on the humanity of Christ. From the scene before the crucified Christ at the little church of San Damiano to the power of crucified love on Alverna it is, I believe, concern with the humanity of Christ that leads Francis on his way. And between San Damiano and Alverna, other factors point in the same direction. I think here of the crib of Greccio celebrating the birth of Jesus in his human reality together with Francis's devotion to the mystery of the Eucharist. The focus of Francis's experience was on the humanity of Christ; and the burden of his spirituality is well captured in the idea of the *imitatio Christi*. So much was this the case that Francis has come to be known as the pre-eminent Christ-figure of the Middle Ages.

In his own writings we note in the first *Admonition* a strong centering on the mystery of Christ as he reflects on the text of John 14: 6-9. Our Lord Jesus says to his disciples:

I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would also have known my Father; and from now on you will know him and have seen him. Philip says to him: Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us. Jesus says to him: Have I been with you for so long a time and you have not known me? Philip, whoever sees me, sees also my Father (Adm 1:1-4).¹

Francis goes on in the same *Admonition* to speak of how the eternal Word humbled himself in the incarnation and again in the mystery of the Eucharist.

Even more so, we sense the focusing on Christ in the terse statement of the fifth *Admonition*: Try to recognize the dignity God has conferred on you. He created and formed your body in the image of His beloved Son, and your soul in His own likeness.

However we might explain this in terms of historical influences and personal experiences, Francis's vision of Christ departs from the Byzantine style which was still perceptible in the religious art of his time—even in the San Damiano crucifix—to a style that is more recognizably directed

to the human in Christ. The Christ that stands out here is not the Pantokrator. It is, rather, the poor, suffering Christ. It is the Christ who, in his human condition, can be recognized as neighbor and brother. But if Christ is seen as brother, then it follows that God, who is Father of the eternal Son in a pre-eminent sense, may be seen in an analogous sense as Francis's Father as well.

Thus this perception of Christ relates with Francis's understanding of God as a loving, generous Father. This may be seen with particular emphasis in the scene with his earthly father before the bishop of Assisi. "From now on I will say: 'Our Father who art in heaven,' and not Father Peter Bernardone" (L3S 6:20).² This seems to express the strength of a new-found sense of filial relation to God, who can now be called Father in a much more radical sense than previously. If Francis is son in relation to the heavenly Father, then the question of his relation to the one who is Son in a pre-eminent sense emerges from this scene. And the question of that relation may be dealt with in terms of the spirituality of the *imitatio Christi*.

But if it is true that Francis is related to a loving, heavenly Father, the same is true of all the other people and things that he meets in life. All come from the same loving God. All should be seen, then, in terms of a familial relationship. This sense of family, the seeds of which are seen early in the conversion process of Francis, would become more intense during his life. In the *Salutation of the Virtues*, Francis describes the obedient person as one who is subject and submissive to all persons in the world, and not only to human beings, but even to all beasts and wild animals so that they may do whatever they want with that person inasmuch as it has been given them from above by the Lord (SalVirt 14-18).³

In the *Mirror of Perfection* we read of the sorry straits to which Francis had come toward the end of his life. His health was at a low point and he was unable even to bear the light of day. He was living in a miserable cell that was infested with mice. Out of the midst of this misery, he is described as saying:

So, to God's praise, for our own comfort, and to edify our neighbors, I want to compose a new *Praise of the Lord in His Creatures*; for we daily make use of them and cannot live without them, and through them the human race greatly offends their Creator. For we are always ungrateful for God's many graces and blessings, and do not praise the Lord, the Creator and Giver of all good gifts, as we should (SP 100).⁴

This text is particularly interesting since it acknowledges that human beings make daily use of other creatures in order to live. We depend on them. Yet we are ungrateful and fail to recognize the Creator from whom they come as gifts and blessings.

This is important to those who like to appeal to Francis for a sort of naive form of nature-versus-culture solution to the environmental issues.

Not only do we admire water, we also drink it and use it to clean ourselves. Having acknowledged our need for and dependence on other creatures, Francis then gives the most sublime expression of the familial relations that ought to exist between humanity and all other creatures since all come from a common loving God. It is what we know as the *Canticle of the Creatures*, or the *Canticle of Brother Sun*.

We have singled out three elements of Francis's spirituality which will play an important role in the theological tradition of the followers of the Poverello. There is a distinct focusing on the humanity of the Lord; there is a strong sense of God as a mystery of generous, creative love; and there is a distinctive, familial understanding of the world of creation. We notice a similar sort of emphasis in the spirituality of Clare, though it is expressed in a unique way. And we find this spirituality reflected on by the great theologians of the Franciscan movement in a history that goes back to the very beginnings of Franciscanism.

II. Development of this vision in the Doctors of the Order, especially in Bonaventure and Scotus.

I will preface these reflections on the theology of the Franciscan authors by pointing out that there is a common tendency among Western Christians, perhaps from the Middle Ages, to limit the meaning of the Christ-mystery to the figure on the cross who offered the sacrifice of infinite merit for the salvation of all others. I do not wish to denigrate the meaning of the cross. Nor do I wish to say that the cross is not of importance in the Franciscan tradition. This would be simply false. As we have just seen, in the experience of Francis, the crucified Christ played a foundational role throughout his life, and especially at the end. This would be developed particularly by Bonaventure. But it is nonetheless true to say that the Franciscan tradition, at least in its classical authors from Alexander of Hales to Scotus, including Bonaventure, did not limit the discussion of the meaning of Christ to the reality of the cross. While the cross was always important, it was never the entire story. The tendency of the theologians was to move from the story of Jesus and the cross/resurrection to the widest possible horizon. They developed a style of reflection that today is commonly called cosmic Christology.

This does not mean letting go of the story of Jesus. On the contrary, it means looking out at the entire world as one sees it at a particular time and trying to perceive the possible relations between the story of Jesus and the larger picture of the world. We might summarize the conviction of the early Franciscan theologians by saying simply that a world without Christ is an incomplete world. Or, in another formulation, the whole of the created cosmos is structured Christologically. If Christ is what Christians claim him to be, he cannot be an after-thought on the part of God. As Bonaventure will say, Christ cannot be willed by God *occasionaliter*, that is, simply because of

sin.

How, then, does the mystery of Christ relate to the rest of reality? What sort of world must we inhabit if the values involved in the life and example of Christ are to be seen not as destructive but as a life-giving, fulfilling way of relating to reality? How can Christ's way be for us a true spirituality? It is to this that we shall now turn our attention.

A. Scriptures and traditional roots for the cosmic Christology.

This is not the place to retrace the history of cosmic Christology. But some indication of how this theme relates to the Scriptures and to the pre-medieval tradition would be in place.

A careful reading of contemporary Scriptural studies will indicate that the historical journey of Christianity began with the early disciples' experience of the human history and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. In this very limited piece of history, enacted in an out-of-the-way corner of the earth by a man who left no known writings or great works of art to enrich subsequent history, the early Christians came to discern something of immense significance. The sense of meaning which was derived from the person and ministry of Jesus was far more than the meaning of one human being's life. It is, if John and Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews can be taken as dependable guides, a meaning that is embedded from the beginning in the very web of created existence as creation emerges from the mind and will of God.

"In the beginning was the Word," writes John, and "through him all things came into being, and apart from him nothing came to be" (Jn 1:1-3). And this same Word through whom all things are made "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14). Without going into long discussions about the sources that might have been used by the author of this Gospel, it is safe to say that for him the term "word" is not simply a linguistic or grammatical term. It is far more than this. It is a way of naming a mystery which contains a divine clue as to the structure and meaning of the universe.

Texts such as this one would be important in the theology of Alexander of Hales and would play a major role in the theology of Bonaventure. Such a text provides a ready scriptural basis for arguing that there is an intrinsic connection between the mystery of creation and the mystery of the incarnation. We discover in a deeper sense, in what we see and hear and touch in Jesus, the divine clue as to the structure and meaning not only of humanity but of the entire universe.

Think of the opening of the first epistle of John:

This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched—we speak of the word of life. This life became visible; we have seen and bear wit-

ness to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life that was present to the Father and became visible to us. What we have seen and heard we proclaim in turn to you so that you may share life with us" (1 John 1:1-3).

It is within this grand vision of creation, of light and darkness, and of divine life shared by human beings that the epistle speaks of being cleansed of all sin through the blood of Jesus. Note, the story of the cross is not lost. But it is placed in a broader, richer context of meaning.

The great text of Paul's letter to the Colossians opens up similar vistas. Speaking of Christ, Paul writes:

He is the firstborn of all creatures. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, principalities or powers; all were created through him and for him. He is before all else that is. In him everything continues in being. It is he who is head of the body, the church; he who is the beginning, the first-born of the dead, so that primacy may be his in everything. It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him and, by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person, both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross (Col. 1:15-20).

One could add other scriptural citations such as Ephesians (1:3-14), 1 Corinthians (8:6), and Hebrews (1:2ff). But the point is clear from what we have already seen. Beginning in the Scriptures there is a significant movement in the faith-reflection of the early Christians. Their faith began, of course, from the experience of the earthly Jesus with all his human dimensions. Viewing his life from a post-resurrection perspective, they began to see it ever more as the paradigm of authentic human living. His cause and his values became ever more important in understanding their own human experience. But eventually, that individual human life, which was seen to be of universal significance for humanity, would be projected against the widest possible horizon. What happens in him and through him comes to be seen as the representative piece of humanity and of cosmic reality that has come home to God.

From here we can conclude that the cosmos is not just a random fact, but that it exists for something. We might refer to that, in the language of Whitehead, as the divine aim. And placing Whitehead's language in the context of Scotistic theology, we might say that in the incarnation of the Word and in his destiny, the divine aim for creation has been realized.

While this sort of orientation was developed in the Eastern Fathers of the early centuries of Christian history, it was eventually lost in the West in favor of a style that is more focused on moral rather than cosmic dimensions. The cosmic dimensions would remain in the treatment of eschatology and the final destiny of the material universe, but would play little if any role in the presentation of Christology.

In this regard, the Franciscan tradition stands out in the West. Following a path similar to that which can be discerned in the Scriptures, this tradition moves from a clear focus on the human history of Jesus and all that involves to a position which says: What Jesus is about is more than helping us get rid of sin. In the final analysis, the issue of overcoming sin is a matter of overcoming all obstacles that stand in the way of the accomplishment of God's creative aim. And that aim is the fullest possible sharing of life and love between God and creation. This is what God intends. This is what has happened in Christ. And we are called to share in this mystery in our own way and to our own degree. While redemption is the overcoming of sin, salvation is the completion of what God initiates in creating. Both of these are what we discover in the mystery of Christ.

B. Principle themes.

1. *Christ as point of departure.* We have already suggested the way in which Francis's spiritual journey can be said to take its point of departure from the figure of Christ. One can think of the experience before the cross at San Damiano. We can recall also the first *Admonition*, to which we have already referred. As Regis Armstrong has pointed out, the centrality of Christ is obvious in this *Admonition*. But, we must add, the figure of Christ does not replace the mystery of God. The role of Christ that emerges in this *Admonition* is that of one who brings the revelation of God the Father.⁵

The role of Christ as revealer of God is developed extensively by Bonaventure throughout his career. Precisely in our meeting with one who is believed to be Son, we discover the meaning of God in a distinctively Christian sense. Bonaventure deals with the revelatory function of Christ particularly in his early *Commentary on the Gospel of John* and even more so in his final work, the *Collations on the Six Days of Creation*. In the latter case, in his expansive reflections on the meaning of the whole of the created universe and its history, Bonaventure asks explicitly about an appropriate starting point for such reflections. There, on the very first page, he argues that one must move from the center, which is Christ; for if this center is overlooked, no result will be obtained.⁶ He then goes on to show in what sense Christ is at the very center of all reality.

Simply put, the mystery of Christ is the mystery of the Word incarnate. But, using a spatial metaphor, Bonaventure argues that the Word is the divine person that dwells at the very center of the Godhead. The same Word, the center of God, is the principle through which God reaches out to create the world. Thus, the Word, at all times and places, is the invisible principle of unity and meaning. But that same Word becomes the visible center of the cosmos and its history in the form of the incarnate Word. Thus it is the shape of Jesus' history and ministry that embodies the divine clue as to the structure of all reality.

If this is the case then for Bonaventure, by shaping our lives through

the values of Jesus (= the spirituality of the *imitatio Christi*), we are bringing ourselves into harmony with the fundamental law of reality; that is, the principle in which everything other than the Father is grounded; the law of the other which is the mystery of the Word or Son that lies at the heart and center of the Trinity. Thus, in the thought of Bonaventure, we move from the history of Jesus to the metaphysical basis for this history, which in turn becomes the theology of the Trinity. And this leads to our second theme.

2. *God as triune love is Creator.* If the movement of Francis was from Jesus to the sense of a loving Father, a similar movement may be discerned in the theology of Bonaventure. If we follow his line of thought, our starting point must be at the center. But as we attempt to ground that center we are led back into the depths of trinitarian theology.

Most Western understanding of the mystery of the Trinity has been shaped by the impact of the so-called psychological model of Augustine. The Franciscan school, however, beginning with Alexander of Hales and moving through Bonaventure and Scotus, was heavily influenced by the work of Richard of St. Victor. Instead of giving pride of place to the analysis of the unfolding of human self-consciousness and cognitional experience as the Augustinian tradition had done for centuries, the tendency of the Franciscan tradition, as reflected in these major figures, was to focus on the nature of love in order to give some deeper insight into the Johannine statement: "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). Reflection on the mystery of the Trinity, therefore, would become a matter of seeking deeper insight into the mystery of divine love. We might see this work of the theologians as an unfolding of the primal insight of Francis into the mystery of God as a loving Creator.

In the case of Bonaventure, who took his inspiration from his mentor, Alexander of Hales, the development of trinitarian thought is the elaboration of a truly theological metaphysics which becomes a structural factor not only in his Christology but throughout the whole of his theology. The creative and sustaining principle of all created reality, that in which all things are grounded, is not a mystery of arbitrariness, nor a mystery of domination and control. Rather, in the word of Bonaventure, it is a mystery of orderly love. This insight strongly suggests the need to rethink our ideologies of power in the light of the Christ-mystery and its trinitarian background.

What, truly, is life-giving power? Is it the ability to control or the ability to call forth the good and perhaps the best in the other? If it is, as trinitarian theology suggests, the second rather than the first, then we must ask: How do we as creatures best mirror the divine mystery in shaping our relations with people and things in the world? Here we discover the deeper theological grounding for what Francis perceived, perhaps intuitively. The familial relation which he perceived in the universe is grounded here in the mystery of the creative love of God.

In the case of Scotus, the analysis of divine love will lead to a charac-

teristic understanding of creation. It leads, eventually, to the metaphysical notion of *haecceitas*, which might be seen as the metaphysical expression of Francis's respect for individual creatures. And, finally, the Scotistic understanding of the orderly love of God leads to his brilliant understanding of the place of Christ in creation expressed in the doctrine of the absolute primacy of Christ.

3. *World as gift of a loving Creator.* We have seen that Francis's vision reached from the loving Creator to the richness and beauty of the gift which pours forth in the work of creation. Whatever may be said about the matter of poverty and the issue of spiritual asceticism in the history of Francis, it is clear that neither of these led Francis to a hatred of the world of God's creation. He and his followers may have problems with the world of "human creation." But if his followers take their inspiration from Francis, his example offers a significant way of relating to the world of God's creation that is important for today particularly.

In the case of Bonaventure, the matter of poverty that plays such an important role in the Franciscan tradition, is grounded finally in the doctrine of creation. Thus, in his *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, Bonaventure indicates how the meaning of poverty lies basically in recognizing that all things in the created universe, myself included, come as pure gift from the loving, creative power of God.

This being the case, our first response to ourself and to the world of persons and things which is our home should be one of awe simply at the fact of our existence—awe and gratitude, not a search for possession and control. Poverty, then, for Bonaventure, who has learned well the lesson of his master, Francis, is not exclusively a matter for friars. It is first of all a question of the most appropriate way for any human being to receive and take up his or her existence as a gift of God in a universe which as a whole is a gift of God. Our first questions, then, ought not to be about rights, possession, and control. They ought to be about how one most appropriately receives and lives with the immense richness, goodness, and beauty of the gifts with which God blesses the whole of creation.

For both Bonaventure and Scotus, the richness of the divine mystery of love analyzed in the doctrine of the Trinity provides a basis for explaining the richness and diversity of the created world. God is the mystery of a self-diffusive love that is beyond measure. If the world is, in some way, an external expression of that mystery, and if no single created word can give adequate expression to the richness of that mystery, it is not surprising that there should be a rich variety of created words through which the eternal mystery of Love finds expression in creation. But even with that variety, the whole of the universe is not an adequate expression of the divine richness.

Bonaventure thinks of God in terms of divine simplicity and boundless fertility. Creation might be viewed in analogous terms. At one level, the elements of the created order are few and simple. But they come to-

gether to produce a staggering richness of both non-living and living forms—thus, the simplicity and richness of created reality and its awesome beauty that is at once tender and frightening. Can the created order be for Bonaventure anything other than a rich symbol that mediates to us a sense of the simplicity and richness of the mystery of the divine that is both *tremendum et fascinatum*?

We find ourselves in a world, then, that is marked by the reality of the divine truth, goodness, and beauty and that is a powerful symbolic expression of the primal mystery of tender, creative, divine love. It is a world that at its deepest level is marked by the radical potential to receive the deepest sort of self-communication of the mystery of divine love into itself. Through its response to that divine self-communication, it becomes a created lover of the Uncreated Lover. According to Bonaventure, the deepest truth about the created world is that it has within itself the potential to become, through God's grace, something of what has already come to be in the mystery of Christ.⁷ Paraphrasing Bonaventure's formulation, what has happened between God and the world in Christ points to the future of the cosmos. It is a future that involves the radical transformation of created reality through the unitive power of God's creative love.

4. *Humans as sisters and brothers in a cosmic family.* What we have just said provides the context for reflecting on Francis's sense of the familial relations that should obtain between all creatures since they come from a common Creator. This is carried over into the theological understanding of the essentially relational nature of human beings and of the values with which these relations ought to be shaped.

Certainly the values reflected in the theology of the vows help to define our relation not only to God but to each other and to the world in which we live. This is particularly clear not only in Francis's own statement on the nature of obedience to which we referred above. It may be seen also in Bonaventure's treatment of the meaning of poverty, which, in its deepest roots, is the recognition of what we are precisely as creatures and of what is the most appropriate way to respond to the gift(s) God has given us.

In terms of what Bonaventure himself accomplishes (bracketing all the other Franciscan theologians for the moment), we could say he has grounded the spirituality of Francis in a metaphysical vision and in a fully cosmic vision of reality. Moving from the spirituality of Francis and its centering on Christ, Bonaventure provides the larger road-map of reality. He assures us that in giving ourselves to Christ and to his cause and his values, we are defining our own reality in a way that will be ultimately life-giving and fulfilling since it opens us in a most radical sense to the mystery of the divine.

Giving ourselves to the cause of Christ is not losing the world. It is ultimately finding the world in its truest reality in its deepest relation to God, the ultimate origin and end of all that is. In Christ we discover the

mystery of our origin in God and the mystery of our final end, sharing in the Son's relation to the Father through the power of the Spirit. And we discover the bond that unites the mystery of origin and end. This is nothing other than the ethics of agapistic love lying at the heart of the mystery of Jesus' historical life. This is the core of our spiritual journey in and with the world into the mystery of God.

I shall end these reflections with a quotation from a sermon of Bonaventure written for the second Sunday of Lent. The Gospel is the account of the transfiguration of Jesus. At the heart of this sermon is the conviction that the transfiguration is the anticipation of the Lord's resurrection. The resurrection, in turn, points to the radical transformation of the entire universe in Christ. Bonaventure writes as follows:

All things are said to be transformed in the transfiguration of Christ, in as far as something of each creature was transfigured in Christ. For as a human being, Christ has something in common with all creatures. With the stone he shares existence; with plants he shares life; with animals he shares sensation; and with the angels he shares intelligence. Therefore, all things are said to be transformed in Christ since—in his human nature—he embraces something of every creature in himself when he is transfigured.⁸

This is a fascinating statement. The metaphor of radical transformation dominates the entire statement. In the final outcome of Christ's history, his created bodily nature is not left behind. In homiletic form, the Seraphic Doctor here simply affirms that, in some way, Christ embodies the whole of creation in his individual human nature and all is transformed in the living presence of God. In his more scholastic works, such as the *Sentence Commentary*, he will struggle to explain how we are to understand that the material universe is not to be annihilated but to be fundamentally transformed into a richer mode of being.

Francis's love for creation is here brought to a stunning expression in the theological attempt to affirm and explain the conviction that, finally, the world will not be destroyed. It will be brought to the conclusion which God intends for it from the beginning. And that beginning is anticipated in the mystery of the incarnate Word and the glorified Christ. Is this not what one would expect if one took seriously the Scotistic doctrine of the absolute primacy of Christ? God creates so that Christ may come into existence. So that Christ may exist, there must be a human race. But a human race needs a place in which to live. So it is that, for both Bonaventure and Scotus, though for each in a distinctive way, a cosmos without Christ is a cosmos without its head. It is like an arch without its keystone. It simply does not hold together. But with Christ, all the lines of energy are coordinated and unified; all comes together in unity and coherence; and all is finally brought to its destiny with God.

At this point, you might want to ask: What happens to the cross of Christ? We have already suggested that the authors of the Order did not overlook the tragic outcome of the history of Jesus. They did not, however, see it as the motive for the incarnation. In terms of Scholastic theology, the Franciscan authors were convinced that, if one can speak of a motive for the incarnation at all, it must lie in the pure and uncoerced love of God and not in anything outside of God. In some instances, for example in Matthew of Aquasparta, the explicit question is raised: Would there have been an incarnation had Adam not sinned? And his answer is a resounding: Yes. Our authors, then, are inclined to distinguish the different ways in which the incarnation could take place.

Presumably, in the absence of sin the incarnation would have been in the mode of glory. But given the reality of sin, the incarnation, which is first of all the completion of creation, takes on a second function which conditions its mode. Not only is it the completion of creation. It is also the overcoming of the obstacles on the way to that completion. It is, therefore, an incarnation in humility, pain, and suffering culminating on the cross of Calvary. In Bonaventure's view, Christ's redemptive work relates to the overcoming of sin, but it does so in a way that brings God's creative action in the world to completion. It is salvific in the most positive sense of the term. God completes what God initiates in creation and crowns it with eternal significance.

Thus, in the theological reflection of the Franciscan Doctors, we have moved from the role of Christ in the spirituality of Francis to the cosmic vision of the Doctors and finally to the doctrine of the absolute primacy of Christ in its Scotistic form. Now I would like to draw some implications from this style of Christology.

III. Implications

A. We might suggest that the first implication of this style of Christology is the way in which it answers the question: What are we as human beings? Rooted in the earth yet created in the likeness of the one who is the divine Likeness, we are destined to embody something of the divine Word in our own individual lives. Is this not the burden of the spirituality of the *imitatio*? The spirituality of *imitatio Christi*, above all, is a question of appropriating the values of Christ in the depths of our own life and allowing these values to shape our self-understanding as well as our relations to all others. Francis once wrote to Brother Leo: "If it is necessary for you to come to me for counsel, I say this to you: In whatever way it seems best to you to please the Lord God and to follow his footprints and his poverty, do this with the blessing of God and my obedience."⁹ If we understand this as a general principle, we may take it to mean that each of us reflects the mystery of the Word in a personal way, in terms of our individual tastes, talents, and skills. All of these personal gifts are to be filled with the spirit of

the values of Christ. Especially in his later writings, such as the *Apologia pauperum*, Bonaventure pointed out the diversity of forms the *imitatio* might take. From the perspective of Christ, the mystery of the incarnate Word is so rich it cannot be limited simply to one form of expression. No single person can express the diversity of dimensions involved in the mystery of Christ. Hence, the varieties of gifts with which the divine Spirit endows individual people become appropriate forms of expression of the wealth of the Christ-mystery. One person may express a particular aspect of Christ; another person another aspect. Thus, we are not to become carbon copies of the historical Jesus nor of Francis nor of anyone else. We are to fill the Christ-form with the elements of our personal life and thus embody something of the Word in ourselves in a distinctive and personal way. This, of course, calls for great skills in the area of discernment and enlightened spiritual guidance.

B. Not only does this style of Christology suggest an answer to the question of human identity, it also suggests an answer to the question about the nature of our world which is the necessary context for human life. If we think of the humanity of Christ as the body of the eternal Word, can we extend that analogically to the cosmos and see the cosmos as the body of the eternal Word. This is one of the insights of Teilhard de Chardin. But independent of his suggestion, the ancient metaphor of the Word suggests that if the Word is the internal self-expression of God, then the cosmos is what comes into being when the divine Word is expressed in something that is external to God. The cosmos, as Bonaventure writes, is the primal book of divine self-revelation. And the meaning of the cosmos is concentrated in humanity and radicalized in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, the doctrine of the primacy of Christ points the believer to an understanding of the inherent meaning of the cosmos.

There has probably been no period in history when this doctrine of the cosmic Christ was as important as it is right now. This may be seen from two perspectives. First, in terms of contemporary perceptions of the nature of the cosmos, one might speak of a sense of cosmic terror. Who are we puny human beings when viewed in terms of the immensity of space and time and the awesome powers of the physical cosmos? Is such a cosmos truly a congenial home for us? Such questions emerge from the insights of the modern sciences. They are not, however, answered by the sciences. It seems that some way of bringing the wisdom of a tradition such as that of the Franciscans into conversation with the questions arising from the sciences might be a significant contribution to make to human self-understanding.

A second perspective is that of the environmental situation in which we now find ourselves. The environmental problems characteristic of the contemporary world point to serious problems in our fundamental way of relating humanity to the world of nature. For whatever reason, we in the Western world tend to do this in purely instrumental terms. We tend to

think of things in terms of what we may use them for, or in terms of their possible monetary value. The results of this may be seen in the many ways we despoil the earth. As I indicated earlier, Francis's vision of creation recognizes that we need at some point to use the things in the world around us. But this is not the whole story. The pragmatic attitude so common in our culture needs to be moderated by a recognition of other dimensions such as the aesthetic and the contemplative. Certainly our sense of human responsibility for the destiny of the human race and the world needs to be heightened, and this precisely as a religious issue and as a specifically Christian issue.

C. The biblical doctrine of the Kingdom of God, when viewed through the optic of the primacy of Christ, is a message about the eternal significance of creation and of human efforts to create a better world. In this we discover a genuine religious motivation for us to identify with all human efforts to overcome the obstacles to the coming of the kingdom. In the light of this doctrine, Christians inspired by the example of Francis of Assisi should be able to say with abiding truth that they love the world. And their love for the world need not replace their love for God.

Human destiny is intrinsically tied into the destiny of the world of God's creation. This challenges us to reflect not only on the final destiny (i.e., salvation) of spiritual souls, but on the final destiny of the whole of material reality. In this sense, the tradition of cosmic Christology widens our understanding of the meaning of salvation and places it in a cosmic context.

D. This Christological style offers a way to avoid the dilemma of being forced to choose between a creational theology and a redemption theology as the issue is formulated by some people today. I am thinking of how Bonaventure integrated the theology of redemption within the larger framework of a creational theology in what might be called the theory of redemptive completion.¹⁰ Completion refers to the process of bringing creation to its God-intended end which is anticipated already in the destiny of Christ. Redemption refers to the necessary process of dealing with all the obstacles that stand in the way. Such a model could be easily related to the sense of an emerging cosmos as it appears to us today in the light of the sciences. This would allow us to create a larger framework for spirituality and theology which would have some resonance with the cultural images that have such a pervasive impact on the minds of our people.

E. Such a Christological vision, with its universalist implications, could well become a significant framework for entering into conversation with other religious traditions. This is particularly significant today in the context of our contemporary consciousness of religious and cultural pluralism. One can enter the conversation with a strong sense of Christian identity and yet without a sense of an absolute possession of Absolute Truth, and hence with a sense that each of the traditions may reveal something distinctive and important. Each may have something to learn from the oth-

ers. Pluralism and conversation do not have to mean total relativism.

Seen in the light of recent understandings of a new evangelization and deeper insights into mission theology, a genuine openness to the truth of the other may turn out to be crucial, if Christian missionaries are to avoid the imperialism that characterized much of our past missionary efforts. Such openness and readiness for conversation calls for partners who know their own tradition well enough to enter into conversation without feeling threatened by what at first may seem utterly foreign to a Western Christian understanding.

To conclude, what I am suggesting is not that we simply attempt to reconstruct the details of a medieval theological system. This, I think, would not be terribly significant. But I am suggesting that insights lying at the base of medieval, Franciscan spirituality and theology need to be retrieved and brought into conversation with the questions and needs of contemporary people. This would be a way of bringing the wisdom of a great spiritual, theological tradition to bear on the problems of a greatly troubled world. This tradition, like the Gospel itself, is not the private possession of any particular group. Those like ourselves who are the immediate heirs of the tradition inspired by the spirituality of Francis might better see ourselves as responsible stewards of a treasure that has much to offer for the healing of humanity and of the world at large.

End Notes:

¹Francis and Clare, Regis Armstrong, OFM, Cap. and Ignatius Brady, OFM (Paulist Press, 1982) 25-26.

²Omnibus of Sources, ed. Marion A. Habig (Franciscan Herald Press, 1972) 909.

³Francis and Clare 151-152.

⁴Omnibus 1236.

⁵Regis Armstrong, OFM, Cap., *St. Francis: Writings for a Gospel Life* (Crossroad, 1994) 139.

⁶Collations on the Six Days, tr. J. De Vinck (St. Anthony Guild Press, 1969) col.1, n.1.

⁷Sermon II on the Nativity of the Lord, in: Z. Hayes, *What Manner of Man? Sermons on Christ by St. Bonaventure* (Franciscan Herald Press, 1974) 74.

⁸Sermo I, Dom. II in Quad. (IX, 215-219).

⁹Francis and Clare 47-48.

¹⁰Z. Hayes, *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure* (Paulist Press, 1981) 152ff.

Those . . . who are the immediate heirs of the tradition inspired by the spirituality of Francis might better see ourselves as responsible stewards of a treasure that has much to offer for the healing of humanity and of the world at large (Hayes).

Waking Up to a New Day

Christina Pecoraro, OSF¹

This is what has been from the beginning
and what we have heard
and what we have seen with our own eyes
and what we have looked at and touched with our own hands—
I mean the Word who is Life (1 John 1)²

WHAT HAS BEEN FROM THE BEGINNING

This is what had been at the beginning of our administration, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and in some instances, what we have touched with our own hands.

Five years ago, communism held sway in Poland. Nelson Mandela was in prison in South Africa. The Berlin Wall still stood. The Five Hundredth Anniversary of the Americas had not yet been mourned or celebrated. The Soviet Union still existed. The tragedy of Tiananmen Square had just taken place in China. The Earth Summit was still to be held in Rio. The European Union was not yet a reality. Yugoslavia was one nation. Earthquakes had not swallowed up Palau Babi, the small, populated island off the coast of Flores, nor had they devastated vast areas of Flores itself.

The tiny African country, Rwanda, where several members of our general council have set foot on the way to Tanzania; where our Dutch missionaries and some members of the Dutch council have passed countless times; where sisters of our international community in Tanzania—Indonesian, North American and Brazilian—have freely moved; Rwanda, which today mirrors our collective human soul, was holding together the thread of a fragile peace.

Peace. Five years ago our general chapter theme, influenced by important leaps in consciousness among many peoples, linked peace to justice and creation. In the face of the world's shimmering beauty and yet violent

behaviors, chapter members focused on two dynamics: *innocentia* and *misericordia*. Earth moved more to the center of our consciousness.

At the endpoint of these five years we come together marked by the dramatic shifts in history that occurred with unexpected swiftness since we began. We also come energized by reverberations of the recent Synod of Africa. Our African colleagues tell us it will cut new paths not only into their suffering continent, but into theology itself. The synod on consecrated life has stirred up questions and input from all over the world—including ourselves.

As we begin general chapter, our Franciscan celebrations of yesterday and today offer us hope and fire. Tomorrow the centenary of our sister Clare reaches its culmination. Through sources that were not available to other generations of Franciscans, Clare has walked boldly out of her history and into ours. During the past year she has sat with us, talked with us, prayed with us, awakened us to vibrant aspects of our Franciscan charism, and sometimes stunned us with her timely insight. All of this and much more we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands.

What then will be the purpose of *this* reflection about our spirit and life? Its goal will be threefold: (1) to recognize movements of consciousness which mark the whole of our congregation; (2) to identify some concrete challenges growing out of these; (3) to see dynamic parallels between the Word of God and the movement of our congregation into the future.

When we open the New Testament, we see that only once do the gospels present us with two dramas that *always* appear under one heading. The reason? because the second "interrupts" the first. This interruption, a drama itself, changes how the first story continues and ends. These are the stories of the Dying Daughter and the Bleeding Woman from the gospel of Mark 5:25-43. Without the second, the first would not be whole.

When Jesus returns [from the opposite shore], all have been waiting for him. A man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, throws himself at Jesus' feet and begs him to come to his house because his only daughter, about twelve years old is dying. As Jesus is on his way, the crowd presses him from every side.

And so we join Jesus *in mission*. As he hurries to the dying twelve-year-old, the crowd pushing from every side, something suddenly stops him. A woman who has been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years touches him.

WHAT WE HAVE SEEN WITH OUR OWN EYES

Who is this woman? Today she could be someone from any one of our countries, bleeding from displacement, trauma, hunger, disease, brutality inflicted on those she loves, ethnic hatred, war, exploitation, domestic abuse,

or one of countless forms of violence. We have seen her in the haunting faces of the women of Rwanda. We have seen her in the features of their husbands, brothers, and children. For she is each and all of these.

She is also someone else. What Francis saw long ago, what contemporary mystics and scientists recognize, what indigenous peoples have known for thousands of years and continue to tell us today, what our recent general chapters have been moving us to see with greater clarity, is that the bleeding woman is ultimately our sister and mother, Earth.

Today Earth bleeds as never before. She bleeds in her children of the human species. She bleeds in her children, our "relatives"³—the land and soil, rocks and mountains, deserts and rain forests, "the clouds of the sky, the bushes and flowers, the waters and wind, the singing birds, the great blue whale under the sea."⁴

Earth's identity and the identity of her children hold a key to a quest that has repeatedly occupied us as a congregation during the recent years—the search to understand our identity and our mission. Almost each time we have a general chapter, some aspect of this search recurs. At this chapter too it re-visits us in several proposals. Why this restlessness to know what we have already attempted to answer many times? Why this seeming preoccupation with identity and mission?

I believe it has to do with the Spirit calling our congregation to further consciousness. On this feast of Francis we recall that Francis heard an inner voice say, "Go, rebuild my house." His mission was clear. He got some stones and mortar and began re-building. Only gradually as the Spirit pulled him further, did he become more and more awake to the deeper meanings of his original call.

For us Franciscan daughters of Mother Magdalen, concerned with our original call, who Earth is has much to say about who we are. How Earth relates to all of her children and we to her, has much to say about our charism, our mission, and our future.

In his book, *Dream of the Earth*, Thomas Berry stuns us by making clear what happens when we destroy any of Earth's life-forms. "The first consequence is that we destroy modes of divine presence."⁵ What new meaning this gives to the call not to harm, which we name non-violence and our last general chapter called *innocentia*. What new consciousness about our capacity to be with the suffering in an attitude of *misericordia*, literally feeling their misery in our heart. I believe the one waking us up to these deeper meanings with the clearest voice is Earth herself.

Earth, full of grace, is the bleeding woman of the gospel. As we return to her in Scripture, we see that she is mingling with the crowd. When she can edge close enough, she comes up behind Jesus and touches the fringe of his cloak.

Now it is we who are stopped. Both the action of the woman and the clothing of Jesus have important secrets to tell. To begin with, both Jesus and the woman are true lovers of their culture. To one acquainted with the

Torah, the "fringe of the cloak" immediately discloses that Jesus is wearing the garment or prayer shawl prescribed in the Book of Numbers (15:38):

Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, "Speak to the People of Israel and tell them to put a fringe on the hems of their garments, and a violet [tassel] on this fringe. . . ."

Similar practices were already known among ancient peoples, for whom such fringes were magical.⁶ What then could have been Yahweh's purpose for such a directive? Were not the so-called magical practices of "alien" religions meant to be banished or replaced? In this case, obviously not. Something else occurred—inculturation: the interaction between faith and an existing culture or cultural practice, the result of which is that both faith and culture are enriched.

Here another question of consciousness confronts us—expanded understanding of the potential of inculturation. As we interact with the multiple cultures in each of our countries, we face the choice to encourage new forms of inculturation or to abort them.

WHAT WE WILL TOUCH WITH OUR OWN HANDS

I believe that within our congregation the challenge of inculturating both the gospel and our charism will continue to grow. The challenge will grow as the migrations of peoples bring more and more refugees to all of our shores. It will grow as the Spirit continues to call even small numbers of sisters to Lybia, Irian Jaya, East Timor, Mexico, Guatemala, the eastern parts of Germany, Russia, and so forth. It will grow as indigenous peoples long crushed in our cultures reclaim their identity and revive their sacred traditions. It will grow each time the Spirit sends sisters or associates from different cultures to live the spirit of Mother Magdalen. Surely inculturation will challenge us as we grapple with our call to continue in Tanzania.

Already we have begun to experience this beautiful truth: inculturation is more than the wedding of faith and culture, or charism and culture; it is a bringing forth of new life for *both*. Inculturation is incarnational. It is a way the Word becomes human and pitches a tent in the midst of a culture. It is a way Yahweh says to a culture, as in Ezekiel, "This is the place for the soles of my feet" (Ez. 43:7).

When Yahweh directed Moses to tell the people of Israel to put fringes and tassels on the hems of their garments, new life was born to an already existing cultural practice. For Yahweh added:

The sight of [these fringes with their tassels] will remind you of all of the commands of Yahweh. You are then to put them into practice . . . so you will remember . . . and you will be consecrated to your God (Num 15:38).

It is significant that the tassels were to be placed on the four corners of the garment: south and north, east and west. I believe that Jesus, on his way to the dying twelve-year-old with the Hebrew prayer shawl around him, was one who loved the soul of his culture.

It has been said that "loss of soul" has been "the great malady of the twentieth century."⁷ If this is so, then it gives fresh urgency to the words of Clare: "Always be lovers of . . . your souls" (BCI 12)—to which I would add "and the souls of your cultures."

In not one of the countries of our congregation today is ethnic hostility absent. In most it is growing. I am persuaded that ethnic conflicts exist, even among good people, not because some love their own cultures too much, but because they love the souls of their cultures too little. When we love the souls of our cultures, then the need to defend them on the one hand, or to hold them superior on the other, will fall away. It seems to me that only those who learn to love deeply the souls of their own cultures—whatever the history of their cultures may have been—will be free to allow others this same love for theirs. The next natural step will be to reverence the cultures of one another.

WHAT WE HAVE HEARD

In the scriptures, there are many evidences that Jesus is a true son of his culture. He is also a discriminating son. We know this because he takes to task those not true to its soul. We remember that he denounces the pharisees for their hypocritical wearing of the same type of tassels we have been speaking about (Matt. 23:5). The bleeding woman too is discriminating. Mark gives us the reason she touches Jesus' garment: "because she has heard about him."

The woman trusts what she has heard. She trusts that for Jesus the prayer shawl is indeed a putting on of the faith of their common culture and a mark of his fidelity to Yahweh. The woman is also courageous. In order to reach out and to activate what is life-giving in their common culture, she must defy what is imprisoning. For she is a bleeding woman. In the culture she shares with Jesus, a bleeding woman is unclean. She is forbidden to appear in public. So long as the flow of blood continues, she renders unclean whatever she contacts—persons, objects, clothing itself (Lv. 15:25-27).

Yet the woman mingles with the crowd. By doing so, she dares to defy what is imprisoning in her culture. This too is our call—to love the souls of our cultures so deeply that we can defy those aspects which diminish them.

Now we reach the story's climax, the exchange:

The woman comes up behind Jesus and touches the fringe of his cloak. Her bleeding stops at once. The feeling that she is cured of her affliction runs through her whole body.

How does Mark know this? Only the woman herself could have told it. Our bodies are trustworthy instruments of consciousness. Often they "know" before we do. It is the same for Jesus.

Jesus asks, "Who touched me?" Everyone denies it. Then Peter says, "Master, the crowd is pushing all around you." But Jesus says, "Someone touched me for I felt power go out from me."

Here we encounter mystery. Here we encounter fact. Faith releases life. The faith within the woman pulls forward the power within Jesus. This is not the first time this happens between Jesus and a woman. At Cana Mary's trust that God wills to intervene through him is stronger than Jesus' sense that the circumstances are not yet right. Jesus himself feels unready. "My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). But Mary acts decisively. She recognizes what Jesus misses: the *kairos* moment.

Later, a Syro-Phoenician woman, a despised foreigner, begs Jesus to cure her daughter. He believes his mission is to his own. He faces the same dilemma we face when we hear the cry from other lands, knowing the desperate needs of the poor in our own. "It is not right," Jesus says to the woman, "to take bread from the children and throw it to the little dogs." She gives a non-violent response. It disarms Jesus. It brings him to new consciousness about the scope of his mission. "It is true, sir, but even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table" (Matt. 15:26-27).

Returning to the bleeding woman, we see that so strong is the exchange of energy between her and Jesus that he spins around and asks, "Who touched me?" The pushing crowd remains mute. Only the woman forbidden by culture and law to touch and be touched comes forward. She comes trembling and kneels before Jesus. Her confession is to the crowd as well. Then she tells in front of everyone why she touched Jesus and how she has been instantly cured.

Jesus' response is also personal and public. He says to the woman who has dared to defy culture and religion, "Daughter your faith has healed you." We see here what we saw with Mary at Cana and with the Syro-Phoenician mother—that God's desire to intervene needs the partnership of both Jesus and the woman. God does not use Jesus only. God uses her spirit and life, her trust and initiative, to act.

Realizing this, once again the consciousness of Jesus is stretched. So is our own. When Jesus tells the woman in the hearing of all "Your faith has healed you," he is saying in effect what Clare will one day say to Agnes of Prague: "I consider you a co-worker of God" (3LAg 8).

The parallel challenges for us are compelling: to be discriminating—another word for discerning; to love the souls of our cultures; to defy what diminishes their souls; to recognize the *kairos* moment; to allow the scope of our mission to be questioned; to let no barrier prevent us from reaching

out for Jesus; to trust what we feel running through our body—even our chapter body; to witness in the presence of others our experience of God's action; to ask ourselves as persons, provinces, congregations, and chapters:

- 1) In what decisions is God relying on *our* spirit and life, *our* trust and initiative, in order to act?
- 2) In what matters are we being called to be God's co-workers?

In the gospel, Jesus continues speaking to the woman who will continue to bleed, but now in natural cycles: "Go in peace." As he is saying this, someone arrives from the house of Jairus with two messages: first, "Your daughter has just died;" second, "Don't trouble the master any further." Now that the child has died, everything changes. It is Jesus who must discern the *kairos* moment. Jesus who must discern how further to understand his mission.

His interruption by the bleeding woman also changes everything. It strengthens Jesus' growing consciousness about how God chooses to work. Scripture scholars tell us that now Jesus "decides upon his course of action from the development of events"—that is by his encounter with the woman. As a result, "he recognizes the divine will to raise the girl to life."⁸

It is tempting at this point to focus on the brief lifetime of the girl, twelve years. This same period of years spans three key moments in our own lifetime: the centenary of Francis twelve years ago, our congregation's 150th jubilee in 1985, and now the centenary of Clare. Each have exploded new seeds of consciousness within us.

What we have said about Earth, about *innocentia* and *misericordia*, about growing into the full truth of our original call—these have been small glimpses into the depths of Francis.

As for Clare, with her privilege of poverty she shows us a way to hold fast to a grace even when others consider it an impossible grace. With her concept of "gazing," she gives us a fresh way to approach contemplation.

At the end of these twelve years, Clare has been the one calling us to be more fully awake to the Franciscan charism that was, and is, Mother Magdalen's gift to us. Clare has done this the way a morning sun wakes up those for whom a new day is waiting.

THE WORD WHO IS LIFE

We hurry now with Jesus to the house of Jairus. Once he arrives, Jesus permits no one to enter with him except Peter, John, James, and the child's parents. In Mark's version of the story Jesus is struck by the noise of people wailing and crying loudly on all sides. He says to them: "Why do you make this din with your wailing? The child is not dead, she is asleep." They begin to ridicule him. But Jesus goes on. He moves into the room

where the twelve-year-old lies lifeless. "Who is she?" we ask. In the gospel, she is clearly the first and only child of Jairus and his wife. She is the new bearer of their identity. She is their future.

Perhaps then we can consider her our future too—a symbol of the young consciousness that has been developing in our congregation during the past twelve years. In the gospel it is significant that all the while the woman had been bleeding, the child had been growing. Now that the woman is healed, the girl will begin to bleed for she is just on the brink of young womanhood. Is she brave enough to make the transition? Are we brave enough to allow our growing consciousness to push us to a next stage?

The weepers and wailers will say no, we must not ask this of ourselves in such a chaotic and violent world. Whether they are our own inner voices or those of others, they will begin to ridicule new ways of thinking about Earth, about mission, about soul, about inculturation, about contemplation, and about God's power working in us. There is nothing like ridicule to kill spirit and life, or to keep new consciousness from developing further.

Jesus leaves the ridiculers behind. He approaches the child's bed. He reaches for her hand. He says to her "*Talitha cum*. Little girl, get up." There is a moment of suspense. Although she is young, Jesus knows from the encounter with the bleeding woman that what happens next will depend upon *her* partnership, *her* response. What will she do? Immediately the girl stands up. Not only that, she begins to walk around. Consciousness, especially young consciousness, needs exercise.

Jesus then asks her ecstatic parents two things. The first is to tell no one what has occurred. Surely the child's aliveness will speak for itself. Secondly Jesus says: "Give her something to eat." Consciousness, especially developing consciousness, needs to be nourished. It is so for the girl. It is so for us.

Who can doubt that it is the girl's mother who runs to the kitchen, or that it is our mother, Magdalen, who runs with her? Who can doubt that Jairus once again falls at the feet of Jesus, his body one with Earth's body? Who can doubt that a great celebration follows?

The girl, in whom we recognize the spirit and life of our congregation, has awakened to her unique moment of transition and even more to her hour in history. A new day awaits her, and close behind, a new millennium.

The healed woman awaits her too. Together they sing:

This is what has been from the beginning
and what we have heard
and what we have seen with our own eyes
and what we have looked at and touched with our own hands—
... the Word who is Life (1 John 1).

Endnotes:

¹ This theological reflection was given by the General Minister as a report to the General Chapter of the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity, Rome, October, 1994.

² Unless otherwise stated, I will use Scripture texts from from *Christian Community Bible* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications and St. Paul Publications, 1993).

³ During our international formation meeting in Rome in 1992, S. Geraldine Clifford and her brother Gerald Clifford of the Lakota tribe explained the sacred tradition of their people—that we and all of the other elements of creation are “relatives.”

⁴ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988) 11.

⁵ Thomas Berry 11.

⁶ *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* 42:63.

⁷ Thomas Moore, Introduction, *Care of the Soul*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994).

⁸ *The New American Bible* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1971) 1089, footnote.



Early Franciscan Eremitism and its Implications for the Life of the Friars Today

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Introduction

During his presidential campaign Bill Clinton's headquarters had a large sign up saying "The economy, stupid" so that campaign workers would remember the single most important issue in the election. In the last election campaign in the United Kingdom many observers feel that the Tories won because they aroused fears that the Labour opposition would not be able to manage the economy efficiently.

At least in Anglo-Saxon cultures there is a strong emphasis on the practical, the tangible, on achieving results, and we find it difficult to justify any activity which does not have a definable goal. In such a culture the importance of prayer cannot be demonstrated persuasively by argument. It needs to be experienced at least vicariously before it is seen to be a value worth incorporating into our lives. Hence it is most important that those who seek to evangelize our culture be steeped in prayer so that they can communicate a lived experience and not just traditional formulae that convince no one. In this context we might investigate Franciscan eremitism and consider how this tradition can nourish Franciscan life today.

However, just to investigate eremitism would be inadequate, because it presumes that even our prayer life is goal oriented. If this paper were merely to investigate eremitism in the context of evangelization it would reflect the prejudices of our culture, assuming that such an impractical activity must have a "practical" end. A question behind this investigation then, is "how far can Franciscan eremitical life be seen as an end in itself, or should it rather be seen as respite from or preparation for the active life?"

Historical Background

The rule of St. Benedict tells us there are four kinds of monks: the ceno-

bites who belong to a monastery and serve under a rule and an abbot; the anchorites or hermits "who have come through the test of living in a monastery for a long time and have passed beyond the first fervor of monastic life. . . . They have built up their strength and go from the battle line in the ranks of their brothers to the single combat of the desert";¹ the sarabaites and gyrovagues of whom nothing good can be said. The monastic eremitic tradition inherited in the West, then, presupposed a period of formation in community which built up the virtues necessary so that "self reliant now, without the support of another, they are ready with God's help to grapple single-handed with the vices of body and mind"² and live the solitary life of a hermit. Hermits were envisaged as an elite of monks who had reached a stage where they were finally ready to enter the arena of the hermitage and undertake single combat with the devil.

From the sixth to the eleventh centuries, the call to the eremitical life came to be seen as a rare vocation of the few. Some progressed through the ranks of the monks as envisaged in the Benedictine rule; others went directly to a hermitage. For some the eremitic life was a retreat to renew their fervour, or as a reward for their service in the monastery, and would be followed by a return to the cenobitic life. There was little tension between such hermits and the cenobites who stayed in the monastery because it was admitted that although the solitary life was the life of highest perfection, it was also very dangerous and therefore for most people it was safer to stay in the monastery.³

A new eremitism emerged in Italy in the late tenth century with Romuald and his biographer Peter Damian. Their inspiration gave rise to the Camaldolese monks. In France between 1075 and 1125 many new eremitical communities were founded, including Grandmont, the Great Charterhouse, Cîteaux, and Prémontré. The new hermits were critical of the old monasticism, considering the monasteries too worldly. They did not in general reject the old rules, seeing reflected in the Rules of Benedict and Augustine the *vita apostolica*; instead they sought to follow in them the *vita primitiva* of the early church. A major difference between the new hermits and traditional hermits was that

for traditional hermits the eremitical life was a goal, a definitive state, very probably reached after some previous religious experience. For the new hermits, by contrast, it was not an end but a beginning.⁴

The new hermits started with a sense of unease with the world they inhabited whether monastic or secular and sought in the desert a way of finding peace. Thus a hermitage was not so much a battleground for hand to hand combat with the devil as school of perfection or "a garden of heavenly delights. . . . The scent of virtue fills the air with fragrance."⁵ They often lived in community but practiced an asceticism and austerity they felt the traditional monks had lost.

Whereas traditional monastic hermits usually had contact only with their own monastery, the new hermits remained in close contact with the poor, and their hermitages became a place of refuge for those seeking guidance and sometimes a physical refuge also.⁶ Some new hermits, like Peter the Hermit who preached the first Crusade, undertook itinerant preaching missions. They often sought confirmation for these missions from the Pope or a bishop. Their preaching used "the simple language of penance, conversion, salvation and love of the Savior"⁷ and responded to a need for preaching that was not being fulfilled by the diocesan clergy or the monks.

By the thirteenth century many of the new hermits and hermitages had been absorbed into one of the groups which grew out of the eremitical movements of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These groups had settled into a pattern of life which in part reflected the influence of traditional monasticism and in part the genius of the Church for harnessing the energy of the new hermits.

Prémontré, which had adopted the Rule of St. Augustine, and its daughter houses accepted the care of souls. Perhaps in this we can see the institutionalization of the new eremitism's close contact with the poor and the preaching missions of hermits. Carthusians adopted a strict separation from the world and even considerable isolation within the monastic community. The Camaldolese lived a traditional monastic eremitism with a preparatory community life leading to a life of solitude in cells near the monastery. Within the Cistercians, the lay brother, often alone on an isolated croft, lived a life which reflected many of the elements of the new eremitism. Thus the new eremitism was institutionalized in new orders, the most successful of which was the Cistercians. These orders kept alive the spirit that inspired hermits, but at the expense of some of the élan of their founders.

Francis's Observance of the Gospel Life

Merton places St. Francis squarely in the tradition of what he calls the lay hermit and what I have termed the new eremitism.⁸ Francis's first intention when he started on the road to conversion was to follow the eremitical life. At first he wore the habit of a hermit as Celano tells us and many others confirm (1Cel 21).⁹ Even when Francis had abandoned the hermit's habit and the Lord had sent him brothers, he displayed a marked predilection for the contemplative life. Indeed all the early friars on the journey back from Rome after the approbation of the rule were tormented by the question of whether they were to go about the world and preach or retire into solitude (1Cel 35). That this was immediately after being given the commission to preach by Innocent III shows the strength of the eremitical tendency of the group. In 1213 Francis accepted the use of Mount La Verna as a hermitage for his friars and sent two friars to take possession of the mountain. He himself soon visited to spend the Lent of St. Michael

there (CSD 1). Mount La Verna pleased him because of its isolation and he returned often for solitude and tranquility (1Cel 91; c.f. LM 8:10, 11:9, 13:1; LP 93 *passim*).

His biographers reveal that Francis saw contemplation and the eremitic life as central to his vocation. Francis felt at home in the hermitages of the Order and allowed his emotions to overtake him in prayer, whereas in public he forced himself to hide the visits of the Spirit (2Cel 94, 95). He would return to a hermitage to recuperate and shelter from the crowds after his preaching tours (1Cel 91). When in solitude in a hermitage, he did not suffer being disturbed even when friars had come long distances to see him (LM 11:9, 12). Likewise, when staying with benefactors he would try to live as eremitical an existence as the situation allowed (LP 92). He wanted all the friars who were travelling about to conserve a spirit of prayer as if they were in a hermitage and compared the soul to a hermit within the body (LP 80).

Many important events in Francis's life occurred in hermitages. At Fonte Columbo he wrote an outline of the 1223 Rule, developed the idea for acting out the Nativity, and had his temples cauterized. Greccio was the location for many of the stories about Francis's love for creatures and where he demonstrated the true Friar Minor by coming to beg alms from his brothers one Easter. Here, too, was the setting for his representation of the Nativity. Mount La Verna witnessed his stigmatization.¹⁰

Not only did Francis see the eremitic life as a key component of his own vocation, but he felt it should be central in the life of all the friars. He was overjoyed when he heard a Spaniard extol the virtues and lifestyle of friars living in a Spanish hermitage (2Cel 178), and he wished that educated friars would enter the order with the intention of devoting themselves to prayer in remote places in order to concentrate the yearnings of their heart (2Cel. 194). When Giles came to Francis to ask him for an obedience, Francis sent him to live in the hermitage in Fabrone where Giles devoted himself to prayer.¹¹

Despite his evident love of the eremitic life, Francis rejected the advice of Cardinal John of St. Paul that he and his friars become either hermits or monks in an established eremitical order like the Camaldolese. Francis wished to follow the Gospel as his only rule.¹² He saw his vocation, given to him by the Lord, as one of rebuilding the Church as well as practicing penance. To do this he needed to preach as well as pray.¹³ Thus, while Francis would be in the tradition of the itinerant preachers, the orders of hermits of his day would not have been able to accommodate his desire to live the whole Gospel. Whereas they had sacred places where they rooted their experience of the holy, Francis's itinerant preaching mission made it imperative that he interiorize his experience of the holy.

So despite the temptation to retire permanently to a hermitage, Francis did not see the enclosed life as his own vocation, nor indeed did the contemplatives, Sylvester and Clare, whom he consulted on the matter.

Francis was happy to see the contemplative life lived in hermitages and was pleased that some of the friars devoted themselves permanently to it, but for himself and for the majority of friars the time spent in hermitages was to be interspersed with time spent on the preaching mission. The hermitage for Francis was a place where he could devote himself exclusively to prayer and ensure that his soul never forgot its vocation to be a hermit in the cell of his body during his preaching tours (c.f. RNB 22: 27).

Rule for Hermitages

The rule Francis wrote for hermitages gives us an insight as to how he envisaged the eremitical life, especially for those who devoted themselves exclusively to it. It is consistently inspiring for its simplicity and charity. It seeks not so much to legislate a detailed way of life as to suggest or rather evoke the spirit with which the hermitage should be imbued. There is nothing on the number of hours to be spent in prayer, nothing on the ascetic rigours to which the brothers are to submit, but everything on the love with which the brothers ought to care for each other as "mothers" and "sons." The tension between fraternity and solitude is resolved not so much by designating times when they may speak, although this is done, but more by describing the dependency the "sons" should have on the "mothers" and the solicitude the mothers should have for the "sons." While the text contains certain restrictions and prescriptions, it is the vision, not the legislation, which inspires; the spirit, not the letter.

The hermitages are to be small, only three or at most four friars. In this way there will be less temptation to build elaborate structures or to seek out the endowments that would be needed to support a larger community in the remote areas where the hermitages are located. Francis's concern for poverty manifested itself in his relations with the friars in the hermitages. He warned the brothers on Mount La Verna not to abuse Sire Roland's generous offer to supply the hermitage with all its needs (CDS 2). Francis seems to have looked on the hermitages as safeguards of the spirit of mendicancy, and Celano gives this as one of the reasons why Francis wanted his friars to live in hermitages as well as in towns (2 Cel 71).¹⁴

Not all the hermitages lived up to his exacting standards. At Sarteano he found the cell constructed for him to be too fine, and so he ordered it covered in branches to hide the planed wood of its construction (LP 13); and at Greccio one Easter he played the prophet by coming to his brothers as a beggar when he saw how the table was laid with napkins, wine and good fare (2Cel 61; LM 7:9; LP 32).¹⁵ On the other hand Francis would have been pleased by the poverty of San Urbano where they did not even have any wine to offer their sick brother and he had to perform a miracle in order to take a little wine for his health (1Cel 61; LM 5:10). The restriction on the size of the community was, then, a pragmatic provision to safeguard the poverty of the hermitages which could not be taken for granted.

Next Francis introduces the terminology that evokes more than anything else the tenderness that the hermit brothers are to display towards one another. Two of the brothers are to be "mother" and two are to be "sons." The image of mother and son is one that Francis uses to express the love and concern that the brothers ought to manifest towards one another (RNB 9:10-11; RB 6:8; EpLeo 2). It is an image of immense tenderness and calls to mind not only Francis's relations with the Lady Pica, not only our own relations with our mothers, but perhaps especially the love of Mary for the Son. How far this is from the dour grim struggle with the devil of traditional monastic eremitism.

The mother and son imagery also revolutionizes the traditional figures of Martha and Mary. The life of Martha, the life of concern with down-to-earth affairs such as preparing a meal, is not denigrated as it had been in monastic spirituality. Instead it is compared with the role of a mother caring for her child. Thus the Marthas of the hermitage are not to feel they are engaged in a lesser vocation, for by caring for their bodily needs they enable the Marys to devote themselves to prayer.

The hermitage is to have an enclosure, which is probably no more than a hedge or even a boundary marking off the isolation of the hermitage. Within this area the friars each have a simple hut or a cave where they are able to pray and sleep. Here we see Francis's practical wisdom: the geographic isolation of having separate cells is far better at protecting a spirit of recollection than regulations of complete silence as has been noted by Cistercian historians for example.¹⁶

The next section of the rule deals with the horarium and atmosphere of the hermitages. The day is to revolve around the liturgy of the hours. The friars are to recite compline after sunset and rise during the night for matins; they are to recite prime, terce, sext, and none at the proper times. In this way the hermitages are to follow a monastic routine of prayer. This rule is the only one where Francis enjoins on his friars the monastic practice of rising during the night for prayer, as it was hardly practical when on the preaching missions. The rigorous observance of the liturgy of hours is to remind the brothers of their purpose in being at the hermitage, which is "to seek first the kingdom of God and His justice" (Matt 6:33). To seek the kingdom of God we need to be inspired by His Word/words, and it is in the liturgy of the hours that we return to the words of God and allow them to soak into our very being. As we return again and again to the psalms and readings of the liturgy of the hours, we achieve an ever deeper experience of and insight into the working of God in history and in our lives. In praying at the set hours we allow the spirit of prayer to invade our hearts regularly and come to a state where it never leaves us. In this way we come to pray unceasingly, schooled in the presence of God by the regular recollection involved in the recitation of the hours. The liturgy of the hours is also the prayer of the Church, and so reminds the hermits that they are not engaged in a solo mission, but are part of a wider community that prays

both in heaven and on earth.

The openness to the world implied in the use of the liturgy of hours is also stressed in the interpretation that Francis gave to the verse from the first book of Samuel about the sterile woman bearing children (1Sam. 2:5, c.f. 2Cel 165; LM 8:2). The hermits are not to consider themselves as separate from the friars who work on the preaching mission. Indeed it is the prayers of the hermits that make the preaching mission efficacious. Similarly, when Francis spoke to the hermits of Mount La Verna about their life as hermits, he stressed that God had called them all into the Order for the salvation of the world (CDS 2). The Franciscan hermitage is not to be closed in on itself, repelling the world as evil, but "open to the world and oriented to the apostolic life."¹⁷

The recommendations on silence are characteristic of Francis's desire for the freedom of the Spirit to move the friars. They are to *strive* to maintain silence, but after Terce the sons *may* end their silence and speak with their mothers. The silence is not an end in itself, but a means of keeping recollected during the day. Silence and solitude are necessary components of the eremitical life but for the friar they need to be reconciled to the witness of fraternal charity. It is in the reconciliation of these two that Merton sees the genius of the Rule for Hermitages.¹⁸

Silence gives way to fraternal charity at certain times in the day so that the "sons" can express their needs to their "mothers" and beg alms from them as poor little ones. In this way the "sons" are reminded of their dependence on the charity of their brothers and ultimately on the charity of God. This provision guards against the sin of pride. The ascetic contemplative is not to feel superior to the rest of humanity just because he is devoted to the things of God while they are concerned with mundane matters. The space for prayer that is allotted to the hermit is a privilege, a gift given him, which he should never forget. He is further reminded of this when he changes places with the "mother" and has to struggle to find time for prayer amidst the competing demands of protecting the "sons" from disturbance, catering to their needs, and begging the daily bread of the fraternity.

Silence also gives way to obedience. When the minister or custos visit, the hermit cannot hide behind his silence and refuse to talk to them. They represent the needs of the wider brotherhood, and the hermit is to be open to those wider needs by listening to the minister and sharing with him the fruit of his prayer. In this way the hermit is reminded that he is dedicated to prayer, not only for his own good, but also for the good of others.

Regis Armstrong neatly encapsulates the main themes of the rule for hermitages:

Thus Francis tells us quite simply how he envisions a gospel life centered on the pursuit of God in solitude: a fraternal caring for one another that can be characterised only by a mother's love and a child's simple acceptance, an identification with the poor and

little ones of the earth, and a sense of freedom and mutual respect. All of these fraternal expressions centered on the celebration of the Word, the Liturgy of the Hours.¹⁹

Implications for Today's Friars

The first implication that can clearly be drawn from Francis's approach to eremitism is that prayer is vitally important in the life of the friar. All that a friar does and is finds a basis in his life of prayer. In prayer he seeks the will of God and the strength to carry it out. He seeks to become as it were transparent to the will of God that it may shine through him. The life of prayer is the inspiration of his active ministry and provides him with the necessary strength. But prayer is much more than that. It is not practiced with an ulterior motive but as an end in itself. The nourishment of one's experience of and relationship with God is justification enough for prayer, which is why Francis permitted and even encouraged friars like Sylvester and Giles to devote themselves exclusively to the eremitical life. Thus no matter how active or seemingly important the ministry of the friar is, if he is too busy to pray, he is too busy.

One can also note the importance of solitude for Francis and the early friar hermits. The encounter with God needed space and silence in order for it to be profound. Even on his preaching missions Francis sought out solitude in which to pray. The activist attitude that "my work is my prayer" does not appear compatible with the eremitical strand of the Franciscan experience. Prayer in this tradition needs time out from the hurly-burly of life. It is not an escape, but penetrates the meaning of our life experience by bringing it into the encounter with God. Only then can prayer come to imbue the whole of life so that work does indeed become prayer. This understanding has repercussions in formation. It is essential that friars in their early years be exposed to solitude and silence and learn to appreciate them. The intrusion of too much ministry into the novitiate program robs the friars of the chance to develop a deep appreciation of the life of prayer, especially in Anglo-saxon cultures where the bias to the practical is so pronounced.

Francis felt the need to return for long periods to the hermitages. Many friars today feel a similar desire. This is why the three first orders and the third order regular have all encouraged the establishment of houses of prayer.²⁰ Such houses have been instituted in many places with varying results. There appear to be two models for such houses of prayer. The first is that of a community open only to the members of the sponsoring province, which Mrozinski calls a closed house, and the second open to all the faithful who seek a period of retreat, an open house.

A closed house of prayer has its advantages, since it allows the "mothers" to exercise their ministry and protect the "sons" from disturbance more easily. It is also a model which exposes the permanent community within

the house of prayer to less temptation to undertake too active a ministry of retreat-giving, which can endanger the spirit of recollection within the community. The danger of an open house of prayer is that it can soon become a retreat center, which, while a good ministry in itself, is not the primary purpose of a house of prayer in the Franciscan tradition. The downside of a closed house of prayer is that it may not have the openness to the poor that we have seen was a feature of the new eremitism. It draws more heavily on the model of monastic eremitism, with the permanent community having little contact except with members of their own province who come there for an experience of solitude.

The statutes of the Order of Friars Minor, when speaking of houses of prayer, prescribes that "the brothers who dwell in such places should make sure that without detriment to their own spirit of recollection they openly welcome groups of the faithful to introduce them to the Franciscan style of prayer."²¹ While this would allow both styles of house of prayer it does manifest a preference towards a certain amount of openness. Perhaps the best way forward when starting such a house would be for it to start with a closed model so that the members of the permanent community can establish a routine and structures that maintain a spirit of recollection and then later, if judged prudent, to open the house to some extent. This way of proceeding would also give the rest of the province a chance to grow confident in the "new" venture, and mitigate the chance of it being regarded as another retreat center primarily for outsiders. If the venture is to be successful it is vital that it be regarded by the rest of the province as a resource of which they can freely avail themselves.

The style of life lived by the permanent members of the community needs also to be considered. Are they simply to be the "mothers" for those who come to experience solitude, or are they also to rotate so that they have an experience of being "sons"? In the early hermitages it seems clear that the friars of the permanent community spent at least some times as "sons." The Rule for Hermitages seems to assume it. The report of the Spanish friars living in hermitage which gave such pleasure to Francis mentioned that the friars there rotated each week, and Giles, after a while, spent nearly all his time in solitude. Therefore it would be most consistent with the early tradition if the permanent community were to rotate the ministries of "mothers" and "sons." Also, it would seem appropriate that they experience what they provide for others, if only for the practical reason that they could then experience the trials and pleasures of those they attempt to support as "sons."

The geography of the house of prayer is important. For solitude it would be best for it to be away from large centers of population as were the early hermitages. This would also make it easier to provide the geographical isolation within the house of prayer that contributes to the spirit of recollection. Ideally the house of prayer would consist of a central house where community events such as meals could be held, a chapel where the liturgy

could be celebrated and several hermitage cells where the "sons" and even the "mothers" could find solitude. It would have to be made clear to visiting friars and others that respect for the solitude of the "sons" was paramount. Of course the ideal is not always possible, but some arrangements could be made to ensure a spirit of recollection. As Cistercian historians remind us, geography is better than complex regulations. A site of natural beauty would be a great boon to such a community.

Francis laid great stress on the celebration of the liturgy of the hours in common in the hermitages. The hermitage experience would give great scope to deepen one's experience of praying the hours. It would also give an opportunity for innovation. This could provide the hermitage with its openness to the wider community, inviting people in to celebrate the Eucharist and to pray the hours with the friars, developing with them ways in which the ancient hours could be brought to life in our day.

A problem that would have to be resolved at the very outset of the venture would be the funding of the house of prayer. Various pointers emerge from the example of the early hermits that may help find a solution. The early hermits were forced to resort to mendicancy, and Francis saw this as one of the benefits of the eremitical life within the order. The Rule for Hermitages makes it clear that the brothers are to be mindful of their dependence on each other and on God. Francis chided the friars who lived too well in hermitages, and he refused to inhabit cells that he felt were too luxurious for a poor man. However, it is essential that the "sons" be freed from the need to work to support themselves so that they can devote themselves to prayer in solitude. The primary role of the "mothers" is to provide for the "sons." It is not beyond human wit to find an appropriate solution.

The most important features of a hermitage cannot be decided by legislation. They concern the atmosphere of solitude supported by an attitude of fraternal concern. These depend on the friars who live the experience. Only they can take the dead bones of a setting and framework and breathe life into it. Thus meditation on the Rule for Hermitages is a good preparation for Franciscan eremitical life. The only way of ensuring a successful contemporary eremiticism is, however, faithfulness in meditating on the Word of God, the revelation that gives meaning to eremitism. One needs more than anything else an openness to the working of the Holy Spirit in one's life. With this any obstacle can be overcome; without it the most perfect structure will be dead. This is true not only for those who live the eremitical life permanently, but also for the greater number who will dip into it to find refreshment and an anchor in their lives.

Conclusion

Given the strength of the eremitical tradition in early Franciscanism, it is sad that it is not more strongly represented in many parts of the Order

today. The eremitical life is a valid option within the Franciscan tradition and adds a contemplative dimension to the life of a province that is difficult to preserve in houses engaged more directly in the active life. The attempt to remedy the situation by establishing houses of prayer that draw their strength from the Franciscan eremitical tradition is timely and important for the spiritual health of the Order. In these centers of solitude and prayer, supported by fraternal charity, the Order can find an important anchor rooting it to Christ, the source of its evangelizing activity. These centers can provide for their permanent members a prolonged exposure to the contemplative life, allowing them to grow closer to God. In them a province has a valuable resource, which strengthens the contemplative dimension of its reflection on its mission. Furthermore, the space that a house of prayer provides to friars in active ministry gives them a chance periodically to renew their life of prayer by a period of eremitic life. This and the witness of the hermits offer the possibility of an evangelization of the Order in which all are reminded of their eremitic roots and helped to find new ways of integrating the contemplative dimension with their active ministry. This can only strengthen the Order as it attempts to fulfil its mission to go and rebuild Christ's Church.

Endnotes:

¹The Rule of St. Benedict. In *Latin and English with Notes*, ed. T. Fry et al (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1981) 1:2-5, p.169.

²Rule of St. Benedict, 1:5, p. 169.

³H. Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism. A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe 1000 - 1150* (London, Macmillan Press, 1984) 12-17.

⁴Leyser 22.

⁵Peter Damian, cited by Leyser 21.

⁶T. Merton, "Franciscan Eremitism," *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 359.

⁷Merton 359.

⁸Merton 360.

⁹See also C. Esser, *Origins of the Franciscan Order* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1970) p. 97 for citation from the *Legenda choralis Carnotensis*; p. 98 for the witness of Bartholemew of Trent; p. 102 for the confirmation of Jordan of Giano.

¹⁰O. Schmucki, "Secretum solitudinis, De circumstantiis externis orandi penes sanctum Franciscum Assisiensem," *Collectanea Franciscana* 39 (1969): 5-58. English translation: "Place of Solitude: An Essay on the External Circumstances of the Prayer Life of St. Francis of Assisi," tr. S. Holland, *Greyfriars Review*, 2:1 (1988): 77-132.

¹¹"Vita Beati Fratris Aegidii" (VA) 6, in *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli sociorum S. Francisci: The Writings of Leo, Rufino and Angelo Companions of St. Francis*, ed. and tr. R. B. Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) 326-327.

¹²Schmucki, "Place of Solitude" 108.

¹³O.R. Mrozinski, *Franciscan Prayer Life: The Franciscan Active-Contemplative Synthesis and the Role of Centers of Prayer* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981) 2-12.

¹⁴In a hermitage because of its location there would be less likelihood of people spontaneously bringing enough for the friars to live on and therefore the friars would be obliged to go on the quest for provisions.

¹⁵The *Legend of Perugia* erroneously situates this event at Christmas.

¹⁶M. Casey, "The Dialectic of Solitude and Communion in Cistercian Communities," *Cistercian Studies* (Jan., 1988) 284.

¹⁷Merton 361.

¹⁸Merton 361.

¹⁹R.J. Armstrong, *St. Francis of Assisi. Writings for a Gospel Life* (New York: Crossroads, 1994) 63.

²⁰Mrozinski .98; c.f. *The General Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor. Our Plan for Franciscan Living*, The Franciscan OFM Conference of North America (1992) 14:1, 2, pp. 8-9.

²¹*General Statutes* 14:2, p. 9.

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John-Charles, FODC: Founder and Minister of the Franciscan Order of the Divine Compassion; an Anglican bishop for thirty-six years; Dean of Holywood Seminary, Liberty, N.Y.

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¹³O.R. Mrozinski, *Franciscan Prayer Life: The Franciscan Active-Contemplative Synthesis and the Role of Centers of Prayer* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981) 2-12.

¹⁴In a hermitage because of its location there would be less likelihood of people spontaneously bringing enough for the friars to live on and therefore the friars would be obliged to go on the quest for provisions.

¹⁵The *Legend of Perugia* erroneously situates this event at Christmas.

¹⁶M. Casey, "The Dialectic of Solitude and Communion in Cistercian Communities," *Cistercian Studies* (Jan., 1988) 284.

¹⁷Merton 361.

¹⁸Merton 361.

¹⁹R.J. Armstrong, *St. Francis of Assisi. Writings for a Gospel Life* (New York: Crossroads, 1994) 63.

²⁰Mrozinski .98; c.f. *The General Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor. Our Plan for Franciscan Living*, The Franciscan OFM Conference of North America (1992) 14:1, 2, pp. 8-9.

²¹*General Statutes* 14:2, p. 9.

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There are Many Colors But only a Single Rainbow A Visit by the Minister General to the Golden Horn

[Last spring, Hermann Schalück, OFM, Minister General, with a friar companion, visited the Eastern Patriarch in Constantinople. This account of their experience was sent to the friars world-wide.]

SPRING IN THE BOSPHORUS

It was Spring again [1995]. The Muslim world had begun Ramadan and Christians were preparing to celebrate the season of Lent. On the fragrantly scented hill of jasmine of the roman Curia, there came to fruition the plan for "an ecumenical gesture" on the Bosphorus—country of the Fathers of Cappadocia who were distinguished for their courageous faith and powerful word—where East and West still meet. For some months, with a tenacious gentleness, the Minister had been requesting an audience with His Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomew. It was his firm belief that the Catholic tradition does not lie in tending the ashes but in taking good care that the fire of hope is not extinguished. At the airport of Istanbul, the Minister and his companion, Br. Tecle, were welcomed by a certain monk named Gennadios who, with exquisite courtesy, accompanied his guests to their hotel. . . .

THE AUDIENCE

With the monk Gennadios as their guide, the two Romans visited the principal monuments of the city on the following morning which was a Saturday. First called "Rome of the East" and later Byzantium, Constantinople was conquered in 1453 by the Turks. A most ancient tradition holds that it is the repository of the relics of the apostle Andrew and the apostle's disciples, Luke and Timothy. . . .

It was about midday when the visitors eventually reached Phanar Hill and St. George's Church, which, since 1612, has been the residence of the Ecumenical Patriarch of the East. His Holiness, receiving his Roman guests

with exquisite kindness, recalled the Council of Chalcedon and Nicaea, the fall of the city in 1453, and the need for communion between the Churches of the East and West. He expressed his joy that he would soon visit Rome and would be able to give the fraternal embrace of the Apostle Andrew to the Apostle Peter.

As a sign and confirmation that the friars throughout the whole world support this desire, Br. Hermann presented him with a replica of the Cross of San Damiano. The patriarch kissed it reverently and gave it a place of honor in his own study. In exchange he presented his guests with a glass-mounted seal of the Ecumenical Patriarch. Furthermore he invited them, together with some other members of the Holy Synod, to a frugal meal, of which they partook with hearts full of joy. . . .

On Sunday morning the visitors were invited to participate with the Patriarch in the liturgy according to the Eastern Rite. In preparation they had already meditated from early morning on the words of St. Origen: "Seek to drink from the spring of the Spirit which is already in you. In the depths of your being is the fountain of living water from which the inexhaustible rivers of spiritual feeling gush forth, unless they are blocked by earth and stones. . . . (Homilies on Genesis, SC 7 bis, p. 307).

THE LARGE AND SMALL THRONES

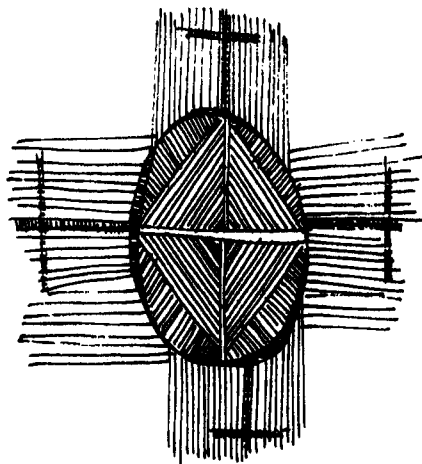
An Eastern tradition called for the setting up in St. George's Church of a large throne for the Patriarch, who conferred an unexpected honor on the Minister from Rome by seating him opposite himself on a small lower throne. Inwardly moved, Br. Hermann prayed for himself and for all his brothers and sisters . . . as Br. Francis inspired him at that moment: "Let us be satisfied with humble places. Grant us to serve without arrogance or vanity. Make us at home with the earth, with the poor and humble. Teach us how to wait, to listen and to remain silent. Make us small and weak, in such a way that others may even be able to come to our assistance. Give us that most beautiful of all privileges: not to have any privilege. Send us forth from here on the highways of the world to seek your name in all religions, confessions and creatures." . . .

FAREWELL

At the end the pilgrims paid a visit to the Church of "Santa Maria in Draperis," where some friars from Tuscany have a ministry. The conversation was about the mission of the Friars Minor and of the Sisters called to foster friendly relations with Islam and with the other religions and confessions. Questions were asked as to how their presence in Turkey could be revived through new incentives. The Minister proposed the setting up in their house, for the entire Franciscan Family, of an "embassy" or "consu-

late" to the Ecumenical Patriarch.

Just before they left the Golden Horn behind them and boarded the plane to travel from East to West, they heard for the last time the slow call of the muezzin who was announcing the three days of *bairan*, i.e., the joyful conclusion of Ramadan. For Latin Christians, on the other hand, as well as for the brothers on the Jasmine Hill, the season of Lent began some days afterwards. This year, the maxim of John Climaco was chosen: "The love of the one and triune God is manifested in the love between brothers and sisters."



Book Review

Men of Habit: The Franciscan Ideal in Action. Bernard Palmer (foreword by the Archbishop of Canterbury): pp. 180 with notes on sources and index. Paper back. The Canturbury Press: St Mary's Works, St. Mary's Plain. Norwich. Norfolk NR3 3BH, England. 12. 95 pds sterling.

The distinguished former editor of the *Church Times* (in England) presents in this book a series of mini-biographies of four Anglicans who made a mark on the history of Anglican Franciscanism in the first half of this century. Three were founders of religious orders. The other was the founder of an association of evangelists, which, like him, had Franciscan characteristics.

Father Andrew of the Society of Divine Compassion—poet, painter, preacher, evangelist, and renowned spiritual director—was the best known of the small group which, in 1894, founded the first modern Franciscan Community in the Church of England. The SDC, in turn, brought into being two religious orders for women: the Community of St. Giles (which specialized in work among lepers) and the Society of the Eternal and Incarnate Word (which did heroic work among youths). It also established a significant Third Order. Fr. Andrew's writings, poetry, and sermons were for several decades powerful instruments of evangelism and spiritual growth. He still has a following among those who are familiar with them.

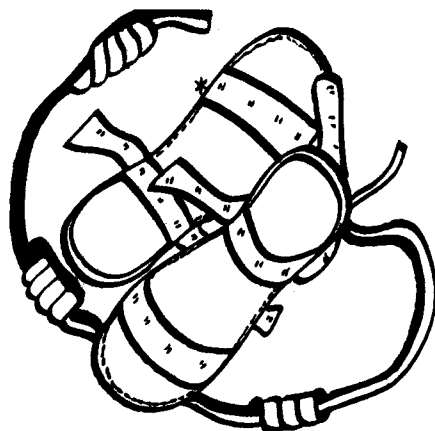
Brother Douglas was led to a life of wandering the roads and highways of Great Britain in the years after World War I. He had a passion for the souls and minds of the tramps (whom he called "wayfarers")—the unemployed. He had a vision of a fellowship in which the wayfarers and the friars would work and live together as equals. In the process the men would be trained for work, and employment would be found for them. He succeeded in getting harsh vagrancy laws changed and developed a chain of houses throughout the United Kingdom where men could be housed and fed, trained and sheltered—and touched by the power of the Gospel. Almost imperceptibly a religious order grew—the Brotherhood of Saint Francis of Assisi. In due time this united with another order (the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ) which had its roots in India. From this union the present Society of Saint Francis developed.

Father George Potter of Pecham founded the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross, a Franciscan Order devoted to the care and rescue of youths and younger lads. His was a remarkable and inspired ministry, but an essentially personal one. It did not long survive his death. Some of the surviving members joined SSF.

Brother Edward was a man with a clear mission—the evangelization of England. He founded the Village Evangelists, which was for a time a powerful agency of the Gospel through the parochial system of the Church of England. Edward's inspiration was Saint Francis.

These four vignettes give us four pictures of vision, sanctity, and sacrifice. Here are four men who stirred their contemporaries and who won many souls to Christ. Here is a glimpse of a little known part of the modern history of the Church in England. Here is a small part of the modern history of Franciscanism. Here is a reminder for our generation of the things that really count.

John-Charles, FODC



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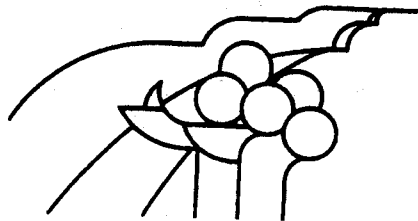
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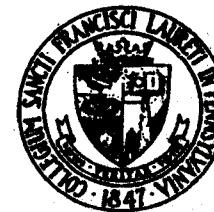
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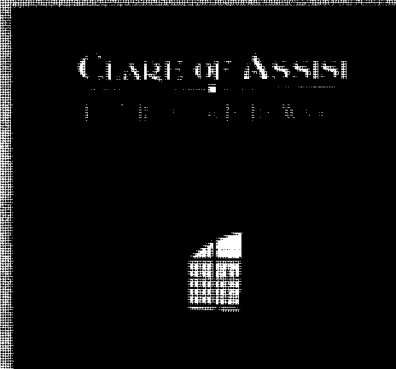
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Wednesday, February 21-Monday, February 26

The San Damiano Crucifix, retreat by André Cirino, OFM. Contact: Franciscan Spirit
and Life Center, 3605 McRoberts Rd., Pittsburgh, PA 15234-2340; ph. 412-881-9207.

Friday, February 23-Saturday, February 24

Seminar on Franciscan Spiritual Direction. F. Edward Coughlin, OFM. Contact: Tau
Center, 511 Hilbert St., Winona, MN 55987; ph. 507-454-2993.

Saturday, March 23

Francis and Clare: The Legend Continues, a day of reflection, imagining and hope
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Friday, May 17-Saturday, May 25

The Soul's Journey Into God. André Cirino, OFM and Josef Raischl. Contact:
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Saturday, May 25-Tuesday, May 28

Second Bi-Annual Networking Seminar for Franciscan Renewal/Retreat Centers
and Franciscan Spiritual Directors. (See detailed ad, p. 45.)

Writings of Saint Francis

Adm	Admonitions	FormViv	Form of Life for St. Clare
BenLeo	Blessing for Brother Leo	1Fragm	Fragment of other Rule I
CantSol	Canticle of Brother Sun	2Fragm	Fragment of other Rule II
EpAnt	Letter to St. Anthony	LaudDei	Praises of God
EpCler	Letter to the Clergy	LaudHor	Praises to be said at all the Hours.
EpCust	Letter to the Custodians	OffPass	Office of the Passion
1EpFid	First Letter to the Faithful	OrCruc	Prayer before the Crucifix
2EpFid	Second Letter to the Faithful	RegB	Later Rule
EpLeo	Letter to Brother Leo	RegNB	Earlier Rule
EpMin	Letter to a Minister	RegEr	Rule for Hermitages
EpOrd	Letter to the Entire Order	SalBMV	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
EpRect	Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples	SalVirt	Salutation of the Virtues
ExhLD	Exhortation to the Praise of God	Test	Testament
ExhPD	Exhortation to Poor Ladies	TestS	Testament written in Siena
ExpPat	Prayer Inspired by the Our Father	UltVol	Last Will written for St. Clare
		VPLaet	Dictate on True and Perfect Joy

Writings of Saint Clare

1LAg	First Letter to Agnes of Prague
2LAg	Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAg	Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAg	Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
LEr	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
RCI	Rule of Clare
TestCl	Testament of Clare
BCI	Blessing of Clare

Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2Cel	Second Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
3Cel	Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
AP	Anonymous of Perugia
CL	Legend of Clare
CSD	Consideration of the Stigmata
Fior	Fioretti
JdV	Witness of Jacque de Vitry
LM	Major Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LMin	Minor Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LP	Legend of Perugia
L3S	Legend of the Three Companions
Proc	Acts of the Process of Canonization of St. Clare
SC	Sacrum commercium
SP	Mirror of Perfection

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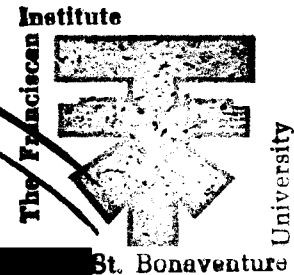
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239 pages

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THE CORD
A Franciscan Spiritual Review

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To save unnecessary delay and expense, contributors are asked to observe the following directives:

1. MSS should be submitted on disk or typed on 8 1/2 x 11 paper, one side only, double spaced.
2. The University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 13 ed., is to be consulted on general questions of style.
3. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized or, in typed manuscripts, underlined.
Titles of articles should be enclosed in quotation marks and not underlined or italicized.
4. References to Scripture sources or to basic Franciscan sources should not be footnoted, but entered within parenthesis immediately after the cited text, with period following the closed parenthesis. For example:
(1Cor. 13:6).
(RegNB 23:2).
(2Cel 5:8).
(4LAg 2:13).

A list of standard abbreviations used in *The Cord* can be found inside the back cover. The edition of the Franciscan sources used should be noted in the first reference in a mss.

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The Cord, 46.2 (1996)

Editorial

Our journey through the Lenten/Easter season is a particularly good time to reflect in a focused way on our vocation as "penitents." Retrieving our spiritual tradition challenges us to translate our inheritance into terms understandable for our own times. Studying the lives of Francis, Clare, and the first followers makes abundantly clear to us that the Franciscan way is inseparable from the penitential way, and the penitential way is a life of on-going conversion.

Bernard Lonergan provides us with a contemporary description of the experience of conversion:

Conversion . . . is a radical transformation on which follows, on all levels of living, an interlocked series of changes and developments. What hitherto was unnoticed becomes vivid and present. What had been of no concern becomes a matter of high import. So great a change in one's apprehensions and one's values accompanies no less a change in oneself, in one's relations to other persons, and in one's relations to God.¹

This contemporary description raises echoes of Francis's own words in his *Testament*, recalling how he had begun "to do penance": "The Lord led me among [the lepers] and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body" (Test 2-3).

In this issue of *The Cord*, we look at conversion as our way of life. Michael Blastic offers a stimulating reflection on the relationship of conversation to conversion and concludes that conversation is a peculiarly Franciscan way of responding to our world. Katherine Caldwell shares a study that helps us understand what it meant for Francis to be a penitent in his own times. Margaret Ann Jackson finds that relating to the poor and outcast of our society is powerfully transformative for us Franciscans, just as Francis found his experience with the lepers transforming.

A "voice from the past" is Celestine Regnier, who in 1956 wrote "An Exhortation to Meekness." We reprint it here as a call to a quite unpopular and inauspicious virtue for our times. And finally we share Edward Zablocki's reflection on the special character of the secular Franciscan vo-

cation, finding its meaning in everyday engagement with the Church's mission in the world.

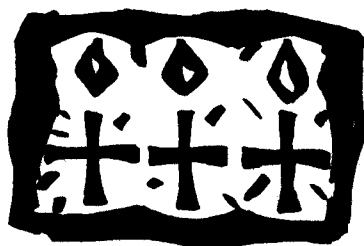
As we celebrate together the Paschal Mysteries, we are graced with remembering how our dying to self is a movement into the very passion of God and a rising to new and unimagined LIFE. Who knew this better than Francis and Clare?

Since our last issue of *The Cord*, in which we announced the formation of a new editorial board, we have welcomed another member. Murray Bodo, OFM, of the Province of St. John the Baptist, Cincinnati, has graciously agreed to serve. In a future issue we will share with our readers biographical profiles of our board members.

Finally, we invite our readers to keep us informed of significant programs and publications which can be shared through *The Cord*. We would especially appreciate receiving information about books in English being published in countries other than the United States, since it is sometimes difficult for us to be aware of these. It is our hope that *The Cord* will become a networking vehicle for sharing a common reflection on our way of life throughout the English-speaking Franciscan world.

Endnote:

¹As quoted by Walter Conn, ed., *Conversion, Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation* (New York: Alba House, 1978) 13.



The crosses featured in this issue of *The Cord* are the work of Francis X. Miles, OFM.

The Cord, 46.2 (1996)

THE CONVERSATION OF FRANCISCANS: MINISTRY IN COSMIC CONTEXT

Michael W. Blastic, OFM, Conv.

The presentation of Zachary Hayes, OFM, to the joint conference of the Franciscan Federation and the Franciscan Friars in Anaheim, CA, in August, 1995, has provided the Franciscan world with a magisterial synthesis of the Franciscan worldview.¹ His reflections are foundational; that is, Zachary articulates the wisdom approach of the Franciscan tradition which derives from the religious experience of Francis and Clare of Assisi and the theological reflection on this experience by the doctors of the Order. This tradition provides a context in which Franciscans can and should evaluate and reflect upon their own life—its structures, expressions, spirituality, mission, and ministry—in order that we might be, in Zachary's words, "responsible stewards of a treasure that has much to offer for the healing of humanity and of the world at large" (Hayes, 17).

Zachary's reflection on the tradition exposes the logic which connects the insights of Francis's spiritual experience with the tradition of Christological reflection, characterized by Zachary as cosmic Christology. He states that the reflective dynamic of the Franciscan masters such as Bonaventure and Scotus moved "from the story of Jesus and the cross/resurrection to the widest possible horizon." This means concretely, as Zachary suggests,

looking out at the entire world as one sees it at a particular time and trying to perceive the possible relations between the story of Jesus and the larger picture of the world. We might summarize the conviction of the early Franciscan theologians by saying simply that a world without Christ is an incomplete world. Or, in another formulation, the whole of the created cosmos is structured Christologically (Hayes 6).

This style of theological reflection which moves by means of its own inner logic from the religious experience of Francis to the cosmic Christology of the Franciscan doctors leads to a particular style and understanding of ministry. Based on Zachary's description of the Franciscan theological perspective, one could define ministry as service to the divine aim in creation. Or, again, ministry might be described as service to the transformation and completion of the world as intended by God. Using strictly Bonaventurian concepts, ministry could be defined as a *reductio*, i.e., a returning of all things to God. We recognize and respect the inner relationship of all things to God as all things have flowed from the creating hand of God. In this context ministry could also be described as respect for reality—letting all things be what they are as intended by God.

What we are speaking of when we attempt to describe Franciscan ministry is a *style* of ministry. The Franciscan style of ministry, based on the vision Zachary has articulated, implies the effort to make connections between the ordinary, everyday human experience of men and women ("looking out at the larger picture of the world") and the story of Jesus (the gospel as rule and life). Franciscan ministry attempts to discover the inner logic of things as intended by God. One way of approaching this Franciscan style of ministry is by employing the metaphor of conversation—Franciscans minister by "engaging in conversation," by looking out at the wider world of humans' life experiences and engaging that world with the story of Jesus through attention to, care and respect for the concrete individual engaged at that moment.

An insight into this Franciscan style of ministry emerges from a story about Francis told by Thomas of Celano. A Dominican doctor of theology approached Francis with a request to interpret the text of the prophet Ezekiel 3:18, in which Yahweh, addressing the prophet, states that if the prophet does not "proclaim to the wicked man his wickedness, I will require his soul at your hand." The Dominican was aware of the learned interpretations of the text but sought Francis's own understanding. With reluctance, Francis responded:

If the passage is to be understood in a general meaning, I would take it that the servant of God should be so aflame in his life and his holiness that he would reprove all wicked men by the light of his example and by the words of his conversation. So, I say, the splendor of his life and the renown of his fame will proclaim to all their wickedness (2Cel 103).

Celano's account of Francis's response to the Dominican reflects his basic stance to the understanding of scripture: to the extent that the Word is embodied in word and example, that is, in the brothers' manner of life, to that extent is the Word understood—life becomes proclamation.² It is this connection of example with understanding, of conversation with proclamation, which reveals an important insight of the early friars into the nature and style of their ministry.

This style of ministry is described in words by Francis himself as he addresses a chapter gathering of the friars, where, according to the author of the *Legend of the Three Companions*, Francis says:

The general behavior of the friars must be such that all who see or hear them may be drawn to glorify our heavenly Father and to praise him devoutly. . . . Since you speak of peace, all the more so must you have it in your hearts. Let none be provoked to anger or scandal by you, but rather may they be drawn to peace and good will, to benignity and concord through your gentleness. We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way. Many who may seem to us to be children of the devil will still become Christ's disciples (L3S 58).

Here Francis emphasizes the behavior, the manner of life of the friars, as the word which leads men and women to glorify God. The behavior itself becomes proclamation—it effects healing, unity, and reconciliation. This way of being with men and women as the friars went about the world, this engagement with their world, this style of ministry, is conversational.

Conversation is thus more than a mere speaking of words. Conversation implies exchange, a sharing of thought and feeling, a familiarity and close association with another, and even a style of life, or as the medieval person might express it, a manner of life.³ The latin *conversatio* is used by the author of the *Legend of the Three Companions* in the text cited above, translated by the English "general behavior."⁴ The medieval use of the Latin *conversatio* as manner of life or behavior was based on the monastic use of the term in the context of the monk's life of conversion which took place within the monastery. It has its origin in the *Rule of Benedict*.⁵

While Francis himself uses the term *conversatio* in his writings, especially significant for our purpose are two texts from the *Earlier Rule*. The first of these texts characterizes the location of Franciscan conversation:

And they must rejoice when they live among people (*quando conversantur inter viles et despectas personas . . .*) [who are considered to be] of little worth and who are looked down upon, among

the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside (RegNB 9:2).⁶

Here Francis specifies a privileged context for the conversation of Franciscan life with the poor and lepers. The use of the preposition "among" (*inter*) suggests a certain intimacy of life, even implying the existence of a single fraternity with the poor and suffering on the margins of Assisi. It was above all in the poor and suffering men and women he encountered that Francis was able to see the image of Jesus Christ,⁷ making a living connection between that particular, concrete history of a poor person and the story of Jesus. Here, Francis's *conversatio* was articulated and effected at the level of personal relationship and mutual presence with these people from this concrete and specific social location. This specific social location does not place limits on where Franciscans are to converse, but does describe some conditions for honest conversation.⁸

There is a second text of Francis in the *Earlier Rule* which is also significant in this context and treats of the Franciscan mission beyond the Christian world:

As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among [the Saracens and nonbelievers] in two ways (*duobus modis inter eos possunt spiritualiter conversari*) (RegNB 16:5).

Here, as Zachary suggests in his paper, the implications of the Franciscan tradition for inter-religious dialogue becomes evident (Hayes 16-17). Francis emphasizes that the way of being with non-believers is itself a spiritual conversation. This chapter of the Rule further specifies that the first way of going among the non-believers is not to "engage in arguments or disputes," but to be subject to everyone and acknowledge that this way of being is Christian. This clearly implies that the behavior of the friars, the manner of life of the friars takes the place of words. The life of the friars speaks the gospel, embodies the gospel that it might be heard, so that in the hearing of the friars' life, others might become engaged with the story of Jesus. This manner of life among the non-believers makes visible the sacred structure of reality revealed in Christ—that in Christ all men and women are brothers and sisters. The sacred structure of reality revealed in Christ demands respect for difference and diversity. Faith in this Christ demands a response of radical openness to reality and the truth of God revealed there.

The relationship between Francis and the brothers and Clare and the sisters in a common ministry of "repairing the church" is situated in this context of conversation. Clare remembers in her *Testament* Francis's pro-

phetic announcement of the arrival of the Poor Ladies at San Damiano, even recording the very words which Francis used on that occasion:

Come and help me in the work [of building] the monastery of San Damiano, because ladies are yet to dwell here who will glorify *our heavenly Father* (cf. Mt. 5:16) throughout His holy, universal Church by their celebrated and holy manner of life (*quarum famosa vita et conversatione sancta glorificabitur Pater noster caelestis in universa ecclesia sua sancta*) (TestCI 14).⁹

With striking clarity of insight, Clare realizes that her ministry and that of her sisters, as announced by Francis, was precisely conversation—it was their holy manner of life which would give glory to God in the church. Later Clare further specifies the nature of this conversation:

In the Lord Jesus Christ, I admonish and exhort all my sisters, both those present and those to come, to strive always to imitate the way of holy simplicity, humility, and poverty and [to preserve] the integrity of our holy way of living (*ac etiam honestatem sanctae conversationis*), as we were taught from the beginning of our conversion by Christ and our blessed father Francis (TestCI 56-57).

Clare places their "holy way of living" on the same level as "simplicity, poverty, and humility," linking the expression of life with these values in an inseparable manner. Clare thus specifies the content of their holy conversation in terms of simplicity, humility, and poverty, describing them as the way—underscoring with insistence that this *conversatio* is incarnate in a particular manner of life which Clare experiences as the same life of conversion taught by Christ and Francis. Clare connects her own and her sisters' concrete experience of life with the story of Jesus as spoken in the life of Francis. It is this engagement at the level of behavior which links the friars and the poor ladies in a ministry that has ecclesial significance: the effect of this *conversatio*, of this manner of life, is the edification of the church. The conversation of Francis and Clare has ecclesial significance in terms of effect (the rebuilding of what has fallen apart), but it is also constitutive of the reality of the church which is built up through conversation. For Francis this conversation began with the experience of hearing the crucified speak and address him personally in the broken down church of San Damiano from the broken body of the Crucified. It continued in the manner of life of Clare and her sisters who, as Francis prophesied, came there to live.¹⁰

Clare continues to characterize even further the nature of this conversation in terms of charity. Charity, Clare insists, is fostered by simplicity, humility, and poverty. She encourages her sisters to love "one another with

the charity of Christ," allowing the "charity you have in your hearts [to] be shown outwardly in your deeds" (TestCI 59). It is this example of charity which edifies, which leads to growth in love of God and one another, engaging all the sisters in the conversation of gospel living. This is the *forma vitae* which Clare struggled to protect throughout her life.

II. Franciscan Ministry as Honest Conversation

An honest conversation does have rules or guidelines. David Tracy suggests rules for conversation which are appropriate to our context. For Tracy, conversation demands a willingness to follow the question wherever it may go. He continues to develop this approach to conversation through rules intended to protect the integrity of the process:

Conversation is a game with some hard rules: say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can; listen to and respect what the other says, however different or other; be willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged by the conversation partner; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded, to endure necessary conflict, to change your mind if the evidence suggests it.¹¹

We might translate Tracy's rules for conversation into Franciscan criteria or foundations for ministry. One could say that in order to have an honest conversation, to live lives of integrity which speak the gospel in human flesh, the Franciscan must engage in ongoing conversion (the life of penance) and contemplation, both of which challenge one to see Jesus Christ as the key to understanding the world, as Zachary suggests.

To state the obvious, Franciscan life begins with and is sustained in conversion. The experience of conversion, while common to all who respond in faith to Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God, is nonetheless understood and experienced in a particular way by Franciscans. This Franciscan approach to the experience of conversion is linked to Francis's own experience, which he describes in his *Testament*, and where he reveals that he began to do penance when "the Lord Himself" led him among the lepers (Test 2). Here Francis learned that the life of penance begins with the action of God, who literally led Francis out of himself, out of his own bitterness and disgust, and turned him to the lepers. As Francis's experiences teaches, the life of penance is about being turned by God toward the other, and in that experience of being turned toward the other, coming to know and recognize that in the experience of conversion one is embraced by God when one embraces the other. Franciscan conversion—the life of penance—

is not something one does primarily for oneself. Franciscan conversion is what God does for us—it is the location in which God can be found and experienced and tasted; it is the place of Franciscan mystical experience.

Francis comes to recognize Jesus Christ particularly among the lepers, in the suffering and the poor. Here he finds an answer to the question "What are we as human beings?" Turning toward God's created image in the other (conversion), we come to recognize that "rooted in the earth yet created in the likeness of the one who is the divine Likeness, we are destined to embody something of the divine Word in our own individual lives (Hayes, 14). Conversion allows honest conversation. In exchanging the bitter for the sweet, in looking beyond oneself toward the other, we are able to respond to God's word spoken to us in the life of the person with whom we are engaged, to whom we attend with attention and respect.¹²

This turning toward the other in conversion brings us out of ourselves and places us before the mystery of God as that finds expression in the created world. Thomas of Celano describes this activity of Francis as contemplation. Francis sees Christ in the poor; he sees Christ in creation; he ultimately becomes what he sees in the vision on La Verna—a crucified man.¹³ This seeing Christ in the world is what contemplation is all about. Throughout his life, Celano insists, from the first moment of his conversion until he drew his last breath, Francis constantly contemplated the mystery of God as that appeared before his eyes in the lives of everyone and everything he encountered. As Zachary comments: "Giving ourselves to the cause of Christ is not losing the world. It is ultimately finding the world in its truest reality in its deepest relation to God, the ultimate origin and end of all that is" (Hayes 12). Francis did not choose between God and the world. As the *Canticle of Brother Sun* proclaims, in choosing either Francis has both.

In this light, Celano's insight into the stigmata was simply that Francis finally became what he saw. Somehow, in the vision of La Verna, the final identity of the human person and the entire created order is revealed in the crucified man whom Francis saw and subsequently became in his own flesh. Celano describes the experience in this way:

Solicitously [Francis] thought what this vision could mean, and his soul was in great anxiety to find its meaning. And while he was thus unable to come to any understanding of it and the strangeness of the vision perplexed his heart, the marks of the nails began to appear in his hands and feet, just as he had seen them a little before in the crucified man above him (1Cel 94).

The mystery of the stigmata is thus the ultimate revelation of the truth fully embodied by Jesus in the Incarnation wherein God embraces the hu-

man condition with its limitation, vulnerability, and fragility. The stigmata of Francis is proof that we can bear the pain of the other, and in that embrace we can come to experience the sweetness of God. In this experience the Word takes on flesh, becomes flesh again to engage the world in conversation. Perhaps the Franciscan understanding of what Tracy means when he suggests that one of the rules of conversation is to "listen to and respect what the other says, however different or other," is exactly what God does in the Incarnation.

For the Franciscan "it is the shape of Jesus' history and ministry that embodies the divine clue as to the structure of all reality" (Hayes 9). The style of Franciscan ministry which derives from this conviction is thus conversational—it means engaging human experience with the story of Jesus, attending to the experience of the other and there naming grace. Conversion and contemplation are the foundation as well as the means to accomplish this ministerial task. Franciscans respond to the invitation of Christ to rebuild the church again in our own day through honest conversation. They speak with lives of integrity which embody the gospel anew in our age while attending to the mystery of God as that is revealed in the life of the other and the world at large.

Endnotes:

¹ Published as "Christ, Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity: The Roots of Franciscan Christocentrism and its Implications for Today," *The Cord* 46:1 (1996): 3-17.

² See *Admonitions* 6, 7, 21.

³ The *American Heritage Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986) defines conversation as "1) an informal spoken exchange of thoughts and feelings; 2) social intercourse; close association; 3) close acquaintance; a circle of acquaintances; 4) manner of life; behavior."

⁴ The Latin text reads: "Talis deberet esse fratrum conversatio inter gentes ut quicumque audiret vel videret eos glorificaret Patrem caelestem et devote laudaret." Theophile Desbonnets, "Legenda trium sociorum: Edition critique," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 67 (1974): 132.

⁵ The *Rule of Benedict* uses the term *conversatio* in the sense of manner of life in the following passages: Prologue 49; 1:3,12; 21:1; 22:2; 58:1,17; 63:1; 73:1,2. See "Monastic Formation and Profession," in: RB 1980: *The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1981) 459-463. Consult also, Terrence Kardong, *The Benedictines* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988) 94-98; 127-129.

⁶ English text used for the writings of Francis is that of Regis Armstrong and Ignatius Brady, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). Latin text for writings of Francis is that of Cajetan Esser, *Opuscula sancti patris Francisci Assisiensis* (Grottaferrata: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1978). Latin text for the writings of Clare is that of M-F. Becker, J-F. Godet, T. Matura, *Claire D'Assise: Ecrits* (Paris: Editions du cerf, 1985).

⁷ Consult 1Cel 76, where Francis reprimands a friar who refused to give alms to a poor man by saying, "Who curses a poor man does an injury to Christ, whose noble image he wears, the image of him who made himself poor for us in this world."

⁸ See the discussion in the next section of this paper which discusses the rules of honest conversation.

⁹ English translation of the writings of Clare is that of Regis Armstrong, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*. Revised and expanded (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1993).

¹⁰ See the reflection of Thomas of Celano in his *First Life* 18 where he suggests that Clare is the foundation of Francis's rebuilding of the church. See also the comments of Optatus van Asseldonk, "'Conversio' y 'conversatio' en la vida de Francisco y Clara," *Estudios Franciscanos* 89 (1988): 109-126; here at pages 116-117.

¹¹ David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion and Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 18-19.

¹² David Tracy comments: "In conversation we find ourselves by losing ourselves in the questioning provoked by the text. We find ourselves by allowing claims upon our attention, by exploring possibilities suggested by others, including those we call texts" (Tracy 19).

¹³ See 1Cel 76-94

IN MEMORY

On February 5, 1996, we received notice of the death of Mother Viola Leininger, OSF, former superior general of the Millvale, PA, Franciscans and Founding President of the Franciscan Federation, Third Order Regular of the Sisters and Brothers of the United States. A Sister of St. Francis for 72 years, Mother Viola had resided at the sisters' infirmary since the early 1980s. She died Sunday, February 4. She will be remembered with admiration and gratitude by all who have benefited from the services of the Franciscan Federation over the past three decades. Just 30 years ago this month (February), Mother Viola wrote a letter to each superior general of women's Franciscan Congregations in the U.S. It invited them to share her dream that Third Order Sisters might move forward collaboratively in their renewal efforts. The response to this letter constituted the beginnings of the Federation which today serves Third Order Regular Brothers and Sisters throughout the country and is a networking vehicle for all U.S. Franciscans. Mother Viola's letter and the story of her role in the Federation's founding can be read in *A Short History of the Franciscan Federation*, published in honor of the 30th anniversary and available at the Federation office, 650 Jackson St., NE, PO Box 29080, Washington, DC 20017.



The Echo in our Hearts Being Formed in the Evangelical Life by the Lepers of Today

Margaret Ann Jackson, FSM

Introduction

The story of Francis's encounter with the leper is a touchstone for renewing within us the foundations of our life as Franciscans. Not only was it a turning point for Francis, but he also had a practice of sending his followers to spend time with the lepers as a way of initiating and forming those choosing to follow in the footprints of Jesus. Someone has suggested that the lepers may have grown tired of being formators for Francis, perhaps wearily saying to one another "here comes another new one to shape up" when they saw a stranger clad in penitents' garb on their horizon. If contact with the poor and outcast of society was important then, what is comparable to that today? What implications does contact with the lepers of today have for our individual and congregational ongoing formation in Franciscan evangelical life?

In his address to the 1994 Franciscan Federation meeting, Joseph Chinnici, OFM, spoke eloquently of the evangelical life.¹ He invited us to enter into the conflicts of our society, holding all in tension, willing to be bombarded with the problems of our day. It is not the apostolic question of how to reach out to the poor in ministry, but rather how the lepers teach us to follow in the footprints of Jesus because we commit ourselves to being with them as sisters and brothers. We do this best when we enter into the spirit of the opening sentences of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [and women] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any

way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.

While all that is genuinely human raises an echo worth listening to, as Franciscans we have a special call to put ourselves into circumstances in which the poor and afflicted, the lepers of today who experience the glaring problems of our society and world, can reach our hearts and form us as followers of Jesus.

The Real World of the Poor

In my experience of working with homeless families and individuals, I find them to be a composite of our society's problems. But as we look toward placing ourselves in solidarity with the poor, we need to avoid romanticizing them and their struggle. They are not akin to the fanciful "noble savage" that a previous generation admired. The homeless family or individual has usually been struggling with one or more of the following:

- alcohol and/or drug addiction,
- mental illness,
- a physical or mental disability,
- a past history of some form(s) of abuse,
- domestic violence,
- trouble coping with life and functioning adequately,
- a prison record, time in jail,
- financial stress, bills piling up,
- loss of a job, "last hired, first let go,"
- lack of education and/or employment skills,
- illiteracy and/or learning disabilities,
- health problems and lack of health resources,
- AIDS.

Those of us who join the poor in addressing this daunting list find ourselves in a complex and untidy environment that defies easy solutions. We are often no more in control of the future than the people with whom we work. As professionals, we try to offer more choices, more doors to knock on, so that our clients can improve their lives. But how should I advise the homeless pregnant seventeen-year-old with a biracial child nine months old, who tells me that no landlord will rent to her because they don't consider her to be of age, even though in other ways she is classified as an emancipated adult? Furthermore, because of the chaos she has known

thus far in her short life, emotionally she seems several years behind her chronological age, which often makes her inconsistent in following through. What echo does that raise in anyone's heart?

As overwhelming as all this can be, in the midst of it there is an intangible human goodness waiting to be discovered by those able to look beneath a not-so-attractive surface. In some particularly troubled individuals, once their story of a childhood of abuse and turmoil emerges, I find it amazing that they can function at all. But even in the worst cases, I often catch a glimpse of the spark of goodness that flickers beneath the garbage heaped upon their spirit. In truth, the spark within them is probably a better witness to the Incarnation than my own, given the obstacles that have stood in their ways. An echo was raised in my heart by a poignant few minutes of listening to five or six homeless teenagers who were singing their favorite popular song in front of a group at the shelter. The song declares: "I swear, by the moon and the stars in the sky, I'll be there . . . for better or worse, I'll love you with every beat of my heart, I swear." Yet most of those teens are children of parents who have repeatedly let them down because of addictions to drugs and/or alcohol. With little or no experience of someone consistently being there for them, their longing for it has survived and become an ideal that moved them to song. Like all of us, they are yearning for the Eternal One who wanted so much to be with us that He fully and irrevocably became one of us.

Entering into this Formation Process

If we in some fashion place ourselves with the poor, God will use them to form us. It is not all that important to understand why God wants us there. It is far more important just to be where God is leading us. But there is a strong temptation to want first to understand and then to follow. We examine and analyze and evaluate and plan everything so that we will feel completely safe and secure before we are willing to act. There is nothing wrong with preparing for the future, as long as we remember that God likes to surprise us and take us places we thought we would never go, asking us to step out in faith. The apostles did not understand, yet they risked following Jesus. "Where do you live?" "Come and see."

The Spirit leads us forward by a rhythm of responding and reflecting, then responding again as the fruit of our reflection. We need to be with the lepers of today in whatever beginning way is feasible for us individually and communally. It is enough to know that it is God's call; the rest will follow step by step. We cannot make such a choice in full safety and security, for if we try to remove the risk totally, we are then depending on our-

selves and closing ourselves to the way God wants to act in our lives. This dialogue with the Spirit is not unlike a bit of wisdom some anonymous person has given us:

Come to the edge.
It's too high.
Come to the edge.
We might fall.
Come to the edge.
So they came,
and he pushed them—
and they flew.

Being Formed in the Four Franciscan Values

Once we have made the leap and are with the lepers, willing and privileged to be formed through them, what happens? I can speak only for myself, conscious that it is always an ongoing unfinished process. It means being further formed into who I truly am, a Franciscan; so I frame my thoughts in terms of the four fundamental values: humility, poverty, contemplation and conversion.

Humility is perhaps the most essential attitude to have. The poor are my brothers and sisters, in no way inferior to me despite their problems and difficulties. They raise an echo in my heart because I, too, have some of the same failings and flaws to struggle with. I must not try to take charge of their lives and make everything better, or I will become trapped on the unhealthy treadmill of control and codependency. I can present them with alternative paths to take and choices to make that will be for their good, but it is always their free decision to make. Neither do I try to manipulate them into choosing as I would. On the other hand, I do not become a party to negative behavior and unwise preferences. For example, the rules and policies of a homeless shelter do not change because someone finds them disagreeable. If they choose not to keep the rules, they are also choosing to leave. But I can still respect their choices and the consequent path and pace of their progress.

One family with four children struggled hard to pay debts, save money, and move out of our shelter. A year or so later they needed to come back again. This time we learned that the father had a drug addiction which had been and was still the underlying cause of their recurring predicament. We required him to receive chemical dependency counseling, as is our policy. He chose not to, and the family moved out, but with some im-

provements in place. If they come full cycle again, we will still be there for them. Perhaps then the father will be willing to address the deeper problem. I am certainly not superior to them, even though I wish they had chosen differently. I am still their sister, caring about them and their journey.

Poverty has many forms, all of them rooted in that most basic poverty we all share: our humanness. Everyone who enters a shelter is materially poor. Many come with virtually no belongings, particularly those women and children who have fled domestic violence, leaving all behind lest they lose their lives. We assist them with material necessities until they are able to provide for themselves, but it is far more important to address the underlying causes of each situation. What are the human limitations that have brought them to us? Mental illness? Chemical dependency? Illiteracy? Abuse and degradation of spirit? The poor and homeless are not really different from the rest of us, for we are all human beings struggling in some way with our inevitable limitations. Those of us who have escaped material poverty may operate under the illusion that because we are in control of certain areas of our lives, we can completely take care of ourselves. We are pained to have to ask anyone for anything, God included.

Being with the poor and homeless brings us face to face with human frailty in a way that cannot be denied. It is still possible for us to seek refuge in a we/they mentality, however. We can comfort ourselves with the lie that these needy ones are less than we are and different from us, that we are safe from ever facing what they face: our core poverty of being human and our utter dependence on God. Yet we ourselves may have made little progress in our lives compared to those who have never known the advantages we enjoy, yet inch forward day by day in their own way.

I am reminded of the father of a family who gave evidence of being paranoid and schizophrenic and refused to take medications for his condition because of their side effects. He tended to isolate himself, yet was always affectionate and caring toward his two small daughters, one of whom is not his biological child. Because he so rarely smiled and tended to distrust everyone, I was amazed to observe one day that another resident of the shelter had actually engaged him in a conversation, eliciting smiles and nods that I had seen only when he was with his children. Furthermore, the one drawing him out was a bit of a character in his own right, with irritating mannerisms and a sometimes volatile temper. The mentally ill father had taken a very large step forward. Sometime later his wife decided she could no longer live with him, and he became quite upset and depressed, but his friendly relationship with the other man continued nonetheless.

Contemplation gives the opportunity to reflect upon one's experiences with the poor, seeking to value these special brothers and sisters as God does. Prayer is the place to bring them and their concerns to our loving Father, conscious that no one else can truly effect the changes that may be needed. It is also the place to struggle with one's anger and powerlessness over injustice and stereotypes. It is the time to ask for greater humility and openness to see the good that is always there. Being part of their lives is seldom dramatic, often challenging, and never flashy, but it is always worth pondering in the presence of God. Again and again I ask that I may be the presence of Jesus to them, indeed with them. I sometimes find myself searching for how to explain why being with the homeless poor enriches my spirit and draws me closer to God. It is much like trying to describe a deep experience of God's presence in prayer. Words always fall short. Thus far, the best expression I have found of how the poor become part of one's contemplation is a line from the song "Here I Am, Lord": "I will hold your people in my heart."

A couple came to stay in our shelter who had obviously lived on the street or out of doors for an extended period of time. When the woman became very seriously ill and was hospitalized, I went to visit her. Her condition had improved. She was glad to see me and talk about how things were going. I enjoyed seeing her gratitude to the nurses and the way she joked with her doctor, calling him her boyfriend. The next day I telephoned to check on her again. When I remarked that I had forgotten to pray with her the day before, she said: "Oh, your whole visit was a prayer." That answer conveys much more about her understanding of prayer than about my brief visit.

Conversion of heart is not any easier for us when we work with the poor than with anyone else. Conversion is about change, and we do not really want to find that we are the ones that need to change. We would like to believe that it is not particularly necessary in our own case. Our political system tends to see the poor simply as people who need to change, but do not want to change. This attitude does not acknowledge how it is hard for each and every one of us both to want and to try to change. Furthermore, it is expected that those who work with the poor are only justified in doing so if they are making these changes happen, as if anyone could actually compel others to transform themselves and the way they live their lives. I can only be responsible for my own conversion, and I find that generally it is the fruit of that rhythm of reflection and response. The people that I work with give me much to reflect on. Sometimes God speaks rather bluntly when I see that a person with far fewer material resources than I is more generous than I. Much of the time I find my own process of conversion to

be elusive, defying my inclination to treat it as my project and my accomplishment. At times I kick against the goad. For the most part, its daily nature puts me too close to it to see what is really happening, or perhaps not happening. Later on, sometimes only years later, I begin to see how the experiences and circumstances of my life have been used by God for my good. God is the One who integrates the activities and relationships of my life with contemplation so as to bring about the growth I need. As long as I am where God wants me to be, cooperating as best I can, I trust that the process is happening.

One day when I felt particularly tired and pressured, I overheard a critical remark about the shelter from one of its residents. I became angry and immediately stopped to tell him that I did not appreciate what he had just said. He accepted my reprimand and I went on. Later it occurred to me that I might have overreacted, so when I next saw him I gave a vague apology. His response: "Oh, I knew you didn't hear the whole conversation and you didn't understand what I was saying. I just blew it off. It's O.K." He was teaching me a humbling lesson about my tendency to be judgmental and his ability to be tolerant and understanding. I hope that it continues to echo in my heart when I need it.

Conclusion

We live in a wonderful time in the history of the Franciscan tradition, a time of discovering and understanding our roots in new ways that call us to follow more closely in the footprints of Jesus. Research about Francis and Clare has gifted us all. But it is not enough to know and understand what went before. It is also a time to put ourselves in the midst of the problems and conflicts of our society and our world and then share the fruits of that experience with each other. As Chinnici puts it:

While we long for a coherent intellectual and practical position, is it not true that genuine religious life has generally caught fire only in the midst of long, hard, practical experience, the acceptance of life's ironies, the struggle with others to put heart and mind and behavior together, and the discovery of God in that very experience?²

Putting ourselves in a position to listen well to the lepers of our day will lead us toward the fire that is of the Spirit. I offer some words from the song "Standing Outside the Fire," as sung by Garth Brooks, hoping they will echo in our hearts:

We call them cool
Those hearts that have no scars to show
The ones that never do let go
And risk the tables being turned.

We call them fools
Who have to dance within the flame
Who chance the sorrow and the shame
That always comes with getting burned.

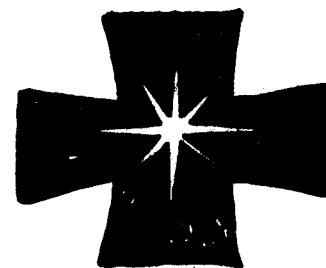
But you got to be tough when consumed by desire
'Cause it's not enough just to stand outside the fire.³

Endnotes:

¹ Joseph Chinnici, OFM, "The Prophetic Heart: the Evangelical Form of Religious Life in the Contemporary United States," address to the 29th annual Franciscan Federation, *The Cord* (Nov., 1994) 292-306.

² Chinnici 296.

³ The song, "Standing Outside the Fire," is in the album *In Pieces* by Garth Brooks for Pearl Records, 1993.



An Exhortation To Meekness

Celestine Regnier, OFM, Conv.

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Like every founder of a religious order, congregation, or society, St. Francis became obsessed with the desire to imitate the example of Christ's life and so to graft the gospel to his daily conduct as to lose his identity in his Divine Master. Francis was appreciative of his abysmal unworthiness of divine recognition: "Who are you, O God, most dear, and who am I, your worthless little worm of a servant?" Nevertheless, he was enraptured by the embryonic possibility. "Please, O Lord, let the fiery, honeyed force of your love lap up my spirit from everything there is under heaven so that I may die for love of love for you" (2Cel 196).

During the course of his conversion, the qualities of Christ gradually came into focus and Christ's virtues took the form of a particular model to be imitated and embodied in Francis. That Christ had done all things well was a gospel fact, but particularly how and why he did so was to be resolved by a personal diagnosis of the Master and by a resultant emphasis upon special virtues which, to Francis at least, best mapped the way that followed his Lord.

Thus Francis could say, when he was striving to formulate a rule of life that would render his followers Christ-like: "I wish you not to speak to me of any other rule, not of Benedict, nor of Augustine, nor of Bernard." Not that one contradicted the other, nor that one's focus of Christ rendered all others blurred; but rather that, inasmuch as each one embraced Christ entirely with the motive of loving him completely, each also was drawn to one or more particular virtue which demanded special attention if one were to become Christ-like.

It is in this light that certain virtues may be called "Franciscan," for they are the ones which Francis believed to have been predominant throughout the diverse circumstances of Christ's life. Indeed, Christ had done all things well; but for Francis there had always been evidence of meekness, peacefulness, humility, and gentleness. Such virtues characterized the beginning of Christ's life: the stable, the manger, the unprivileged shepherds, poverty, the humble and self-effacing parents, Mary and Joseph. Such virtues also characterized the end of that life: a cross, nakedness, a borrowed tomb. And throughout the three public years there was the repeated evidence of Christ's own words: *I am meek and humble of heart* (Matt. 11:29).

As Francis paged through the gospels, ploughed and harrowed their lines to cultivate a rich crop of truth and virtue, the meekness and humility of Christ held his eye, like the silver ribbon of the moon's reflected light across the dark, mysterious ocean. So it was that he wrote in his Rule: "I counsel, admonish and exhort my friars in the Lord Jesus Christ, that when they go about in the world, they should not quarrel, argue, nor judge others; but they should be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble" (RegB 3:10-11).

It was elementary logic that he should so exhort his followers, for Christ had said of himself that he was meek and humble of heart. So, then, must Francis be; so, then, must be his followers. Nor was this to be regarded as a lesser virtue—optional, so to speak; for Francis exhorted, urged, that this virtue of meekness be especially evidenced in the lives of his disciples, who were at all times to be harbingers of peace. "Peace be to this house." Unless the kindly warmth of meekness permeated their entire being, they would not truly be called *Fratres Minores* nor would they be said to be "following the teaching and footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (RegNB 1:2), as Francis counseled, admonished, and exhorted. They would be lacking in one of the essential ingredients of Christ-likeness, according to the Franciscan ideal.

The particular beauty and magnetic attraction of the Franciscan way of life spring from what may be termed "the silent virtues." This is evidenced particularly in meekness, which holds anger in check and locks the tongue so that no quarrel or vituperation may escape to disrupt the peace or sear the hearts of others. This quiet virtue steers attention to humanity, specializing in the recognition, appreciation, and understanding of its qualities, characteristics, ideals, foibles, day-to-day difficulties, likes and dislikes, expressed or patently implied in daily words or conduct. Seemingly unoccupied, the disciple is engrossed in mental observations to increase ways and means of fostering concord, to avoid even the conception of a trial or pang within the neighbor. Meekness is an examining physician of

human frailty, seeking how to lessen it; it is a probing spectator of the human race, seeking how to help it. In the realm of worldly affairs it is the discerning diplomat at the conference table; it is the pleasing personality that disperses discomfort and uneasiness and makes one feel in place and wanted; it is the palliative business director who magically causes accounts to multiply.

By means of an habitual, unnoticed observation of others, the disciple increasingly realizes that the thoughtless word or deed can be a thrust of a dull, jagged knife; that frequently what is summarized as an unintended hurt or sorrow is in reality a lack of consideration, concern, and consciousness of another's over-all make-up; that the over-worked rejoinder, "I'm sorry," or, "I didn't mean it," has as its foundation an uncultivated sensibility for the peacefulness of another. Meekness has no hand in fashioning human-made crosses, for it is concerned not with self, but with others. It prefers to listen than to talk, to be the audience rather than the performer who gains the plaudits. It is happy to applaud, to console, to help even without recognition, to waive what is due, and to estimate values in relation to eternity. It allows for considered opposition to a viewpoint expressed or of an action performed, but never to the exclusion of reined emotions, so that a clear evaluation of benefit or futility prevails at all times. Futility of conversation is quickly recognized, and then the priceless wisdom of mortification stems the possibility of erupting passions.

Meekness possesses as one of its many facets the pervading awareness of the existence in others of human defects and of countless personal idiosyncracies, which, in their overall insignificance, have the power to ignite the spark of impatience, temper, uncharitableness, spreading discord, hurt, and inner turmoil. The disciple is perpetually on guard against the sudden display of another's imperfections and weaknesses, and, therefore, is seldom surprised and propelled into exhibitions of equal frailty. Patience, understanding, and a prevailing spirit of forgiveness are ever accessible tools, which the disciple strives unceasingly to master. "Blessed is the person," said Francis, "that puts up with the frailty of his neighbor to the extent he would like his neighbor to put up with him if he were in a similar plight."

In order to render this virtue more keen and sensitive in practice, disciples practice moderation. They resist talking too much or without cause, for too often the wagging tongue renders inaudible the sage whisperings of common sense, balance, altruism, and tact. They think well before speaking, and, like the diplomat, having thought twice, say nothing, for the unweighed word, once expressed, falls heavily upon another's heart. They laugh genuinely, but not without sobriety. Like words, unbridled laughter

can rankle, disturb, annoy, bore, and even wound. They are conscious of the fact that they do not convey or transmit their inner thoughts, emotions, and reactions by words alone, but also by tone, gestures, and facial expressions. These, too, must be studied and controlled, for, while the tongue is silent, the eye may trumpet anger, impatience, and dislike as loudly as a verbal explosion. They realize, too, that silence is not always wise nor most fruitful, but that at times it may prompt discomfort, embarrassment, and even resentment within the neighbor; and so there will be situations which will elicit a few well-tempered words in order to ease a tense or uncomfortable situation and set everything in proper balance and value.

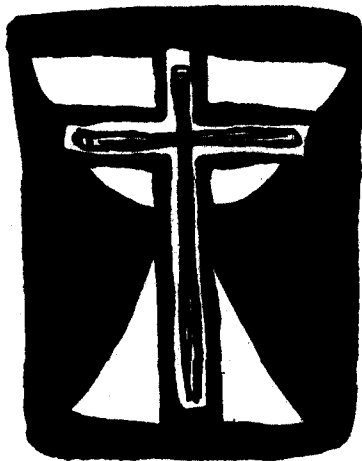
Wisely, then, did Francis urge his followers to be meek; it is Christlikeness as described by Christ himself; it is the product of temperance, patience, fortitude, and charity; and it is proof positive that virtue and sanctity can be attained only by a vivid and studied awareness of the countless opportunities provided by daily living. "Meekness," wrote Saint Jerome in his *Commentary on Galatians*, 5:20, "is a mild virtue; it is kindly, serene, gentle in speech, gracious in manner; it is a delicate blending of all the virtues." And he goes on to pinpoint the virtues even more precisely; "Kindness is akin to it, for, like meekness, it seeks to please; still it differs from the latter in that it is not as winsome and seems more rigid, for though equally prompt to accomplish good and render service, it lacks that charm, that gentleness that wins all hearts."

As the adult is humored and enchanted by the innocence of a child, so the countless failings of humankind are overcome by the winning virtue of meekness. For good reason, then, all have been directed by Christ to become as little children, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. In his insistence on meekness there was a keen realization in Francis of the tragic possibility and flagrant contradiction of a person of prayer and dedication, self-centered, of volatile temper, bombastic, inconsiderate, harsh, uncouth. "For my part," said Francis, "I want just this privilege from the Lord, never to have any other privilege from anybody than to do reverence to everybody and by obedience to the holy Rule to convert everybody by example more than by word" (MP 50).

To Francis, spirituality was not so much something to own as something to give; something by which others were to be helped, lifted up, assuaged, and restored to peace. It was a tender bloom to be watered and nurtured privately, but to be displayed publicly so that its sweet scent might fill the air. Meekness, in its delicate blending of all the virtues, looked out on a vista of limitless spiritual horizons: "I became all things to all people that I might save all" (1 Cor. 9:22).

In his daily study of his Master, Francis must have noted what Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah: "The bruised reed he shall not break, and the

smoking flax he shall not quench" (Is. 13:3). This was how the Savior was to be recognized. Francis observed the Lord with his apostles; how He bore with their faults, their ignorance, even their rudeness; how he was patient when impatience seemed justified to hurry the *slow* process of their education. He heard the Lord preach meekness unceasingly. The apostles must be simple as doves, meek as lambs, and they must forgive seventy times seven times. To walk in the footsteps of Christ meant, for Francis, to be meek, for then would the soul be emptied of self and filled with God.



And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would simply pray and speak in this way: "We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ, in all Your churches throughout the world, and we bless you, for through your holy cross you have redeemed the world" (Testament of St. Francis 4-5).

Francis and the Penitential Life

Katherine Caldwell, TOR

Introduction

In the early biographies of St. Francis of Assisi, he is described as both a penitent and hermit.¹ The purpose of this study is to examine the influence which the penitential and eremitical movements had on Francis's life. Through examining the sources for the life of Francis within his historical context, we will see that Francis had become a penitent embracing the eremitical lifestyle during the two years (1206-1208) between his initial conversion and the beginning of the brotherhood. This period of his life was a formative time, which helped to shape his Gospel vision of life.

Francis Becomes a Penitent

The conversion of Francis was a gradual process which began with his imprisonment in Perugia in 1202 (2Cel 4 and L3S 4) and eventually led him to a complete renunciation of the world and a total consecration to God in the service of the Church in 1206. In 1205, on his way to battle in Apulia, Francis had a spiritual experience which changed the direction of his life. Francis heard a voice speaking to him: "Who can do more for you, the Lord or the servant?" "The Lord," Francis answered. "Then why are you deserting the Lord for the servant, the Prince for the vassal?" Francis asked: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" "Go back to your own land" the voice replied, "and do what the Lord will show you." (AP 6b). Following this experience, Francis went back to Assisi, withdrew from the bustle of the world and devoted himself to prayer in order to know God's will. The biographies indicate that Francis meditated on the Gospel parable of the man who sold everything to purchase the hidden treasure (Mt. 13:44-46)

(1Cel 6-7, L3S 12, LM 1:4). His great desire for God alone, his heavenly treasure, led him to a series of events in which he renounced himself and the world and embraced God his Father in the service of the Church.

Early biographers of Francis describe his experience of kissing the leper as a key event which marked Francis's complete renunciation of himself (1Cel 17, 2Cel 9, L3S 11). Francis, in his Testament, expresses the importance of his experience with lepers (Test 1-3). He not only renounced himself, but the following events show how he renounced the world and embraced the life of a penitent in the service of the Church.

Returning from his trip to Apulia in which he put into action the Gospel text of Matthew, he sold everything, even the horse he was riding. He went to San Damiano and offered the money to the priest. The priest refused the money, but agreed to let Francis stay with him (1Cel 9, L3S 16, LM 2:1). According to Pazzelli, Francis was received as an oblate, which was an official form of a penitent who gave themselves to the service of God by committing themselves to the service of a church, monastery, or episcopacy.² Pazzelli supports his position by critically examining Celano's Latin text in comparison to the language used during this time to refer to an official penitent. Based on Fortini's historical research of Assisi, the words, *morari* and *mora*, used in Celano's text, are the same words used to describe an oblate in Assisi documents.³

Further proof for Francis's state as an official penitent is found in the description surrounding Francis's trial before the bishop, particularly evident in *The Legend of the Three Companions*. At that time in history, clerics and religious, including official penitents, were not subject to the civil court. Their cases were heard by their local bishops. The description in *The Legend* clearly indicates that Francis was not subject to the civil court, and his case was heard by the Bishop of Assisi.⁴ Furthermore, the language used in the trial between the Bishop and Francis in the *Legend of the Three Companions* also clearly indicates his state as an oblate. The Bishop addressed Francis, "Si tu vis Deo servire . . ." ("If you really want to consecrate yourself to the Lord . . ."). Francis replied: "Quia Deo servire proposui . . ." ("Since I have decided to dedicate myself to the Lord . . .").⁵ Hence, the evidence seems to show that Francis became an official penitent.

Development and Characteristics of The Penitential Movement

The penitential movement has its roots in the early Christians' struggle with the question: "What happens if a Christian sins after baptism?" What gradually developed was a process of reconciliation of the penitent sinner with the Church. In the third century, this process became a transitional

Order of the Church (Order of Penance) like the Order of Catechumens. Penitents were to embrace both an interior disposition of *metanoia* [conversion] and a lifestyle that reflected this stance in outward actions, such as prolonged time in prayer, contrition (ie: tears, public confession), and fasting (three periods of forty days). From the fourth century on, the Order of Penitents developed into a permanent state with ecclesiastical status. During the fifth century, members of the Church who were not guilty of grave sin were voluntarily entering the Order of Penance. These voluntary penitents embraced this lifestyle, as a means to grow in perfection. Especially after the seventh century, the Order of Penance provided a new alternative to monastic life for people who either did not desire to enter a monastery or who for some reason were not eligible.⁶

Becoming an official penitent was still a common practice during Francis's time. The person desiring to enter this state would present the bishop or his representative with a *propositum*, which was a statement of how he proposed to live. If the *propositum* was approved, the person would pass from the secular state into the religious. Penitents were distinguished from seculars by the following: 1) they wore distinctive dress (usually a gray woolen tunic), 2) they could not bear arms, hold public office, nor attend worldly entertainment, and 3) they performed works of penance and charity such as prayer, fasting, and care for the sick or travelers.⁷

There were different forms of penitent lifestyles: 1) oblates who attached themselves to and provided services to monasteries or churches 2) pilgrims who uprooted themselves from home and security in an act of penance and a search for grace, 3) hermits and recluses (women counterparts to hermits) who separated themselves from the world in order to devote themselves to prayer and also did works of charity, 4) married penitents, and 5) virgins who lived in their own homes.⁸

Francis's life during the two years before he received brothers (1206-1208) was characterized by the distinctive marks of the penitential order. He was not under the jurisdiction of the civil court. He wore a distinctive garb, served the Church by repairing churches, performed works of charity by caring for lepers, and embraced a life of penance.

Francis Described as Both Penitent and Hermit

From the time after Francis's trial before the Bishop (1206) until he received his apostolic call in 1208,⁹ Francis is described as wearing a habit of penance and a hermit's garb: "He [Francis] returned to Saint Damian, gay and full of fervor, clothed in a hermit's garment" (L3S 21). Celano also likens Francis's garb to that of a hermit: "Meanwhile the holy man of God,

having put on a new kind of habit. . . . At this time [after he finished the rebuilding of the Portiuncula] he wore a kind of hermit's dress, with a leather girdle about the waist; he carried a staff in his hands and wore shoes on his feet" (1Cel 21). However, in the *Treatise on the Miracles*, Celano describes Francis's garb as the habit of penance: "Just because he was interiorly conformed to the same Cross, he wore the habit of penance, made in the shape of the Cross" (3Cel 2).¹⁰ It could seem as though there are discrepancies between the sources as to whether Francis was a penitent or a hermit. The most probable explanation of why his garb is described as both a habit of penance and a hermit's dress is that Francis was an official penitent who lived an eremitical lifestyle. He was both a penitent and a hermit, something common in his day.

Eremitical Life during the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries

It would be impossible to understand the development of Francis's Gospel form of life without seeing it within the religious atmosphere of his time. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was a revival in eremitical life. This revival was due in part to the growing dissatisfaction with monastic life and to the desire of lay people and secular clergy to pursue a life of prayer, independent of monasticism."¹¹ It led to the development of new eremitical orders, such as the Camaldolese (1012) and the Carthusians (1084). The lay hermits in the latter group were often official penitents who lived an eremitical lifestyle. Many of these hermits (both lay and cleric) also became itinerant preachers.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was a growing desire to live a poorer and more eremitical life than was lived in the monasteries. The new eremitical life had a different nuance from that lived by the traditional desert hermits. Leyser uses the term "new hermits" to distinguish them from the traditional. Constable calls the movement "eremitical cenobitism."¹² Like traditional hermits, the new hermits desired more solitude than cenobitic monasticism provided; however, they did not seek complete solitude like the desert hermits. Solitude for the new hermit did not mean without company, but to be away from the bustle of secular society. Degrees of solitude varied according to the foundation and the desires of the individual hermits.¹³

The concern, desire, and aim of the new hermits was different from that of the monks of their time. The new hermits were primarily concerned with "asceticism and austerity" and that they desired to live according to an "objective standard." Hence, they aimed at developing a rule of life (an objective standard) which was based on the life of the apostles, the model

of the early church and the Scriptures.¹⁴

The observances of the new hermits were different in other respects as well. Most of the new hermit groups lived a stricter poverty than the monasteries, simplified liturgical prayer, did manual labor, and performed works of charity. In regard to poverty, as opposed to monastic standards, the new hermits embraced personal as well as communal poverty. They refused to hold any land charters or to receive tithes which would have given them security. They hermits simplified liturgical prayer so that they could perform manual labor. In addition, they did not isolate themselves from the poor and sick nor ritualize their charity as had happened in monastic life. Many groups of new hermits gave personal care to travelers, the poor and the sick.¹⁵

The eremitical life was also seen as a form of penitential life. This was the case for Francis. During his conversion Francis sought solitude and hidden places like the hermits of his time. He adopted many elements of his spirituality from the eremitical life.¹⁶ Schmucki states:

Beside the circumstance of solitude, we clearly see his life of penance resulting from his sense of sorrow for sin, by which he lamented bitterly the years of his past. We also notice the little prayer of the publican in the Gospel (Luke 18:13b) which our saint repeated again and again as an ejaculatory prayer. These items are easily connected with the spiritual resolutions of the hermits who embraced the canonical state of penitents, either to expiate their public sins or as a voluntary self-discipline.¹⁷

In addition, Francis's description of his hermit brothers shows that he connected a life of prayer with penance: "Behold my Knights of the Round Table: the brothers who hide in abandoned and secluded places to devote themselves with more fervor to prayer and meditation, to weep over their past sins and those of others" (LP 71). Francis's spirituality was influenced by both the penitential and eremitical movements of his time.

Francis as Penitent/Hermit before His Apostolic Call

The two years before Francis received his apostolic call, while he lived as a penitent/hermit, was a significant time in his formation. The sources describe both the internal and external changes that were happening in him. Francis's transformation was rooted in his deep desire to respond fully to God: "Francis the servant of God was now stripped of all worldly things and free to serve divine justice. He held his life of no account and dedicated himself to the service of God in every possible way" (L3S 21).

His dedication bore fruit in the internal transformation he experienced. *The Legend of the Three Companions* describes the amazement of the townspeople over Francis's great patience in suffering persecution from his father and brother (L3S 23). The sources describe also how the Holy Spirit was operative in Francis's life in a special way during this time. Celano describes him as being "in a kind of spiritual intoxication," prophesying in French and being "filled with the ardor of the Holy Spirit" (2Cel 13). This was a graced time for Francis, a time of spiritual consolation.

This internal transformation manifested itself also in Francis's actions. During these two years Francis embraced a life of penance and mendicant poverty, worked on restoring three churches, embraced and cared for lepers. Francis, who had been used to an easy life, now embraced a life of manual labor and penance: "It would be difficult to specify all the hard work that had to be done to restore the church. At home Francis had been coddled, whereas now he carried a load of stones on his own shoulders and endured many hardships for love of God" (L3S 21).¹⁸ Francis is even described as being worn down by his life of penance: "half dead from penance and hardships" (L3S 23). He struggles with his first experience of mendicant poverty, begging for his daily food. At first, his bowl of scraps was repulsive to him, but he overcame his disgust and found himself filled with joy, realizing that he could endure anything for the love of God (L3S 22; 2Cel 14). Francis also cared for and dwelt among lepers. "While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to, me to see lepers. And the Lord himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them" (Test 2-3; 1Cel 17). "After that [his return from Gubbio], in his love for humility, he devoted himself to the lepers and lived with them waiting on them all, for love of God" (LM 2-6).

This period as penitent/hermit was a formative time for Francis, in which many of the things he learned remained as central values throughout his life. Here we see the beginning of his embrace of poverty and minority. Poverty became an internal value which enabled him to experience a deep joy in the Lord. Like the poor, he also embraced manual labor and was not afraid to identify with those who were most despised in society. The way Francis cared for and lived among the lepers shows that he had embraced the value of minority, which was to become the mark of his brotherhood.

Development of Francis's Gospel Form of Life

The development of Francis's Gospel form of life, like the foundation of many eremitical communities, was a gradual process. "Behind the found-

ing of any hermitage it can be supposed there had been months, in some cases years, of doubts, discussion, speculation."¹⁹ Founders sought solitude or went on a pilgrimage (sometime with one or more followers) to seek God's will and learn from the wise.²⁰ This was the case for Francis during his conversion and his two years as a penitent/hermit when he was earnestly seeking to know God's will for his life.

Clarity came to Francis one day while he was attending Mass at the Portiuncula, which Bonaventure says was the Mass of the Apostles (LM 3:1). Francis heard the Gospel text of Jesus sending out his disciples to preach, and he knew this was his call:

The holy Francis, hearing that the disciples of Christ should not possess gold or silver or money; nor carry along the way scrip or wallet or bread; that they should not have shoes or two tunics but that they should preach the kingdom of God and penance, immediatly cried out exultingly: "This is what I wish, this is what I seek this is what I long to do with all my heart." Then the holy father, overflowing with joy, hastened to fulfill that salutary word he had heard. . . (1Cel 22).

After this experience Francis began to preach penance and attract his first followers (1Cel 23-25). Together they began to live according to the instruction of Francis and the Holy Gospel (1Cel 26-31; AP 14-30; LM 3:7; L3S 36-45).

Despite Francis's original clarity, after the brothers returned from having their Rule approved in Rome, they began to question whether they should dwell among other people or in solitary places (1Cel. 35). Bonaventure describes an incident in which Francis questioned whether he should give himself solely to prayer or to go out preaching. With the assistance of Clare and Silvester, he realized he should preach (LM 12:1-2). He embraced preaching in imitation of Christ and for the love of souls.

Although it was clear that Francis and the brothers were called to preach, this call did not cause Francis to abandon his former penitential and eremitical lifestyle. He gave himself to both contemplation and preaching: "It was his custom to divide up the time given him to merit grace, and, as seemed necessary to him, to give part of it to working for the good of his neighbors and the rest to the blessed retirement of contemplation" (1Cel 91). Furthermore, the penitential and eremitical lifestyle of the brothers provided the context which enabled their preaching to be effective.

When the people saw them rejoicing in their sufferings and patiently enduring them for the Lord, unceasingly engaged in devout prayer, neither accepting nor carrying money like other poor

people, and having such great love for each other, by which they were known to be the Lord's disciples, many, through the kindness of the Lord, experienced a change of heart (AP 24a).

The lifestyle of the brotherhood was a rhythm of prayer, work and ministry (caring for lepers and preaching). In the early brotherhood, prayer was the foundation of their life, manual labor was a means of example, and ministry arose from their desire to save souls. Francis describes the life of the early brothers: "We who were clerics used to say the office as other clerics did; the lay brothers said the Our Father . . . and I used to work with my hands. . . . The Lord revealed to me a greeting, as we used to say: 'May the Lord give you peace'" (Test 18-23). Jacques de Vitry describes the lifestyle of the brotherhood as follows: "During the day they go into the cities and villages, giving themselves over to the active life of the apostolate; at night, they return to their hermitage or withdraw into solitude to live the contemplative life."²¹ Even later, when the brothers went on missionary journeys, Francis instructed them that prayer was to be the foundation of their life, both in solitude and when among the people:

In the name of the Lord go out two by two with becoming dignity. In the morning, observe silence until after tierce by praying to God in your heart. Let there be no useless conversation, for although you are traveling, your conduct must be upright as if you were in a hermitage or in your cell. Wherever we are, wherever we go, we bring our cell with us. Our brother body is our cell and our soul is the hermit living in that cell in order to pray to God and meditate. If our soul does not live in peace and solitude within its cell, of what avail is it to live in a man-made cell? (LP 80).

The uniqueness in Francis's vision was that the brothers were to be hermits whether they were in an actual hermitage or in the world.

The ermetical aspect of Francis's Gospel form of life is also seen clearly in the description of the lifestyle at the Portiuncula (2Cel 18-19 and LP 9) and in his Rule for Hermitages.²² In examining these texts, Schmucki describes the following characteristics which the brothers had in common with the eremetical life:

- 1) striving for unceasing prayer,
- 2) physical isolation from the world,
- 3) evangelical silence,
- 4) interior recollection and detachment,
- 5) limitation of food and drink, and
- 6) manual labor.

Schmucki concludes by pointing out some unique aspects of the Franciscan eremetical life—his use of the relational terms of mother/Martha (servant) and son/Mary (praying brother) to describe the roles of the brothers and his concept of rotating these roles. In addition, although poverty had been the ideal of every age of hermits, Schmucki believes that the radical degree of poverty embraced by the early brothers was unique.²³

Merton points out the unique realities of fraternal and universal love found in Franciscan eremitism: "Here [*Rule for Hermitages*] Saint Francis has completely reconciled the life of solitary prayer with warm and open fraternal love. . . . Franciscan eremitism had another aspect: it was open to the world and oriented toward the apostolic life."²⁴

For Francis, solitude not only increased his love for God, but also his love for all people. Even after Francis experienced the heights of mystical prayer at Mt. Alverna, he came down from the mountain, and, motivated by great love for people, he preached even when he was too weak to walk (1Cel 98; LM 14:1). It was for love of God and for souls that Francis embraced his Gospel form of life of prayer, work, and ministry:

He [Francis] would not think himself Christ's lover, if he did not compassionate the souls whom he redeemed. It was for souls that he wrestled in prayer, for souls that he was so active in preaching, and it was for souls that he went beyond all limits in giving good example (LM 9:4).

Conclusion

As a Third Order Regular sister, I appreciate the significance of the way in which Francis integrated the eremitical lifestyle as a penitent and how he maintained aspects of the eremitical life even after he received the apostolic call. Since the Madrid Document in 1974, the primary emphasis in the Third Order has been on penitential spirituality. There seems to be a growing need to explore further the eremitical dimensions of our Franciscan penitential tradition. Communities, such as the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, NY, have integrated this tradition in establishing the Ritiro, a contemplative house within their congregation. It will be interesting to see if this eremitical dimension will revive as Franciscan religious sincerely grapple with their identity and lifestyle.

In my own congregation we have been grappling with how to live out the contemplative dimension in our lives. From our conception, we have seen ourselves as contemplative/active sisters. We live a fully contemplative life in regard to prayer and community life, but we are not cloistered. This enables us to do corporal works of mercy. Constrained by the practi-

cal limitation of being a new community with most of our sisters in formation, our contemplative life has a monastic bent. Gradually, we have been able to incorporate more eremitical aspects, such as weekly hermitage days and more solitude. Eventually, as sisters are received into final profession, the eremitical aspects of our contemplative life will develop more fully. With this in mind, I find it important to study Francis's life and the development of Third Order communities. We can learn so much from those who have gone before us.

Endnotes:

¹The Battle of Collestrada took place in 1202 and scholars (following the time in L35) believe that Francis was imprisoned for about one year.

²Raffaele Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989) 30.

³Pazzelli 184. Also see Arnold Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, trans. Helen Moak (New York: Crossroads, 1981) 217.

⁴Pazzelli 88, 184; Fortini 217, 222-230.

⁵Pazzelli 89.

⁶Pazzelli 11-24; Robert M. Stewart, "De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam": *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. Origins, Development, Interpretation* (Rome: Istituto Storico Dei Cappuccini, 1991) 91-106. For a thorough investigation of the development and characteristics of the Order of Penitents see: Joseph A. Favazza, *The Order of Penitents: Historical Roots and Pastoral Future* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988).

⁷Pazzelli 39-40.

⁸Pazzelli 38-40.

⁹The author of the *Chronicle of the 24 Generals* wrote that the date of Francis's apostolic call while hearing Mass in the Portiuncula was 1209 or perhaps 1208. Modern chronologists use 1208.

¹⁰Translated in Pazzelli 185 from *Analecta Franciscana* X, 273.

¹¹Thomas Merton, "Franciscan Eremitism," *The Cord* 16 (1966): 359.

¹²Giles Constable, *Monks, Hermits and Crusaders in Medieval Europe* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988) 239-240.

¹³Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe 1000-1150* (London: Macmillan, 1984) 18-19.

¹⁴Leyser 21-26.

¹⁵Leyser 56-65.

¹⁶Octavianus Schmucki, "Place of Solitude: An Essay on the External Circumstances of the Prayer Life of St Francis of Assisi," *Greyfriars Review* 2 (1988): 72-86, 91-96.

¹⁷Schmucki 82.

¹⁸For other sources on Francis's efforts to rebuild the three churches see 1Cel 18, 21; 2Cel 11; LM 2:7-8; TestCl 4.

¹⁹Leyser 38.

²⁰Leyser 39.

²¹Jacques de Vitry, "Jaques de Vitry's Letter, 1216, Letter I," *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of Sources*, ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983) 1608.

²²For a commentary on *The Rule for Hermitages* see Kajetan Esser, "Die 'Regula pro eremitoriis data' des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi," *Franziskanische Studien* 44 (1962): 382-417. Unpublished English translation by Bernard Doerger.

²³Octavian Schmucki, "Mentis Silentium: Contemplation in the Early Franciscan Order," *Greyfriars Review* 4 (1990): 35-64.

²⁴Merton 361.

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Extending the Understanding of Franciscan Mission: Secular Franciscans and the Renewal of the Temporal Order

Edward Zablocki, SFO

The importance of mission has always been characteristic of the Franciscan movement. Do Secular Franciscans today have anything to add to the Franciscan sense of mission and efforts at evangelization? Does the Secular Franciscans' rootedness in a life consumed with commitments to family and work preclude any meaningful contribution to Franciscan mission?

Secular Franciscans, who, under their previous Rule lived out a life of piety as Third Order members, are today called to an apostolic life nurtured in "dynamic, evangelizing" fraternities. The Secular Order is undergoing an awakening and is in the throes of birth pangs from which a truly international order is being born—at least 750,000 Franciscans all following the same way of life—the 1978 Pauline Rule. If we accept the premise that Secular Franciscans are a necessary and constituent part of the Franciscan movement then it behooves all of the Franciscan family, in the spirit of seeking a "vital reciprocity" with the Secular Order, to come to appreciate the unique aspects of the Secular Franciscans' call to mission.¹

To begin to develop this appreciation, a reconsideration of the breadth of the Church's evangelical mission is the necessary starting point. Limiting our understanding of evangelization to the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord and Redeemer captures the essential core of the Good News, but misses the vast penumbra of our Church's understanding of evangelization surrounding the kerygma.

In the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, this broad sense of mission is captured succinctly:

The work of Christ's redemption concerns essentially the salvation of men; it takes in also, however, the renewal of the temporal order. The mission of the Church, consequently, is not only to bring men the message and grace of Christ but also to permeate and improve the whole range of the temporal (no.5).

Paul VI, in *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, gives fuller expression to the Church's all-encompassing appreciation of her mission:

Evangelization will also always contain—as the foundation, center, and at the same time summit of its dynamism—a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men as a gift of God's grace and mercy (no.27). . . . But evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development—a message especially energetic today about liberation (no. 29).

What is the value of reminding ourselves of this expansive understanding of the Church's mission? If we fail to do so, there is the clear danger that Secular Franciscans' most important efforts at carrying out the Church's mission will not be understood. For the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* continues: "Laymen ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order" (no.7).

Tragically, laypersons are generally unaware that their quotidian efforts to maintain and improve the world, are, in fact, helping to achieve an aspect of the Church's mission.² Secular Franciscans are increasingly becoming an exception to this unfortunate situation as they deepen their appreciation of and commitment to their new "way of life," which is both fully Franciscan but also fully consonant with the Second Vatican Council's trenchant portrayal of the vocation and mission of the laity.

Not that this understanding was easily attained. In "De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam," *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation*, Robert M. Stewart, OFM, observes that the first attempts at developing a new rule for Secular Franciscans failed to incorporate the radical change which the Second Vatican Council represented in terms of the understanding of the vocation and mission of the laity.³ While the Rule Project began in 1968, as late as 1974 the draft Rule had a serious omission—the distinctive lay spirituality enunciated by Vatican II. "[T]he 1974

Basic Text does not consistently present a "secular" spirituality [and] contains little that would not also be appropriate within a rule for a canonical religious Franciscan group."⁴

This situation was reversed in 1975 through the efforts of an International Commission that "most strongly criticized the 1974 Basic Text for its failure to present adequately a specifically "secular" spirituality."⁵ An entirely new section called "In the Midst of the World" was added to address this omission. Note this section's congruence with the Church's distinctive mission for the laity as noted above:

Like all members of the Franciscan Family, we are sent to the entire world. As seculars, we have our own vocation: living in the midst of the world, engaged in various duties and works of the world. It is our duty to enlighten and to direct all temporal realities to which we are closely united in such a way that they may work and prosper constantly according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer. Also, as members of secular society, we will know how, according to the gifts given by the Lord, to take our share of responsibility, bringing to the management of temporal things the spirit of the Beatitudes. By our witness and our action, joined with that of other men and women, we will work in these different sectors towards the realization of the plan of God for the world. It is first of all in our family that we will live the Franciscan spirit, striving to make it a sign of the world already renewed in Christ. We will make our work a participation in the development of creation, the redemption of men and women, and a service to the whole human community. Finally, we are aware that it belongs to the whole Church to make people capable of building the temporal order well and of orienting it toward Christ with a clear distinction of the rights and duties of ecclesial communities. The secular fraternities will assume their apostolic and social responsibilities and commit themselves to concrete evangelical choices.⁶

This paragraph from the 1975 draft became the basis for Articles 14-18 of the approved 1978 SFO Rule. These articles define the evangelical mission of Secular Franciscans:

Article 14. Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone "who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself," let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service.

Article 15. Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public

life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.

Article 16. Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community.

Article 17. In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ. By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

Article 18. Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which "bear the imprint of the Most High," and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

In order to move these articles from words on paper to praxis, the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States has established four Apostolic Commissions: Justice & Peace, Work, Family and Ecology. These Commissions are mirrored at the levels of regional and individual fraternity. Initial and on-going formation emphasizes these Commissions. The results are impressive. A recent survey response from 57 fraternities in the eastern US belonging to Holy Name Secular Franciscan Province found 1,352 instances of peace & justice related commitments, 951 family related apostolates, 568 examples of efforts to improve the environment, and 368 examples of Seculars upholding the dignity of work.

Let us remember that in striving to en flesh the challenge contained in their Rule, Secular Franciscans are doing more than just improving their world and achieving humanitarian objectives; they are carrying out, along with other laypersons, their "distinctive" role of renewing the temporal order. Keep in mind that these efforts have a missiological dimension—they are an important contribution to Franciscan mission.

Lay people, whose particular vocation places them in the midst of the world and in charge of the most varied temporal tasks, must for this very reason exercise a very special form of evangelization. Their primary and immediate task is not to establish and develop the ecclesial community—this is the specific role of the pastors—but to pursue every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world. Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It

also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering. (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, no. 70)

Or—to put it in lay language—above the exits inside every church there ought to be signs posted reading: “Now Entering Mission Territory.”⁷

Endnotes:

¹*Hidden Power III: From Gospel to Life—The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1979).

²Russell M. Shaw, *Understanding Your Rights: Your Rights and Responsibilities in the Catholic Church* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Publications, 1994).

³Robert M. Stewart, OFM, “De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam,” *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation* (Rome: Istituto Storico Dei Cappuccini, 1991).

⁴Stewart 257.

⁵Stewart 257.

⁶Stewart 270-271.

⁷William L. Droel and Gregory F. Augustine Pierce, *Confident & Competent: A Challenge to the Lay Church* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1987).

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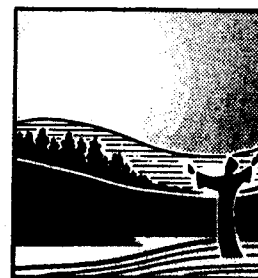
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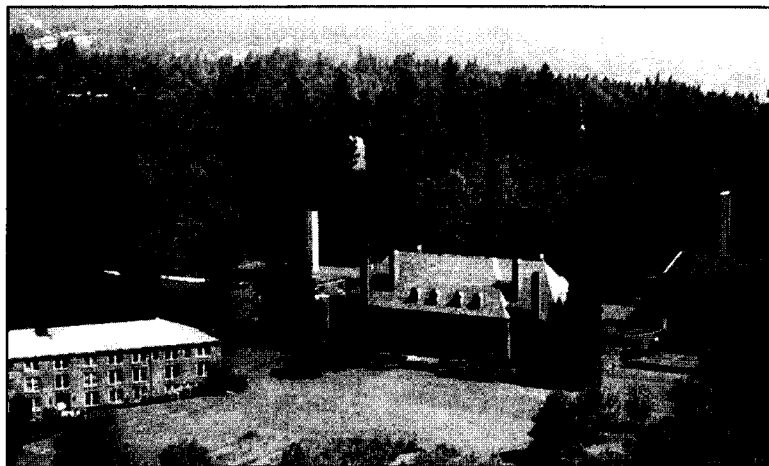
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Volume 10, 1996

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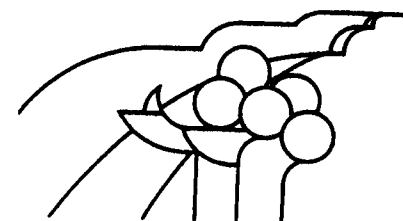
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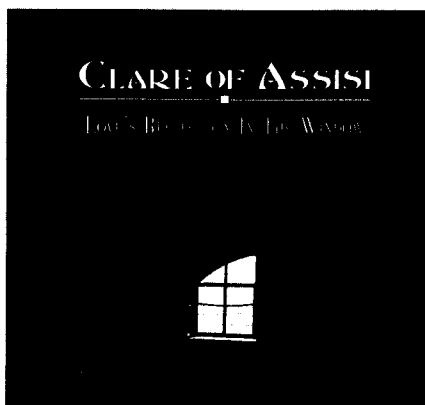
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Region 4 Franciscan Gathering. "How Did We Get from Assisi to Ellis Island?" "How Did We Get from Ellis Island to the Mississippi?" William Short, OFM. At St. Francis Hospital, Lacrosse, WI. Contact: Michon Desmond, FSPA, 3560 Highway 51 N., Arbor Vitae, WI 54568-9540.

Saturday, March 23

Francis and Clare: The Legend Continues, a day of reflection, imagining and hope led by Joe Nangle, OFM and Marie Dennis, based on their book, *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God*. Co-sponsored by Franciscan Federation Region II and Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. At Newman College Life Center, Aston, PA. Fee: \$10. Contact: Kathy Donovan, OSF, 609 S. Convent Road, Aston, PA 19014; ph. 610-558-7716; fax 610-558-1421.

Friday, April 26-Sunday, April 28

Facing the Christ Incarnate. Tau Center, Winona, MN. Sponsored by the Franciscan Federation. (See detailed ad, pp. 100-101.)

Saturday, April 27

Seeding a New Hope, a workshop on Transformative Elements for lay and religious Franciscans, co-sponsored by Franciscan Federation Region II and the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. Presenters: Celeste Crine, OSF and Kathy Donovan, OSF. At St. Joseph's Church, Columbia, SC. Cost: \$20 includes breakfast and lunch. Contact: Noreen Buttner, OSF. Ph. 803-795-3821 (days) or 803-762-6058 (evenings).

Friday, May 17-Saturday, May 25

The Soul's Journey Into God. André Cirino, OFM and Josef Raischl. Contact: Director, Franciscan Spirit and Life Center, 3605 McRoberts Rd, Pittsburgh, PA 15234-2340; ph. 412-881-9207.

Saturday, May 25-Tuesday, May 28

Second Bi-Annual Networking Seminar for Franciscan Renewal/Retreat Centers and Franciscan Spiritual Directors. At Serra Retreat Center, Malibu, CA. Contact: Julie McCole, OSF, St. Clare Renewal Center, 608 B Legion Road, Aston, PA 19014, ph. 610-459-4077.

Tuesday, May 28-Sunday, June 2

Retreat: "Letting Jesus Question Us: An Interactive Retreat around John's Gospel." Franciscan Renewal Center, Portland, OR. (See detailed ad, p. 96.)

Friday, June 7-Friday, June 14

Retreat: "Freedom in the Service of God." Tau Center, Winona, MN. (See detailed ad, p. 94.)

Sunday, June 16-Friday, June 21

Institute on Nonviolence. Peter Damien Massengill, OFM, Conv. and Tau Center Staff. (See detailed ad, p. 94.)

Writings of Saint Francis

Adm	Admonitions	FormViv	Form of Life for St. Clare
BenLeo	Blessing for Brother Leo	1Fragm	Fragment of other Rule I
CantSol	Canticle of Brother Sun	2Fragm	Fragment of other Rule II
EpAnt	Letter to St. Anthony	LaudDei	Praises of God
EpCler	Letter to the Clergy	LaudHor	Praises to be said at all the Hours.
EpCust	Letter to the Custodians	OffPass	Office of the Passion
1EpFid	First Letter to the Faithful	OrCruc	Prayer before the Crucifix
2EpFid	Second Letter to the Faithful	RegB	Later Rule
EpLeo	Letter to Brother Leo	RegNB	Earlier Rule
EpMin	Letter to a Minister	RegEr	Rule for Hermitages
EpOrd	Letter to the Entire Order	SalBMV	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
EpRect	Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples	SalVirt	Salutation of the Virtues
ExhLD	Exhortation to the Praise of God	Test	Testament
ExhPD	Exhortation to Poor Ladies	TestS	Testament written in Siena
ExpPat	Prayer Inspired by the Our Father	UltVol	Last Will written for St. Clare
		VPLaet	Dictate on True and Perfect Joy

Writings of Saint Clare

1LAg	First Letter to Agnes of Prague
2LAg	Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAg	Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAg	Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
LEr	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
RCl	Rule of Clare
TestCl	Testament of Clare
BCl	Blessing of Clare

Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2Cel	Second Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
3Cel	Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
AP	Anonymous of Perugia
CL	Legend of Clare
CSD	Consideration of the Stigmata
Fior	Fioretti
JdV	Witness of Jacque de Vitry
LM	Major Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LMin	Minor Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LP	Legend of Perugia
L3S	Legend of the Three Companions
Proc	Acts of the Process of Canonization of St. Clare
SC	Sacrum commercium
SP	Mirror of Perfection

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Evangelical Form of Life

Joseph Chinnici, OFM - July 1-12

Franciscan Theology of Presence and Ministry

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Franciscan Theology of Prayer

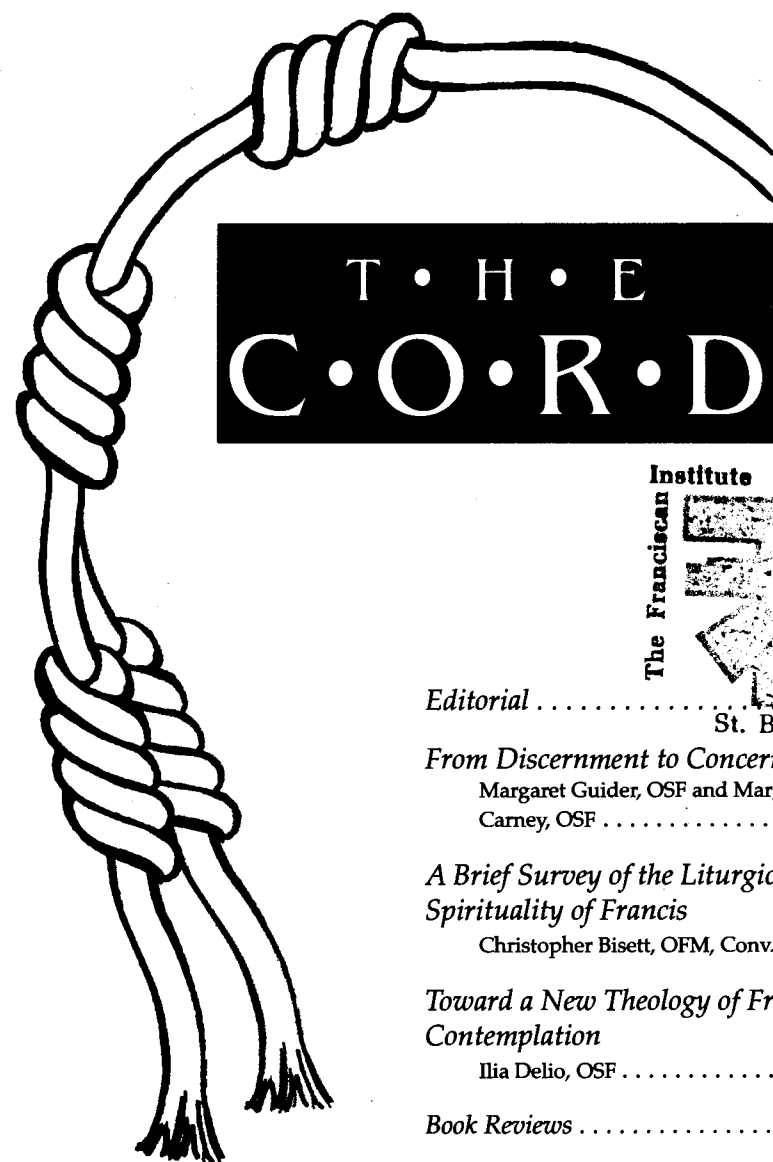
Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap. - July 15-26

Spiritual Direction in the Franciscan Tradition

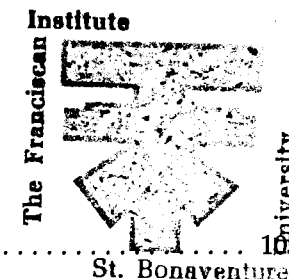
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Special Course Offerings: Francis: His Life and Times
William Short, OFM - June 24-July 5
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Dominic Monti, OFM - July 8-July 26

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW



T · H · E C · O · R · D



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THE CORD
A Franciscan Spiritual Review

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To save unnecessary delay and expense, contributors are asked to observe the following directives:

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2. The University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 13 ed., is to be consulted on general questions of style.
3. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized or, in typed manuscripts, underlined.
Titles of articles should be enclosed in quotation marks and not underlined or italicized.
4. References to Scripture sources or to basic Franciscan sources should not be footnoted, but entered within parenthesis immediately after the cited text, with period following the closed parenthesis. For example:
(1Cor. 13:6).
(RegNB 23:2).
(2Cel 5:8).
(4LAg 2:13).

A list of standard abbreviations used in *The Cord* can be found inside the back cover. The edition of the Franciscan sources used should be noted in the first reference in a mss.

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The Cord, 46.3 (1996)

Editorial

The prayer life of Francis and Clare is a never-ending source of fascination for those who follow them. Today, though we emphasize the "evangelical" character of our Franciscan life, we nevertheless continue to struggle with the too obvious tension between what we call our prayer life and what we call our life of ministry or action. The mood of our times makes us yearn, often enough, for a more contemplative and even solitary existence. Yet the needs of our world compel us to be engaged, to embrace solidarity with our suffering brothers and sisters, to serve human needs to the best of our ability. Many books and writings grapple with this question.

In this issue of *The Cord* we offer some aspects of a Franciscan approach to a life that is characterized by the "Spirit of prayer" (EpAnt 2). Sisters Margaret Guider and Margaret Carney present some helpful and practical thoughts on the process by which we discern God's will in our corporate as well as in our individual lives. Our desire to be guided by the Spirit of God in all our life responses moves us to seek this knowledge, alone and in our communities.

Father Christopher Bisett reflects on the significant role that liturgy plays in our Franciscan life and tradition. As a post-conciliar Christian, Francis was very concerned that the teachings of Lateran IV be well-understood and integrated into the lives of his followers and of all Christian people. One of the most pressing issues of his time was the need for a more meaningful practice of the sacramental life of the Church. As post-Vatican II Christians, we are faced with many of the same issues. As Franciscans we seek spiritual nourishment continually in this sacramental life and strive to teach others about its vast possibilities.

Sister Ilia Delio offers us a penetrating study of St. Bonaventure's approach to the mystical life as it squarely faces the full implications of the Incarnation. This is a message with great contemporary relevance, especially for us Franciscans, as we continue to seek in Christ, our brother, the full meaning of being human today.

From Discernment to Concernment: A Franciscan Approach to Choosing the Good as Sister and Sisters

Margaret Guider, OSF and
Margaret Carney, OSF

[In anticipation of the upcoming general chapters of several congregations of Franciscan sisters, this article was written to facilitate shared reflection on the election of leadership.]

Introduction

The election of new leadership is an important event in the shared life and history of a Franciscan sisterhood. The process raises feelings of hope, anxiety, and frustration and a sense of new horizons. These days are days of reckoning for each of us and for all of us, especially as nominees for elected leadership come together for a brief moment in time to hold in a common trust the collective hopes, dreams, convictions, and longings of their sisters. The call each nominee receives is as much an affirmation as an invitation. It compels all of us to ponder two questions which are foundational to our identity as Franciscan women: What does it mean to be sister? What does it mean to be sisters?

The task we assumed in preparing this reflection for sisters nominated for elected leadership is simply this: to use a few insights from our Franciscan tradition as starting points for reflection on the qualities of a leader, on the meaning of individual discernment, and on the desire to choose the good in common. Our offering includes three short reflections and a brief conclusion. At the end of each reflection, we invite our readers to consider a few suggested questions and to share with each other their thoughts on these questions. When the time for shared reflection is over, we encourage you to pause for a moment of silence, ponder what you have heard, and continue to the next section. At the end of the third discussion period, we offer a few concluding remarks for your ongoing consideration.

From Discernment to Concernment

Why have we chosen this title, "From Discernment to Concernment"? Let us take a moment to review the origins of the word "discernment."

cerno, crevi, cretum L. - 1) to distinguish with the senses, to perceive with the mind, to show oneself or be shown; 2) to decide, to contend, to resolve, to determine, to accept an inheritance.

We find the last entry to be particularly fascinating. However, moving from the dictionary definition to the task at hand, we recognize that the title, "From Discernment to Concernment,"—especially in the context of a reflection process on elected leadership—might seem to be contrived in an effort to put a Franciscan spin on what is typically seen as an Ignatian corner on the spiritual market we have come to know as "discernment." For better or for worse, there is a measure of truth in such a caricature. However, this measure of truth should not be confused with the whole truth.

Admittedly, proponents of Ignatian spirituality have at their disposal a set of rules for discernment contained in the *Spiritual Exercises*. For generations, this method for discernment has guided the imaginations and consciences of those who have sought to respond to the apostolic vocation to be men and women for others. Though Jesuits, along with their lay collaborators and many other vowed religious, continue to have an influential perspective on discerning God's actions in the individual and collective histories of human persons, few among them would make the exclusive claim that theirs is the only way or necessarily the best way for everyone. Recognizing this fact requires that those of us who have been drawn to the evangelical life as envisioned by Francis and Clare take hold of the charism entrusted to us. As Franciscans, we must find ways of discerning God's will that are authentically our own ways. This is not always an easy task.

Ignatius's rules for discernment have been well-articulated, described, codified, and mediated over the course of four centuries. Franciscan approaches to discernment, however, have not been equally and abundantly clear, even among those of us who have made a lifelong profession of following a Franciscan spiritual path. In fact, as members of Franciscan sisterhoods founded in the nineteenth century and living as women religious at the turn of the twenty-first century, our respective spiritualities are unquestionably hybrid. Take for example, a congregation whose constitutions were written by Passionists, whose spiritual directors were Jesuits, and whose title was Franciscan. Members of such a congregation might have experienced some existential confusion following the Second Vatican Coun-

cil, a confusion which gave rise to much growth and some wonderful humor as well.

Consider as well a Franciscan sister who has spent many years of her life affiliated with the Catholic Worker community and whose own commitment to non-violence has been deeply influenced by the Buddhist practice of vipassana meditation. It goes without saying that we have drunk from many spiritual wells over the course of two centuries, and we continue to do so today. For many of us, this diversity of spiritualities has been a great blessing that has enriched and strengthened our lives and ministries. Yet, at a time like this, when the approach of a general chapter stirs up in us countless expectations and anxieties, we are led by divine inspiration in much the same way as the Risen Christ led the disciples of Emmaus. We are faced with questions central to our identity. What does it mean to be Franciscan? What does it mean for each of us individually? What does it mean for all of us collectively?

In light of these observations, we invite you to consider the following four questions:

- 1) From what spiritual well(s) do I draw life-giving water?
- 2) In what ways does my spirituality shape and influence my self-understanding as a Franciscan?
- 3) How do our diverse approaches to spirituality contribute to our collective identities as women? as Christians? as Franciscans? as sisters?
- 4) What insights do these approaches bring to our understanding of the call to elected leadership?

A Franciscan Approach to Choosing the Good as Sister and Sisters

It is natural for Franciscans, in circumstances such as those in which nominees for elected leadership find themselves, to recall the prayer of Francis as he gazed upon the Crucifix at San Damiano.

Most High,
glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart.

Give me
correct faith,
certain hope,
and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge

so I might always discern
your holy and true will (OrCruc).¹

This prayer captures Francis's deepest desire to discern God's holy and true will. No doubt this prayer remained in Francis's heart throughout his lifetime. To pray this prayer was to be reminded of how the process of his conversion began and how it unfolded—from the grottoes of Monte Subasio, to encounters with the lepers, to unsettling visions, to the church of San Damiano, to understanding more completely the call to "rebuild the church" (see LM 2:1; 1Cel 6-7; L3S 13; 2Cel 9-11).

In reviewing the writings of Francis, we do well to remember that this is the only prayer in which we find Francis praying for "sense and knowledge." Although the desire to do God's will is quite prominent in Francis's prayers and writings, these particular concepts appear only in this prayer. Unlike the other prayers of Francis which are characterized by a certain universalism, (for example, we think of the wonderful lyrical Chapter 23 of Francis's Earlier Rule), the Prayer before the Crucifix is also the only prayer in which we find Francis using the first person singular. This prayer—and its context—provide us with an important key to understanding the relationship between Francis's desire to discern God's will and his commitment to the evangelical life.

When Francis heard the command: "Go rebuild my church," he interpreted it quite literally and understood it to be a personalized expression of God's will for him. In time, however, Francis discovered that this command had little to do with bricks and mortar. It was not about masonry or carpentry. The command was not about the refurbishing of San Damiano. Rather, it was about building the Reign of God. The command was about discipleship. It was about compassion and justice. It was about participation in the unfolding of God's will for all of creation. It was about experiencing God's will as mediated by the person of Jesus Christ.

We might ask ourselves how often we have desired to understand God's will for ourselves—or others—in terms of concrete particulars? How often have our so-called prayers of discernment been oriented toward getting clarity on the bricks and mortar of our personal lives only to discover that God's only will for us is that we participate in the compassion and justice of the Reign of God. *How* we participate is not so much a matter of discernment, but rather, a matter of "concernment." There is more at issue than discovering "how" we could, should, or might participate in God's will, for we already know this. At issue is our understanding of the power of choice—my will, your will, our will—and coming to terms with what each of us, some of us, and all of us will choose to do, knowing that every choice involves choosing and not choosing.

In our efforts as Franciscans to choose the how, the what, the where, and the when of our participation in the Reign of God, it is helpful for us to recall how Francis, when faced with such choices, sought out the prayer and counsel of others (see 1Cel 91; LM 12:1; LM 13). Bonaventure beautifully recounts a great classic example in his *Life of St. Francis*, Chapter 12. In this story, Francis sends friars to both Sylvester and Clare to ask each of them to spend time in prayer (and Clare we might add in conversation with other trusted sisters), so as to help Francis discover God's pleasure. Should he spend more time in the hermitages or should he be about the evangelical and apostolic task of preaching? Bonaventure introduces this story by saying:

[Francis] was not ashamed to ask advice in small matters from those under him, true lesser brother that he was, though he had learned great things from the supreme Teacher. He was accustomed to search with special eagerness how and in what way he could serve God more perfectly according to God's good pleasure (LM 12:2).

Bonaventure goes on to say that he was willing "to inquire from the wise and the simple, the perfect and the imperfect, the young and the old" (LM 12:2) so that he could more effectively reach his goal.

In stories such as this, we see the movement from individual discernment to what may best be described as fraternal or sororal "concernment." Although it is archaic English, the word "concernment" continues to keep its place in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It is defined as

an experience of anxiety and solicitude; a matter in which anyone has or takes an interest; the quality of concerning or being important to persons.

In pondering this wonderful definition of concernment, it seems to us that the word could serve us well in our efforts as Franciscans to capture the values and insights of these narratives. The idea of concernment makes it possible for us to speak about **the desire to give expression to the experience of human cooperation with "God's holy manner of working" in a way that is characteristic of our own spirituality.** Or, to put it another way, the word "concernment" describes the process by which those of us shaped by the charisms of Francis and Clare endeavor to choose the good by actively listening to the Word of God and to the words of one another.

It is good to remember the great teachers of our tradition, such as Bonaventure. In his classical spiritual treatise, *The Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure explains that the power of choice involved in choosing the good is realized through deliberation, judgment, and desire. Deliberation consists of inquiring which is better, this or that—knowing that better has

meaning only in terms of its proximity to the best. Judgment relies on a deep understanding of the law which our Creator has imprinted on our mind. Desire tends principally toward what moves us most; knowing that what moves us most is what is loved most, and what is loved most is happiness, understood as the highest good (Itin. 3:4).³

Given these thoughts, we pose the two following questions for reflection:

- 1) In light of the nomination process, what ideas or questions does this reflection on the movement from discernment to concernment raise for you? for your congregation?
- 2) Are there other insights from the Franciscan-Clarian tradition (or other spiritual traditions) that inform your own understanding of how to choose the good—individually and collectively?

Spirituality and Elected Leadership: Insights from the Life of Clare

Clare's embodiment of the qualities of an elected leader and her encouragement to those who dispose themselves to such a call are noteworthy. Throughout Clare's life, we see the interactive dynamic between spirituality and leadership unfold in countless ways. Unquestionably, Chapter 4 of her Rule offers a number of important insights regarding Clare's vision for elected leadership. However, in an effort to understand more fully the person of Clare as an elected leader herself, we may learn more from her example as described in the Bull of Canonization, 10:

This Woman, the first of the poor, the leader of the humble, the teacher of the continent, the abbess of the penitents, governed her monastery and the family entrusted to her within it with solicitude and prudence, in the fear and service of the Lord, with full observance of the Order: vigilant in care, eager in ministering, intent on exhortation, diligent in reminding, constant in compassion, discreet in silence, mature in speech, and skillful in all things concerning perfect government, wanting to serve rather than to command, to honor than to be extolled.

Her life was an instruction and a lesson to others who learned the rule of living in this book of life (Rev 21:27). The remainder learned to behold the path of life in this mirror of life.

Although in the body on earth, nevertheless, she was dwelling in spirit in heaven. [She was] a vessel of humility, a fortress of chastity, a fire of peace, and the communion of familiarity: meek in word, gentle in deed, and lovable and tolerant in everything.⁴

When reading these words, it is hard to resist the temptation to dismiss this passage as another one of those ideal role descriptions such as we usually reserve for designated leaders and persons in authority, role descriptions that are nearly impossible to fulfill. However, before succumbing to this temptation, we encourage you to think for a moment about the qualities ascribed to Clare and the qualifications which were indeed rooted in very factual observations: her conduct, her writings, and her life. We would like to take some of these descriptive phrases and use them as a method of exploring a few practical examples of the way in which Clare understood her role and the role of others who shared in governmental structures within her Franciscan community.

First of all, it is important to note that the biographies reveal that Clare resisted assuming the office of abbess, an office urged upon her by Francis just a few years after she entered San Damiano. His position eventually prevailed, and she did accept the title, although she used it sparingly in reference to herself. Clare did not like to use language associated with positions of prestige, precedence, or honor. She was not shy or naïve, however, about the very real importance, authority, and impact of her abbatial role, and she used it prudently and with great love for the community and the common good.

We see Clare, therefore, as one who governed with solicitude and prudence. Part of her solicitude was to be very sure that in governing the monastery she always had, to the greatest possible extent, the consent of the sisters in decisions great and small. We know from her legislation that there were regular chapters of the entire community. She exhorted that all be heard, specifying that even the youngest be given the opportunity to speak.

Clare clearly indicates in her writings that decisions for the monastic community were not to be made in the privacy of the abbess's chamber, nor that of her council, but rather with "all of my sisters." Thus we see that, in Clare's thinking, the bedrock of governance is the mutuality of hearts and respect for the operation of the Holy Spirit in each member.

We also see Clare described as someone vigilant in care. She expressed vigilance in showing a great concern to maintain certain forms of order, certain practices, and certain attitudes. She realized that leadership needed to call the sisters to a constant conversion and a constant awareness of the kinds of disciplines and directions required for commitment to the path of publicly vowed religious witness.

We read that Clare was intent on exhortation. In her letters, in her statements to the sisters in the course of chapters, in her individual conferences, counseling, and spiritual direction, she found many occasions to remind the sisters of their high ideals and of the overwhelming love of Jesus as a

source of energy and power for their lives. We see also that Clare did not limit her exhortations to members of the community, but appealed also to the friars and to princes of the church to understand and interpret correctly, not only the legislation by which the Poor Ladies lived, but the heart of their commitment.

We are told that Clare was diligent in reminding. There is an interesting passage in her Rule in which Clare cautions about the destruction of community that comes about through gossip, through murmuring, through dissension. Clare rarely spoke in abstractions about ideals or values that should bind the community together. She clearly had some very concrete examples of how community life and community experience could be fractured and fragmented by imprudence in speech, reaction, conversation—the kinds of disharmonious activity and behavior which we recognize in ourselves and others at times. Clare therefore did not hesitate to call the sisters continually beyond the limitations of human frailty and egocentricity in her desire to see to it that the common heart was rooted in Jesus and in the gospel message.

But lest it appear that Clare was constantly about correction and exhortation, we are told that she was constant in compassion. This truly was a major hallmark of her governance. There are many indications of her profound concern for the sick, careful instruction of the young, hospitality to guests, mutual regard for and rapport with the friars. All of these indications tell us that Clare did not hesitate to make exceptions, to modify policy, to dispense, to bend the rule a little or a lot, when charity, necessity, or human frailty cried out for attention.

Clare is described as skillful in all things concerning perfect government. One of the discoveries that gives great pleasure to those who immerse themselves in the study of her Rule is the recognition that Clare understood very well the structures and the origins of the structures by which she lived. She had a consummate skill in addressing the realities of current church law, traditions handed down from generations of monastic practice, new policies or legislation arrived at by common consent as well as by long and proven experience. At the same time, she never lost her excitement and enthusiasm for the fresh new charism that she shared with Francis. Taking all these factors into account, Clare was able to develop stable governmental forms and to articulate a Rule of life. At the same time she was able to allow maximum flexibility for the abbess and the sisters to make judgments suited to time, place, and person.

It is very clear to anyone who studies Clare's Rule and conduct carefully that she was not an unwilling, slavish, or frightened administrator. She was confident. She was careful. She was authoritative. She was bold

when she needed to be and she was quiet, discreet, and very careful when necessity required such attitudes from her. At times we are tempted to romanticize the humility of Clare and of Francis, too, as they approached the responsibility of the office of minister, servant, or abbess. We would be better served by restoring a proper appreciation of the manner in which Clare, the first Franciscan woman, understood the true measure and reality of her role and responsibility as leader in her community. She saw in that role an aspect of her vocation by which she might incarnate Christ among her sisters. She accepted it willingly and gave to it the best of her wisdom and energy.

And so let us consider these qualities of Clare: solicitude and prudence, vigilance and intentionality, diligence and compassion, discretion, maturity and deliberation, skill in governmental administration, a servant's heart, a modest woman's claim to the authority given by God and the common consent of the sisters among whom she was abbess, sister, and servant.

In the light of these observations, we suggest two reflection questions:

- 1) What qualities of leadership do others recognize in me? What qualities of leadership do I recognize in myself?
- 2) What qualities of leadership are most needed in the congregation at this time in our history?

Conclusion

Over the course of the past few years, many congregations have been influenced by reflections on religious life that use the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13-35) as a point of reference. Indeed the experiences of the disciples on the road to Emmaus offer all of us preparing for general chapters a number of insights, challenges, and consolations. Similarly, there is a passage from Thomas of Celano's *First Life of Saint Francis* (34-35)⁵ which in its own way, mirrors for us something of the gospel story of Emmaus as well as our own chapter experiences. The setting is Francis's return from the city of Rome to the Spoleto Valley shortly after he and the brothers had received from Pope Innocent III approval to live the evangelical way of life. Here is how Thomas describes what has come to be known as the *first* chapter of the Friars Minor:

While they were going along the way, they talked with one another about the number and quality of the gifts the most kind God had bestowed upon them and about how they had been received most kindly by the Vicar of Christ, the lord and father of the whole Christian world, about how they might be able to fulfill his admonitions and commands, about how they could sincerely observe

the rule they had taken upon themselves and keep it without failure, about how they should walk in all sanctity and religion before the Most High and finally about how their life and conduct might be an example to their neighbors, by an increase of holy virtues.

By the time the new disciples of Christ had sufficiently discussed these things in the school of humility, the day was far spent and the hour was already late. They came then to a desert place, greatly fatigued from their journey and hungry, but they could find no refreshment because that place was far removed from other people's dwellings. Immediately, the grace of God providing, a man met them bearing in his hand some bread, which he gave them and departed. But they did not know him and they wondered in their hearts and devoutly admonished one another to place even greater trust in the divine mercy.

The writer goes on then to describe how they came to a place near the city of Orte and stayed there for fifteen days. During that time, they were supplied with food by kind benefactors in the nearby town. They were given over to tremendous rejoicing and it was there that they began to understand better their compact with holy poverty. It was there that they strengthened their resolve to cling to poverty and to put aside all their solicitude for earthly things. Many people knew they were there and wished them well. Finally, as they began to understand that it was time for them to leave this tiny haven in which they had found so many consolations and had such wonderful deliberations, they made the decision to follow Francis to the Spoleto Valley. The story concludes:

They all conferred together as true followers of justice, whether they should dwell among the people or go to solitary places. But Saint Francis who did not trust in his own skill, but had recourse to holy prayer before all transactions, chose not to live for himself alone, but for the One who died for all.

We find in this narration by Thomas of Celano, not only a fascinating allusion to the Emmaus story, but also a wonderful indication of the spirit that first drew Franciscans together in chapter experiences: the desire to confer together about how better to live a rule of life formulated upon the marrow of the Gospel and the desire to exchange lengthy conversations with one another about God's favors. We perceive an equal desire to help one another discover pitfalls, encumbrances, temptations, and obstacles and to question, alone and together, how God might intend the implementation of Gospel impulses and desires. We observe, too, the friendly collaboration of their unknown and secret benefactors, who saw to it that they were fed during their stay.

Though we, unlike those early friars, might not be loathe to depart

from our chapter rooms and assembly halls, we share a common hope that might best be expressed in our longing to rekindle something of their spirit as we try to renew our experience of Franciscan chapters. At the heart of our desire to choose the good as sister and as sisters lies the fundamental insight of this story. Responding to the call of leadership is not solely a matter of asking ourselves the question: "What shall I do?" It is also a matter of asking ourselves the question: "How shall we do this together?"

Francis and his brothers, in lonely and isolated places, deliberated with wonder and concernment. Clare and her sisters, in the tiny cloistered rooms of San Damiano, questioned, searched, and reflected. Now we too, discerning and concerned, must go forward to seek the will of God individually and as a sisterhood, so that peace and good may abound among us and the Reign of God may be clearly mirrored in and through our lives.

Endnotes

¹See *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis Armstrong, OFM, Cap. and Ignatius Brady, OFM (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) 103.

²The phrase *sancto operatio*, "holy manner of working," appears frequently in the writings of Francis. See 1EpFid 1:10; 2:19; 2EpFid 37; RegB 10:8; Test 39.

³See Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God in Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, and the Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press) 83-84.

⁴*Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, trans. Regis Armstrong, OFM, Cap. (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

⁵*English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983) 256-8.

**Almighty, eternal, just, and merciful God,
grant us in our misery [the grace]
to do for You alone
what we know You want us to do,
and always desire what pleases You
. . . [that we may] be able to follow
in the footprints of
Your beloved Son,
Our Lord Jesus Christ.
(EpOrd 50-51)**

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A Brief Survey of the Liturgical Spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi

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Introduction

Liturgy and spirituality do not exist in a vacuum. Both are aspects of humanity's attempt to respond to the living presence of God as it is encountered in the midst of creation. In effect, liturgy and spirituality are organic realities in that they arise from, are shaped by, and give expression to a living human experience of the Divine. Liturgy and spirituality are relational and historical in nature; both take shape from the constant interaction of personal experience, religious tradition, and culture. As a result, there can be a diversity of spiritualities and forms of liturgy within our global human community, even within the same religious tradition. Liturgy and spirituality, as well as their union in "Liturgical Spirituality," demand an awareness and appreciation for the context in which they are formed and in which they are lived.

The liturgical spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi, as it is presented in his extant writings, cannot be properly understood outside the historical milieu in which he lived. Therefore it is important to take a few moments to examine some of the dynamics at work in the liturgical and spiritual life of the Church in thirteenth-century Italy.

"Liturgy" in Context

What did the term "liturgy" mean to the people of the Middle Ages, and how was it expressed in the Church?

In the Western church the word [liturgy] fell out of use for many centuries. Other words such as "divine office," "ecclesiastical office," or "sacred rites" were used to denote worship services. When

the word liturgy returned into use in the 18th century it referred to the entire cultic activity of the Church.¹

In origin, evolution, and spirit, the liturgical tradition of the Western Church is complex and diverse. What is known as the Roman rite was only one of several Western rites which existed between the 4th and 16th centuries. In matters of worship, local churches were free to develop their own forms. Until 1080, the Roman See never attempted to control the liturgical observances of churches outside of *Italia suburbicaria*.²

By the end of the Middle Ages liturgical 'pluralism' had become chaos and reform was necessary.³

It is apparent from the first citation that the word "liturgy" had faded from popular use in the Latin church. In its place a variety of terms emerged that attempted to express a variety of forms of liturgical worship (e.g., "divine office," "sacred rites"). It is evident that from the Patristic period through the Middle Ages, forms of liturgical worship were developed and practiced in the context of the local church (i.e., urban churches, dioceses). This allowed for the development of a variety of liturgical practices that existed throughout Western Christianity for more than twelve centuries. It is also evident that this plurality of liturgical forms generated some chaos within Latin Christianity, especially as the church began to evolve from being a union of local churches to a Roman-centered church. "Reform" was the word and the practice of the Church as it became centered in the person of the Roman Pontiff. Two major contributions to the Church of the early Middle Ages were the liturgical reforms which began under Pope Gregory VII (i.e., the Gregorian Reform), and the liturgical disciplinary canons of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).

In the Western Church, liturgy includes all the sacraments (including the Eucharist), the Liturgy of Hours (sometimes called the Divine Office), funerals, the rites of religious profession, ordination, the blessing of persons (abbots, abbesses), as well as the consecration of persons (virgins) and things (churches). Liturgy is often called the "public or official prayer of the Church."⁴

In the Catholic tradition, both of the East and the West, worship from the earliest days was sacramental, communal and always associated with the proclamation of God's word.⁵

From the earliest days of the Church, "liturgy" has referred to that activity of the Christian community by which they offer public worship to God. This activity has essentially been communal, sacramental, and centered on the word. Although the Western church has allowed a variety of ritual forms to be encompassed under the title "liturgy," the Eastern church

by the fourth century used this term to refer exclusively to the celebration of the Eucharist.⁶ The importance of public, communal worship (i.e., liturgy) has never been disputed in the Church. The worship of God has been a paramount value of the Christian people from the beginning. It is when forms of worship are discussed that disputes arise. There has always been one focus, one goal for all liturgical practices in the Church: the authentic worship of God.

"Spirituality" in Context

Although liturgy and spirituality can be discussed as separate topics, the fact remains that they are always in relationship to one another. Liturgy serves to promote, shape, and express the relationship and interaction that the human person shares with the Divine (i.e., spirituality). Spirituality, in its turn, serves to authenticate the form of worship that is being celebrated by a particular people. Thus, spirituality will always have a liturgical dimension, and liturgy will always have spirituality as its starting point.

The liturgical spirituality of St. Francis was not formed in a vacuum; it did not spontaneously appear in the beginning of the thirteenth century. The spiritual world in which the Poverello lived was shaped largely by the monastic spirituality of the Middle Ages (Benedictine, Cistercian) as well as by the mounting desire for a return to the simplicity of Gospel living. This latter tendency arose as a result of the need and process of reform in the Church.

Before considering the liturgical spirituality of St. Francis, we need a brief survey of two of the major contributing forces that helped to shape the spiritual world of Italy in the thirteenth century: Benedictine and Cistercian spirituality.

Because God is especially present in the liturgy, every aspect of its performance must be done with careful attention.⁷

What Benedict wants to inculcate is reverence, the basic religious sentiment that characterizes all genuine religious experience.⁸

The *Rule of St. Benedict* was the norm for monasticism in the Latin Church from the sixth century. The influence of St. Benedict's thought cannot be understated when examining its effect upon the Church in the Middle Ages. In the *Rule of St. Benedict* (43:3), the Saint writes: "Let nothing be preferred to the *opus Dei*." In effect, St. Benedict is presenting the core of his spirituality—the life of the monk is centered on the word of God. The Sacred Scriptures are a privileged source for experiencing the power and the

presence of the Divine. Therefore, the Benedictine tradition developed and promoted liturgical and spiritual practices and disciplines that enabled the participant to encounter the mysterious and hidden presence of God in the Word (e.g., in the *lectio divina*). For St. Benedict, God is especially present in the liturgy—the Mass and the Divine Office. The “heart” of the liturgy is always the Word of God, and so the entire monastic horarium centered around the celebration of the liturgy of the Church in its fullness. The proper and dignified celebration of the Mass and the Divine Office enabled the monk to listen with care to the Word, and it promoted the spirit of profound reverence which was considered by St. Benedict to be the proper response to the experience of the presence of God.

Although the *Rule of St. Benedict* was the rule for monasticism in the Western Church, by the eleventh century a reform of the monastic life was beginning. The “Gregorian Reform” had ignited an interest in retrieving the pristine vision of the *Rule of St. Benedict* which had been lost in the pursuit of wealth, influence, and because of multiple accretions to the discipline of the monastic life.⁹ By the early twelfth century, a reform of Benedictine monasticism was being established in the woods outside of Citeaux.

The new foundation was poor and isolated, without many of the material benefits of an established monastery. The monks attempted to live by the Rule quite literally, distancing themselves consciously from many, but not all, customs derived from Cluny and other traditional Benedictine centers. A return to poverty, the desire to be “poor with the poor Christ,” was a hallmark of the reform. This was expressed particularly with regard to the liturgy.¹⁰

At the height of its reform in the early 13th century, it numbered approximately 750 monasteries.¹¹

The Cistercian reform embraced the pure observance of the Rule of Benedict, but it did so by pursuing the path of evangelical poverty. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the poverty of Christ became the image and goal of reform within the Church. Therefore, the tremendous popularity of the Cistercian Order during the Middle Ages is not surprising, nor is its impact on other reform groups within Medieval Western Christianity.

The Cistercian spirituality maintained St. Benedict’s conviction about the privileged place of the *opus Dei* in the daily life of the community. Nothing was to interfere with the monks’ pursuit of the Divine Presence revealed in the word of God. However, the Cistercian vision rejected the multiple accretions (i.e., the “pomp and circumstance”) that had been added unnecessarily to the liturgy. The reform of the liturgy in its fullness (i.e., the Mass and the Divine Office) was paramount for an authentic and vi-

brant pursuit of the Divine Presence. Evangelical poverty, as expressed in liturgy through simplicity, was to be the tool through which the community would reform its celebration of the Word in the Mass and the Divine Office.

The monastic practice, as well as ecclesiastical and liturgical reform, was to fashion the world in which St. Francis found himself. This was a society that existed before the printing press. It was a society that was, for the most part, functionally illiterate. Yet, at the center of this milieu was the emphasis on the power and presence of God in the Word. The psalms became tools for learning how to read and write, and yet these same psalms became the voice of God and the voice of prayer for the Church. Cathedrals and monasteries not only taught the people how to listen to the voice of God in the word proclaimed at the Mass and the Divine Office, but they also taught the faithful how to raise their voices, minds, and hearts to God through the same Word that was proclaimed to them. The thirteenth century was a liturgical world, a world that resonated with the sound of the Sacred Scriptures.

The Liturgical Spirituality of St. Francis—from His Writings

The Divine Office/Liturgy of the Hours

It is important to note that St. Francis of Assisi never used the word “liturgy” in any of his twenty-eight extant writings. As mentioned earlier, the word “liturgy” had fallen into disuse by his time. Instead, the Poverello used the word “worship,” a functional equivalent for the term “liturgy” by the thirteenth century. It is important to note that only fourteen of St. Francis’s writings make any reference to worship in a liturgical sense (e.g., 2EpFid 19-20; RegNB 22:27-31). The focus of much of the Poverello’s writing reflects the teaching of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), as well as Benedictine and Cistercian influences.

St. Francis was a man of profound reverence for the presence of God in all of creation, most especially in the written word and the Eucharist. He was a man who was aware of the disrespect which people manifested towards God in their abuse and/or neglect of sacred things. The worship of God necessitated a reverence for all things that revealed the presence of the Divine, and this reverence needed to be manifested in the way in which they cared for the holy. For St. Francis, worship involved more than the faithful and recollected celebration of the liturgies of the Church; it demanded a care for all things connected to the celebration of the liturgy. Preparation, celebration, and care were intrinsically linked to reverence, and reverence was at the heart of authentic worship of God.

Closely linked to Francis' attention to the word of God are his love and veneration for the Eucharist. Both the words of the Lord and the Eucharist are visible, concrete, and tangible realities for Francis: as the word is heard with human ears, so the Eucharist is seen by human eyes.¹²

Seven of St. Francis's writings were concerned with the celebration of the Divine Office. Two of the extant texts are undated, and they are entirely associated with the practice of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours: the *Office of the Passion* and the *Praises to be Said at All Hours*. The *Office* is reminiscent of the practice of the Little Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary—a variation of the form used in celebrating the Divine Office, meant to be done in addition to, or in some cases as a substitute for, the celebration of the Hours. The *Praises* were meant to be an additional prayer to be offered along with the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours.

The remaining five texts come from the last seven years of St. Francis's life. All of them reflect the Poverello's concern for the proper celebration of the Divine Office. In the *Rule for Hermitages*, written prior to the *Earlier Rule* (1221), the Seraphic Father reveals the importance of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours in the daily life of those committed to the eremitical way:

And they should always say Compline of the day immediately after sundown; and they should be eager to keep silence, and to say their hours, and to rise for Matins; and let them seek first of all the kingdom of God and His justice (Mt. 6:33). And let them say Prime at the proper time, and after Terce they may be free from silence. And afterward they should say Sext and None and Vespers at the proper time (RegEr 3-6).

It is clear from the text that St. Francis envisioned the celebration of the Divine Office to form the horarium of the eremitical community. It was important to the Poverello that the Divine Office should be celebrated at the proper hours and that the entire Office was to be prayed by the community. Once again, it is the word of God that nourishes the life of prayer for St. Francis and his followers. It is the Word that gives life. This horarium of biblical-public prayer is reminiscent of the theme underlying the prayer and the title: *Praises to be Said at All Hours*—our entire day is to be a hymn of praise to God.

St. Francis was clearly a man of the Church, and he was a man of the Council (i.e., Lateran IV, 1215). The *Earlier Rule* echoes the disciplinary reform of Pope Innocent III in 1213:

For this reason all the brothers, whether clerical or lay, should celebrate the Divine Office, the praises and prayers, as is required of

them. The clerical [brothers] should celebrate the office and say it for the living and the dead according to the custom of the clergy (RegNB 3-4).

From this citation it is clear that St. Francis believed in celebrating the Office "according to the custom of the clergy" (i.e., according to the discipline of the local/diocesan church). A few years later the Poverello refined this teaching on the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours:

The clerical [brothers] shall celebrate the Divine Office according to the rite of the holy Roman Church, except the Psalter, for which they may have breviaries (RegB 3:1-2).

This citation from the *Later Rule* reveals a remarkable change in the Seraphic Father's thinking. At the time of the *Earlier Rule* Francis seemed content to have the friars celebrate the Divine Office according to the custom of the local church where they found themselves. Thus, there was no single, monolithic form of the Office that was celebrated by the entire Order. The early friars enjoyed a flexible approach to this Prayer of the Church. The *Later Rule* reveals a change towards uniformity in practice, as well as communion with the symbol of unity for the Church on earth: the Pope (and his household).

In *A Letter to the Entire Order* (43), written after December, 1224, St. Francis renews his desire to have the friars celebrate the Hours according to the prescriptions laid down in the *Later Rule*. However, he also writes:

[Further, he should insist] that the clerics say the Office with devotion before God, not concentrating on the melody of the voice but on the harmony of the mind, so that the voice may blend with the mind, and the mind be in harmony with God. [Let them do this] in such a way that they may please God through purity of heart and not charm the ears of the people with sweetness of voice (EpOrd 41-42).

The Seraphic Father touches upon a concern that finds echoes in the *Rule of Benedict* (Chapter 19) and the Cistercian pursuit of simplicity and authenticity in worship. True worship of God arises from the heart that pursues the word of God, not through the "show" of liturgical prayer. St. Francis is challenging the friars to have integrity in their prayer—their hearts and their voices must be one in the praise of God.

In his *Testament* the Poverello offers his final thoughts on the celebration and the importance of the Divine Office:

And although I may be simple and infirm, I wish nonetheless always to have a cleric who will celebrate the Office for me as it is contained in the Rule. And all the other brothers are bound to obey

their guardians and to celebrate the Office according to the Rule. And [if] they are found who do not celebrate the Office according to the Rule and [who] wish to alter it in any way or [who] are not Catholics, let all the brothers be obliged through obedience that wherever they come upon [such a brother] they must bring him to the custodian [who is] nearest that place where they have found him. And the custodian is strictly bound through obedience to guard him strongly as a prisoner day and night, so that he cannot be snatched from his hands until he can personally deliver him into the hands of his minister (Test 29-32).

Although the Seraphic Father was blind by the time he dictated this *Testament*, he reveals that he did not want to be dispensed by illness from celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours. He requests that a cleric (i.e., a literate friar) read the Divine Office for him so that he might pray the Prayer of the Church. Furthermore, St. Francis did not want the friars to celebrate the Hours in any other way than that which was stated in the *Later Rule*. The Divine Office was to be celebrated according to the form of the Roman Church, no exceptions! These final words echo the importance of this form of worship—the hours of the day are to be filled with the praise of God arising from the word of God.

The Celebration of the Eucharist/Mass

Of the twenty-eight extant texts there are only eight that address the issue of the Eucharist itself in either its liturgical dimension or the eucharistic species. Although St. Francis refers to the Eucharist in few texts, he was just as concerned with it as he was with the celebration of the Divine Office. They are two sides of the same reality: the power and presence of the Divine manifested in the Word.

The Seraphic Father addresses the Eucharist under several themes: the "Real Presence," the respect and care due the Eucharist, the attitude necessary for reception of the Eucharist, the need for and the benefits that come from reception of the Eucharist, and the respect that is due the clergy. I will briefly survey these topics, providing citations as to where they can be found in the writings.

See, daily He humbles Himself (cf. Phil. 2:8) as when He came from the royal throne (Wis. 18:15) into the womb of the Virgin; daily He comes to us in a humble form; daily He comes down from the bosom of the Father (cf. Jn. 1:18) upon the altar in the hands of the priest. And as He appeared to the holy apostles in true flesh, so now He reveals Himself to us in the sacred bread. And as they saw only His flesh by means of their bodily sight, yet believed Him to be God as they contemplated Him with the eyes of faith, so, as we

see bread and wine with [our] bodily eyes, we too are to see and firmly believe them to be His most holy Body and Blood living and true. And in this way the Lord is always with His faithful, as He Himself says: Behold I am with you even to the end of the world (cf. Mt. 28:20) (Adm 1:16-22).

In this first *Admonition* we see the fundamental Eucharistic belief of St. Francis presented in poetic terms. The Seraphic Father is a mystic—he can see beyond the physical to the spiritual reality that lies hidden, a reality that invites discovery and belief. Jesus is fully present in the concrete realities of bread and wine, just as He was present in the concrete reality of His humanity as a baby in the arms of His Mother, Mary. The only true realization of the presence of Christ in the world is in the bread and wine that have become the Body and Blood of Christ by the proclamation of the word of God. This fundamental belief is echoed in three other texts by St. Francis: *A Letter to the Clergy*, 3; *A Letter to the Entire Order*, 26-29; *The Testament*, 10.

Therefore, kissing your feet and with all that love of which I am capable, I implore all of you brothers to show all possible reverence and honor to the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom that which is in the heavens and on the earth is brought to peace and is reconciled to the all-powerful God (cf. Col. 1:20) (EpOrd 12-13).

In this excerpt, St. Francis reveals his concern for the respect and care due the eucharistic presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Seraphic Father exhorts his friars to hold the same respect for the Word of God in the bread and wine as he has told them to have for the Word present in the Sacred Scriptures. Fundamentally, the Poverello is calling his brothers to cherish the presence of the person of Christ. Once again, the Eucharist is not a mere symbol; it is the real presence of the person of Christ. This concern for respect is echoed in *A Letter to the Clergy*, 5.

Along with respect, St. Francis was concerned with the attitude that the brothers, and by extension all people have when receiving the Eucharist:

Therefore it is the Spirit of the Lord, Who lives in His faithful, Who receives the most holy Body and Blood of the Lord. All others who do not share in this same Spirit and who presume to receive Him eat and drink judgement to themselves (cf. 1 Cor. 11:29) (Adm 1:12-13).

Therefore, I firmly advise you, my lords, to put aside all care and preoccupation and receive with joy the most holy Body and the most holy Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in holy remembrance of Him (EpRect 6).

The first text speaks of the belief that the Poverello had concerning the fact that it is the Spirit of the Lord within us that makes it possible for us to receive the Body and Blood of Christ worthily. The reception of the Eucharist is a pneumatological experience (i.e., the working of the Holy Spirit). If we do not have "the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working" (RegB 10:8), then we cannot worthily and reverently receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

In the second citation, St. Francis exhorts those who are in positions of responsibility to lay aside their "cares and preoccupations" so that they may receive the Lord worthily. Reception of the Eucharist demands recollection, freedom from distractions. This is also "part and parcel" of the reverence due the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Seraphic Father's concern about the attitude we bring to our reception of the Eucharist is further echoed in: the *First Letter to the Custodians*, 7; *A Letter to the Entire Order*, 18-19; the *Second Letter to the Faithful*, 24; and the *Later Rule*, 20:5.

It is also important to note the "response" which we are called to give to the reception of the Eucharist. In only one place in the extant writings of St. Francis, does the Poverello describe the response that should be given to the Real Presence of Christ:

And when It is sacrificed upon the altar by the priest and carried to any place, let all people, on bended knee, praise, glorify, and honor the Lord God living and true. And you must announce and preach His praise to all peoples in such a manner that at every hour and whenever the bells are rung, praise, glory, and honor are given to the all-powerful God throughout all the Earth (1EpCust 7-8).

This passage presents a majestic image of the Real Presence and a majestic response to this Presence. In it, the friars are called to be heralds of the Great King. They are to announce His praise, glory, and honor in such a way as to inspire others in joining them in offering worship in spirit and truth. The attitude necessary for reception of the Eucharist comes full circle with this joyful response.

The Poverello was well aware of our need to receive the Eucharist and of the benefit to be gained by our encounter with the Real Presence in our daily lives.

All those, however, who are not [living] in penance and do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, [who] practice vice and sin and walk [the path of] wicked concupiscence (Col. 3:5) and evil desires; who do not observe what they have promised and bodily serve the world by the desires of the flesh (1Pet. 2:11), the cares and anxieties of this world, and the preoccupations of this life: [such people] are deceived by the devil, whose children

they are and whose works they perform (cf. Jn. 8:41). They are blind because they do not see the true light, Our Lord Jesus Christ (EpFid 63-66).

He who does not eat His Flesh and does not drink His Blood (cf. Jn. 6:55, 57) cannot enter the Kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5) (EpFid 23).

And in every sermon which you give, admonish the people concerning [the need of] penance, and [tell them] that no one can be saved unless he receives the Body and Blood of the Lord (cf. Jn. 6:54) (EpCust 6).

In these three citations St. Francis views the "need" and the "benefit" as being one and the same: salvation. Those who do not receive the Eucharist worthily and with reverence bring the judgement of damnation upon themselves. The Eucharist is truly the bread of life, for in it we receive the Lord of Life. For other echoes of this teaching see: 1EpFid 1:3,5; 2:2, 6; RegNB 20:5-6; Adm 1:12-13. It is important to note that the Seraphic Father does not mention the reception of Eucharist or Holy Communion in four of his texts: *A Letter to the Clergy*, the *Later Rule*, the *Rule for Hermitages*, and *The Testament*.

The respect which St. Francis demonstrated toward priests arose from his respect for the Word of God and the Eucharist which they administer. The Poverello did not consider the individual person of the priest as the determinant for the respect they were to receive. Respect, reverence, and obedience were given because it was with their (i.e., the priests) hands and voices that the presence of the Divine was revealed in the word of Sacred Scripture and in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Thus, the Seraphic Father's liturgical spirituality reached beyond the word and the eucharistic species to encompass those who administered them to us. For other references to this teaching see: EpOrd 14-15; 2EpFid 33; Test 13.

In a related teaching, mentioned only once in the entire corpus of extant texts, St. Francis speaks of his desire to have Mass celebrated every day where the friars are living:

Therefore I admonish and urge in the Lord that only one Mass according to the form of the holy Church be celebrated each day in the places in which the brothers stay. If, however, there should be more than one priest in that place, let one be content, for the sake of charity, to assist at the celebration of the other priest; for our Lord Jesus Christ fills those who are present and absent who are worthy of Him (EpOrd 30-32).

Here the Poverello is encouraging the celebration of a single Mass, even if more than one priest is living in the community. St. Francis is not presenting a theological position for or against concelebration. He is simply

expressing his belief in the value of a shared liturgy for the growth of unity among the friars. What is of value is the sense of community that is formed and expressed when one group of friars shares the one bread, the one cup, and the one word.

Concern for the Care of the Sacred

St. Francis was aware of the abuse and neglect that occurred in regard to those things that were part of the liturgical life of the Church. The Seraphic Father was a witness to the deplorable conditions of many of the churches that he happened upon during his tours.

Consider the sad state of the chalices, the corporals, and the altar-linens upon which the Body and Blood of our Lord are sacrificed. And [the Body and Blood of our Lord] is left by many in dirty places, carried about in a miserable manner, received unworthily and administered to others without discretion. Even His sacred written words are sometimes left to be trampled underfoot; for the person who does not have the spirit does not perceive the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14) (EpCler 4b-7).

As is seen in this excerpt, these conditions were often revelatory of the attitude of the people and the clergy towards God and His Presence in their lives. St. Francis was well aware of the teachings of the Fourth Lateran Council regarding the care of the Eucharist, the Sacred Scriptures, and those things which are connected with worship (e.g., sacred vessels, linens). He sought to correct the abuse and neglect in two ways.

First, his biographers mention that the Seraphic Father taught the clergy during his tours how to care for the church, the Blessed Sacrament, the Scriptures, and those things which were associated with the liturgy. He is known to have carried a broom with him when he visited churches to demonstrate by his actions that the "House of God" was to be kept clean and cared for—a sign of reverence for the presence of God.

Secondly, St. Francis used the power of his words and personality to convey his concerns and to exhort his friars to promote care for the sacred:

I beg you, with all that is in me and more, that, when it is appropriate and you judge it profitable, you humbly beg the clergy to revere above everything else the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and His holy written words which consecrate [His] Body. The chalices, corporals, appointments of the altar, and everything which pertains to the sacrifice must be of precious material. And if the most holy Body of the Lord is very poorly reserved in any place, it should be placed in a precious location under lock and kept according to the mandate of the Church and carried about with great reverence and administered to others with discretion. In a similar way the written words of the Lord, when-

ever they are found in an improper place, should be gathered together and kept in a becoming place (1EpCust 2-5).

This excerpt not only reveals the Poverello's concerns for the care of the sacred, but also his awareness of the teachings of the Church. St. Francis wanted his confreres to be instruments of renewal wherever they found themselves, not for his sake, but out of respect and reverence for the presence of God. (See also: EpOrd 34-37; EpCler 4; Test 11-12.)

Conclusion

The liturgical spirituality of St. Francis reflects his mysticism and his sacramental imagination (i.e., his appreciation for the concrete ways in which God manifests the Divine Presence). Michael Scanlon, OSA, a professor of systematic theology at Villanova University, is well known for teaching: "That which is not expressed, is not real!" This can be easily applied to the Poverello's approach to liturgical spirituality. The Seraphic Father's sacramental imagination was reciprocal. God reveals the Divine Presence in myriad ways in the concrete world—preeminently in the Incarnation. Through this awareness, St. Francis realized that he must reveal his reverence, respect, and love for God through real and tangible actions in the world.

The mysticism of the Poverello brought him to see, hear, and touch the Presence of God in the midst of life. The privileged place for this encounter was the liturgy of the Church. In the Church's celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours and the Mass, St. Francis encountered the spiritual, yet tangible, presence of God in the words of the Sacred Scriptures as well as in the bread and wine that was blessed, broken, and shared. Through the liturgy the Seraphic Father came into contact with the most tangible and real presence ever revealed by the Divine, the person of the Christ. In turn, his rendezvous with the Word empowered him to reveal the hidden secrets of his heart through tangible gestures of love. For the Seraphic Father and for us, liturgy and spirituality meet in the life that is truly devoted to the love of God in spirit and in truth.

In light of the conciliar reforms instituted by the Second Vatican Council, we are challenged to retrieve the best of our spiritual tradition and make it tangible in our world today. The gift of St. Francis's enthusiasm for the liturgical life of the Church should inspire us and guide us in our attempts to retrieve the best of our Seraphic inheritance. The Poverello has given to us, through his life and writings, an invaluable path and example to follow. For St. Francis and for those of us who seek to follow in his footsteps in this post-conciliar world, the liturgy is our greatest work and a

privileged path in the pursuit of holiness (i.e., union with the poor and crucified Christ). Wherever St. Francis encountered the People of God, he sought to teach them and share with them the tremendous treasure of the Church's liturgical life. We can do no less! Wherever we find ourselves, we must participate fully and actively in the liturgy of the Church and assist others in doing the same.

Endnotes

¹Fink, Peter E., ed., *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* [NDSW] (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990) 740.

²NDSW 1282.

³J.G. Davies, ed., *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* [NWD] (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986) 470.

⁴Michael Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* [NDCS] (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993) 603.

⁵NWD 470.

⁶Cf. NDSW 740.

⁷NDCS 85.

⁸NDCS 88.

⁹NDCS 174.

¹⁰NDCS 175.

¹¹NDCS 174.

¹²NDCS 409-410.

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TOWARD A NEW THEOLOGY OF FRANCISCAN CONTEMPLATION: THE MYSTICISM OF THE HISTORICAL EVENT

Ilia Delio, OSF

Introduction

In his address to the Fifth Plenary Council of the Capuchin Friars, Jose Pedroso identified the ambivalence of the word contemplation in the contemporary discussion of Franciscan spirituality: "We talk a lot about Franciscan contemplation without really knowing what it is."¹ Pedroso defines the problem of Franciscan contemplation as one essentially weighed down by the monastic model, fostered by educating friars (and sisters) in the monastic writings rather than the Franciscan sources.

In this essay, I would like to offer a new vision of Franciscan contemplation, one that is rooted in the spirituality of Francis himself and expounded by Bonaventure. This distinct type of contemplation is referred to as mysticism of the historical event, a term originally identified by Ewert Cousins to signify mystical union through participation in the historical event.² In the mysticism of the historical event, imitation of and conformity to the humanity of Christ lead one to union with God through the power of the Spirit. Mysticism of the historical event is a type of mysticism that is characteristically Franciscan since in no other type of Christian mysticism does union take place on the level of the Incarnate Word.

In comparison with the ascent to mystical union in the monastic tradition, which is essentially a Neoplatonic ascent, the mysticism of the historical event is a Christocentric, Christiformic ascent to God. In this article I will try to show how the mysticism of the historical event stands apart from mystical union in the monastic tradition by examining it through Bonaventure's Christ mysticism. The goal is to identify an authentic type of Franciscan contemplation that is marked by devotion to the humanity of Christ.

The Monastic Quest For Union With God

The term mysticism is one not readily found in medieval monastic writings. Rather, the common term for the phenomenon of mystical experience in the Middle Ages is *contemplatio*, a Latin translation of the Greek *theoria*, meaning "looking at" or "gazing at."³ Thomas Aquinas defines contemplation as "a simple act of gazing on the truth."⁴ Jean Gerson describes it as an "experimental knowledge of God."⁵ The word mysticism is a relatively recent word, entering the language of spirituality in the seventeenth century through the discussion of infused and acquired contemplation.⁶ Although the broad use of this word has lent itself to ambiguous meaning, it refers, in its Christian context, to the hidden encounter with God perceived by the eyes of faith.⁷ Bernard McGinn, in his comprehensive study on mysticism, defines it as a "direct or immediate consciousness of the presence (or absence) of God."⁸ In this article, the words contemplation and mysticism are used synonymously to describe the intimate experience of the hidden presence of God in Christ.

In the monastic tradition, contemplation has generally been assumed to be an essential part of the life, although in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, one of the principal rules of western monasticism, the word contemplation is absent. Benedict offers a distinct doctrine of prayer, however, that is derived largely from the writings of John Cassian, a sixth-century monk, who obtained his teaching on prayer from the desert Fathers and Evagrius Ponticus. The tenets of prayer that are incorporated into the *Rule of Saint Benedict*—hesychia, compunction, and short and pure prayer—are essentially eastern in origin.

Although Benedict does not explicitly discuss contemplation in the *Rule*, he implies that contemplation arises from pure prayer and encourages the monk to pursue this path under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His incorporation of an eastern doctrine of prayer in the *Rule* underscores the path to contemplation as a Neoplatonic ascent to God. Neoplatonism is a metaphysical structure of relationships, arising in the third century (A.D.) among both pagan and Christian thinkers. Contemplation among Christian Neoplatonists such as Evagrius and Origen is identified by the characteristics of emanation and return, introversion and ascension, passionate striving and union with divine transcendent Being. In this type of ascent, prayer enables the soul to rise above the material world to attain an intellectual transforming vision of God.

The ascent to union with God in the Middle Ages is principally Neoplatonic since the goal of contemplation is union with the uncreated Logos. Although devotion to the humanity of Christ arises within monas-

tic circles, it does not significantly affect this type of ascent. The mystical theology of Bernard of Clairvaux is typical of this medieval trend. Bernard is considered a primary advocate of devotion to Christ in his humanity. He describes, in various sermons, the human tribulations that Christ endured in his earthly life. Bernard's influence on the current of medieval spirituality has been highly regarded and identified as a factor in the development of affective spirituality in the Franciscan tradition. However, Bernard's influence, as Jean Déchanet notes, may be overemphasized.⁹

As the "last of the Fathers," Bernard's theology stands in much closer affinity to the Greek Fathers, especially that of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, than to Francis and Bonaventure. Although he advocates devotion to the humanity of Christ, such devotion serves to foster the movement from carnal love to spiritual love. Because fallen humanity is initially unable to love God other than in the flesh, Bernard takes this as a starting point, albeit a necessary one, to begin the journey to union with God. However, he does not place the primary emphasis on the earthly life of Christ but rather on the ascended and glorified Christ. As Jean Leclercq states, Bernard's focus lay on the Jerusalem above and the hope of sharing the life of the risen and glorified Christ.¹⁰ The ascent to union with God is an ascent of the soul to union with the divine Logos; the carnal love of God impels one to the spiritual love of the Logos marked by passionate desire.

Bernard's doctrine of mystical marriage is one in which, at the height of union, the soul is united to the uncreated Word in a bond of consummate love. The experience of union is one not of darkness but of light, transcending the humanity of Christ and the sensory world of images. Bernard's spousal mysticism is unique in its language and approach to union with God. It stands firmly in the monastic tradition, reflecting concepts already found in the Fathers such as transcending union, deification, and passionate desire. In this respect, his journey to union with God follows a Neoplatonic ascent marked by a light-transforming union.

Bonaventure and the Mysticism of the Historical Event

Dom Eudes Bamberger, in an article on St. Bernard's influence on medieval spirituality, remarks that Bonaventure "carried on the same doctrine" of Bernard's affective spirituality, providing a link between Bernard and the *devotio moderna* movement.¹¹ Although Bernard's devotion to Christ is in the service of contemplation, a comparison between his doctrine and that of Bonaventure reveals that Bonaventure's path to union with God is distinct from that of Bernard and the monastic tradition. Among scholars of medieval theology, Bonaventure's doctrine of contemplation has been the subject of ambiguity, since he never clearly defined it nor did he devote

any particular work to elucidating it. However, throughout the course of his writings he constantly refers to contemplation as experiential love and wisdom in union with Christ, an experience integral to the journey to God and one comprising the goal of the Christian life.

In the Hexameron the Seraphic Doctor identifies the key to contemplation as the Word uncreated, incarnate, and inspired (Hex. 3, 2). It is the incarnate Word who, having touched both heaven and earth, reconciles humanity to God and thus enables the human person to attain to union with God. The humanity of Christ, as the restoring principle of fallen humanity, is the principal key to the contemplation of God, since Christ is the mystery of the Word uncreated and incarnate. Throughout his devotional writings, Bonaventure describes the humanity of Christ in detail with the purpose of fostering the contemplation of God. Bonaventure's *Lignum vitae*, for example, an amalgamation of the four Gospels, depicts the life of Christ, illustrating the various aspects of his historical life. While some scholars have argued that the *Lignum vitae* is dedicated to conversion and moral transformation, Bonaventure suggests at the beginning that the work is oriented to the contemplation of Christ as true God, that is, the Word through whom all things were made and through whom all things are restored:

When you hear that Jesus is begotten of God, beware lest some inadequate thought of the flesh appear before your mind's eye. Rather . . . in him the Father ordered all things from eternity; through him he made the world and governs it and directs it to his own glory. . . .¹²

In the *Lignum vitae* Bonaventure seeks to establish a personal relationship between the reader and Christ. The focus of his meditations is directed to the person of Christ, who is truly divine and human. He draws upon the senses and imagination, impelling the reader to participate in the historical life of Christ, who is God. In describing the manger scene, for example, he states:

Now then, my soul, embrace that divine manger; press your lips upon and kiss the boy's feet, . . . marvel at the assembling host of angels singing with your voice and heart: Glory to God in the highest. . . (Lig. vit. 4).

In this meditation Bonaventure illustrates the profound mystery of Christ as divine and human. Just as in the incarnation God "kisses" humanity by taking on human nature, so too the kiss here signifies union. To kiss the boy's feet is to unite oneself to the humanity of Christ whom the

angels testify is true God. By drawing upon the senses and imagination, Bonaventure impels the reader to enter into the historical life of Christ, that is, to participate in the life of the one who is the divine-temporal exemplar.

Through descriptive detail of the historical life of Christ, Bonaventure advocates that one can experience the immediate presence of God hidden in the humanity of Christ; thus he illuminates a mysticism of the historical event. In union with Christ one can experience the presence of God. The mysticism of the historical event acquires a theological foundation in Bonaventure's Christology. For Bonaventure, Christ is the uncreated Word, the eternal exemplar, the perfect image of the Father, and the one in whom everything other than the Father is grounded. As Incarnate Word, he is the temporal exemplar and the expression of God.

Bonaventure notes by analogy that the temporal exemplar and the eternal exemplar are one. Just as the self-knowledge of God is expressed in the inner Word, when the Word is vocalized it becomes the world in which Christ comes as the most perfect vocalization of the inner Word. Because the human nature of Christ exists in a dialectical relation to the eternal Word, he is the single and undivided exemplar. The humanity of Christ is the perfect external Word in which the inner Word of God comes to expression in something ontologically different from God. His human nature and its history, therefore, are the historical embodiment of his eternal Sonship.

In the humility and poverty of the incarnate Word is the historical manifestation of the Son who is the pure receptiveness of being and full loving response to the Father. Since the Son is in union with the Father, to attain to union with God is to become like the Son. Thus, the human person enters into the movement of the trinitarian life by entering into the life-movement of the Son, personalizing the fundamental values of his life in his or her own life. Only through participation in the life of the one who is truly God can one attain to union with God, which is the goal of the Christian life.

Bonaventure's emphasis on the humanity of Christ as the path to union with God underscores the "mysticism of the historical event," indicating that devotion to the humanity of Christ can lead one to the highest level of mystical union. Unlike Bernard, devotion to Christ is not a mediating step from carnal love to spiritual love. Indeed, Bonaventure never directs his readers to the carnal love of Christ, but always to the mystery of Christ as God and man. Thus as one approaches the higher stages of contemplation, the humanity of Christ is not transcended, but is always contemplated in union with the divinity.

In his sermon, "Christ, the One Teacher of All," the Seraphic Doctor identifies Christ as the master of contemplative knowledge in his human-

ity and divinity, thus referring to a twofold movement of contemplation. He states that contemplation is both an inward movement, that is, a going in to Christ as the uncreated Word, and an outward movement, that is, going out to Christ as the Incarnate Word in the flesh.¹³ This inward-outward movement of contemplation characterizes the mysticism of the historical event, whereby conformity to Christ in body and soul leads one to the true contemplation of God. This twofold movement also underlies the concept of image, since to be an image of God is to be an image of the Son, who is the perfect Image; and to be an image of the Son is to be conformed to him in body and soul.¹⁴

In light of the mysticism of the historical event the question is raised, what does it mean to attain the height of contemplation? To address this question, one may look to the highest level of contemplation described by Bonaventure, which is ecstatic union. Ecstasy is a transforming union of love whereby the soul enters into the dark fire of God's love through union with the crucified Christ. Although Bonaventure uses terms and concepts of Pseudo-Dionysius to describe ecstatic union, he transforms the Dionysian Neoplatonic ascent into a Christocentric and Christiformic ascent to union with God. Thus, Christocentricity becomes the metaphysical path to union with God. He adopts the language of Bernard's nuptial theology to describe ecstatic union as mystical marriage with the Crucified. Whereas Bernard describes ecstasy as a union of wills, a union between the soul and the uncreated Word, Bonaventure describes ecstasy as being inflamed by the Holy Spirit and conformed to the Crucified in flesh and spirit. At the level of ecstatic union, knowledge is transcended, and one enters the order of divine love. It is a mystical darkness in which the soul, flooded by the brilliance of divine light, is suspended in mid-air like the Crucified, hovering between heaven and earth.

That ecstatic union takes place with the Crucified is wholly consistent with Bonaventure's thought. The mystery of the cross for Bonaventure is the mystery of poverty, because here God fully communicates the mystery of love in radical openness and acceptance of the human person. The life of Christ in its poverty and humility is a manifestation of the humility of God's love. The piercing of the human heart of Christ is the opening to the human person of the depth of divine love embodied in the love of the Son of God. The paradigm of Francis's stigmata is the model that Bonaventure holds up as the ideal of mystical union. To attain the level of ecstatic union with Christ, therefore, is to be crucified with him in body and spirit; it is to be inflamed by fire of the Holy Spirit (Itin. 7, 6) who is the Spirit of love.

In light of Francis's stigmata Bonaventure writes at the beginning of the *Lignum vitae*: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Lig. vit. prol. 1),

indicating that devotion to the humanity of Christ is to lead one to the height of ecstatic union which is union with the Crucified Christ. The mysticism of the historical event, as the mark of Bonaventure's doctrine of contemplation, means that to attain to union with God is to become like Christ, crucified for the sake of the world.

One advances in contemplation, therefore, by acquiring the spirit of Christ. It is through the power of the Spirit that one becomes like the Son in union with the Father. Bonaventure refers to the power of the Spirit being both impressed and expressed, just as divine wisdom was "ploughed into the flesh of Francis" (LM 13:10) by the "finger of the living God" (LM 13:5). To attain the height of mystical union is not to transcend the world and become absorbed in God; rather, it is to become, like Francis, an *alter Christus*, and thus to express the love of the Father through the power of the Spirit. Mystical union, according to Bonaventure, is to manifest cruciform love.

Mysticism of the Historical Event: Mystical and Active

The tendency to "monasticize" Bonaventure's doctrine of contemplation obscures the uniqueness of his doctrine as one that advocates a contemplation of God that is both mystical and active. The mysticism of the historical event as union with God through imitation of and conformity to Christ means that conformity to the Son brings one into relationship with the Father. Since the most profound love of the Son for the Father is expressed in the cross, the goal of contemplation is to become like the Son, cruciform in love. In *The Triple Way* Bonaventure identifies cruciform love as peace; it is the highest stage of love whereby one is willing to suffer or die for one's neighbor (*De tripl. via* 2, 8, 11). Thus, it is compassionate love expressed in the desire for martyrdom. In union with Christ one becomes, like Christ, the servant of humanity, willing to offer up one's life for the goal of unity so that "all may be one" (John 17:22; *Brev.* 5, 8).

To be in union with Christ is to be both interiorly and exteriorly conformed to him, manifested by the power of the Spirit. In this respect, preaching the Gospel and the desire for martyrdom are not preparatory for union with God, but are themselves events of union. Mystical union marked by compassionate love is distinguished from that found in Bernard in whom passionate desire is the driving force of union; desirous love is characteristic of the Neoplatonic ascent. Conversely, the mysticism of the historical event is union with God through compassionate love, a love which by its very nature is poured out for the life of the world.

The mysticism of the historical event rests on a Johannean Christology whereby the relationship between the Son and the Father underscores the goal of contemplation. The evidence of this is present in Francis's own

writings, particularly in chapter 22 of the *Earlier Rule*. Francis composed this chapter as a "last will and testament" prior to his mission among the Saracens, where he anticipated the possibility of martyrdom.¹⁵ The last part of the chapter is based on Jesus' Priestly Prayer (John 17:1-26). Francis indicates to the brothers that the goal of their life is to be in union with the Crucified and to express cruciform love; this is the path to the glory of the Father and the unity of the kingdom (RegNB 22:41-55).

The mysticism of the historical event, as it characterizes Bonaventure's doctrine of contemplation, takes a dramatic turn from the traditional monastic type of contemplation. In the latter, the journey to God follows essentially a Neoplatonic ascent whereby the soul, superior in its intellectual nature, transcends the body and thus the material world in attaining to a light-transforming intellectual vision of God. It is, in Plotinian terms, a flight of the alone to the Alone, emphasizing the privatism of the journey and the need to transcend the world. Even Bernard, despite his prodigious preaching throughout Europe, referred to preaching as an obstacle to contemplation and encouraged his monks to strive for the Jerusalem above.

Conversely, in the mysticism of the historical event, the Neoplatonic ascent to God is transformed into a Christocentric and Christiformic ascent. Union with Christ draws one into fellowship with humanity and creation. In Bonaventure's vision Christ stands as center of the soul and center of the world. As the divine-temporal exemplar, Christ is the absolute center. Only in union with the crucified humanity of Christ is union with the Father attained: "There is no path other than through the burning love of the Crucified" (Itin. prol., 3). As Zachery Hayes states: "He who has always been the Center of reality, though hidden in the history of a sinful world, is and remains the Center through whose humanity we enter into the contemplation of God."¹⁶

The principal characteristic of mysticism of the historical event is relationship. Union with the Incarnate Word is the key to the total synthesis that Bonaventure envisions in Christ. And union with Christ is made possible through the power of the Spirit which is visibly expressed in cruciform love. Bonaventure develops this idea into a Christocentric world view (*Weltanschauung*), indicating that the destiny of the historical process and the consummation of creation are contingent on the relationship between the human person and Christ. The eschatological age of peace, he maintains, will ensue when those like Francis are conformed to the Crucified in body and spirit.

The mysticism of the historical event, as it unfolds in Bonaventure's doctrine, shares a similar world view with the Christogenesis of Teilhard de Chardin. In Teilhardian terms, the mystic in union with Christ urges

reality toward the Omega who is Christ, to the final synthesis which is constantly growing within him or her self.¹⁷ In Bonaventure, the mysticism of the historical event does not lead one out of the world but, in union with Christ, one enters into the heart of the world where Christ is the Center. Only in union with Christ, he maintains, can authentic contemplation of God be achieved. For in Christ alone all return to the Father.

Conclusion

Mysticism of the historical event characterizes a distinct type of Franciscan contemplation, described by Bonaventure, whereby participation in the earthly life of Christ through imitation of and conformity to his humanity enables one to attain union with God. Mystical union is not a Neoplatonic flight of the soul to pure transcendent Being giving rise to transcendence of the material world. Rather, union with God is union with the crucified Christ in whom the power of God's love is revealed. To attain the height of mystical union is to express the desire for martyrdom, since conformity to the perfect Image which is Christ is conformity to him in body and spirit. Union with the Crucified means to be imbued with the power of the Spirit, which both impresses itself and expresses itself in cruciform love.

The mysticism of the historical event makes no obvious distinction between "action" and "contemplation," since the overarching goal is union with the Father through conformity to the Son. In union with the Father one is, like the Son, willing to lay down one's life for one's neighbor, whether it be the preaching of the Gospel, the ministering to lepers, or the prayer of solitude.

To arrive at the level of mystical union is to enter the dark fire of God's love manifested in the Crucified, who is the center of the soul and the center of the world—that hidden center whom Francis discovered in the poverty and humility of the humanity of Christ. The mysticism of the historical event provides an answer to the quest for an authentic Franciscan doctrine of contemplation. Only in union with Christ can one attain the goal of mystical union with God, a union visibly expressed by the Spirit of compassionate love, that love which moves the entire created world to its destiny in Christ.

Endnotes

¹Jose Carlos Correa Pedrosa, "Franciscan Contemplation," in *Fifth Plenary Council of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin* (New York: Glenclyffe, 1986) 7.

²Ewert Cousins, "Francis of Assisi: Christian Mysticism at the Crossroads," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Stephen T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 166; idem, "Franciscan Roots of Ignatian Meditation," in *Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age*, ed. George P. Schnier (Toronto: Willrid Laurier University Press, 1984) 60.

³William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982) 24.

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⁵Louis Dupré, Introduction to *Light From Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, ed. Louis Dupré and James A. Wiseman (New York: Paulist, 1988) 4; Johnston, 24.

⁶Tanquerey, 649-50.

⁷Robert Woods, *Mysterion* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1981) 32.

⁸Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, vol. 1, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994) xix.

⁹Jean Marie Déchanet, "Les mystères du salut: la christologie de S. Bernard," in *Saint Bernard Theologien: Actes du Congrès de Dijon, 15-19 Septembre 1953*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1953) 86.

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¹¹John Eudes Bamberger, "The Influence of St. Bernard," *Cistercian Studies* 25 (1990): 108-9.

¹²*Lignum vitae* 1, Engl. trans. Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis* (New York: Paulist, 1978) 126.

¹³"Christ, the One Teacher of All," in *What Manner of Man: Sermons on Christ by St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes, OFM (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989) 31-2.

¹⁴See Adm 5 where Francis advocates a similar concept of image.

¹⁵David Flood and Thaddée Matura, *The Birth of a Movement: A Study of the First Rule of St. Francis*, trans. Paul LaChance and Paul Schwartz (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1975) 45.

¹⁶Zachary Hayes, *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1992) 222.

¹⁷Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Activation of Energy*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1971) 279-80.

"Therefore let us desire nothing else
let us wish for nothing else
let nothing else please us
and cause us delight
except our Creator and Redeemer and Savior."
(Reg^NB 23:9)

Book Reviews

Arnulf Camps, OFM and Pat McCloskey, OFM. *The Friars Minor In China (1294-1955): Especially the Years 1925-55*. St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1995. 318 pages. Hard cover. \$28.

In 1955 there were 3,300,000 Catholics among the 461 million people who populated China. Annual confessions and communions hovered close to the million mark. Two years later relations between the Vatican and the People's Republic of China were severed, and remain strained to this day. The Bamboo Curtain was lowered to lock out the world, and the records of the missionary activities were stored in the archives of the Roman Curia and local religious provincialates.

Forty -six pages outline the Franciscan presence in China from 1294 to 1924. The remaining pages of *The Friars Minor in China* deals with the thirty years immediately preceding the divorce between Rome and Peking in 1957. During those thirty years members of forty-seven religious institutes of men and 6,927 women religious (4,832 Chinese) labored as missionaries among the Chinese people throughout the constant turmoil of civil wars, the Japanese occupation and the eventual victories of the Communist forces.

The Order of Friars Minor first arrived in China in 1294. As early as 1307 a Franciscan, John of Monte Corvino, was archbishop of the largest archdiocese in the world for it comprised the entire Far East. It was short-lived, but again in 1575 the Macao diocese was established, and the bishop had jurisdiction over all of China. Late in the seventeenth century, China was separated from Macao, and during the centuries which followed, haphazard ecclesiastical boundaries of jurisdiction were created on Roman drawing boards as zealous missionaries from the West attempted to penetrate the widely scattered territories of China.

In 1948 there were 706 (150 Chinese) friars minor from twenty-three European and American provinces in China, working in twenty-eight sees. Written records, documents, photographs and maps abound in the archives of the Order's General Curia. A mountain of boxes marked SINAE, SGMA, MH and copies of HKA fill yard after yard of shelf space in the Roman Curia in Hong Kong and in Provincial archives of the respective friars who labored in China.

In 1980, the Minister General of the Friars Minor, Fr. John Vaughn, OFM, entrusted a difficult task to Fr. Bernward Willeke, OFM, and Fr. Domenico Gandolfi, OFM. The project was known as the "Twentieth Century Franciscan Missions in China Project." In less than ten years, these two friars managed to produce over forty monographs (1000 pages) on the

mission activities of the Friars Minor in China. These monographs provided the basic contents of *The Friars Minor in China—Especially the Years 1925-1955*.

The Order's China Commission met in Taiwan in 1992. The Commission requested Fr. Pat McCloskey of Cincinnati and Fr. Arnulf Camps of Holland to "edit the monographs of Willeke and Gandolfi" and produce "a unified and popular-level work." They accomplished their task within two years, and have provided the Franciscan world with a compact overview of the history of the friars' missionary evangelization efforts from 1925 to 1955, as well as valuable insights into the 1957 split between Rome and the Patriotic Church of China.

The format is simple by design. The editors focus on a specific ecclesiastical jurisdiction entrusted to friars and provide a brief sketch of (1) the political situation; (2) a thumbnail sketch of the historical leadership, i.e. the friar leaders who were responsible for the development of the mission; (3) the personnel of the mission, i.e. the religious sisters, the lay catechists, the local clergy, and the local ordinaries; (4) the founding of local congregations; and (5) the apostolic works of the missionaries—especially the schools, hospitals, dispensaries, and orphanages which all missions were involved in. The information contained in chapters three to seven follow this format and provide the reader with concise and practical data. The editors provide an almanac of sorts.

Fr. Arnulf Camps, OFM, has been an avid observer of the Church in China for the past twenty years. It is not surprising that he was chosen to assist in the editing of the monographs. Fr. Arnulf is a recognized expert of missiology and the theology of the local church. This work offers honest insights into the minds and hearts of the Chinese bishops, priests, and laity who opted to favor the Autonomous Church of the Chinese Patriotic Association. The ever present and growing conflict between the local clergy and the foreign clergy and religious is clearly presented, and the position of those who opted for the Patriotic Church is obviously viewed in positive terms. Underlying the views in this work is the probability that the Chinese Patriotic Church is a classic example of a truly "local church"—a concept yet to be acknowledged by Rome. This is perhaps the most valuable new contribution and should serve well any future theologian or historian who desires to analyze the Patriotic Church of China from a realistic perspective.

Modest in its purpose, *The Friars Minor in China* is a valuable contribution to the Franciscan Mission world, and has nuances which will be appreciated by China Church-watchers in the years ahead. Just as American Catholics have discovered a way of being both American and Catholic, so too the Chinese sincerely desire to be both Chinese and Catholic. Just as

some Americans claim American Catholics are too Roman, and the Roman Church feels American Catholics are too American—so too the Chinese Church struggles today. The editors have presented the sources of this struggle in simple but honest terms. The question raised by the editors is how the local church and the universal church can be united in the love of Christ who prayed that "all be one."

Chapter 8 summarizes other contributions of the friars minor in China. Among those treated are: (1) The Language School of the Belgian friars in Beijing which became the model for Franciscan language schools in Tokyo, Japan, and Seoul, Korea; and (2) Fr. Gabriele Allegra's translation of the entire Bible into Chinese. The work of Fr. Allegra continued after 1948 at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Hong Kong. The credit given to Fr. Allegra by the editors is certainly deserved for he was a genuine learned scholar as well as a saintly and apostolic friar. His life makes him a candidate for canonization and his monumental work deserves continued inquiry by scholars.

Flavian Walsh, OFM

André Cirino, OFM and Josef Raischl, eds. *Franciscan Solitude*. St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1995. 370 pages + xviii. \$18.00 paper.

The renewal of interest in Franciscan forms of contemplative living has prompted a new and welcome publication from the Franciscan Institute. *Franciscan Solitude* gathers into one place and one language twenty-seven essays from Italian, German, Latin, and English sources. This is a large task of editing and translating, and the editors, André Cirino, OFM, and Josef Raischl have done a fine job of making this tradition accessible to an English-speaking audience.

The book's five chapters help to locate the Franciscan solitude tradition in its context. The pre-Franciscan experience of solitude is traced first, beginning with the New Testament accounts of Jesus in solitary places, moving through the desert hermits of early monasticism, and into the lay and women's eremitical movements in the centuries just before Francis and Clare. "Ideals of the Women's Hermitage Movement" by Edith Pásztor is especially important for casting light on the traditions contemporary with the growth of the Poor Clares.

The work of Benedikt Mertens, OFM, on solitude and hermitages in the life of Francis (Chapter 2) helps to illuminate an aspect of Francis's

"evangelical life" that has been gaining increasing attention in the past decade.

The heart of the book is Chapter 3 on the "Rule for Hermitages" with a critical edition of the text and commentaries. These pages make available Kajetan Esser's Latin and German work on the text, along with that of Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap., and Ignatius Brady, OFM.

Many studies would end here. Fortunately this one does not. The editors have chosen (in Chapters 4 and 5) to show the ongoing vitality of the Franciscan tradition of the hermitage from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries.

Here can be found: Poor Clares' expression of the hermitage tradition; an urban hermitage experience; Third Order Regular women and men interpreting solitude and the contemplative tradition in a Pennsylvania parish or a South Bronx "cabin." Josef and Bernadette Raischl reflect on the meaning of this tradition for a married couple.

Special recognition should be given here to the translators, especially Nancy Celaschi, OSF, who took on the daunting mass of the Italian texts. As a translator myself, I applaud her service and that of Berard Doerger, OFM, as well as that of the editors for their work on the German material. On the matter of the translations, I would suggest one change of term—"houses of recollection" rather than "houses of gathering" for the sixteenth-century Spanish contemplative communities.

André Cirino and Josef Raischl and their collaborators deserve congratulations for bringing to our attention this important and little-known piece of our Franciscan story. I hope they now have the opportunity to enjoy some of the silence and solitude of the hermitage they so clearly love.

William J. Short, OFM

Saint Anthony: Herald of the Good News, a Guide and a Light for Today. Excerpts from the Sermones of Saint Anthony. Trans. Claude M. Jarmak in collaboration with Thomas E. Hunt. Ellicott City, MD: Conventual Franciscan Friars, 1995. 227 pages.

In 1995 the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Anthony occasioned the publication of numerous scholarly and popular works in his honor, and the output of printed tributes continues during 1996 as we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of his being named a doctor of the Church. The book under consideration is unique among the items that have been issued and continue to be issued around the world in that it has earned

the acclaim of both specialists in the life and writings of the Evangelical Doctor and devotees of the Wonder-worker of Padua. The former applaud its readable translation of selected texts from the 1979 critical edition of St. Anthony's *Sermones*, and the latter express appreciation for its deft rendition of the Franciscan tone of the prayers.

Readers should be aware, however, that the *Sermones* are not sermons in the modern sense or homilies actually preached by the saint, but rather a collection of sermon sketches and preachable material assembled for the use of busy and less gifted pastors of souls. The themes of the seventy-seven extant *sermones*—fifty-three for Sundays and twenty-four for feast days—derive from the texts of the liturgy of the day, and each concludes with a prayer.

In 1986 Edizioni Messaggero of Padua published *Praise to You Lord*, Father Jarmak's translation of selected prayers of St. Anthony; and two years later the same publisher released *Seek First His Kingdom*, Jarmak's translation of excerpts from the *Sermones*. *Saint Anthony, Herald of the Good News* draws heavily but artfully from both these earlier works. Each of its sixty selections contains an excerpt from the *Sermones* and an accompanying Anthonian prayer, all organized under ten basic topics. An appendix, which rearranges the selections according to the liturgical seasons, will prove helpful to those who may wish to use the book for private devotion or to incorporate its contents into public services honoring the saint.

Cyprian J. Lynch, OFM

Among all the other gifts which we have received and continue to receive daily from our benefactor, the Father of mercies, and for which we must express the deepest thanks to our glorious God, our vocation is a great gift. . . . The Son of God became for us the Way which our Blessed Father Francis, His true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example.

(Testament of Clare 1-2)

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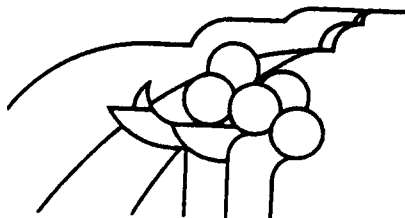
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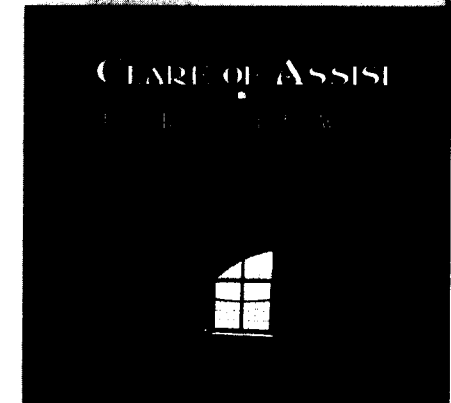
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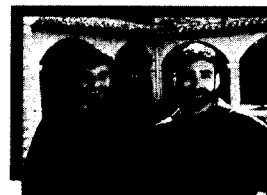
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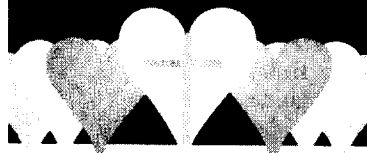
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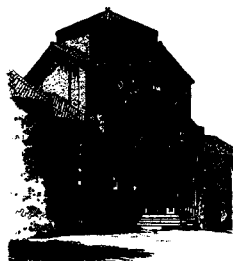


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The Soul's Journey Into God. André Cirino, OFM and Josef Raischl. Contact: Director, Franciscan Spirit and Life Center. (See detailed ad p. 154.)

Saturday, May 25-Tuesday, May 28

Second Bi-Annual Networking Seminar for Franciscan Renewal/Retreat Centers and Franciscan Spiritual Directors. At Serra Retreat Center, Malibu, CA. Contact: Julie McCole, OSF, St. Clare Renewal Center, 608 B Legion Road, Aston, PA 19014, ph. 610-459-4077.

Tuesday, May 28-Sunday, June 2

Retreat: "Letting Jesus Question Us: An Interactive Retreat around John's Gospel." Michael Crosby, OFM, Cap. Franciscan Renewal Center, 0858 Palatine Hill Road, Portland, OR 97219, ph. 503-636-1590, FAX 503-636-8099.

Friday, June 7-Friday, June 14

Retreat: "Freedom in the Service of God." Eric Kahn, OFM, Ramona Miller, OSF, Margaret Pirkel, OSF, Mira Radatz, OSF, Carol Rennie, OSB, Valerie Usher, OSF, Rosemarie Whitehead, OSF. Contact: Tau Center, 511 Hilbert St., Winona, MN. 55987, ph. 507-454-2993, FAX 507-453-0919.

Sunday, June 16-Friday, June 21

Institute on Nonviolence. Peter Damien Massengill, OFM, Conv., and Tau Center Staff. Tau Center, Winona, MN. (See above for contact information.)

Sunday, June 30-Sunday, July 7

"The Parables of Jesus Today." Nancy Schreck, OSF. At Shalom Retreat Center, 1001 Davis Ave., Dubuque, IA 52001. Contact Mary Therese Kalb, OSF, ph. 319-582-3592.

Sunday, July 7-Saturday, July 13

"Franciscan Evangelical Life." Ramona Miller, OSF. At Mount St. Francis Retreat Center. Contact Marilyn Uhing, OSF, 7665 Assisi Heights, Colorado Springs, CO 80919, ph. 719-598-5486.

Saturday, July 13-Monday, July 15

"Facing the Christ Incarnate." Sponsored by the Franciscan Federation at St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778. Contact: Federation Office, 650 Jackson Street, NE, P.O. Box 29080, Washington, DC 20017, ph. 202-529-2334, FAX 202-529-7016.

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"Living in our Franciscan Experience" (Life Program). Cost: \$950 includes retreat, seminars, room and board. At the Fullerton Cenacle, Chicago, IL. Contact Madonna Hoying, SFP, 2473 Banning Road, Cincinnati, OH 45239, ph. 513-522-7516.

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"The Gospels as Foundation of Franciscan Life," preached retreat and directed retreat. Ramona Miller, OSF, Margaret Pirkel, OSF, Carol Rennie, OSB, Linda Wieser, OSF, Jude Winkler, OFM, Conv. Tau Center, Winona, MN. (See above for contact information.)

Writings of Saint Francis

Adm	Admonitions	FormViv	Form of Life for St. Clare
BenLeo	Blessing for Brother Leo	1Fragm	Fragment of other Rule I
CantSol	Canticle of Brother Sun	2Fragm	Fragment of other Rule II
EpAnt	Letter to St. Anthony	LaudDei	Praises of God
EpCler	Letter to the Clergy	LaudHor	Praises to be said at all the Hours.
EpCust	Letter to the Custodians	OffPass	Office of the Passion
1EpFid	First Letter to the Faithful	OrCruc	Prayer before the Crucifix
2EpFid	Second Letter to the Faithful	RegB	Later Rule
EpLeo	Letter to Brother Leo	RegNB	Earlier Rule
EpMin	Letter to a Minister	RegEr	Rule for Hermitages
EpOrd	Letter to the Entire Order	SalBMV	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
EpRect	Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples	SalVirt	Salutation of the Virtues
ExhLD	Exhortation to the Praise of God	Test	Testament
ExhPD	Exhortation to Poor Ladies	TestS	Testament written in Siena
ExpPat	Prayer Inspired by the Our Father	UltVol	Last Will written for St. Clare
		VPLaet	Dictate on True and Perfect Joy

Writings of Saint Clare

1LAg	First Letter to Agnes of Prague
2LAg	Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAg	Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAg	Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
LEr	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
RCI	Rule of Clare
TestCl	Testament of Clare
BCI	Blessing of Clare

Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2Cel	Second Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
3Cel	Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
AP	Anonymous of Perugia
CL	Legend of Clare
CSD	Consideration of the Stigmata
Fior	Fioretti
JdV	Witness of Jacque de Vitry
LM	Major Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LMin	Minor Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LP	Legend of Perugia
L3S	Legend of the Three Companions
Proc	Acts of the Process of Canonization of St. Clare
SC	Sacrum Commercium
SP	Mirror of Perfection

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Arnulf Camps, OFM and Pat McCloskey, OFM
1995

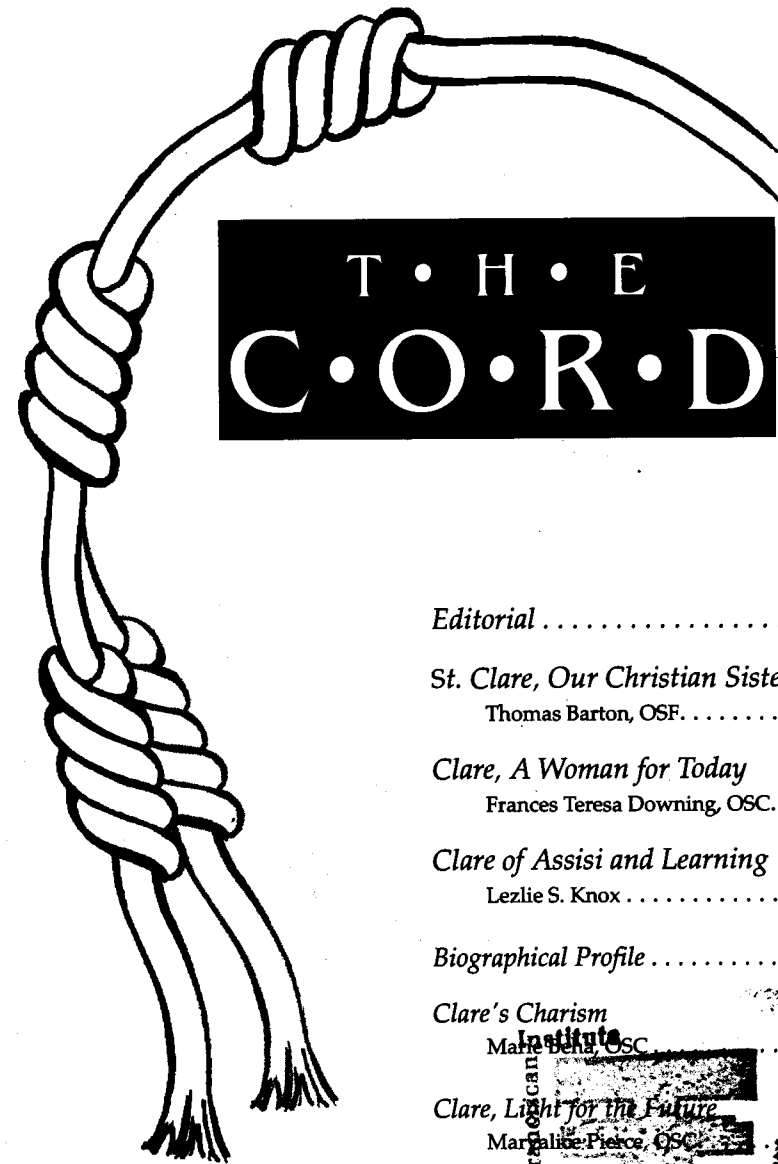
This volume presents the life and work of the Friars Minor in the Middle Kingdom during the last seven centuries. Based on 1,110 pages of scientific monographs by Bernward Willeke, OFM, and Domenico Gandolfi, OFM, the text concentrates on the years 1925-55 yet provides considerable information up through 1995. The OFM presence in China eventually took the form of 28 mission territories served by one Chinese entity (Fengxiang) and 23 European and North American provinces. In 1948 there were 706 friars, of whom about 150 were Chinese, working in China.

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THE CORD
A Franciscan Spiritual Review

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1. MSS should be submitted on disk or typed on 8 1/2 x 11 paper, one side only, double spaced.
2. The University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 13 ed., is to be consulted on general questions of style.
3. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized or, in typed manuscripts, underlined.
Titles of articles should be enclosed in quotation marks and not underlined or italicized.
4. References to Scripture sources or to basic Franciscan sources should not be footnoted, but entered within parenthesis immediately after the cited text, with period following the closed parenthesis. For example:
(1Cor. 13:6).
(RegNB 23:2).
(2Cel 5:8).
(4LAg 2:13).

A list of standard abbreviations used in *The Cord* can be found inside the back cover. The edition of the Franciscan sources used should be noted in the first reference in a mss.

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The Cord, 46.4 (1996)

Editorial

Again we devote our summer issue of *The Cord* to writings about St. Clare of Assisi and her order. We begin with a short reflection by Brother Thomas Barton, OSF, on Clare as a Christian, a title which we rarely consider, perhaps because of the many sub-divisions which identify Christians of various denominations. But from that earliest time in Antioch, when the followers of Jesus were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:26), to our present time, the name is a clear mark of those who aspire to live like Jesus in the world. For Franciscans, who aim to follow the very footprints of Jesus Christ, this title has an enduring value—and in a world which longs for the Gospel of peace, being Christian offers a ministry of word and example that can lift the hearts of our brothers and sisters across all lines of race, of religion, of political or ethnic persuasion. This is the vision of Francis of Assisi, of Clare of Assisi, of all true Christian persons down through the ages.

Sister Frances Teresa, OSC, gives us a remarkable view of Clare as a woman for our own times—and some criteria for evaluating our own vocations as Franciscans today. Lezlie Knox provides an assessment of the intellectual life of Clare and her sisters and broadens our understanding of how enclosed, contemplative, poor women contribute to the intellectual content of the Church's life and thus enrich us all.

Sister Marie Beha, OSC, considers characteristic qualities of the apostolic and contemplative dimensions of the Franciscan way of life and demonstrates how different emphases contribute to issues of charism. Sister Maryalice Pierce, OSC, looks at Clare as a contemporary light for the Church and world.

We are happy, in this issue, to offer a biographical profile of Sister Marie Beha. This is the first in a series of such profiles that will introduce to our readers the members of *The Cord's* editorial advisory board. We are grateful for the support and advice of these sisters and brothers who, in their love for our tradition, give of their time, talent, and thoughtful critique so that *The Cord* may continue to serve well our Franciscan family.

St. Clare, Our Christian Sister

Thomas Barton, OSF

A few weeks ago while looking over some issues of *The Cord*, a title of one article caught my eye: "How Radical was St. Clare?" That set me thinking about Clare and her response to life.

We know about Francis and his vocation. In the early stages, some people thought him mad, chased him, and even threw stones at him. Girls hid their faces when he walked down the street. His father, seeing the spectacle that his son had become, ran to bring him home. Was this at least in part to save him from further scorn and contempt?

Can we imagine the conversations of the Offeduccio household when Lord Rufino abandoned all to follow Jesus as a Franciscan? Rufino, one of the seven knights of the Offreduccio family, had decided to give it all away. Can you hear the chorus? Madness!

Very little is recorded about their reaction to Clare. There is, however, one direct incident and some direct responses. The family patriarch, Monaldo by name, having located Clare at the Benedictine Monastery of San Paolo, went quickly to bring her home. (Wisely Francis and Bishop Guido had requested shelter there. The previous year Innocent III had granted San Paolo the privilege of sanctuary.) When Clare heard Monaldo's voice she took herself immediately to the chapel. When he entered, his eyes beheld a nun whose head had been shaved, claiming the right to sanctuary by holding onto the altar cloths. Can we imagine his shock? Can we imagine what his immediate thoughts might have been? Surely madness passed through his mind.

What then of the direct responses? First, as a trickle, Agnes joined Clare. Then quickly, as if a dam had burst, the highest society gave its most eligible daughters to this new way of following Christ, as if they had been waiting many years for this one chance. Was this madness? Surely many thought so.

But to come back to the first question: How radical was St. Clare?

For a woman to leave her parental home, alone, at night, during the curfew, was conviction. To leave the shelter of the protection offered by the city was courageous. To go into the dark night through a swampy area, possibly infested by wild animals, bandits, and lepers was extremely brave. But was this radical?

The radicality of Clare's decision came at St. Mary of the Angels. For the sake of Christ and her desire to imitate him, Clare became the first Franciscan woman at the same time that she forfeited her good name. What else do we truly have but our own good name, our own reputation?

Clare went to St. Mary of the Angels alone with all those men! Can you imagine the tale that was woven with that story? Surely madness is a part of that, but truly very much more must have been said. Clare herself indicated that was the case in her own Testament:

When the blessed Francis saw, however, that although we were physically weak and frail, we did not shirk deprivation, poverty, hard work, trial, or the *shame or contempt of the world* (emphasis mine)—rather, we considered them as great delights, . . . he greatly rejoiced in the Lord (56).

The radical nature of Clare's vocation lies primarily in what she forfeited due to her association with Francis and the brothers. This decision had to work for Clare; it had to be her correct, one, true life choice. Why? The double standard operant in the Middle Ages gave women no margin for error. By her stepping out of the realm of Assisi's values and into the life of the Gospel, she closed forever one door, while walking through the door to eternity. The magnitude of that choice, the decision to join Francis and the Brothers, Clare consciously recalled in her encouragement to another seeker. In her first letter to Agnes of Prague, Clare exclaimed:

What a great and praiseworthy exchange: to leave the things of time for those of eternity, to choose the things of heaven for the goods of the earth, to receive the hundred-fold in place of one and to possess a blessed and eternal life! (37)

To answer the initial question then of the radicality of St. Clare, let us look at the title Francis gave her—"our Christian Sister." That title, "Christian," Francis reserved for two—the leper and Clare. In both he found the person of Jesus in a very particular way. In the leper he found the wounded Jesus. In the Lady Clare he found one who had truly done what Jesus himself had done—emptied herself.

How radical was St. Clare? Radical enough that Francis identified her with Jesus.

Clare of Assisi: A Woman for Today

Frances Teresa Downing, OSC

Introduction

While this article intends to reflect on Clare as a woman for today, it might be helpful to examine some of the principles behind this idea. It means a bit more work, but it will be time well-spent in helping us understand better both Clare and ourselves.

If you would forgive me for some dry stuff first, I would like to set out a sort of ground plan based on something which Bernard Lonergan, the Jesuit theologian, says about the Word in our lives and to use that as the framework within which to say what has occurred to me. Lonergan says that the Word, as it speaks to us, always has three dimensions. It is personal, it is social, and it is historical.

It is personal because it is spoken to a person, and it is always a word about love—God's love for me. This Word becomes a communication because of the inner response of the person addressed—because of the heart. Clare gives us an instance of this when she tells us in her Testament that the Lord enlightened her heart (TestCl 24).¹

The Word is social because its meaning is only fully unfolded in relationship with others. It brings together what Lonergan calls "scattered sheep," which is what we always tend to become; and the only thing which effectively binds us together is the fact that, in the depths of our hearts, we all respond to the same mystery. We know this is true from our own experience of trying to build community. We recognize the things which do build community and how impossible it is to build community when these things are not present. It is out of our shared response that our shared life comes. "I," said Clare, "together with a few sisters whom the Lord had

given me after my conversion, willingly promised him [Francis] obedience" (TestCl 25).

Finally, the word is historical. Its meaning has had a specific historical expression—there was a time *when*. . . . The teaching which the Word gives is historical because the Word used words of everyday life from one era (in our case, the thirteenth century) to speak to us now, in the twentieth and nearly the twenty-first century, of an experience of love and awe which is for life now. Further, it has to do, says Lonergan rather unexpectedly, with common sense.²

This word spoken for history would be what Clare meant when she said in her Testament:

The Lord himself has placed us not only as a form for others in being an example and mirror, but even for our sisters whom the Lord has called to our way of life as well, that they in turn might be a mirror and example to those living in the world (TestCl 19-20).

The *Legend of Saint Clare*, in the same sense, calls Clare "a brilliant light for women" (Preface) and Pope Alexander IV says that she was a sister and companion to the faithful (*Bull of Canonization* 19).

We will consider each of these three dimensions: the personal, as Clare and her charism; the social, as the Order and its charism; the historical, as us and our charism. We will then explore how these fit together and are parts of a whole. In this way we can begin to perceive how Clare can be, after 800 years, a woman for today.

The Word is Personal

We know what an important place the Word of God held in Francis's life. This was not just a vague love of Scripture, but an immediate interaction with God. God spoke to Francis and changed his life. Francis is in a direct line with all those people in the Scriptures who say things like: I saw the Lord and he said this to me. Francis understood that he was the little poor man to whom God had spoken. He himself tells us: "No one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel" (Test 14).³

We find something similar in Clare. She was first moved when she heard the Word of God spoken by Francis in San Rufino Cathedral. She tells us:

After the Most High Heavenly Father saw fit by His grace to enlighten my heart to do penance according to the example and teach-

ing of our most blessed Father, Saint Francis, I, together with my sisters, willingly promised him obedience (RCI 6:1).

This was what the Word said to her; this was her call, her vocation; and the action which followed was the free promise of obedience to Francis. Through that obedience, she was led to share Francis's own insight into the mystery of the Incarnation. They were both tutored by Mary, whom they saw as the paradigm of Christian living, the one who heard the Word of God and kept it so totally that the Word itself received flesh from her.

Clare's Own Charism

Let us now think about the gift, the charism, given to Clare herself. In our admiration for Clare we must not forget that all these things were given to her for us, the people of God. We can consider this under two headings. The *Legend of Clare* says:

Let the men follow the new male disciples of the Incarnate Word [and] the women imitate Clare, the footprint of the Mother of God, a new leader of women (CL Preface).

Under these two titles, footprint of the Mother of God and new leader of women, we are provided with a neat way of thinking about Clare which matches Lonergan's three divisions without any contrivance. The first enables us to look a little into Clare's own heart, and the second helps us reflect on her in community.

Footprint of the Mother of God

We can see from Clare's letters that she was a very reflective person. Whatever she read or heard about God, she took into herself and meditated on, pondering it in her heart as Mary did, and learning from Mary to "do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). By naming her the footprint of Mary, the author is making a statement about the way in which the Incarnation was at the heart of her life in God. The writings of some mystics can fairly easily be translated across denominational boundaries, but there is no way Clare could have written her letters except as a deeply committed Christian. A Sufi or Hasidic Clare is not easy to imagine, unlike the way in which the *Cloud of Unknowing*, for instance, can be read by people from all sorts of religious backgrounds.

Clare understood her call as an invitation to learn from Mary to be at the heart of the Christian mystery. Mary embodied the designs of God in the most literal way:

[She] gave birth to a Son whom the heavens could not contain, and yet she carried Him in the little enclosure of her holy womb and held Him on her virginal lap (3LAG 18-19).

Clare learned from Mary to do "whatever he tells you." This is the sum and substance of Clare's call, and what she learned from Francis was simply the how of doing this. She explains in her Testament: "The Son of God has been made for us the Way" (TestC 5). And at the beginning of her Rule, she says that for herself and her sisters, their form of life is to observe the holy Gospel.

It follows from this that a key factor in Clare's thinking is the concept of discipleship. She learned it from the one who said: "He that is mighty has done great things for me" (Luke 1:49). It is in the light of this statement that she understands her own call to be a mirror and example, surrendering herself to what we might, without too much frivolity, call the spiritual knock-on effect—we look to Clare, Clare looks to Francis, Francis looks to Christ, Christ looks to the Father. Each person in that chain has his or her own specific role. Christ is the way to the Father, Clare tells us, and Francis showed it to me (TestC1 5).

Another key idea which she learned from Mary is that of a spirituality of exchange, an exchange of nothing for everything. The everything, what she called the incomparable treasure, is hidden in the world and in the field of our hearts. We search for it and take hold of it by non-possessiveness and inner freedom. In exchange we are made co-workers of God, supporting those who need support. Clare always seemed to be aware of the wider, apostolic dimensions of her way of life. Although she had a strong sense of having opted for the eternal rather than the transient and saw the world as a deceitful and turbulent place, she was profoundly positive and optimistic towards people and life in general. This conviction seems to have governed all her relationships, within and without the community.

Clare, the New Leader of Women

When we read about Clare's early religious life and her time at the two other religious houses where "her mind was not completely at peace" (CL 10), we can see that, like the rest of us, she learned as she went along. As she matured she discovered personally how to live the Gospel. She had to undergo a long process until she measured up to John Futrell's definition of a founder as someone who drinks of the Spirit as an essential condition of life, not simply as an extra to earthly existence.

The consequence of this was the usual one—others were drawn to join her because holiness is the most attractive thing on this earth. Bernard

Häring says that what we all thirst for is an experience of the living God and that the heart of a community of faith is not a system of doctrine but a shared and profoundly disturbing experience of Jesus.⁴

This is what Clare brought to San Damiano and shared with her sisters. While she does seem to have been a leader by temperament, it was her experience of the living God which was the true source of her leadership. It was this which drew the sisters to her in the first place, as it drew the brothers to Francis. The hope of sharing this is partly why we are here today, still trying to learn from Clare and Francis how to prepare ourselves for an experience which no system of doctrine can give. This experience is much nearer to play and to poetry, to wisdom and to aesthetic experience.

The Word is Social

The Charism of the Order

How did this affect the women who became the first Poor Clares? What happened to ordinary individuals who broke with their families and came to live with this most attractive woman? Clare had become one of those who

strike us by their unique nature and their personal light in the most absolute sense. Nothing like this has been seen before. They [are people who] have broken with the old, the usual, and this new impression is like a scandal and a madness.

Any religious family, and the early Franciscans were no exception, takes shape and is crystallized by the interaction between the charismatic founding figure and the disciples or the community. What develops is, for a short time, like a living parable of the Kingdom in which the disciples surrender themselves to the prophetic vision of the founder. As a result, that prophetic vision and parable of the Kingdom pass into the common life of the Church. From being a personal story it becomes part of the history of God's people. We can see from this how necessary it is for people such as Clare and Francis to have companions. They knew well that their companions were gifts from God and that each one had a task to perform for the wider Church through their shared life.

That moment when Clare's personal call began to interact with those who had left all to join her is the moment when her call began to crystallize. Such a moment is an extremely crucial one in the life of any group. Until then the initial gift to the Church, the charism, had been mediated through those personal qualities which were uniquely Clare's; but in the designs of the Spirit, it also needed to be enriched by the contribution from

each of the early sisters, as well as by being lived over a period of years in a particular social and ecclesiastical climate. Many of the modifications which necessarily followed would have been enlargements of the gift, but in the process of adjusting to each other, there must surely have been some diminishment as well.

Each of the first followers had to find a way to contribute her own personal calling and gifts while expressing with fidelity what she had learned from others. She had to have the courage to make her own contribution even while realizing that this might modify the original charism. This is why the interactions between the foundress and the early community, and then between the early community and its environment, are of such importance. They are the first external, modifying influences to be brought to bear on the personal call of the foundress. Through mutual commitment this new community then began to share the fruitfulness of the Church, to form Christ in others, and to share in the motherhood of Mary, the virgin made Church, as Francis called her (SalBVM 1).

The Setting

We can now look briefly at the external setting, the context in which all this was happening. We know that the great Via Francigena, the main trade route to France, crossed the valley of Spoleto from Spoleto in the south to Assisi in the north. We know that the valley was papal property, that it was subject to the Bishop of Rome and included the three dioceses of Assisi, Foligno, and Spoleto. We know that it had been granted to the papacy by Charlemagne himself—Clare's ancestor through her mother Ortolana. We know that inter-city strife was causing a complete breakdown of the rule of law—those same conflicts which drove Clare and her family into exile in about 1200 and which involved Francis in the Battle of Collestrada in 1202. As a way of strengthening his control over the area, the Pope appointed papal legates. With men such as Cardinal Ugolino in place, the Pope could deal with the political, religious, and heretical situations more directly.

At that time, the Catharist and Waldensian heresies were very strong and presented one factor which is particularly interesting to us—the unusually high profile of Cathar women. Catharism seems to have come into Lombardy partly from Bulgaria and partly from France and found strong supporters among the merchants of Italy who were constantly traveling north into France and back again. Basically, Catharism was dualistic—it saw good and evil as two principles, expressed as conflict between the spiritual and the material worlds. That dualism is still very strong today. People suspect that evil and good are equally powerful and often fear that

evil even has the edge over good. The material is seen as the primary domain of evil and the physical is linked to the material. Thus the material can be dimly perceived as either bad or irrelevant—an attitude to which the Church is not always immune. One consequence is an abandonment to physical experience; another is a devaluing of the material as irrelevant and unimportant. We see both attitudes at work today—both disastrous for the believer in an incarnate God.

One result, both negative and positive, was that women as well as men set out to free themselves from the limitations of the body and become “perfect”—they were even called *perfectae*. There were convents of such women living in great poverty and purity, allowed to preach and teach and engage in pastoral work. In addition to the explicitly heretical groups, there were a large number of groups whose exact definition was vague. Pope Innocent III pursued an extremely interesting and enlightened policy with regard to them, seeking to support their strengths as a preliminary to easing them back into communion with Rome. There is no doubt that he saw Francis, and later Clare, as people who would live lives every bit as poor and as pure as those of the heretics, but who would be bound by obedience to the papacy.

These issues help us to see with hindsight some of the expectations the Church had of Clare, as well as some of the needs which she and Francis tried to meet and the imbalances they corrected. We understand better Clare’s insistence on poverty as something linked to the Incarnation and to the kenosis of Christ. We also see that Clare, like us, lived at a time when the institutional Church was in crisis. (When is it not?) On every front, Francis and Clare lived in a period of change, and the Church stood in great need of new and courageous incentives. The pope called a Council to try to initiate exactly such an incentive. One result was a major reorganization from the top down and a formulation of Church Law. Does that sound familiar? As part of the strengthening of legal controls, communities of women were obliged to set themselves on a sound financial footing, to remain unseen within their enclosures, and to await the coming of the bridegroom without being any trouble to the hierarchy.

But the Spirit is always more subtle than the would-be organizers of the Church. Just as in our own time we have seen the reform of Canon Law running side by side with the Charismatic renewal, so it was then. Parallel to all the organizational activity was a movement towards the simple and undefined, towards what today we might call the organic. It was typified by increased self-awareness and independence among women who were forming themselves into new social and religious groupings. Some of these, like the Beguines, consciously held back from seeking official approval in

order to retain greater freedom and autonomy.

This is the background against which Clare formed her community at San Damiano. It supports the sociological theory which suggests that a group like a religious order comes into being for at least one of three reasons: in response to a need; as an attempt to redress a balance; or because of some great and attractive person. The Franciscan movement fills all three categories. It might help us to find our way forward if, at some time, we were to think about our own vocation under each of those headings: meeting a need, redressing a balance, following our charismatic leaders.

Until they were joined by others, Francis and Clare were individuals, not initiators. By the time Clare went to San Damiano, she already had companions—Agnes was there, Pacifica was in close touch, Benvenuta came that same year (Proc 2:1). The Bull of Canonization suggests that Clare’s mother, Ortolana, entered fairly early, at least before Clare became Abbess in 1215 (8). As a result of this shared life, a structure developed at San Damiano which gave a new and particular social expression to the personal Word which Clare had received. This expression explored, and largely solved, the difficulties of living a true mendicancy in a setting of external stability. Margaret Carney, in her excellent book on Clare, suggests that the friars of Clare’s time could have learned a lot from her solution to the problems of how to have a house and still live radical poverty.⁵

Clare’s way of life was an example of what J.B. Metz calls an institutional form of a subversive memory!⁶ It was a memory because the challenge of the Spirit had already been spoken and accepted. It was subversive because it came from the vast spaces of the Spirit which rarely sets up more than an uneasy balance with the institution. It was, however, unavoidably institutional in form, because it is virtually impossible for human beings to live together without structure. The subversive memory needs the structure, but even more the institution needs the subversive memory in order to stay alive and be perennially fruitful.

The Word is Historical

The Charism We Inherit

If the Word is extended in space by being shared, it is extended in time by being passed on. It moves from being social to being historical simply by the clock ticking—the founder and the first companions die. Why is it, do you think, that although Clare outlived Francis by so many years, it is only recently we have begun to think of them as being, in any real sense, co-founders of the Franciscan movement? This does seem to be one new thing that the householder is drawing out of our Franciscan treasure house

for today. Neither Poor Clares nor other Franciscans any longer see Clare as the exclusive preserve of the Second Order. Rather, we sense that she has a relevance beyond the Order or the movement or the Church to our society in general. Without any doubt, this is one of the major signs of the times for us today.

Just as those first companions had the tricky task of accepting a new gift of the Spirit, so we later generations too have a task. This task is even trickier than the earlier one, it seems to me, because the first companions always had the presence of the original charismatic figure with whom to check developments and growth. But we have this only at second hand. So we must find other ways of being faithful to the past which will enable our inheritance to mature and flourish. We must be like the Jews, who are taught by their rabbis to read the Exodus story as an account of something which has happened to each of them personally and that this identification is not a fiction, but a reality. As we read about Francis and Clare, something similar must happen for us.

The Word spoken to them was a gift of the Spirit for all time, but we inherit it through the refracting glass of the Middle Ages. Our most demanding task is to discern between the gift and the glass. To do this, we need to be steeped in the story of our beginnings. We also need to be true and ordinary people of today. You recall that Lonergan said this Word was a word about common sense? We need to be clear-sighted about the strengths and weaknesses of our society; neither canonizing nor despising either the medieval or the modern. Out of this accurate chemistry will come light for the way forward. This is what Vatican II was about, what *Perfectae Caritatis* is about, and what we have all been struggling with for the last twenty-five years. It is at the root of much of our historical research, of our formation, and of our reading. The fruit of it is to understand Clare as a woman for our times.

The Charism of Each One of Us

We, like the first brothers and sisters, have seen in Francis and Clare an incarnation of Gospel living which we can understand and which we find attractive. This is why we are here today. There is something in them which echoes in us. We are enthusiastic when we see it in each other and recognize it as something to which we too feel summoned. The other side of our call is that the gifts and graces given to each of us begin to make us like Francis and Clare; we grow to resemble them; they are true parents to us. Because we add what we are to what they were, their ground-plan or pattern shines through whatever we build on it. In this way God's original gift to the Church comes to fruition in our time.⁷

So we can come to another form of the question which we put earlier about the first companions: in what way am I relevant to the work which the Spirit began in Francis and Clare? There are two parts to this question, both rooted in the fact of the Church's mission. Every gift to the Church is *for* the world, simply because the Church is for the world. So one part of the question is: how is this gift to the world expressed in me today? The other part is: what do I contribute to it? Do I leave it richer than I found it? Or do I simply draw on it as on a deposit account which will eventually be empty? The Church and the world today count on us for both a response and a responsibility. Francis and Clare are not simply people to whom we can look back and whom we follow. Because they were called by the living God, they are the point of departure for a gift which is developing as long as it is relevant. When it ceases to be relevant, the whole Franciscan movement will shut down.

Surely it is here that we find the real meaning of Clare as a woman for today. We can only call her this if we honestly feel that she is relevant, that we do not have to manipulate her message, though we may need to translate it. If she speaks to us across the years—and it does seem that she is doing so—then ways must be found for her voice to be heard by the wider Church and by our society. I have carefully refrained from telling you why I think she is relevant, because I believe it is far more important for us to try to define this together. If she is speaking to the whole Franciscan Order, then all the branches of the Order should listen together.

The personal Word to Clare comes to us now as the Word in its historical dimension, extended in time; but it is also spoken to each one of us personally. In addition, the Spirit's gift in Clare is also open to the particular gift given to every one of us. While we must ask ourselves which elements in Clare echo most strongly for us, we must also try to discover what elements of our own call are given so that we can plow them back into the Franciscan bit of the vineyard and do our part to keep it fruitful. We must also ask what elements in Clare most speak to the needs of today's society and today's Church; and finally, how are those needs experienced by my particular branch of the Order, be it First, Second, Third, Regular or Secular? Do we all meet the same needs, or is it part of the richness of Franciscanism that different needs are met by different branches of the Order?

What I have tried to suggest is that the call given first to Clare and Francis and the charism as it lives in the wider Franciscan movement, together with the gifts and the calling of God to you and to me, are all parts of one whole. They are bound together by the presence of the Word as it is extended in space and time.

¹ All references to writings by and about Clare are from *Clare of Assisi, Early Documents*, ed. and trans. Regis J. Armstrong, OFM, Cap. (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1993).

² Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972) 113-15.

³ References to the writings of Francis are from *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, tr. Regis J. Armstrong, OFM, Cap. and Ignatius C. Brady, OFM (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

⁴ John C. Futrell, "Discovering the Founder's Charism," in *The Way* (Supplement) 14 (1971) 65.

⁵ "Atteggiamento religioso di fondo" in *Il tempo intermedio e il compimento della storia della Salvezza*, 10 MS (V/1) (Brescia, 1978) 264.

⁶ P. Evdokimov, *La novità dello Spirito* (Milan, 1979) 120.

⁷ Margaret Carney, *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi & Her Form of Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993) 136-137.

⁸ J.B. Metz, *Tempo di religiosi? Mistica e politica della sequela* (Brescia, 1978) 34.

⁹ J.M. Lozano, "Carisma e istituzione nelle comunità create dallo Spirito" in AA.VV., *Carisma e istituzione, Lo Spirito interroga i religiosi*, (Rome, 1983) 134.



Francis and Clare are not simply people to whom we can look back and whom we follow. Because they were called by the living God, they are the point of departure for a gift which is developing as long as it is relevant. When it ceases to be relevant, the whole Franciscan movement will shut down. (Frances Teresa, OSC)

Clare of Assisi and Learning: A Foundation for Intellectual Life within the Franciscan Second Order

Lezlie S. Knox

At first glance, Franciscan nuns in the early decades of the thirteenth century seem unlikely to have made intellectual activities a part of their lives—to study books, to reflect on ideas, to copy manuscripts, and especially to build libraries. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, it is not difficult to find examples of Franciscan women in Italy who were involved with learning and promoted intellectual life within their convents. Already at the end of the thirteenth century Friar Salimbene de Adam praised the intellectual abilities of his niece, a Poor Clare in Parma: "She has an excellent understanding of Scripture, and a good memory and general intelligence."² During the fourteenth century, the community at Monteluca (Perugia) organized a large scriptorium and became well known for its production of manuscripts.³ Caterina Vegri, a nun at Corpus Domini in Bologna, secretly wrote a devotional treatise and guide, *The Seven Spiritual Weapons*. After her death in 1463 this treatise became one of the most widely circulated religious texts in central and northern Italy in both manuscript and printed forms. Moreover, Roberto Rusconi, one of the foremost scholars of the medieval Franciscan Order, has remarked that the best convent libraries during the fifteenth century were found in Franciscan women's communities.⁴

One might wonder whether Clare of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan women's order, would have been displeased by the extent to which her Order enveloped learning. Certainly, she is not generally considered one of the Middle Ages' great intellectuals. It is possible, however, that she herself might have been a model for later intellectual activities

among Franciscan nuns and that she helped their houses develop into intellectual communities. This question has remained largely unexplored because, until recently, medievalists have paid little attention to Clare beyond how she followed Francis of Assisi. She is rarely viewed as an intellectual figure since she seems too unlike the learned women of the earlier Middle Ages, such as Heloise or Hildegard.⁵ Nor does her story fit easily into narratives of a female intellectual authority gained through mysticism as do those of later women such as Catherine of Siena or Angela of Foligno. The contemporary sources, however, remember Clare as “mother and teacher of the Order of San Damiano” (emphasis mine).⁶ Because of the role which learning came to play for the Franciscans—the nuns as well as the friars—her thoughts about learning and the nature of her intellectual activities should be examined with specific regard to what it meant for Clare to be perceived as a “teacher” during the thirteenth century. To do this, I will consider especially how Clare intellectualized her devotional practices, a concept I refer to as contemplative intellection.⁷

Clare’s intellectual life revolved around two poles. On the one hand, she was self-consciously a prototypical Franciscan for whom traditional learning had little place. A life marked by humility and charity that also was lived in apostolic poverty—both individual and communal—defined her years at San Damiano, the community she founded in 1212. She and the other sisters pursued this vocation, which was shared with the Franciscan friars. Their goal was to imitate Christ and become one with Him. This life of spiritual humility did not necessarily require book learning or study (especially in comparison to the importance given to *lectio divina* in the Benedictine tradition⁸). For Francis, perfect poverty meant that the friars should not own books either individually or as a community, nor should they pursue academic study because it risked engendering intellectual pride.⁹

While spiritual humility certainly did not originate among the Franciscans, Francis developed his own understanding of this moral virtue in relation to education and learning. He associated learning with a certain “pride of place”—namely that held at both schools and ecclesiastical courts by clerics trained in advanced theology—and he envisioned his friars as not enjoying the status of learned clergy.¹⁰ Yet, during the first half of the thirteenth century, the friars lived in a state of tension between their professed humility and their need to allow a role for teaching and preaching in the Order.¹¹ This need seemed less applicable to cloistered nuns. Clare did not leave any statements about whether learning might jeopardize the spiritual life of the sisters, nor did she comment on the friars’ struggles to accommodate learning into their Order. Events during her life,¹²

however, suggest that Clare mistrusted intellectual activities and felt they might not enhance the Franciscan charism.

To understand her ideas about learning, it is important to understand the life Clare lived at San Damiano. We begin by examining how the rules that governed her community defined or created a place for intellectual activities. Unlike the Benedictine Rule or the Augustinian Rule adopted by the Dominican nuns, the *Form of Life* Clare wrote in the 1250’s for San Damiano and its daughter communities did not provide a place for instruction in reading and writing, nor did it designate time for devotional reading.¹³ Clare’s text was not the first rule for the Second Order;¹⁴ in 1219 Cardinal Hugolino de Segni, the future Gregory IX, adapted the Benedictine Rule for San Damiano. In chapter 5 on the Divine Office, he wrote: “If there are some young or even older women who are humble and capable of learning, the Abbess, if she sees fit, may appoint a capable and discerning mistress to teach them to read” (RHug 5). This passage was also included in Pope Innocent IV’s rule for the Franciscan nuns written in 1247 (RIIn 2). In drafting her rule, Clare excluded these passages. She did so in spite of the fact that young girls who would presumably need instruction in reading and writing to participate fully in liturgical life entered her community. Concerning education, Clare turned away from her community’s earlier rules—as well as from the female monastic tradition—to make her *form of life* directly parallel to the respective passage in Francis’s Rule of 1223 for the Friars Minor.¹⁵ Her citing of Francis marked Clare’s belief that the friars and nuns shared one charism. It might also indicate that, like Francis, she felt learning detracted from their spiritual life and so assigned no space for education at San Damiano.

Clare did not believe, however, that intellectual activities should be entirely avoided. She herself owned a breviary¹⁶ and there were readings during meals and as part of the Liturgy of the Hours in her community (Proc 7:11).¹⁷ But Clare believed that learning should be moderated and highly controlled. Therefore, in her Rule, she distinguished between literate and illiterate nuns in describing liturgical practices. Those who were literate might read the Divine Office, while the illiterate recited the *Lord’s Prayer* (RCI 3:1-3). At the same time, she did not want the illiterate sisters to make an effort to learn to read:

Let those who do not know how to read not be eager to learn. Let them direct their attention to what they should desire above all else: the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity, to pray always to Him with a pure heart, and to have humility, patience in difficulty and infirmity, and to love those who persecute, blame and accuse us. . . . (RCI 10:8-11).

These passages suggest that Clare established at San Damiano a community that formally disengaged from the traditional ways we have understood learning: instruction in reading and writing, devotional reading—even of Scripture, or the copying of manuscripts. An image of Clare emerges as a woman who resisted learning and feared intellectual pride. At San Damiano mental prayer and contemplation, rather than devotional study, would guide the nuns to their understanding of religious life and their encounter with the Divine.¹⁸ Nevertheless, this image of Clare and San Damiano is challenged by Clare's own actions and engagement with learning and use of intellectual activities.

At the opposite pole from her desire to restrain learning, we can consider Clare as a learned woman. Although some scholars had thought she dictated to a scribe,¹⁹ most medievalists today accept that she herself wrote the seven surviving Latin texts attributed to her.²⁰ These writings include the Rule, four letters to Agnes of Prague, a Testament, and a Blessing for the nuns at San Damiano. Moreover, since there are extant letters to Clare—from cardinals and popes, as well as from other nuns—it is easy to imagine many letters written by her that are now lost. These epistles should not be dismissed as “mere letters”—in the thirteenth century letter writing remained uncommon among women, even in Italian cities.²¹ Indeed, these letters demonstrate her learning and intellectual abilities. Her Latin was never very sophisticated, but Clare nonetheless displayed sufficient familiarity with its grammar that she could shift style and tone as appropriate to the genre of her text. Moreover, the very act of Clare's writing was vital and challenging. In some ways, her most audacious text was the *form of life* written for San Damiano. Clare was the first woman in the medieval Latin church to write a rule for nuns,²² making her the first woman to define the lives of other women through an authoritative textual form. Clare's text borrowed from both Hugolino's and Innocent's Rules and was modeled closely on Francis's, but this fact should not be taken as evidence of her “lack of originality” or a “derivative nature.” Rather, it demonstrates her ability to draw from established texts and sources to make her own points. With the Rule in particular, but also with the teachings recorded in her letters, she established a precedent for the written word and texts to guide her community. Moreover, these textual records disclose the tension the nuns shared with the friars as Clare both tried to restrain learnedness at San Damiano and yet used her learning for spiritual instruction.

Thomas of Celano, who knew Clare personally, observed that the nuns at San Damiano “learn in [contemplation] everything they should do or avoid and they know with joy how to leave the mind for God” (1Cel 18).

He suggested that their learning was superior to that gained from books because it had come directly from God. In his First Life of Francis, Thomas called the learnedness of the sisters “wisdom from God” (1Cel 18), a phrase Clare herself used in her Third Letter to Agnes of Prague: “[You are] helped by a special gift of wisdom from the mouth of God himself and in an awe-inspiring and unexpected way” (3LAg 6). This term, wisdom—*sapientia* in Latin, can best be explained with reference to another gift of the Holy Spirit, *scientia* (often translated as knowledge).²³ By the thirteenth century, *scientia* had become a word most often used to indicate learning gained from books or treatises studied at the university or in other schools.²⁴ This institutional practice is completely absent in Clare's writings. For Thomas and Clare, their learning had moved beyond reading books and formal study to emphasize the importance of prayer and contemplation as a means to understanding. *Scientia* gave way to *sapientia* in communities of Franciscan women.

The nuns at San Damiano distinguished between learning gained from books and *sapientia* acquired through contemplation. At Clare's canonization process one nun, Sister Agnes (daughter of the podestà of Assisi and not Clare's natural sister), testified that “Lady Clare delighted in hearing the Word of God. Although she had never studied letters, she nevertheless listened willingly to learned sermons” (Proc 10:8). Her hagiographical legend similarly reported:

Although she was not educated in the liberal arts, she nevertheless enjoyed listening to the sermons of those who were, because she believed that a nucleus lay hidden in the text that she could astutely perceive and enjoy with relish. She knew what to take out of the sermon of any preacher that might be profitable to the soul (CL 37).

When these passages state that “Clare had not learned letters,” they do not mean that Clare was illiterate, but rather that the type of learning she possessed was different from that of the learned preacher. But this knowledge was in no way less valid because the nuns gained understanding not only through hearing learned sermons, but also through their contemplation. Thus Sister Agnes's testimony continued:

One day when Brother Philip of Arti of the Order of Friars Minor was preaching, the witness saw a very handsome young boy, who seemed to be about three years old, appear to St. Clare. While she, the witness, was praying in her heart that God would not let her be deceived, He answered her in her heart with these words: “I am in their midst,” signifying through these words the young boy Jesus

Christ Who stood in the midst of the preachers and listeners when they were preaching and listening as they should (Proc 10:8).

The significance of this scene described by Sister Agnes is that the Christ Child became visible during the sermon only to Clare and the other women but not to the preacher. The learned man lacked the understanding that the vision represented to the "unlearned" women. Indeed, the point is precisely that they are not actually "unlearned" but gifted with wisdom/*sapientia*. Although the women had not studied the liberal arts to prepare for a career of preaching, contemplation prepared them to understand the preacher's teaching and facilitated their knowledge of the Divine. Hence, both Clare and her sisters constructed an internal topography of learning based in contemplation and signified as *sapientia*.

From within this internalized intellectual space, Clare connected the knowledge she gained with more traditional intellectual activities. Prayer was always one of the central aspects of her vocation, and she often reflected on it in her letters to Agnes of Prague. In her third letter, she described the three steps of prayer: "O most noble Queen, gaze upon [Him], consider [Him], contemplate [Him], as you desire to imitate [Him]" (3LAG 20). Clare expanded this practice in her final letter written shortly before she died. She advised Agnes to gaze into a mirror and see poverty, humility, and charity reflected back and told her that these virtues might be contemplated throughout the entire mirror. At the border, Agnes should see Christ's poverty revealed in the image of the Child placed in the humble manger. On the mirror's surface, Agnes should reflect on humility as she considered how Christ had suffered for human redemption. Lastly, in the mirror's depths, Agnes should contemplate Christ's charity in suffering the Crucifixion and dying a shameful death.²⁵ Through this contemplative exercise Clare taught her fellow sister and effective pupil how to reach an understanding of their lives as Franciscans. One might see this text as a representation of Clare's mysticism, her affective and experiential understanding of union with and worship of the Divine. These passages also reveal, however, how Clare intellectualized this spiritual experience.

Her division of the practice of prayer into steps and her use of the analogy of the mirror demonstrate how these women, who had never pursued academic training and who deemphasized study at San Damiano, nevertheless engaged learnedness. With Francis and many other medieval spiritual authors, Clare shared the image of the mirror, but from within her contemplation she transformed its purposes.²⁶ Whereas Francis had stressed being a mirror for others in the world, Clare turned the image around both to reflect and to reflect on Christ.²⁷ Her evocation of this theme demonstrates how she engaged ideas active in the learned culture, incorporated

them intellectually, and then taught them effectively. Moreover, this image of the mirror functioned as a space through which Clare, Agnes, and other Franciscan women could explore their understanding of the Divine through contemplation. In practice, the mirror became an example of an intellectual space where learning occurred.

Reviewing Clare's life in this way begins to explain how she became both model and authorization for future learning among Franciscan women and helped their convents to develop as intellectual communities. We do not know where Clare wrote—whether in a cell, a study, or at a table in the refectory. This lack of a specific intellectual space at San Damiano emphasizes that we need to look beyond the physical structures for learning and learnedness. At San Damiano and other communities of Franciscan women, Clare's contemplative intellection internally mapped a feminine intellectual space throughout the convent.

Endnotes

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 30th International Congress on Medieval Studies in May 1995. A longer version of this essay is in the third chapter of my dissertation in progress ("Breaching the Convent Wall: Learning, Learnedness, and Medieval Religious Women") at the Medieval Institute of the University of Notre Dame. In the many drafts of this paper, I am particularly grateful for the comments and encouragement of Mark Jordan, Ingrid Peterson, John Van Engen, and Lisa Wolverton.

² *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam* trans. by John L. Baird (Binghamton: MRTS, 1986): 177.

³ Katherine Gill, "Women and the Production of Religious Literature in the Vernacular, 1300-1500," in *Creative Women and the Arts*, 67, and Ugolino Nicolini OFM, "I Minori Osservanti di Monteripido e lo "scriptorium" delle clarisse di Monteluce in Perugia nei secoli XV e XVI," *Picenum Seraphicum* 9 (1971): 100-130.

⁴ Roberto Rusconi, "Sources for the History of Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages (Italy, 13th to 16th centuries)," paper presented at the 28th International Medieval Studies Congress, Western Michigan University, May 1993, typescript.

⁵ Learned women during the Middle Ages were usually considered exceptional as the title of a 1980 essay collection on women's learning demonstrates: *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York: University of New York Press, 1980). Often both historically and historiographically women's learning has been judged according to male standards so that only women who fit into these categories (e.g. university training, scholastic writing) are learned.

⁶ For this phrase see Proc. 20:7 which recalled the wording of the Official Notification of her Death: "Venerable mother and teacher." All English translations of Clare are from Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap. ed. and trans. *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, 2nd. edition (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1993).

⁷ Regarding Clare as a teacher, the mid-thirteenth-century *Versified Legend* also recalled "Clare, the teacher of children, instructress of the unlearned" (line 1073) and "as a mother teaches her children by her way of life" (line 1075).

⁸ I develop the concept of contemplative intellection at length in my dissertation.

⁹ See Jean LeClerq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 3rd. edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982): 15-17, 72.

¹⁰ Francis testified to his respect for learned men in his Testament (13): "We should honor and venerate theologians too, and the ministers of God's word, because it is they who give us spirit and life," (*St. Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, ed. Marion Habig, OFM, 4th. edition (Quincy IL: Franciscan Press, 1991). Francis did not think that the friars needed to pursue learning, however, telling his brethren that people were more moved by the prayers of the humble than by the most learned preaching (Bonaventure, *Major Life*) and reminding them to be humble before all (*Admonitions 7, Praises of the Virtues*, and the *Mirror of Perfection* 69).

¹¹ Francis was greatly angered when he discovered that a house of study had been built for the friars in Bologna (*Mirror of Perfection* 6; 2Cel 58). Another time he told a friar who asked whether the communities could own books that if he had his way, the friars would own nothing but the habit granted to them in the Rule (*Legend of Perugia*, 66).

¹² John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968): 99, 103.

¹³ One example is Clare's desire to maintain radical poverty. While Clare's main focus was ownership of property, her concern to avoid any possessions could have included books. In January of 1228, Pope Gregory IX had to order the Franciscan nuns at Monteluce to accept and not discard the books left to them by a Brother Angelo and threatened them with excommunication if they did so. The text of the Pope's communication is printed in *Bullarium Franciscanum* I, 38.

¹⁴ For example, the feminine version of the Augustine Rule proclaims (5:10): "Books will be available every day at the appointed hour, and not at any other time." See Tarsicius J. Van Bavel OSA, *The Rule of Saint Augustine: Masculine and Feminine Versions*. Trans. Raymond Canning, OSA (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984). Both Augustinian and Benedictine Rules also make provisions for table readings, which we know occurred at San Damiano as well, although Clare did not mention it in her Rule.

¹⁵ Originally San Damiano had lived under a primitive form of life given to them by Francis that simply called upon them to live in the spirit of the Holy Gospel (RCl 6:2-4). After the Fourth Lateran Council which banned new religious foundations, however, the community was under pressure to adopt an existing rule. This council's decree led directly to the rule written by Cardinal Hugolino.

¹⁶ At Clare's canonization hearing, Sister Lucia and Sister Agnes testified that they had come to San Damiano as young girls, Proc 8:2 and 10:1.

¹⁷ Clare adopted Francis's form and structure, excluding only his chapter on preachers (9). She used chapters 6 (lack of possessions) and 10 (admonition and correction of the sisters) entirely, and in the other chapters only made changes as necessary due to the nuns gender or situation.

¹⁸ A manuscript, known as the breviary of St. Clare, is preserved at San Damiano, which was taken over by the friars around 1260 when the nuns moved closer to Assisi. See Stephen Aurelian Van Dijk, OFM, "The Breviary of St. Clare," in *Franciscan Studies* 8 (1948): 25-46, 351-87.

¹⁹ "[Sister Balvina] also said, because of her simplicity, she would not know in any way how to speak about the good and the virtues in [Clare], that is, her humility, kindness, patience and other good virtues which she had in such abundance that she firmly believed, except for the Virgin Mary, no other woman was greater than the Lady. Asked how she knew this, she replied she had heard about the sanctity of many other women saints through their legends, but she had seen the sanctity of the life of this Lady Clare during all the time." [Emphasis mine].

²⁰ "Meditate constantly on the mysteries of the cross and the agonies of His mother standing at the foot of the cross. Pray and always be vigilant (LEr 12-13)." While this letter is probably not an authentic letter written by Clare to Ermentrude of Bruges, nonetheless it represents her spiritual ideas and ideals.

²¹ Cf. Lázaro Iriarte, "Clare of Assisi: Her Place in Female Hagiography," *Greyfriars Review* 7 (1989): 185.

²² *Claire d'Assise: Écrits. Sources Chrétiennes*, ed. and trans. Marie-France Becker, Jean-François Godet, and Thaddée Matura, (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985) 34. The editors argue

that Clare composed and wrote her own texts because of a unity of inspiration, common style (with change due to the nature of the texts), and personal nature.

²³ A collection of essays on women's epistolary tradition includes only three examples that predate Clare. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus, eds. *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

²⁴ Earlier rules for women were always written by men (cf. the feminine adaptation of the Augustinian and Benedictine Rules); Hildegard wrote a commentary on the Rule of Benedict but did not make specific changes (other than those necessary regarding time and place) or identify it as an independent rule. See Hildegard of Bingen, *Explanation of the Rule of Benedict*, trans. Hugh Feiss, OSB (Toronto: Peregrina, 1990). For a perspective on Clare's rule and authorship, see Margaret Carney, *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi and Her Form of Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993).

²⁵ The second chapter of my dissertation focuses on the relationship between the gifts of the Holy Spirit used to talk about learning and understanding (*sapientia, scientia*, and *intellectus*) and how the understanding of these gifts was gendered.

²⁶ Charles Vulliez, "Le vocabulaire des écoles urbaines des XII^e et XIII^e siècles à travers les *summae dictaminis*," in *Vocabulaires des écoles et des méthodes d'enseignement au moyen âge*, ed. Olga Weijers (Turnholt, 1992) 90.

²⁷ Clare uses these images in 4LAg 18-23.

²⁸ Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap. "Clare of Assisi: The Mirror Mystic," *The Cord* (August 1985): 197-8.

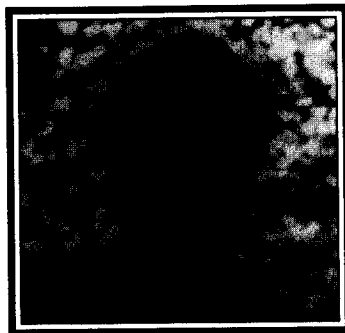
²⁹ Marco Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, trans. Frances Teresa OSC (Quincy IL: Franciscan Press, 1993) 117-118.



A Biographical Profile

of

Sister Marie Beha, OSC
Monastery of St. Clare
Greenville, SC



Sister Marie Beha, OSC, brings a rich life experience to her service on the editorial board of *The Cord*. She began her religious life as a Franciscan Sister of Joliet, IL, receiving the habit in 1943 and making final vows in 1947. She taught high school and college and earned her MA and PhD from the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure, NY, specializing in Franciscan medieval philosophy.

After twenty years of teaching, she changed ministries in 1969 and served for two years as Associate Executive Secretary for the Sister Formation Conference (now Religious Formation Conference) in Washington, DC.

In 1973, Sister Marie answered her heart's desire by transferring to the Monastery of St. Clare in Greenville, SC, where she made her solemn vows.

As a Greenville Poor Clare, she has served her community as abbess, vicaress, directress of formation, and member of the discretorium. Presently, her days are filled with the rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours, the daily round of simple work that is the staple of her life. She also spends some few hours per week writing and preparing talks. Last year she gave retreats to the Carmelite Sisters in Cleveland and to the friars of Assumption Province in Burlington, WI. She continues to publish in *The Cord*, *Sisters Today*, *Review for Religious*, and *Human Development*.

Sister Marie reflects on her life in this way:

Being a Poor Clare is so rich an experience that I hardly feel justified putting it with the "poor" in our title. Gratitude for the "grace of our holy vocation" can be my only response. I am excited about the ways in which I see our 700-year-old tradition opening to new possibilities in the 21st century, including new opportunities to share our charism with others. I am also very interested in sharing as a Clare with the other branches of the Order. Our family connections are a part of our heritage that I am particularly happy to deepen.

CLARE'S CHARISM

Marie Beha, OSC

Introduction

To what am personally I called? The question is familiar, dynamic, insistent. It is one we must answer over and over again in everyday decisions and life style changes. Equally important is the question: to what are we called as community? How are we being invited in our communal reality to grow, to respond to the call of the Lord, to change in ways that affect how we live and serve?

Discovering our communal vocation brings us face to face with the gift that is our community charism, the way we are graced before the Lord for others. Equating our common call with charism is only the beginning, the easy part. Examining its meaning is the on-going challenge.

The general elements of a community's charism are relatively stable, providing a kind of last name identity that allows us to know something of a group's orientation. We speak of a community as being Dominican or Franciscan, influenced by Jesuit spirituality or Benedictine in orientation. The labels are familiar and convenient. But no matter how widely used, they reveal very little of a community's particular giftedness because they are so general. We still need to spell out the specifics of community charism since self-knowledge is as necessary for a group as it is for an individual.

Franciscan Origins of Clare's Charism

Clare of Assisi linked her call with that of Francis. This is clear and certain. In her Testament (37)¹ she speaks of herself as "the little plant of the holy father," and to the end of her life she continued to pay tribute to Francis as her "most blessed father" and "inspiration." In the same way, she wanted her daughters always to consider themselves Franciscan, ob-

serving the same obedience to the successors of Francis as they had promised the saint himself (TestCl 50).

While insisting on this general identification of her Order with the Franciscan family, even fighting for it against an early papal attempt to classify her as "Benedictine," Clare came to realize that her charism was distinct from that of the friars. She and her daughters were to live out their vocation within the enclosure of San Damiano, not in the direct ministry. Similarly, while sharing the same basic orientation to poverty that is one of the most clearly identifying elements of Franciscan life, Clare developed her own unique understanding of what this meant for her and how it would shape the lives of her sisters. She likewise experienced community in a way different from but related to the fraternity that characterized the other followers of Francis. Finally, she and her sisters knew the common Franciscan call to contemplation, but also lived this out in ways that were different from all the other branches of the Franciscan family.

The interrelationship of these elements of poverty, community, and contemplation constitutes the special grace of a Franciscan vocation. The nuancing of this interrelationship distinguishes the charism of each particular branch of the Order. We will examine this thesis in terms of Clare's charism as it was spelled out in her writings and in the lives of the first Poor Sisters.

Clare's Charism of Poverty.

How did Clare experience her call to poverty? We know that it began with her desire to live a gospel life following in the footsteps of Francis. Like all of Assisi, she heard how he had renounced his patrimony, even returning his clothes to his father as part of a single-minded commitment to having only one Father in heaven. Clare too renounced her patrimony, selling it and giving the proceeds to the poor. On Palm Sunday night she made her way through the night to the Portiuncula where Francis waited for her. From his hands she received the coarse woolen tunic that would mark her as a follower of Lady Poverty.

Clare spent the first week of her Franciscan life with the Benedictines, experiencing the monastic rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours alternating with simple manual work. These values spoke to her own desires. But she also observed the hierarchical structure of the community and the middle class comfort, neither of which coincided with the attraction of her spirit.

After another brief period with a group that has been variously identified as lay penitents or recluses, Clare finally came to the place of her beginnings. As she says in her Testament: "By the will of God and our most

blessed father Francis, we went to dwell in the Church of San Damiano" (30), the very same small structure where Francis had heard a voice from the cross saying: "Go and repair my church." Here Clare found a home for her poverty; she would spend the remaining forty years of her life faithful to the charism of Francis but modifying it in innovative ways.

At this period of history, contemplative women living an enclosed life were supported by dowries. Whether a piece of land or some cattle or other livestock, a dowry was intended to support a sister during her lifetime and accrue to the monastery on her death. It was the sister's security and the monastery's endowment. The system had worked well for centuries; in fact it had worked too well. Monasteries became comfortable; some even wealthy. They offered safety, the assurance of always having enough.

It was not "enough" for Clare. What she wanted was the insecurity of having nothing. She had already begun this process when she gave away her dowry, reducing herself to the same absolute poverty that Francis had espoused. This was the privilege she wanted, not only for her sisters as individuals, but also for the community. The monastery would have nothing, renouncing the security of communal ownership.

This, however, the Pope did not wish to allow. The risk was too great. How could these contemplative women survive? Their enclosure precluded their going out to beg as the friars did. They would starve to death!

But Clare persisted. Her vocation, distinct from that of Francis, was to be both poor and enclosed. She petitioned Innocent III for an indult that would allow the sisters at San Damiano the "privilege of poverty," and in 1215 the Pope granted them this "privilege."

It was only a beginning, however. Innocent's successor, Gregory IX, despite his personal admiration for Francis and Clare, perhaps because of it, decided to provide for the future of the Order of Poor Ladies by giving them a new Rule of his own composing. Basically Benedictine, it allowed the sisters to own property.

Once again Clare protested, and once again a Pope retreated before the strength of her conviction. Gregory, too, conceded the "Privilege of Poverty" to her and to her sisters at San Damiano.

Clare knew with the certainty of a God-given call that the vocation of all her sisters was to live in complete dependence on the provident care of God, unencumbered by any secure source of income. Her determination to provide such insecurity for the Poor Sisters must have been further fueled by the difficulties the brothers were experiencing. As the First Order grew and became more involved in preaching and teaching, it became increasingly difficult to reconcile absolute communal poverty with the demands of the apostolate. This was not Clare's problem. Her sisters had no

need of houses of study; they could afford the privilege of complete poverty. To ensure this as the heritage of all who would come after her, Clare began to formulate a Rule of her own. It was the work of a lifetime, approved by the Pope just days before she died.

In it she not only claimed the right of the Poor Ladies to live "without anything of their own," but she also legislated for this with a prudence learned from experience. She speaks about the sisters'

not receiving or having possession or ownership either of themselves or through an intermediary, or even anything that might reasonably be called property, except as much land as necessity requires for the integrity and proper seclusion of the monastery, and this land may not be cultivated except as a garden for the needs of the sisters (RCI 6:12-15).

Here she concedes that radical non-ownership permits owning the buildings and grounds essential for the day-by-day functioning of the monastery. She does not resort to the legal fiction of putting the title into the hands of someone else designated by the community. The sisters would own the monastery, but in such a way that nothing beyond the bare minimum was theirs. Similarly, she permitted the sisters to receive and handle money, a practice that Francis forbade. Her heart told her that the root of all evil was not money, but greed

Like Francis, Clare and her sisters would be mendicants: "Let them confidently send for alms. Nor should they be ashamed, since the Lord made Himself poor in this world for us" (RCI 8:2-3). But begging was to be the exception. Ordinarily the sisters would work for their daily bread "in such a way that, while they banish idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all other things of our earthly existence must contribute" (RCI 7:2).

Like Francis, Clare's motivation was not primarily economic, but rather a desire to be like Jesus. In a letter to Agnes of Prague, Clare wrote, "O God-centered poverty, whom the Lord Jesus Christ . . . condescended to embrace before all else" (1LAG 17). She repeatedly linked the poverty of Jesus with his infancy as well as with the utter destitution of his dying on the cross (4LAG 19-23). And in many passages she also joined the poverty of Jesus to that of his mother.

Clare and her sisters were called to the same radical poverty as Francis and his brothers. But Clare's practice was more perilous because of the enclosed character of the sisters' contemplative lifestyle. They relied not only on alms, but also on having the alms brought to them. Even the kind of work they did was limited by their enclosed life. But it was this same life together that would transform radical poverty into rich treasure, a joyous way of incarnating the self-emptying of Jesus in the crib and on the cross.

Clare's Charism of Community

Fraternity and community are core values for followers of Francis and Clare. As one of the most faithful disciples of Francis, Clare experienced this attraction to poverty and contemplation in a community of sisters, however, rather than in a fraternity. The distinction is more far reaching than the simple differentiation between women and men. It speaks to the orientation of relationships within the group and to the community's relation to those to whom it ministers.

In a fraternity, individuals relate primarily to other individuals; it is these individualized relationships which bind the group together. In other words, it is the interaction of member to member that eventually unites the whole group into a fraternity of mutually related brothers or sisters. A helpful image might be that of a circle of persons, each holding the hand of the one next to him or her and so forming a circle. Life energy moves around the circle as members deepen their relationships with each other, and it is this renewal of "spirit and life" that makes fraternity such a rich resource for energizing ministry.

In community, on the other hand, each member relates primarily to the whole, and the total community relates to each individual. Members entrust themselves to the community, working to maintain and strengthen it, responding to its needs in love. Communal faith and shared values bond the group in growing openness; life together *is* their ministry.

This distinction in relationships is one way of differentiating between fraternity and community. While it is certainly true that most groups have some elements of each, when the predominate pattern is one on one, we have fraternity; when it is more a matter of each person relating to the whole, we have community.

Another distinction concerns the way the group relates to those beyond its parameters. A fraternity comes together for ministry, preparing the members for its challenges and sustaining them during periods of special difficulty. The individualized relationships of the group renew and refresh them, enabling their being given to others in ministry. Picture Francis and his first few brothers going out to preach and then coming back to the Portiuncula for renewal or the early friars returning from their far-flung missions to the encouragement of a Chapter of Mats.

Contrast this with Clare's purely contemplative community whose members were always together. Sharing life in community was the sisters' ministry. Clare's gift did not require that she be geographically present to those to whom she ministered; the overflow of life within helped to vitalize the whole Body of Christ. Community held priority; life together was the challenge of the apostolate. Its asceticism is immediately obvious. There is

no escape from the demands of relating within community—none of the excitement of new beginnings, nor the hope that difficult situations will be solved by a change of personnel. The sisters would either relate to each other in the truth and love of Jesus or their life would be reduced to perpetual imprisonment. Despite such obvious difficulties, close community also promised special joys—the opportunity to grow in unity of mind and heart that such constant living together makes possible; the support of a shared belief that this hidden intercession really does make a difference.

Practical woman that Clare was she describes the “how” of this ideal in terms of day to day living. Though she is writing for her Poor Clare sisters, many of the practices she mentions are applicable to other forms of life in community. Here her debt to Francis is especially evident, as she takes his concerns and spotlights them within the small circle of enclosed community.

The goal of the sisters’ efforts is to “preserve the unity of mutual love and peace” (RCl 4:22). To make this possible Clare requires that whatever concerns the group as a whole is to be decided by the group as a whole (RCl 4:15-18). Examples of this kind of communal responsibility range from giving all the sisters a voice regarding the persons who are to be received into community (RCl 2:1-2) to sharing with all the sisters the good news about alms received. Similarly the work assignments of each sister affect the common good and so are made known to all (RCl 7:3).

Decisions are made in a chapter composed of all the members who have made their final profession. In the chapter the sisters also acknowledge “their common and public offenses” (RCl 4:16). How wise! The offender needs to admit to herself and to others that she has failed. Such humility is bound to diminish the kind of critical spirit that weakens unity in any group.

Clare warns against letting a climate of anger settle in, chilling relationships and hardening hearts.

The abbess and her sisters, however, must beware not to become angry or disturbed on account of anyone’s sin, for anger and disturbance prevent charity in oneself and in others (RCl 9:5).

She is not speaking of the flash of anger that is an instinctive and healthy response to provocation, but the nurturing of this emotion through continued critical judgment, gossip, resentment, revenge. All these damage that peace so essential for living a contemplative life. If a sister offends another, the Rule restates the gospel injunction of mutual responsibility both to seek and to receive pardon, so that what begins as negative ends up strengthening the bond of charity (RCl 9: 6-10). “If a mother loves and cherishes her child according to the flesh, how much more diligently should a sister love

and cherish her sister according to the Spirit” (RCl 8:16).

How are the sisters to show such sisterly love for each other? Again, Clare is eminently practical. She suggests that the sisters should be so comfortable in their relations with one another that each can “confidently manifest her needs to the other” (RCl 8:16). Such manifestation requires some minimum of communication, and in the interests of gospel charity Clare allows the sisters “to communicate whatever is necessary always and everywhere, briefly and in a low tone of voice” (RCl 5:4). In response to the other’s known need, she also permits a sister who has received a gift she herself does not need to “give it lovingly to a sister who does need it” (RCl 8:10).

In a community made strong by this kind of sisterly love, what is the role of authority? It is different from the Benedictine model. Clare saw how authority could assume a position superior to others. A Benedictine abbess could hold office for life and sometimes even live apart from the community in privilege, if not in fact. Clare’s leader, however, would remain “sister,” even when she added the title and responsibilities of “mother.” She would always exercise authority as a “servant.” This was the ideal abbess in the community of the “Poor Ladies;” it was the way Clare lived almost all of the forty years of her religious life.

Only reluctantly and under obedience, did Clare assume the title of abbess, but she redefined its meaning in the large letters of life experience. She remained a “sister,” living the common life, sleeping in the dormitory, eating in the refectory and taking part in all the simple work of the community (RCl 4:13). If she claimed any privilege in regard to the latter, it was to reserve for herself the most menial of tasks, for instance, cleaning up after the sisters who were sick.

Clare, however, does not reduce authority to a purely horizontal relationship. The leader is also discerning and attentive to her sisters as a good mother, taking care “especially to provide for them according to the needs of each one out of the alms that the Lord shall give” (TestCl. 63-64). The Proceedings of the Process of Canonization give repeated evidence of Clare’s maternal concern: making her way through the dormitory at night to ensure that the sisters had adequate blankets against the cold, consoling them when they were troubled, and miraculously multiplying bread when it seemed there would not be enough for the community’s dinner.

As a good mother Clare likewise paid her sisters the supreme compliment of trusting them. “Should anything be sent to a sister by her relatives or others, let the Abbess give it to the sister. If she needs it, she may use it” (RCl 8:9-10). Each individual is responsible for her own decision about personal need and the ultimate disposition of her goods.

Finally, Clare's ideal abbess was to be the servant of all the sisters, who should "speak and act with her as ladies do with their servant" (RCI 10:4). Note, she does not speak only of "serving" but of being "servant." This role was one that Clare cherished. She describes her own practice when she challenges her successors to be "so kind and available that [the sisters] may safely reveal their needs and confidently have recourse to her at any hour, as they see fit both for themselves and their sisters" (TestCl 65-66). But Clare was not content to encourage the sisters to come to her in their need. She also gave practical example of being a servant by washing their feet, serving them at table, and waiting on the sick (CL 12).

Like the Suffering Servant who was her model, Clare was willing to lay down her life for her sisters. When the Saracens threatened to overrun the monastery, they were turned back by Clare standing between the mercenaries and the sisters saying: "I wish to be your ransom . . . place me before them" (Proc. 4:14). This is a summarizing image of Clare the leader—in front, yes, but for the sake of serving, giving life, to those who were her sisters.

Apostolic Contemplative

Identifying Clare with the contemplative life is almost automatic: Clare before the San Damiano crucifix; Clare in choir with her sisters; Clare rapt in Eucharistic devotion. These images accurately underline the priority of the life of prayer for her and her sisters; but they remain incomplete, needing to be complemented by images of concerned community member, caring healer, dedicated apostle. It is the balance of all these elements that speaks to Franciscan contemplation.

The primacy of prayer is evident, both in Clare's life and in her writing. As she says plainly in her Rule, the sisters are to do nothing to "extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all other things of our earthly existence must contribute" (RCI 7:2). Praising God daily in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the Eucharist was the pattern of their lives. At regular intervals each day they gathered to intercede before God in the name of and for all "God's holy people."

But even such a rich ration of liturgical prayer was not enough for Clare; her focus on Jesus became still more intimate as she came to "gaze upon Him, consider Him, contemplate Him, as [she] desired to imitate Him" (2LAg 20). This is what Clare did until her whole life was transformed, like that of Francis, into an image of the Crucified Christ. Clare explains the process of this transformation using the popular image of the mirror:

Gaze upon that mirror each day . . . and continually study your face within it that you may adorn yourself within and without with

beautiful robes, covered . . . with the flowers and garments of all the virtues (4LAg. 15-17).

The mirror is Jesus. And what does Clare see when she looks in this mirror? First of all, herself in Jesus, herself in the love God has for her. That is contemplative self-knowledge—we are loved and lovely in God's eyes. True we are also sinners; but loved sinners. That is the meaning of incarnation and death/resurrection. We, in all the uniqueness that is our own personal giftedness and weakness, are worth the redemption.

Clare urges Agnes (and us) to keep looking in the mirror that is Jesus until this simple but central truth of our being loved moves from acknowledged theory to blazing, life-giving reality. Clare could not stop looking. For forty years she prayed before the very same crucifix that had summoned Francis to rebuild the Church. She and Francis would do it together in different ways. Clare was a contemplative with the heart of an apostle; Francis was an apostle with the heart of a contemplative. Together they spelled out the charism of Franciscan contemplative living.

The apostolic thrust of Francis's whole life is clear. From the beginning he and the friars were called to proclaim the good news, carrying the gospel even into mission countries. The friars were to be itinerant preachers. But Francis also had the heart of a contemplative; he longed for the silence and solitude that would allow him simply to be in the presence of his beloved. We know how the tension between these two attractions led him to consult with Clare and Sylvester who both confirmed his call to remain active in the direct apostolate. Francis accepted their discernment, but continued all his life to spend three to six months each year in solitary prayer in remote places. Such emphasis on solitude was integral to his understanding of what it meant to be a Franciscan apostle.

In Clare's case the same attraction gave rise to a different expression of the charism. Her call to contemplation seems obvious; that she also had the spirit and motivation of an apostle may be less evident. The early sources tell us how, when she heard of the martyrdom of the first friars in Morocco, she expressed her longing to give her own life in the same way. And that is exactly what she did with equal generosity in the forty years of her enclosed life. In the *Bull of Canonization*, Pope Alexander IV described how "in the austerity of her cloistered solitude, she broke the alabaster jar of her body with her severity, the whole church was thoroughly imbued with the fragrance of her sanctity" (4).

Clare's self-giving love, like that of Jesus, issued in self-sacrifice. Her sisters testify over and over again how she devoted herself to their service, healing their illnesses, consoling them in their difficult times, counseling them in their perplexities. Above all she was an example to them of how a

Poor Lady should live. She urged them to be bright mirrors "to their own sisters whom the Lord has called to our way of life that they in turn might be a mirror and example to those living in the world" (TestCl 19-20). In such concrete ways, Clare's contemplating of Jesus formed her and the sisters for the work of evangelization both inside and outside the community.

Personal example is one form of this contemplative/apostolic action. But it is not the most profound one. What Clare knew was that a contemplative life, just because it is a *life*, affects the vitality of the whole Body of Christ. Nothing special needs to be said or done; faithful living builds up the body. In powerful imagery, Clare urges Agnes to this demanding way of being contemplative, urging her and her sisters to be co-workers "of God himself and a support of the weak members of His ineffable body" (3LAg 8).

Conclusion

In the preceding sections we have looked in turn at each element of Clare's vision of Franciscan contemplation: her poverty, her life in community, her spirit of apostolic prayer. The uniqueness of the Franciscan charism and of Clare's gift lies in the way these particular elements interrelate. Each gives specific shape to the others. Here we can only indicate some of the ways in which this is true, allowing the reader to discover others.

Radical poverty is the cornerstone of the Franciscan charism, something Clare symbolizes by placing the chapter on poverty at the heart and center of her Rule. The poverty she describes is made possible by life in community. Without each other the Poor Sisters could not risk such absolute non-ownership; no one could do it alone. As community they need to stand guard together over the treasure that Francis had entrusted to them.

The spirit of minority is also evidenced by their relationships within community. As sisters they relate to each other in noncompetitive ways, building each other up in love rather than trying to outdo each other. Each strives to serve the others. Those entrusted with office lead the way as servants of all. Each sister experiences, too, the poverty of her own faults and weaknesses as well as those of her sisters, exposed to each other within the small space of enclosed community. Here the acceptance of poverty is expressed in the alms of mutual forgiveness.

Poverty also gives form to the life of prayer, which is another central element in Franciscan contemplative living. It makes possible the faith that is the bedrock of contemplation, the trust that waits in patience, and the perseverance in dark emptiness that is the contemplatives' daily bread. Their love of being little in the eyes of God enabled Clare and her sisters to

be content with prayer's lack of efficiency and productivity; they would not have to justify their life's work through personal accomplishment. Having nothing to call their own, they had to seek their sufficiency in God.

To the wider community the concern of the sisters reached out in special ways to those who were poorest. We know how the sick, the needy, the troubled, made their way down Assisi's hills to find help in the small shelter of San Damiano's.

Leadership in a poor community does not become a possession, something to be held on to by the few. If an abbess is no longer serving the needs of the sisters, they should elect another. Positions of authority should be both accepted and relinquished in terms of humble service. In this same spirit of minority the abbess should consult the whole community, so that even the poorest, the youngest, the weakest are part of decision-making in matters that affect the whole community.

Life in community is nuanced by the sisters' call to contemplative living since that is their whole purpose in being together. United in mind and heart they form a community of solitude, coming together to be given to God and to the world and not primarily for forming bonds with each other. Their life in community, however, is nonetheless warm, since their union is meant to support each one's solitude, preventing it from becoming an escape from the interpersonal or degenerating into destructive loneliness.

Francis and Clare were given as apostles and contemplatives. Francis and his friars were apostolic contemplatives, their ministry having a kind of priority. Their life of contemplation was tested by their service. Clare and her sisters were contemplative apostles. Prayer had a certain priority in their lives, and any ministry they might be called to undertake within or without the community was discerned in terms of its effect on their life of contemplation.

Finally, the call to contemplative living colored their poverty as well as their life in community. Without a willingness to be empty of clear concepts, satisfying self-reflection, self-directed activity, contemplation is aborted before it can even begin. Contemplatives who are in touch with their poverty and minority know that prayer is not about themselves, but about God.

Another insight of the Franciscan charism is that contemplative/apostolic life is nuanced by community. Prayer for both friars and sisters has a strong communal element. They come together to encourage each other in prayer. Even their going apart into greater solitude is discerned by community and involves return to community. Francis's Rule for Hermitages with its exchange of roles between "mothers" and "sons" makes this clear. Clare's sisters lived aspects of this Rule, but within the close quarters of

enclosed community. Here the sisters prayed together the Liturgy of the Hours; here they heard the Word of God together. Community supported a generous provision of time for personal intimacy with God which nourished each and all. Growing union of mind and heart was to be the communal fruit of such contemplation. If, when they came together for prayer, they were not really one, then their sacrifice of praise was flawed. Gospel fidelity required that they leave their gift at the altar and go first to be reconciled. This is what they did in all the realism of everyday experience.

If Franciscan prayer does not issue in growing compassion for all, then contemplation is not authentic. It is no accident that Francis, having just received the stigmata, was made aware of Brother Leo's need for encouragement or that Clare was remembered by her sisters, not only for her contemplation, but for her love as their "sister and mother."

All of the above suggests that the Franciscan charism is a trinity of poverty, prayer, and community. It is the way these elements come together that forms the unique gift, the charism of Francis and Clare in the Church. As Franciscans we are invited to become that gift ourselves and to share it with the Church in our time.

Endnote

¹ Source for quotations from writings by and about Clare are taken from *Clare of Assisi, Early Documents*, ed. and trans. Regis J. Armstrong, OFM, Cap. (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1993).

Francis and Clare were given as apostles and contemplatives. Francis and his friars were apostolic contemplatives. Clare and her sisters were contemplative apostles. (Marie Beha, OSL)

CLARE, LIGHT FOR THE FUTURE

Sister Maryalice Pierce, OSC

Clare of Assisi is a light for the future, not only for Poor Clares, but for all members of the Franciscan family. Just as she was a light for people in her own time, she continues to give us insights as we immerse ourselves in the study of newly available documents by and about her and reflect on the heritage she has left us. In this paper I would like to show how Clare's light can guide us into the future as Franciscan women and men.

I will begin by looking at Clare as our light, move on to the legacy of our vocation in her light, and finally, consider what that vocation might mean for us and the Church in the future. This sounds presumptuous, of course. No one of us knows what the future holds; more often than not, it unfolds in ways we could never have imagined. Therefore, I don't claim to have answers or even a clear course of action for the future. What I hope to do is raise questions that challenge all of us both to hold firm to what we have been given in our vocation and to keep asking questions and seeking ways to live it more fully.

Clare as Light

While it seems redundant to discuss Clare as light, yet, it is important if we are to appreciate her impact on our lives. Evidently Pope Alexander IV thought this. At Clare's canonization he used this metaphor to sound her praises eloquently (cf. Proc; Bull of Canonization). What do we mean when we say that a person is a light? There are several dictionary definitions that we can apply: a light is a person who inspires or is admired, who is a pathway of illumination, who is filled with spiritual awareness, who is a way of looking at something. A light is someone who admits illumination.

How many times in the Process of Canonization do we read that Clare inspired her sisters and was admired by them? Clare's own sister, Beatrice, attested to this when she spoke of Clare's holiness. She said it consisted of: "virginity, humility, patience, and kindness; in the necessary correction and sweet admonition of her sisters; in the continuous application to her prayer and contemplation, . . . the fervor of her love of God, her desire for martyrdom, and, most especially, her love of the Privilege of Poverty" (Proc 12:6). She was, for her sisters, for the friars, and for all who encountered her, a pathway to illumination: a way to Jesus, the Light.

In her letters to Agnes of Prague she constantly refers to her source of light, Jesus the Way (1LAG 8-11; 2LAG 20; 3LAG 11-16; 4LAG 15-26). Clare's whole thrust was one of spiritual awareness; she told her sisters to keep their minds always on spiritual things (RCl 8:2). She told Agnes: "But because one thing is necessary, I bear witness to that one thing and encourage you, for love of Him to Whom you have offered yourself as a holy and pleasing sacrifice, that you always be mindful of your resolution like another Rachel always seeing your beginning" (2LAG 10-11). Clare modeled this advice well. We read in Benvenuta's witness statement that she was not given to idle talk, but spoke only what was necessary (Proc 2: 10). Her attentiveness to prayer was attested by several of the sisters during her canonization process (Proc 1:7; 2:9; 10:3). They said that there was a special glow about her when she came from prayer (Proc 2:17). They cited times when she remained in the choir after the others had left to continue communing with Christ (Proc 14:2). Clare counseled in her Testament that the sisters should study Jesus the mirror so intently that they themselves would become mirrors, not only for each other, but for others outside the monastery (TestCl 18-20).

The Legacy of Our Vocation in Clare's Light

Sister Frances Teresa, OSC, in her book, *This Living Mirror*,¹ portrays Clare as a totally human person. Her description of Clare's journey from darkness into light helps me appreciate Clare as one who struggled, not one who was born perfect. First of all, Clare was born in an age of darkness and she couldn't help but be deeply affected by this. There was war, struggle for power, and a class system in which the Church, as well as the government, was engaged. Because the city of Assisi was enmeshed in this struggle, so was Clare's own family. The men in her household were part of the fight to defend the nobility from the rising merchant class, and they were caught up in the struggle between the emperor and the pope. Clare herself would have aided their efforts, had she consented to marry some important po-

litical ally instead of choosing to live the radical gospel life that Francis preached.

Clare was engaged in a struggle between darkness and light. Her personality was a combination of her father's Lombardy strength and vigor and her mother's Frankish sensitivity, gentility, and religious tendency. For Clare, conversion was a matter of reconciling these different gifts. Implied in her strong objection to becoming abbess was a fear of her own inclination to exert control. We know she had a strong will from the tenacious way that she, in the face of strong ecclesiastical opposition, held onto the ideal of poverty given to her by Francis. What is seen in retrospect as virtue, could also have become stubbornness and "self-will." It was both her virtue and her vice. She had to accept her weakness so that the Holy Spirit could transform it in making her holy.

Clare was raised in the midst of nobility and wealth. Washing the feet of her sisters and even kissing them was her way of overcoming her cultural refinement as much as it was her way of imitating Christ, the servant. Her insistence in her Rule that there was to be no class system at San Damiano and that even the youngest were to be consulted in all important decisions of the community indicates her desire to move beyond the limited view of her cultural milieu and even the view of religious orders of her time. Clare had to struggle with inherited and learned limitation. She had seen the results of the division and injustice of the class system in the poor who huddled in the streets of Assisi just below her home. She made a clear choice of poverty in order to combat the prevailing system. But none of this came easily to her. It grew out of life experience and struggle, combined with prayer and discernment.

Darkness lurked in Clare's inner spirit as well as in her inherited gifts and in the world around her. Holiness, especially for women in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was shrouded in darkness. Women were looked upon as sources of evil and temptation. Medieval women themselves tended to believe this. Therefore the road to holiness for them lay in punishing their bodies by inflicting extreme fasts and penance.² We read the stories of her hair shirts, her extreme fasts, and long vigils of prayer in her zeal for living the gospel (Cf. Proc 7:4; 4:6). Yet, as Clare aged she moved beyond this. Her gazing on Christ led her to value deeply all of God's gifts, including the gifts of her body.

In her third letter to Agnes of Prague and in her Rule, Clare cautions a temperate view, one allowing for human nature and its differences. She says: "But our flesh is not bronze, nor is our strength that of stone" (3LAG 38). Indeed, Clare expresses a sensitivity to human weakness when she stresses that the abbess should provide adequate clothing for the climate

and needs of individual sisters (RCI 2:16) and allow enough food for those unable to fast according to the custom (RCI 3:10-11). While she includes legal restrictions from the Rules of Innocent and Hugolino, she softens them with her learned understanding of human nature. Total silence becomes: "They may communicate whatever is necessary always and everywhere, briefly, and in a low tone of voice" (RCI 5:4). While Clare incorporates in her Rule the prescriptions of Innocent and Hugolino regarding enclosure, both in leaving the monastery and allowing others to enter the enclosure, she allows for "useful, reasonable, evident and approved purpose" (RCI 2:12; 12:11). The abbess is "sister, mother, and servant" to the sisters and they, in turn are expected to be so for each other (RCI 10:4). Over and over Clare shows the maturity of wisdom that has been acquired through experience over her lifetime.

Even poverty, the core of Clare's commitment, deepened in meaning as she matured; it found its fulfillment in being stripped of selfishness and sin, recognizing that our greatest poverty is embracing our human nature as Christ did, becoming, not less human, but more human. Poverty meant detachment from all that was not Christ in order to be united with him completely. Clare's constant gazing on Christ opened up a new vision of holiness; it was a focus on Christ that included the whole of humankind and of creation. She found him in each sister and in each person who came into her life. Sister Angeluccia tells us that "she reminded them [the serving sisters] to praise God when they saw beautiful trees, flowers, and bushes; and, likewise, always to praise Him for and in all things when they saw all peoples and creatures" (Proc 14:9). Once Clare's vision was focused there was no going back; her strong personality would see it through to the end of her life when she said to her sister, "Do you see, O child, the King of Glory Whom I see?" (CL 46). Clare not only saw the Light; she became the Light; she became Christ.

Clare expects us to take up the same challenge. Her urging her sisters in her Testament to become mirrors reflecting Christ the mirror to each other and to those outside the monastery was another way of saying that we must be lights, reflecting the light of Christ. As individuals and as communities, we are to mirror Clare's light and the light of Christ to all who look upon us. Our vocation is to be beacons, lighting up the way for our Church and our world. This can happen only after we have confronted our darkness, embraced it, and allowed it to be overcome by the Light of Christ.

Our Vocation in the Future in the Light of Clare

What do we mean by the future and how can we begin to talk about it? A number of years ago I participated in a Futurology workshop. The group

of nine participants spent days trying to depict how the community would look in twenty years, fifty years, one hundred years. The thesis of Futurology is that we hold the future within us—our attitudes and our actions today influence what will happen in the future. An important part of looking into the future is to be free in our thinking, free to dream. For us believers in the workings of the Holy Spirit it is being open to "God's dream for us."

Francis and Clare, because their lives were so focused on Christ and so uncluttered, were natural dreamers. Francis's dream of holding up the Church and his dream of Poor Ladies one day inhabiting San Damiano and Clare's dream of a new form of life are examples of their visions for the future. Dreaming of the future must have fertile ground to take root and grow. It must be nourished by the courage to put aside what is comfortable and to be moved by Divine inspiration. There must be realism in the dreams even as they flow freely from the depths of faith and hope and our relationship with God. If most of our community is aging, if there are many sick, if we are rattling around in buildings that are too large and that we are unable to maintain, if we have had few vocations in the past ten years, we have to face these facts and look at our future in that light. This need not be depressing, although it will require some dying and rising.

Let us be dreamers like the prophets and Francis and Clare. Let us look at our present situation and take heart. The gift of our vocation is no less real today than it was when Clare first heard God's call or when we first heard God's call. While we have not lost our first joy and fervor in our vocation, we have come to know it in a deeper and more real way. Let us peel off the outer skin, the nonessentials, and look at what it is: to walk in the footprints of Francis and Clare, to live in a way that is counter-cultural in order to witness by our very lives what is basic to gospel life. This is what is meant by constant conversion. How can we live our lives more deeply today, at the eve of the new millennium, so that like Clare, we will reflect Christ so brightly to those around us that they will have to examine their own lives in that light?

It is the authentic living of our vocation that will attract others to join us. In the end, it isn't the "romantic" elements of religious life that hold candidates; it is the central values that they see lived in our midst. Ever so often when someone new enters or visits our community she will ask: "Why do you do it this way?" or "Have you ever considered this"? We need to listen to such questions and ask them of ourselves. How does a given practice support a gospel way of living? Is it life-giving now? We cannot let ourselves get stuck in a mode of action just because we are used to it. This is death-dealing, not life-giving.

In a talk I heard recently by Bishop Morneau, he said that in order for change to occur there are three steps: first we must change the way we look at things; then we must change our attitudes; finally we must change our behavior.³ The diversity in our communities makes change difficult for us. Yet, even small changes can make a big difference in freeing us to attend to the important things.

Clare and Francis dared to ask questions. They questioned the forms of religious life and practices of their day; they questioned practices in the Church itself. For example, Francis set out on a kind of campaign regarding respectful care of the Eucharist. Clare joined that campaign when she sewed linens for use at the Eucharistic celebration and sent them as gifts to the local churches. They both had new ideas about what Holy Poverty meant. It was a radical departure from the thinking of the religious groups and even of the Church itself at that time.

Clare's conviction about the role of an abbess was totally innovative: a servant, mother, and sister, to whom the sisters could easily turn in their need (TestCI 65-66). Her concept of government was innovative, as well. She consulted the sisters in all matters that had a bearing on the community (RCI 17). She wanted the abbess to model love and respect (TestCI 62). Francis and Clare started a whole new movement in the Church and in history. Their vision was uncluttered and focused on Christ.

Clare was a light in her time precisely because she struggled against the darkness in her inner self and in the world around her and overcame it. She knew that the suffering of initiating change was part of God's redemptive plan for her. Gazing on Christ in the gospels and in each person, Clare kept her focus: unwavering attention to the essentials. Her concern about poverty came out of her concentration on the Poor Christ. Clare did away with the nonessential things. She wanted to be stripped of all that encumbered her.

We cannot take refuge in externals, even those that make us look and feel good. We need to sift out things that do not support simple gospel living, things that take time and energy but have little to do with our vocation. This will free us to focus more intently on Christ, "to gaze on him, consider him, contemplate him . . . so that [we may] share always and forever the glory of the kingdom of heaven in place of earthly and passing things" (2LAg 20).

As I write this I remember the gospel story of the of the royal official who came to Jesus to beg him to cure his son (John 4: 43-54). In a commentary on this gospel, Carroll Stuhlmueller points out that everyone who saw the man could tell how full of joy he was because he truly believed that Jesus had cured his son. His walk was more lively, his face was lit up, and

a demeanor of enthusiasm for life told all who saw him that he was filled with faith and hope.⁴ Do people know, when they come in contact with me, that I possess a priceless treasure? Is there a glow about me? Do our communities reflect the light of Christ? What do people hear when they call us or come to our door—a person full of the joy of Christ or one who seems weary of it all?

In Matthew's gospel we read: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. We do not light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket. . . . Your light must shine before all so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to God" (Mt. 5:13-15). If we are truly living the gospel form of life that Clare modeled for us, our light will shine far and wide and cause others to take notice. We will become places of healing, life-giving places, like San Damiano in Clare's day, where people come in their time of necessity to seek refuge for their pain and distress. Our life of prayer and conversion must witness to the reality of God's love and presence in our Church and in our world.

The future for us lies in giving the kind of witness that comes from looking intently on Christ, Mirror and Light, and truly becoming lights for the world, lights that are sources of healing and refreshment to those who come seeking. This depends on our ability to cling faithfully to the essentials of our vocation while letting go of the nonessentials which clutter our vision. It depends on our freedom to become dreamers and prophets—people with our feet firmly planted in the real world, aware of our darkness, but with our eyes always fixed on Jesus, our Light. Clare, the perfect image of that light, has shown us clearly how to move into the future "with swift pace, light step, unswerving feet, so that even [our] steps stir up no dust, . . . [going] forward securely, joyfully, and swiftly on the path of prudent happiness" (2LAg 12-13).

Endnotes

¹ Sister Frances Teresa, OSC, *This Living Mirror* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books)

² Ingrid J. Peterson, O.S.F., *Clare of Assisi, A Biographical Study* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993) 213-214.

³ Bishop Morneau, *The Newman Lecture* at the Oratory in Rock Hill, SC (Mar. 9, 1996).

⁴ Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP, *Biblical Meditations for Lent* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978)

About Our Contributors

Thomas Barton, OSF, a member of the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn, is a graduate of The Franciscan Institute. He has most recently been serving in HIV ministry in New York City. In August he will return to India, where he will teach Franciscan studies.

Marie Beha, OSC, is a member of the Poor Clare community in Greenville, South Carolina. She serves on the editorial board of *The Cord* and her biographical profile is featured in this issue on page 180.

Frances Teresa Downing, OSC, is a member of the community of Poor Clares at Arundel, West Sussex, England. She is the author of *Living the Incarnation: Praying with Francis and Clare of Assisi*, a book on Franciscan spirituality, translator of *Clare of Assisi* by Marco Bartoli (DLT) and *The Charism of the Founder* by Antonio Romano (Paulist Press). At present, she serves her community as vicarress and part-time cook while also writing.

Lezlie S. Knox is a doctoral student at the Medieval Institute, Notre Dame, Indiana. Her dissertation is on the intellectual life of the Franciscan nuns of the Second Order. During the past academic year, she has been doing archival research in Italy.

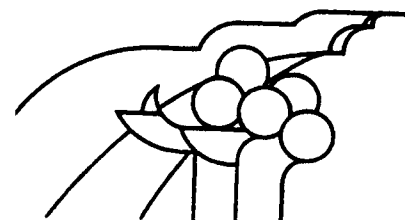
Maryalice Pierce, OSC, is a Poor Clare sister of Greenville, South Carolina. Her article was originally presented as the keynote address at a federation meeting of the Poor Clares in Andover, Massachusetts, April 24-30, 1996.

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Saturday, August 3-Saturday, August 10

"The Gospels as Foundation of Franciscan Life," preached retreat and directed retreat. Ramona Miller, OSF, Margaret Pirkle, OSF, Carol Rennie, OSB, Linda Wieser, OSF, Jude Winkler, OFM, Conv. Tau Center, 511 Hilbert St., Winona, MN 55987; ph. 507-454-2993; FAX 507-453-0919.

Thursday, August 15-Saturday, August 17

Franciscan Federation annual Conference (See ad, p. 202.)

Sunday, August 25-Saturday, August 31

A retreat on the San Damiano Crucifix by Andre Cirino, OFM. \$185. At Stella Maris Retreat Center, Skaneateles, NY. Contact: Stella Maris Retreat Center, ph. 315-685-6836.

Sunday, September 17

Region 3 Franciscan Walk for AIDS. 6th Annual AIDS Walk, Chicago. Contact: AIDS Walk Chicago, 909 West Belmont, Chicago, IL 60657

Saturday, September 28

A Day of Recollection with Michael Blastic, OFM, Conv. at St. Anthony Shrine, 100 Arch St., Boston, MA 02107-2278. (See ad, p. 206.)

Sunday, September 29-Tuesday, October 1

"Facing the Christ Incarnate," at Mount St. Francis, Colorado Springs, CO; sponsored by the Franciscan Federation. Contact: The Franciscan Federation, 650 Jackson St., NE, Washington, DC 20017, ph. 202-529-2334; FAX 202-529-7016.

Sunday, October 13-Tuesday, October 15

"Facing the Christ Incarnate," at Franciscan Retreat Center, Portland, OR; contact the Franciscan Federation (see above).

Friday, October 25-Sunday, October 27

Praying with Franciscan Women Mystics, Ingrid Peterson, OSF; at The Franciscan Center, Andover, MA. Contact: Franciscan Center, 459 River Road, Andover, MA 01810, ph. 508-851-3391; FAX 503-858-0675.

Thursday, October 31-Sunday, November 3

"The Enkindling of Love: Bonaventure's Triple Way," Regis J. Armstrong, OFM, Cap., at the Tau Center, Winona, MN (see above for contact information).

Thursday, October 31-Sunday, November 3

Franciscan Connection at Mount St. Francis, Dubuque, IA. Speakers: Beatrice Eichten, OSF and Nancy Schreck, OSF. Contact: Jean Schwieters, OSF, 727 E. Margaret, St. Paul, MN 55106, ph. 612-772-1740 or Judi Angst, Box 4900, Rochester, MN 55903, ph. 507-282-7441.

Writings of Saint Francis

Adm	Admonitions	FormViv	Form of Life for St. Clare
BenLeo	Blessing for Brother Leo	1Fragm	Fragment of other Rule I
CantSol	Canticle of Brother Sun	2Fragm	Fragment of other Rule II
EpAnt	Letter to St. Anthony	LaudDei	Praises of God
EpCler	Letter to the Clergy	LaudHor	Praises to be said at all the Hours
EpCust	Letter to the Custodians	OffPass	Office of the Passion
1EpFid	First Letter to the Faithful	OrCruc	Prayer before the Crucifix
2EpFid	Second Letter to the Faithful	RegB	Later Rule
EpLeo	Letter to Brother Leo	RegNB	Earlier Rule
EpMin	Letter to a Minister	RegEr	Rule for Hermitages
EpOrd	Letter to the Entire Order	SalBMV	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
EpRect	Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples	SalVirt	Salutation of the Virtues
ExhLD	Exhortation to the Praise of God	Test	Testament
ExhPD	Exhortation to Poor Ladies	TestS	Testament written in Siena
ExpPat	Prayer Inspired by the Our Father	UltVol	Last Will written for St. Clare
		VPLaet	Dictate on True and Perfect Joy

Writings of Saint Clare

1LAg	First Letter to Agnes of Prague
2LAg	Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAg	Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAg	Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
LER	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
RCl	Rule of Clare
TestCl	Testament of Clare
BCl	Blessing of Clare

Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2Cel	Second Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
3Cel	Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
AP	Anonymous of Perugia
CL	Legend of Clare
CSD	Consideration of the Stigmata
Fior	Fioretti
JdV	Witness of Jacque de Vitry
LM	Major Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LMin	Minor Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LP	Legend of Perugia
L3S	Legend of the Three Companions
Proc	Acts of the Process of Canonization of St. Clare
SC	Sacrum Commercium
SP	Mirror of Perfection

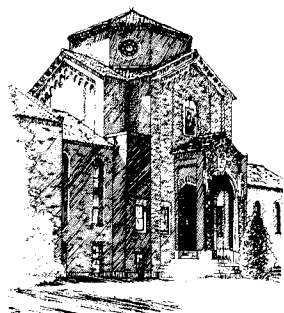
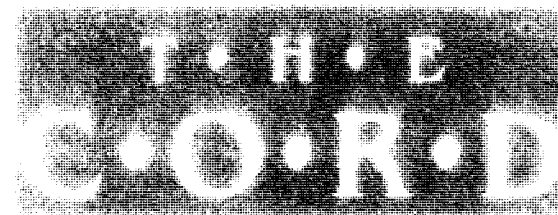
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THE CORD

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1. MSS should be submitted on disk or typed on 8 1/2 x 11 paper, one side only, double spaced.
2. The University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 13 ed., is to be consulted on general questions of style.
3. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized or, in typed manuscripts, underlined.
Titles of articles should be enclosed in quotation marks and not underlined or italicized.
4. References to Scripture sources or to basic Franciscan sources should not be footnoted, but entered within parenthesis immediately after the cited text, with period following the closed parenthesis. For example:
(1Cor. 13:6).
(RegNB 23:2).
(2Cel 5:8).
(4LAg 2:13).

A list of standard abbreviations used in *The Cord* can be found inside the back cover. The edition of the Franciscan sources used should be noted in the first reference in a mss.

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The Cord, 46.5 (1996)

Editorial

On June 22, 1995, at the age of 91, Yves Marie-Joseph Congar, a Dominican priest, Cardinal of the Church, and renowned theologian, died in Paris. Richard J. Beauchesne, in an obituary, quoted Congar on some of his major thought, including an observation on the meaning of being Catholic. He offers a startling witness to us Franciscans:

Christians who are truly Catholic are . . . those who, more authentically, belong to God; and the more they are truly of God's family, the more they are also brothers and sisters of all. . . . *St. Francis offers the model*. He lived his life so perfectly as son of God that he was brother to all that is created. This was made possible for him through his literal acceptance of both gospel and creation. And for this, the liturgy [for his feast] gives him the magnificent title of Catholic.¹ (Emphasis mine.)

At this time of year, as we celebrate the feast of Francis, we Franciscans praise God for such a Catholic father and brother—and open ourselves anew to the graces of our own Franciscan vocation—gifted as we are with the desire to follow in the footprints of Jesus Christ as Francis did.

In this issue of *The Cord* we are happy to present contemporary reflections on the meaning of our way of life. Elena Bingham understands Francis's passing in a new way after experiencing in her own life the mortal limits of her human existence. For her, "This Transitus" is different from all the others. The general ministers of all the branches of the family offer us challenges stemming from the 1986 Assisi Day of Prayer for Peace as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of that event. Gabriele Uhlein, OSF, helps us to understand some critical aspects of spiritual direction in the Franciscan tradition. Patrick Conlan, OFM, leads us on a journey through 770 years of Franciscan Irish history and presents some of the challenges of refounding in the Irish context. Finally, we share with our readers a chapter from a new book by Murray Bodo, OFM, and Susan Saint Sing, *A Retreat with Francis and Clare of Assisi*.

In this issue we also express a word of gratitude and farewell to F. Edward Coughlin, OFM, who for the past five years, as director of The Franciscan Institute, has been publisher of *The Cord*. Brother Ed's broad vision for contemporary Franciscan spirituality, his great energy, unfailing humor, and untiring labor have brought to the Institute and its publications a vital new force. Thank you, Brother Ed. May many blessings accompany you in your new duties as Provincial Secretary for Holy Name Province.

At the same time we also welcome a new director and publisher, Anthony M. Carrozzo, OFM, wishing him well as he joins us in serving the Franciscan family through The Franciscan Institute.

Endnote

¹ Richard J. Beauchesne, "Yves Congar leaves rich legacy," *National Catholic Reporter* (July 14, 1995) 2.

"For those who want to follow Francis, nothing written, or primarily a written rule, but he himself is the point of reference. . . . [Until the rule was approved] profession consisted mainly in the promise of a life according to the gospel, which finds in Francis a model. For life should come from persons, not from texts. Francis's . . . own lifestyle was for others inspiration, creative force, and decisive shaping. . . . He concentrated on being an image and form for his brothers" (Anton Rotzetter, OFM, Gospel Living, page 5).

The Cord, 46.5 (1996)

This Transitus

Elena Bingham

[This talk was presented on October 3, 1995, at the celebration of the Transitus, St. Bonaventure Church, Paterson NJ.]

Do you remember falling in love? Do you remember how your heart was full and your eyes wore sparkles? How you wanted to speak and write and hear the name of the one you loved? How you wanted to shout to the world that there was now magic in your life? And how that magic, that gentle psychedelic, made all colors sparkle, all stars shimmer and the moon yours alone?

I remember all that. But most of all I remember *the songs*. It is hard to recall feelings, but songs have both presence and permanence. When we fall in love, *our heart begins to listen in a new way*. Vibrant with fresh love, it opens up to the songs. And the lyrics grab us. The lyrics that we once ignored penetrate now with sharp and memorable clarity.

And it is easy to remember all that with a smile on our face. We have all loved. Love, falling in love, *turns life into a song*.

Let's take a different look at our lives. Do you remember grieving? Do you remember the powerful blow of death? Do you remember the salt of your tears? Do you remember the desolation, the loss? Do you remember a loss so swift and sudden that it left you paralyzed, unable to breathe or think? Do you remember what it felt like to be grabbed and ripped and torn by pain? Do you remember wondering why there should be such force to the blows of God's chisel?

Do you remember wondering how your life would go on without the mother whose arms once held you? without the father who taught you how to drive? without the spouse who warmed your bed for a lifetime? or the lover who made you feel beautiful? And how, how could your life go

on when the child you once consoled was no more?

We can grieve over the loss of another. But we can also grieve for ourselves. We can grieve with the same confusing intensity when our own death suddenly becomes both certain and near.

When we fall in love our hearts awaken to songs. But when we grieve there are no songs. There is only silence, the most profound internal silence. And in our silence, in the internal desert created by the loneliness of our pain, our souls turn to prayer. Our grieving souls open to prayer. Our souls, our hearts, our eyes, our minds awaken to prayer and turn to God.

Prayerful words that we once half-heard, psalms that we merely repeated, liturgies that became habit, are transformed by grief. Grief gives prayer a forceful reality. Grief makes prayer as vibrant and insistent as a neon sign and as necessary as water for parched lips. *Because in grief it is to God, not to humans, that we wish to speak. And it is from God, not from humans, that we wish to hear.* Grief, the silence of grief, turns life into a prayer.

The Transitus is about love and song and about grief and prayer. But this time, *this* Transitus is different for me. This time I have come to see the Transitus, not as the intellectualized and romanticized spiritual passing of a saint, but as the death of a man, of a man named Francis, who was a friar, and happened also to be a saint. Why is that?

Grief, you see, has its own unique process of selectivity. It is a filter for our perceptions. It filters, it selects, what is nourishing to our souls. I prepared for this Transitus while grieving. In the past I have grieved for others. But this time, I contemplated this Transitus while coping with my own difficult medical diagnosis, with a painful and disfiguring surgery, and the subsequent rigors of lengthy chemotherapy.

And grief not only transformed me, it transformed how I see the last winter of Francis. During that time his life was no more than stages in one long agony. Doctors experimented with painful—and ultimately useless—treatments. He was ravaged by tuberculosis. His liver, approaching total failure, caused his abdomen to become swollen. His eyelids were on fire. He vomited blood. The symptoms were brutal. He was a man. He suffered and grieved—as we will suffer and as we will grieve.

But there is no intrinsic value in suffering itself. There is value only in the transforming power, the redemptive power if you will, of suffering.

And this man Francis, this friar, certain that his life would end, was able to write the Canticle of the Sun—a prayer and a song of joy, of being in love with God's creation. But a prayer/song that was incomplete until Francis, in humility, in acceptance, in grief, gallantly welcomed Sister Death.

I cannot love a saint. I can admire a saint, be impressed with his holiness and in awe of his miracles. But I cannot love him. I can only love a

man, a human being. This time Francis, the vulnerable and suffering man, the grieving but joyous friar, has finally grabbed my heart. He has captured my heart with the song that he was; my soul with the prayer that he became.

The Transitus is about love. And the Transitus is about grief. The Transitus is about song. And the Transitus is about prayer. Francis welcomed Sister Death, and as he did so, he transformed prayer into song; grief into love.

"While the brothers chanted the psalm, *Voce mea (With my Voice)*, death came slowly. On the bare earth of his cell, at the beginning of night, Francis breathed his last."



**LETTER OF THE CONFERENCE
OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY**
**On the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of
The Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi**

Brothers and Sisters:

On October 27, 1986, the leaders of other churches and church communities and the heads of the great religions of the world came to Assisi for a *Day of Prayer for Peace* at the invitation of Pope John Paul II in observance of the International Year of Peace. For the first time the great religions, as religions, met to live a moment that was strictly religious. Since then the Pope has often recalled this meeting, a fact that indicates the importance he gives this event which has become the reference point of a search for unity shared by the world religions.

Francis, Symbol of Peace

Ten years after the event we are better able to appreciate the meaning and the challenge that the meeting has for all of humanity and in particular for us of the Franciscan family. Pope Paul VI, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, had already chosen October 4, the feast of St. Francis, to share with the delegates of the member nations gathered in New York his call for peace: "War no more!" On his part, Pope John Paul II, in his address of welcome to those invited to Assisi, wanted to underscore the bond between the event and St. Francis in these words:

In a moment of quiet prayer I chose this city as the place for our Day of Prayer because of the special significance of St. Francis, the holy man who is venerated here. He is known and revered by many throughout the world as the symbol of peace, reconciliation, and brotherhood.¹

The questions which the Ministers General asked the Franciscan Family on Holy Thursday, 1987, are still valid today: "Why is it that he [Francis] is still a model that can be offered to people of all faiths?" And above all, how can we, sons and daughters of Francis, be authentic witnesses of peace wherever we live? What do we bring of his message of peace to the world of today?"²

Spiritual Courage

The meeting in Assisi reflects the teaching of the Council which recognizes other religions as places of authentic spiritual experiences. It is an event that presents itself as an example of an inter-religious meeting inspired by the Gospel and an initiative which is marked by spiritual courage and great respect for the truth of each religion. Jesus himself recognized the faith of several "non-believers" of his time (Lk. 7:9; 17:19; Mt. 15:28).

Francis, in harmony with the example of Jesus, encouraged his brothers to act "spiritually" among the Saracens and other non-believers, to live among them without "quarreling and arguing," to put themselves at their service "for the love of God," and to announce the word of God only when "they notice that it pleases the Lord."³

At the Fountains of Peace

The Assisi meeting also had the effect of emphasizing the importance of prayer in the search for peace, as the Pope underscored in his words to the participants:

The coming together of so many heads of religion to pray is an invitation to the world to become aware that there is another dimension to the process of peace and another way of promoting it that is not the result of negotiations, of political compromise or economic trading. The result of prayer, even in the diversity of religions, expresses a relationship with a supreme power that surpasses our mere human capacities.

Our meeting proclaims a simple truth to the people of our time: that despite our diversity humanity can maintain its great commitment to peace only by dipping into its deepest and most life-giving resources in order to form its conscience and to base the action of people.⁴

A New Spirit

The "spirit of Assisi" is the way Pope John Paul characterized the spirit that prevailed at the October 27, 1986, meeting. Like the Spirit of God from which it derives, this spirit cannot be contained by any frontier (John 3:8). However, we can recognize its principal traits. They are the same as those which inspired the experience of Francis;

- **an ecumenical attitude which invites** "all people, nations, races, and tongues, all the nations and men and women from every part of the earth," to recognize that "all the gifts are of the most high omnipotent Lord God."⁵
- **a passionate search for peace**, a trait found not only in the formula of the greeting revealed to him by the Lord,⁶ but also the constant commitment of Francis: on his bed of sickness he reconciled the Podestà and the Bishop of Assisi.
- **a constant practice of prayer**, not only the use of prayer of petition and of thanksgiving for the true peace which comes from God,⁷ but above all the prayer of contemplation in order to know how to discern the presence and action of the creative word of God and of his Spirit in every initiative of peace, of reconciliation, and of brotherhood on the part of anyone.⁸

A Challenge

For several years the representatives of different religions met to explore the means that would permit the various religions to bring about a world that is more fraternal and more peaceful by sharing their particular vision and experience. The Council document *Nostra Aetate* provides the Catholic Church with the first official formulation of the basis for such a collaboration. The day of prayer in Assisi was a special time for this new theological sensitivity, a "sign of the times" that attracts us and gives us a road to travel in the "spirit of Assisi."

All this engages our vision and our practice of inter-religious dialogue. It invites us to a greater respect for the primary role of the Spirit, who puts into the heart of every person of good will the leaven of the Reign of God of which, we Christians are simply witnesses and servants. It urges us to deepen the theology of peace, that includes all of creation and restores to prayer an indispensable role.

An Invitation

The relationships which we have with the members of the other great religions differ according to the regions of the world. In some countries, the religions have lived together for centuries; in other places the encounter is more recent, often due to immigration. Every situation offers its own challenges, promises, difficulties, and successes. But, as Pope John Paul II reminded the participants of the meeting of Assisi, we do not have any other choice on the practical level except to commit ourselves to carry on a dialogue. "Either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we distance ourselves from this situation and we ruin ourselves and others."⁹

We invite you, brothers and sisters, not to allow the tenth anniversary of this historic encounter to go by in silence. We thank the Lord of Peace that he has allowed the great world religions to encounter each other around the tomb of the humble Francis and we ask the Father of mercies to lead them on a fraternal journey along the paths of peace.

Let us celebrate the event in various ways. The Holy See will provide us with the initiatives for the occasion. Let us also cooperate with the efforts of sister churches and the other religions in the spirit of *Ut unum sint*. There can be elaborate celebrations as well as ecumenical prayer. Spiritual and theological encounters with the members of other religions are recommended as well as very simple gatherings like an invitation to dinner, a visit to the places of worship of another religion, etc. The initiatives, already taken here and there inside the Franciscan family, demonstrate that the encounter of Assisi can find expression even on the level of local friaries.

May this anniversary be for all of us an occasion to deepen the "spirit of Assisi" in our way of living the mission of being "builders of peace" in imitation of the example of Francis of Assisi.

Wishing you, one and all, a very sincere Pax et Bonum.

Hermann Schalück
Minister General, OFM

Maria Elena Echavarren, TC
President, CFI - TOR

Agostino Gardin
Minister General, OFM Conv.

Emanuela De Nunzio
Minister General, SFO

John Corriveau
Minister General, OFM Cap.

M. Giacinta Ibba
Segretaria della CFF

Bonaventure Midili
Minister General, TOR

¹ John Paul II, "Discorso a S. Maria degli Angeli" 5, *L'Osservatore Romano* (October 27-28, 1986).

² "Nello Spirito di Assisi," Letter of the Ministers of the Franciscan Family (April 16, 1987).

³ RNB 16: 5-7.

⁴ John Paul II, 1, 2.

⁵ John Paul II, 1, 2.

⁶ Cf. Test 23.

⁷ Cf. EpOrd 13.

⁸ Cf. Cant 10.

⁹ John Paul II, "Discorso alla Piazza Inferiore di San Francesco" 5, *L'Osservatore Romano*, (October 27-28, 1986).



Franciscan Spiritual Direction: Some Critical Aspects

Gabriele Uhlein, OSF

[This presentation was originally given to a gathering of the Franciscan Federation on May, 1996, in Malibu, California.]

There can be no doubt that as Franciscan spiritual directors, as directors of Franciscan spiritual centers, we "know differently" than the great Franciscans that preceded us what it means to be human. Our understanding of church, of relationships, of the spiritual life, and of the world are radically different. But like Francis and Clare, like Bonaventure, we too live in "interesting times." Be it blessing or be it curse, the fact remains that in these "interesting times" of ours, we are privy to heretofore unheard of diversities and undreamed of complexities. The ready "click" of a remote control, the easy "whoosh" of a sliding mall door, and the curt tap of a courtroom gavel instantaneously heard across a country 3,000 miles wide, all definitively remind us that we do not live in medieval Italy. Although we can say that our God is the same God as the God of Francis and Clare, how we understand God at work in our lives and in our world is very different from how the holy ones of our past recognized God. For us Revelation has continued, the Spirit has moved, and now we find ourselves at the cusp of a new millennium, not with answers, but hopefully with helpful questions and with one another's good encouragement.

It is my intent in this reflection on our ministry together, to explore what I perceive to be some critical aspects of Franciscan spiritual direction and spiritual development. I will limit myself to three general areas:

- Trends revealed by the books related to spirituality that are

- selling well in our country today
- Specific Franciscan theological considerations and cautions in our North American context
- "What is ours to do" as Franciscans skilled in our particular ministry.

The American Spiritual Scene

We are fast approaching a new millennium. As a potent spiritual archetype, the dawning of a new age carries an enormous amount of psychic weight. It is based upon the experience of nature's great cycle of death and rebirth. Indeed, the promise of "new life" is the driving metaphor of any "good news." Such hope shaped not only the expectations of the early followers of Jesus, but also the dreams of every immigrant to venture to America. I myself am such an immigrant, raised in a German household in Queens, NY. We were raised on a litany of reasons for our immigration, not the least of which was the chance for a good education and for prosperity. Such was my father's dream—birthed out of the struggle and violence of a world war.

The millennial metaphor

The lure of a millennial vision enchants us all in some way. Who among us has not dreamt of a hoped-for good life—a golden, blessed time when all desire is appeased, tears are dried, and suffering ceases? The images are multiple: Paradise, Heaven on earth, the Kin-dom come, the Promised Land, Blessed Elysium, the New Jerusalem.

Certainly the seeds of such a millennial expectation are evident in what was preached in my own home, and they continue to be fostered by our educational system, by our movies, and most successfully by our advertisers. James E. Côté and Anton Allaher, two Canadian psychologists, in their book, *Generation on Hold: Coming of Age in the Late 20th Century*, state that, for the most part, North Americans believe that their "society in general is benign, that the economy functions in the interest of the average person, and that they will be duly rewarded if they work hard, . . . and live happily, if they adopt a conventional lifestyle.¹ There are several assumptions inherent in these beliefs:

- If there is no success or tangible reward, I am at fault.
- If others do not succeed, or are not rewarded, it is their own fault.

- Hard work is rewarded "fairly" based on merit and not privilege.
- There are enough resources within the system for all to be satisfied and successful.

I have encountered these assumptions both in myself and in those I converse with regarding their spiritual life. These assumptions are betrayed by:

- Judgments about my own ability to pray "well."
- Judgments about whether or not others have their prayer "in order."
- Judgments about what God ought to be doing, what ought to be happening in my life.
- Comparisons with what occurs in another's life.

These, and a multitude of other similar "consumerist" traps, belie the hidden hope that with just the right formula, the right regimen, the right faith, God will reward us duly—much as society is presumed to do.

Slowly but surely life erodes such a simple formula of a God that dispenses blessing on demand, much as the major news events of the last fifty years contradict many of the core beliefs of the "American Dream." Hiroshima, Vietnam, Granada, Desert Storm, and Haiti; a trinity of assassinations; Rodney King and O. J. Simpson; Oklahoma City (not to mention hundreds of leadership scandals in every sector of society, political, corporate, labor, and religious)—these are only a few of the events that daily remind us of the dissonance of our dreams. Moreover, each of us personally, and from the personal lives of those we serve, know many more stories of hopes dashed and worst fears realized. There is no escaping the fact that Gubbio has a hungry wolf. There ought to be no surprise at the anger of rap lyrics, the attractiveness of fundamentalism, and the prevalence of numbing "drugs" and diversions of every sort. It takes a great capacity of heart, great courage, and much love to face a broken crucified dream and not resort to violence or surrender to despair.

Jacques Maritain, in his *Reflections on America*, observed that in the American milieu there is a great capacity for contemplation; that is, the capacity to aspire to paradise. If in America "certain elements are causing complaint or criticism," they proceed most likely from a desire, no matter how mistaken or twisted, for lasting happiness, for "the active repose of the soul" in a New Jerusalem. Still, he goes on to caution, to wish such "a paradise on earth is stark naïveté. But it is better than not to wish any para-

dise at all." Such an aspiration is our human grandeur. He reminds us: "The question is to know what paradise is. Paradise consists, as St. Augustine says, in the joy of the Truth. Contemplation is paradise on earth, a crucified Paradise."²

Thus we find ourselves today living and ministering in a great plurality, at times both mesmerizing and contemptible for its seemingly reckless abandon and consumptive gullibility. Then again, each of us is privy to hundreds of little dramas of crippling and rehabilitative love, of losses and new life. These are our contemplative witnesses to the individual transforming experiences of God-with-us in the fabric of America's crucified paradise. As Franciscans we have a unique contribution to make, not only as witnesses to a subversive spiritual peace, but also as heirs to a spiritual tradition that can contemplatively attend to crucified love.

What Americans want

In *Rediscovering the Sacred*, Phyllis Tickle, the religion editor of *Publishers Weekly*, analyzes the books that are being sold in the American market place and makes several observations. According to the Association of American Publishers, sales in the bible/religion/spirituality category rose almost 60% between 1992 and 1994. Furthermore, according to a *Time* magazine poll, 93% of all Americans believe in God. Of these, 90% pray frequently and earnestly; 50% of those who say they pray, pray daily; and 95% "know" their prayers have been answered.

In response to the question of what Americans pray for, Phyllis Tickle suggests that there are four primordial aims:

- health and wellness ("to maintain ourselves as long as possible");
- financial security ("to want the wolf away from the door");
- dominance ("to want power over circumstances so as to maintain self-determination");
- safety ("more from one another than from natural disasters").

In addition, Tickle suggests that we have concerns "about loving and being loved" as well as a great desire for distraction ("sensations that divert, activities that absorb, events that focus—all to escape the chattering mind"). While these "primordial aims" seem almost self evident, the particular nuances given them in *Rediscovering the Sacred* are of interest to my Franciscan ears (e.g. "wolf at the door," power over, independence, mistrust of neighbor).

Also reflective of the state of "American" spirituality are the subjects of the books being purchased. According to the Association of American Publishers, they can be divided into four categories: ancient wisdom, God-experience, self-help, and faith fiction.

- Ancient wisdom: books that specifically lay out origins and/or teachings; (e.g. *A History of God*, Karen Armstrong; *The Bible*, the Koran, *The New Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*).
- God experience: books that witness to near death and/or angelic intervention experiences, (e.g. *Where Angels Walk*, Jan Wester Anderson; *A Book of Angels*, Sophy Burnham).
- Self-help: 2500 titles in print re: spiritual techniques, meditation and prayer
- Faith fiction (e.g. *Joshua*, *This Present Darkness*, *The Celestine Prophecy*, *Mutant Message from Down Under*, *Ishmael*).

Considering this data, several conclusions can be drawn that are significant to us as heirs to a tradition grounded in affectivity and direct experience and fostered by fire and scripture:

- There is a desire to know "for sure" what the specific teachings of a particular religion are. While this is a positive trend, there is little prevalent ability for complex analysis. The driving need is for the simple determination of orthodoxy—what is right and what is wrong—expressed in fundamental and scriptural certitude.
- There is an American romance with self-help and technique improvement. The good work of AA and other such institutions notwithstanding, there is a "getting it together," "getting it right," "getting it better" attitude that prevails in the desire for enhanced technique and self improvement.
- Given the mainstreaming of eastern spiritual practice and feminist sensibilities, people have discovered a spiritual life does not necessarily imply a religious or even a theological affiliation. Americans have discovered that to live spiritually is to live reverently, and not necessarily theistically.
- There is a hunger to hear the experience of those who have tasted God's love. The most popular books document the ex-

perience of those who claim to know God's unconditional care for them. In particular, there is much interest in near-death experiences that report the encountering of a great loving presence as well as a fascination with angels, the messengers and harbingers of that love in our own chaotic, unloving, and unpredictable world.

- There is an appetite for fiction or for stories of any sort that make accessible in the midst of the human condition the truths and life-changing reality of beliefs and spiritual practice. This category is by far the newest and the fastest growing of the four, with individual successful books often selling over a million copies. Moreover the books themselves are often specifically written to proselytize or to confirm faith.

A Franciscan Spirituality of Ministry

As we approach the end of this millennium and as we consider the concerns and desires of Americans who purchase books on spiritual topics, we can perceive ourselves as ministers to a people directly engaged with what might be called the existential "noonday devils"—alienation, uncertainty, powerlessness, vulnerability, and purposelessness. As Franciscans we have a tradition that directly addresses itself to these five spiritual wounds. Francis and Clare understood them well, as did the gospel Jesus.

According to the above data, our era does not doubt the efficacy of God but rather that God is all embracing, life transforming love. The God most people believe in is not big enough—someone is always excluded and subject to God's wrath (and it may very well be myself if I'm not careful!). This is belief in a God made in our own image, acting much like we do at our worst. Yet, as the book sales show, we keep looking for evidence that will prove otherwise.

Our Franciscan tradition, over and over again, explicates for us the unfathomable reality that we are in *God's* image. We are to be lovers: compassionate contemplatives, mirrors of God, witnesses to God-with-us. We are to be nothing short of a God-connected, certain, powerfully vulnerable, and purposeful presence in the world. Hermann Schalück, OFM, speaking in recent years about the Franciscan movement, sometimes uses the image of a "sleeping giant" to describe the potential of our Franciscan spirituality. He says:

I am convinced that, in Francis' vision of God's involvement with creation enormous potential lies dormant. Wonderful treasures lie buried in our history, our Franciscan philosophy and theology. Treasures that can be intuitively understood and appreciated by diverse people throughout the world."³

Franciscan trinitarian foundations

Rosemary Radford Reuther in her book, *Gaia and God*, deals kindly with St. Francis. She even offers him as a model for the eco-feminist consciousness she espouses:

Like the great nature mystic, Francis of Assisi, may we learn to greet as our brothers and sisters, the wolf and the lamb, trees and grasses, fire and water, and even "holy death," the means by which all living organisms are returned to earth.⁴

Francis eschewed academic pursuits and perhaps this provided him a certain innocence. He did not leave his followers a systematic theology. That task would be undertaken by another who kept for Francis "a sentiment of special love" and who came to be recognized as Master cathedratus by the faculty of theology of Paris. This learned follower was St. Bonaventure.

As a spiritual director and retreat facilitator I have found in Bonaventure's theology a rich source of images for my ministry and continue to experience with Bonaventure an ongoing consolation in what Francis first revealed to us. I am likewise encouraged by Bonaventure's willingness to enter into the mystic arena himself. That his devotion was rewarded and that he too tasted of contemplation's transforming love is my own inspiration and best hope.

Bonaventure understood that his *Soul's Journey into God* was much more than an autobiographical account of his own experience. It was "to guide others to mystical contemplation and even to mystical ecstasy" and to present "structures of mystical consciousness, not as personal to himself, but in their more universal modality as these can be shared by many who read [his] work."⁵ This models for me a way of being present in my ministry and a way of incorporating personal experience as illustrative not only of my own capacity, but also of the great human capacity to experience God in the particularity of our individual lives.

Moreover, the God of whom Bonaventure speaks is an irrepressibly communicative God, utterly self-diffusive. Hence creation pours forth, as

from an overflowing fountain. Yet even this is insufficient "to give adequate expression to the immensity of the divine fecundity."⁶ In this regard Ewert Cousins speaks specifically of the "intentionality" of Bonaventure's contemplative consciousness—a recognition of one's self as part of that communicative divine overflowing. When Bonaventure contemplates God, he intends a participation in the self-diffusion birthed of divine Trinitarian love.

In us then the corresponding subjective correlative is affectivity, but affectivity of a complex kind. There is love and awe at the divine perfection in general, but a special kind of love and awe before the "divina fontalis plenitudo," for this involves a sharing in the divine self-diffusion. This is a complex experience of God's love for us, of grace, and of participating in [God's] divine energy and interpersonal love."⁷

In my own experience such affectivity culminates in the ever expanding realization of God-with-us. It affords me the capacity to acknowledge and hold the realization of God-with-us through the spiritual direction session, through the retreat presentations, and eventually, through the very existence of the retreat center itself. Each of these presences irrepressibly witnesses a trinity of love, and as such, incarnates the truth of God.

It is my contention that this joy, this truth, is precisely what we seek when we seek paradise. In the earlier quote from Jacques Maritain it was suggested that critical to the resolution of our restless yearnings and our millennial expectations is the ability to know what "paradise" actually consists of. For me, then, the joy of the Truth is this—the experience of knowing that in this work I host no less than the Trinity and that I and those I communicate with are inevitably transfigured and irrevocably loved. Moreover, this is not an optional participation. Rather, what is optional is the quality of intention and annunciative consciousness which we bring to the communication of God-with-us in unstoppable love.

Characteristics of Franciscan spirituality ministry

According to Anthony Carrozzo, OFM:

The spiritual director in the Franciscan tradition travels the way with [the] directee, searching for the truth that will guide the directee in life and in [his/her] decisions, and enjoys the contemplative entrance into the mystery of Christ with that directee.⁸

I would like to amplify this. It is the ministry of a Franciscan retreat center or director to host persons that are seeking the truth in a way that

will help inform their life choices. It is the ministry of a Franciscan retreat center or director to foster a contemplative ambiance in which to meet the mystery of Christ—of God-with-us. Following Carrozzo's lead then, as directors and administrators, as preachers and hosts, as brothers and sisters, we are about the work of living the truth of God-with-us (and most especially the crucified reality of God-with-us) in the fullest possible manner. In doing so, we participate in no less than a glorious and ecstatic transfiguration of the disfigured and suffering crucified.

To do this requires of us several skills (graces):

- To understand with Bonaventure that "the enterprise is an exploration *into God*." Our task is to reveal, however it is given us to do, a spiritual itinerary or a "mystic map" that says, "yes, even here is an entrance into God; yes, even in this situation, in this person, at this point of crucifixion, a vista of God is possible "

- To understand with Bonaventure that the Spirit comes upon us and we conceive Christ. Our work is to birth Christ in this world, especially where Christ is least expected. Moreover, we are required to cultivate a distinctly feminine sensibility of pregnant expectancy, of natural attentiveness. Our retreat centers and our spiritual direction places are nothing less than Annunciation sites, Visitation places, and Christmas crèches.

- To understand with Bonaventure that "reading is insufficient without unction," as is "speculation without devotion, investigation without wonder, observation without joy, work without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, endeavor without divine grace."⁹

- Our work is to cultivate affective sensibilities. We do this best as wholly incarnate beings—body and mind, heart and soul. All that we do in our ministry presumes that no aspect of our incarnate reality will be excluded. Our ministry at its best celebrates our humanness and recognizes it as worthy of divinity itself. Above all, it brooks no intolerance nor fears learning to make mistakes and to forgive. To this end our ability to incorporate psychology as well as bodywork stands us in good stead.

Franciscan theological cautions and considerations

In light of the earlier discussion of the American spirituality scene, it may be helpful at this juncture to consider some useful theological cautions and considerations. I suggest four specifically:

- **Pseudo-gnosticism:** given the mainstreaming of such ideas as spiritual "energies" and "soul work" there is once again a propensity to overemphasize the spiritual aspects of our experience to the detriment of our body. There is a tendency to see the body as a hindrance to our spiritual life and as something that is ultimately to be "spiritualized." A Franciscan corrective would be to consider that souls, when fully embodied, have a special affective happiness in the "sense-fullness" of their experience of God. As Franciscans we are to give witness to an enjoyment of incarnate life—it is patterned after no less than God.
- **Pseudo-messalianism:** given the plethora of self-help books available and the psychologizing of interior experience in general, it is easy to confuse psychological work with spiritual practice. In the Franciscan tradition it is essential to understand that spiritual practice is simply and purely about the affective loving of God-with-us. According to Hermann Schalück spiritual practice is about "being clear with ourselves and each other about what kind of God (or even what kinds of different gods) we serve and love."¹⁰ Where does our God live? How is God revealed to us? What does God desire or expect of us? How much are we willing to risk, and what risks are we willing to take? Certainly such questioning about our Beloved may well take us into psychological realms. Yet what we as Franciscans ultimately witness to is not our mental health or "wholeness," but God's all transforming love for us and for others through us.
- **Pseudo-pelagianism:** given our prevailing work ethic, this is the most distinctively "American" of all the potential "land mines" in the spiritual geography I am suggesting here. It is derived directly from our cultural assumption of "equity," of "fair" wage for effort expended, and of absence of suffering as evidence that God does indeed love us. It assumes that spiritual growth and "deepening" is to be accomplished by dint of our own effort. Over and over, both Francis and Clare address our inner spiritual experiences as pure gift, and moreover, a gift that is to continue to be *shared*. We are gifted with experiences of God-with-us so that others may also participate in this transforming giving of God, not as we love, but as God loves through us.

- There is one final consideration—angels. We minister today in a milieu of "darling" cherubs and comely "domesticated" angels. Indeed, they are at the presumed beck and call of human agents. In the midst of such popular spiritual icons, it is invigorating to stand in a tradition that has as its centerpiece an awesome and transfiguring seraph. This is not an image easily converted to a lapel pin or conjured lightly. The seraph, "resplendent and flaming," is in marked contrast to the benign beings that occupy so much of the contemporary spiritual imagination and bespeaks the great paradox of love the Franciscan tradition offers our suffering and crucified world.

What Is Yet Ours to Do?

I have heard it said many times, that of Franciscans, to whom so much of God's unabashed love has been given, much is expected. Hermann Schalück had strong words for my sisters when he addressed them at one of our recent Plenary Council meetings. He admonished us:

Francis' option for the poor, the unconditional regard for all, his readiness for new initiatives, his affinity for different cultures and people, his non-violent speech and behavior, his commitment to peace, the novel ways in which he courageously proclaimed the gospel, all continue to inspire persons of various religions around the world. At times it is embarrassing for me to experience the fascination that Francis captures from other Christians and non-Christians when it is juxtaposed with the spiritual poverty and small-minded provincialism of Franciscan men and women who quote Francis and bear his name.¹¹

In response to Friar Hermann's challenge, I would suggest that as spiritual directors and retreat ministers, we consider our own particular influence in four areas:

- Franciscans and the feminine voice
- Franciscans and non-violence
- Franciscans and creation
- Franciscans and the "enoughness" of God

Franciscans and the feminine voice

If Franciscans are to participate actively in the world, it is necessary to

attend to the voices of women. According to Elizabeth Johnson:

Christian feminism is a world view or stance that affirms the equal human dignity of women, criticizes patriarchy for violating this dignity and advocates change to bring about some just and mutual relationships between women and men, and human beings with the earth. It does so based on the deepest truth of the gospel itself."¹²

The challenge of feminism is rightly addressed to Franciscans steeped as they are in a trinitarian theology. Ewert Cousins writes:

For Christians, the maleness of the Jewish God was intensified by the fact that they believed his unique incarnation occurred in the male Jesus of Nazareth, who called God his father. This male image of God reached a peak in the doctrine of the Trinity. Although the doctrine of the Trinity introduced differentiations within the divinity, instead of opening up the masculine-feminine aspects of God, it was formulated exclusively in the patriarchal terms of Father and Son.¹³

Cousins goes on to note that "despite the fact that for Bonaventure the Trinity is not primarily concretized in the patriarchal names of Father and Son, nor in the mathematical pattern of three in one," Franciscan theological reflection must dare to explore the Trinity in a way that is mutually inclusive of the feminine.¹⁴ He suggests that we think more deeply than just to label the spirit as "feminine" and leave it at that. He offers instead a conceptualization that posits the primordial Trinity as the complementary masculine emanation flowing forth from a fecund primordial feminine ground. The prior suggestion would merely "subsume the feminine into a basic masculine construct," while the latter affords the feminine "a full sharing in the divine nature as a complementary aspect of God."¹⁵

This suggestion poses a provocative solution for contemporary Franciscans whose trinitarian theology echoes the coincidence of opposites and complementarity. It affords a new way of understanding the experience of the potent silence before the Word, the pregnant darkness before the light, the undifferentiated and unconditional before the distinctions of condition and differences, the mysterious and unrevealed before the revelatory and the explicit. Additionally, this construction allows a rethinking of our relationship to undifferentiated "matter," which in its marvelous creative differentiation reveals no less than God—a God for which

the Trinity in its present masculine imaginal formulation is insufficient for us today.

I am well aware that this topic alone could occupy us for days. I suggest it here only as a way to begin rethinking the spiritual direction relationship which I alluded to earlier as a hosting of the Trinity. We must begin and foster a theological reflection that offers a way of honoring and integrating those feminine aspects that are undeniably aspects of our human experience (and thus, part and parcel of our spiritual vocabulary)—the unconditional, undifferentiating love of a mother, the dark mysterious womb, the power of pregnancy, the primordial chaos, and at last, the mystery of our very mortality.

While the articulation of a suitably revisioned theology is important, there is another way we can witness to the inclusion of women—that is to acknowledge and explore the role of Clare and her particular expression of Franciscan life. Edward Coughlin, OFM, writes:

As she continues to emerge from behind the dark veil of centuries of ignorance, neglect, and the failure on the part of many generations of Franciscans to acknowledge her role in the early development of the movement, the life and vision of the first Franciscan woman will increasingly enlighten the way of those who wish to follow Christ in the contemporary world.¹⁶

Moreover, as spiritual directors and retreat ministers, we are in a unique position to contemplate the mysterious divine feminine, to attend to and to encourage the voices of the women we serve and serve with, as well as to participate in the promotion of such awareness. To do so is to participate in the privilege of ongoing revelation. Moreover, it is no less than the first requisite step in an honest attempt at interfaith dialogue as well. If I cannot hear the transforming voices of the women whom I have already acknowledged as my sisters and whom I say I love, how can I hear the voices of those who are yet strangers? How can I receive the good of God from them?

Franciscans and non-violence

Much has been made of Franciscan peacemaking, from the appellation of "Man of the Millennium" by *Time* magazine to General Schwartzkopf's announcing on national television that his favorite prayer was St. Francis of Assisi's desire to be made an instrument of God's peace. What is significant to the discussion here is that the peace Francis proclaimed is born of his experience of the paradox of perfection crucified—the Lord revealed to

me a greeting: "May the Lord give you peace." It is no less than a peace based on the certitude of a God who loved so much that the risk of suffering to make that love evident was both warranted and willingly undertaken. Thus Francis dispensed blessings of peace and undertook acts of engaged peacemaking well beyond the logic of reason and human good sense. His peace was God's.

The key to comprehending this is to be found in Francis's Alverna prayer for two graces: He asks first

that during my life, I may feel in my soul and in my body, as much as possible, that pain which you, dear Jesus, sustained in the hour of your most bitter passion. The second is that I may feel in my heart, as much as possible that excessive love with which you, O Son of God were inflamed, in willingly enduring such suffering for us sinners.¹⁷

It is significant in this present time of fascination with sweet angels that the answer to Francis's prayer was a seraph with six blazing wings. The story in the Fioretti goes on to say that Francis was filled with fear, joy, grief, amazement, compassion, and, above all, the insight that "to be utterly transformed into the direct likeness of Christ crucified" was not accomplished "by physical martyrdom" but rather "by the enkindling of the mind."¹⁸ To Francis, to bring the peace of Christ was to dare to contemplate and attend to the Crucified and thereby to become engaged and transformatively *enlightened*. It is our blessing of peace then to be likewise granted the grace to attend to the crucified and twisted, to see clearly and to feel deeply in the name of an all embracing and transforming love. This is the paradox of the Seraph. It is no less than that paradox which affords us peace and love in our ministries as we attend to births and deaths, crucifixions and transfigurations. Such peacemaking acknowledges the scandal of the cross with a steady gaze, confronts the reality of suffering, and dares to keep loving transitus vigil. It is nothing short of the witnessing to God-with-us even here, or rather, especially here, in our not-yet New Jerusalem.

Retreat work and spiritual direction require that we, like Francis, are available to have our hearts filled with fear, joy, grief, amazement, and compassion. Thus we encourage (we en-hearten) those who experience us. Our ministry likewise requires a mind willing to be enkindled and transfigured into Christ's, paradox as that is! I can think of no greater mystery and experience, no greater awe, than to contemplate this truth—and, above all, to know that this privilege is an unearned, unqualified gift. We get to do this! It happens!

Francis and Creation

It was the grace of Alverna, paradoxically, that brought Francis peace and allowed him finally to enter into the experience he so longed for. Furthermore, the seraphic experience afforded Francis a contemplative capacity that was

not a withdrawal from the world, but an entry into its deepest gifts—the mystery of life, the presence of God in life and mirrored by life. He moved through life in contemplation, in a fundamental attitude of receptiveness to the spirit and a primary attunement to the reality around him at all times. His manner of contemplation led him to a deeply intentional life; the awareness of God's presence shaped how he lived every movement.¹⁹

Again, much has already been made of Francis as the patron of ecologists, as that "darling statue" most likely to be found in backyards and bird-bath ornamentation. There has been, to be sure, a mistakenly benign co-opting of Francis's love of nature. Franciscan contemplation of nature is much more than a Disney-like delight in blue skies and flowering fields. When Francis considers the sun, moon, and stars, when Francis gazes upon earth and water, and even death, he encounters God's face. How much more we today who call ourselves daughters and sons of Francis need the insight of Alverna to begin to grapple with the reality of the crucified Eden that is our mother, Sister Earth. Action from such an experience is certainly not benign, any more than an action born of feminist awareness or gospel conviction is benign.

I am aware that I have deliberately stretched the Alverna experience in order to ground an overt reverence for the natural world within Franciscan experience. It was, after all, Alverna that allowed the full flowering of Francis's capacity to understand how it is indeed that we are brothers and sisters within the family of creation—all creatureliness together in a great familial exchange of suffering and being suffered, loving and being loved. It is this kin-dom, this fraternity, that perhaps is the most necessary contemporary amplification of our tradition. Hence, any examen of our ministry ought to include a scrutiny of our witness to the ecological reality of our incarnate presence with one another. The face of God we encounter in nature today looks very different from the face that Francis contemplated. We know very differently how we as a human species are of, in, and about the earth. Our lives, our spiritual practice, our choices must mirror that truth to the fullest extent possible.

What Alverna allowed Francis to taste and what Bonaventure's journey into God confirmed is the "enoughness" of God which we know metaphorically as the New Jerusalem and its peace. As Bonaventure writes, this "paradise moment," this blessed, treasured experience, lets us

say with Philip: It is enough for us.
 Lets us hear with Paul: My grace is sufficient for you.
 Lets us rejoice with David saying:
 My flesh and my heart have grown faint;
 You are the God of my heart,
 and the God that is my portion forever.
 Blessed be the Lord forever
 and all the people will say:
 Let it be; let it be. Amen.²⁰

Here it is—the truest desire of our hearts fulfilled. Here, unbeknownst to so many, is the Truth that is "our human grandeur" to mirror. It is, whether we know it or not, what the 90% of Americans who say they pray are praying for. It is ultimately what we buy books about, help ourselves toward, and ask angelic assistance for.

In my own understanding of Franciscan life and ministry, there is finally but one work—to surrender, in spite of our consumer culture, to the "enoughness" of God's love. We are to mirror this truth both as one to whom it is revealed and as one that reveals it. This is the Christ-work, the Good News, the incarnate reality of God-with-us.

There is great subversiveness in such a mission; for to see God transforms us. We are never the same again, nor can the institutions and systems within which we live and serve remain unaltered and unaffected. This is so, because it is no less than the result of that profound interdependence that the Franciscan worldview dares to reveal: the creature and Creator, the creature and creation, the creatures with one another in a great incarnation of the divine Trinitarian relationship that pours forth from the mysterious ground of unfathomable love.

The marvel of it is that there is always more to be revealed. The more transfiguration we allow ourselves to contemplate—the feared, the strange, the outcast, the disregarded, and the shunned—the more of God's face is revealed to us, and the more of God's face (our face) we make available to be experienced. As I consider my own life and the circumstances in which I find myself, I know that I have been given opportunities and gifts to do

retreat work and spiritual direction well. Given the prior reflections on feminism, on non-violence, and on creation, I know that my ministry cannot be sustained without a willingness to experience my own personal Alverna.

The finest witness I bring to this ministry is the sure certitude that God is lovingly with us and transformatively at work, no matter what the circumstances. This is possible only if I am contemplative enough to listen to and engaged enough to comprehend the incarnational paradox of our profound interdependence in the revelation of God. We are nothing if not connected, be it in spiritual direction, in retreat work—in a great Church rebuilding and in culturally transformative ecology. It is a particular Franciscan gift to be thus everywhere "at home" and everywhere connected—to weep for the Jerusalem that daily crucifies and simultaneously to exult at how marvelously God manifests—daily allowing ourselves to be lured into a divine loving that surpasses all reason and all expectation. It is enough.

Endnotes

¹ James E. Coté and Anton Allahar, as quoted by Rémi Trembley in "Youthanasia: Breaking the Souls of the Young," in *Creation Spirituality* (Autumn, 1995) 16.

² Jacques Maritain, as quoted by Robert McNamara, OCD, in *The Human Adventure*, (Element Books, 1991) 57.

³ Hermann Schalück, from a privately circulated address at the Generalate of the Franciscan Sisters, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (Rome, May 24, 1995) 3.

⁴ Rosemary Radford Reuther. *Gaia and God: Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (Harper Collins, 1992) 49.

⁵ Ewert Cousins, *Christ of the 21st Century*, 1992, Element, p. 124

⁶ Cousins, 125.

⁷ Cousins, 126.

⁸ Anthony Carrozzo, from an unpublished address at the Franciscan Federation sponsored Networking Seminar for Franciscan Retreat Centers and Spiritual Directors, Dubuque, IA (May, 1994).

⁹ Bonaventure, "The Soul's Journey into God," Prologue, 4, ed. Ewert Cousins (Paulist Press, 1978).

¹⁰ Schalück, 1.

¹¹ Schalück, 3.

¹² Elizabeth Johnson, as quoted by Clare Wagner in "Feminism and Religious Life: Struggle and Hope," *Horizon* 2 (Fall, 1995) 21.

¹³ Cousins, 156.

¹⁴ Cousins, 158.

¹⁵ Cousins, 160.

¹⁶ Edward Coughlin, OFM, "Clare of Assisi: a Paradigm for Building Partnership," *New Theology Review* 9 (February, 1996) 58.

¹⁷ *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, ed and trans. Raphael Brown (Image Books, 1958) 190.

¹⁸ *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, 191.

¹⁹ Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, and Stuart Taylor, *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God* (Orbis, 1993) 147.

²⁰ "The Soul's Journey into God," 7:6.

REFOUNDING: THE IRISH FRANCISCAN EXPERIENCE

Patrick Conlan, OFM

A recent publication on the refounding experience of the United States Holy Name Province, OFM,¹ set me thinking about similar episodes over a longer time-scale in the Irish Province. Refounding is a process by which religious return to their roots, examine the culture in which they exist, and adapt their lifestyle and ministry accordingly. It implies a vision involving prophetic insight into the ideals and aspirations of the people among whom the religious live and work.

Accepted values evolve within society. Thus westerners have fostered a positive view of the capacity of the human race to build a better world over the past forty years. They became supporters of global conservation in the 1980s. People are now debating the meaning of the term "better world." Religious must adapt as insights and commitments change. On occasion we may be prophetic leaders, such as St. Francis, but we often lag behind.

The history of the Irish Franciscans spans seven hundred and seventy years.² The friars probably came to Ireland in 1226. The first minister provincial was appointed in 1230. The province has gone through four cycles and is currently searching for that vision which will animate the fifth. Each began with inspirational input which stimulated a period of growth. The zeal and energy of the friars later faded as the province settled into a period of stasis. The creative vision faded. There was a lack of consensus about life and work. The center did not hold and decline set in. Adaptations occurred within each cycle without producing a major change in emphasis. The purchase of a family car is a good image. We get one because of the need to get around town. We make sure to buy one with enough

space for children. It satisfies our needs for years. It begins to use oil and has a few dents, but we do not trade it in because we know it so well. Repairs become expensive and eventually we replace it.

The first cycle began when the friars arrived in Ireland and met kindred spirits. The Irish saw a reflection of their own deep sentiments in the followers of Francis. Celt and friar shared a common vision—a stress on the poetic and the artistic rather than on the scientific and the rigorous, on the individual rather than the group, and on the goodness of creation rather than human works. Twenty-three houses were founded in forty years. Consolidation followed, with a new friary every decade. Things stabilized around 1290. There were few new houses, and internal wrangling occurred between Irish and Anglo-Irish. During the Black Death of 1348 many friars died and decline set in.

A fresh cycle began with the Observants. Irish friars traveled widely, discovered the vision of a more spiritual life, and brought it to Ireland. The first reform friary was founded at Quin in 1433. The Irish Observants were recognized in 1460 and became a province in 1517. They started small houses in country areas in the west and north and inspired the spread of the Third Order Regular. Conventuals and Observants made twenty-two new foundations between 1420 and 1490. After that only four more houses were added in the next fifty years. The split in the Order and the suppression of religious by Henry VIII hindered further growth. There were then nineteen Conventual and thirty-nine Observant houses. Since the Conventuals were in cities or areas under government control, young friars could not be trained, and the province died out. The Observants continued, especially in the west. They went into decline because of the difficulty of living together in friaries and forming young friars. Individuals did their own thing, impelled, as they saw it, by pastoral necessity, such as the breakdown of parish structures. The sense of community died.

The Council of Trent ended in 1563, but Irish friars did not introduce its vision for forty years. The third cycle began with the appointment of Florence Conry as provincial in 1606. In the spirit of Trent, he started by reorganizing formation and opened the first Irish Franciscan Continental College at Louvain in 1607. A period of rapid growth began. The province entered its golden age. The three large and five small communities in Ireland in 1612 grew to thirty-two by 1629 and peaked at sixty two in 1646. The number of friars rose from under one hundred in 1600 to six hundred. Three colleges, in Louvain, Rome, and Prague, formed excellent friar priests. These colleges had an enthusiastic body of researchers who produced a stream of books on Irish civil and religious history, pastoral theology, dogma (especially on the Immaculate Conception), philosophy, and Franciscan

sources—the first edition of the writings of Francis, the Annals of the Order, the first edition of the works of Scotus, and a catalogue of Franciscan writers.

The initial impetus died out after 1660 due to a mixture of persecution and infighting. The province entered a long period of stasis. For forty years (1660-1700) the friars sought to restore the golden age and did not realize that conditions had changed in Ireland. They were happy to take on diocesan ministry during the time of Penal Laws (1700-1800). A decline set in when the friars were pushed out of parish work. During the nineteenth century about sixty friars drifted on, staffing about seventeen friaries. They existed without particular ideals or identity, but resented and strongly resisted efforts to reform their way of life. The Order on the continent, decimated during the French Revolution, had been rebuilt through the vision of strict community life and regular observance. Bernardine dal Vago (minister general, 1869-89) added the element of better literary and theological education.

The next cycle began when an Irish friar, Luke Carey, tried to raise the educational level of the clerics. Gregor Janknecht of the Saxony province, general visitor in 1879, concluded that it would be better to uproot the Irish province rather than let it continue in its unreformed condition. Hearing of Carey's efforts, Janknecht arranged the appointment of a German, Bernard Doebbing, as lecturer and master of students at the Irish house of formation, St. Isidore's College, Rome, in 1883. The young friars received a better education and were trained in the continental way of Franciscan life. Janknecht returned to Ireland as visitor in 1888 and promulgated a decree for total reform. It was based on education—a seraphic college, a renewed novitiate, a new house of humanities, and colleges for philosophy and theology. The old friars, who dressed in black soutanes, were not allowed to receive novices and died quietly away. The new friars, wearing the brown habit, took over the Irish houses one by one. Growth began after World War I. Vocations increased, and the friars moved into new apostolates, especially second and third level education and foreign missions. Stasis came at about the time that the fathers of Vatican II were meeting in Rome. The friars implemented the decrees of the Council with enthusiasm, but it has taken them time to absorb the deeper implications. A decline, with a decrease of vocations and a huge variety of ministries, set in during the 1980s. While diversity of work seems to indicate vitality, it actually points to a disagreement on core values which puts individual interests above community witness.

Like Holy Name Province, the Irish friars have sought a new vision over the past decade. We who live at the threshold of the third millennium

are impatient people. We forget that human nature moves at its own pace. The four cycles show that the friars sometimes waited for decades for a new vision. The first Franciscans in Ireland were received with open arms. Fifty years intervened between the Black Death and the beginning of change. Another forty years passed before the Observant ideas became popular. Conry took action forty years after the Council of Trent had ended. The Black friars resisted reform for most of the nineteenth century. Again there was a forty year gap between the decree of 1888 and growth in the 1920s. Elements of change float out there for years before the filaments are pulled together and the vision appears. Everyone but the family concerned knows that the car should be replaced.

Individuals may seem to start a new cycle—Florence Conry in 1606, Gregor Janknecht in 1883. In fact they are pulling the filaments together and articulating a vision owned by a core group. One friar may formulate an ideal, but others must adopt it as their plan for life and work if it is to thrive. Consent is the key. Some of the family must like the new car.

The spirit of a Church council is reflected in each cycle. Francis adopted the insights of Lateran IV (1215). The Order that emerged after his death was a product of that Council. The Council of Constance supported the ideals of the Observants (1415). Trent not only set parameters for church renewal but also decreed a reform of religious life (1563). The ultramontane spirit behind nineteenth century religious life was reflected at Vatican I (1869-70). The fifth cycle is rooted in Vatican II (1962-65), even if that vision has not yet seen the light of day.

The members of an inner group live in their new vision, including both fresh insight as well as tried and tested ideas, without worrying about the other friars. Some friars convert to the insight. Others fade away quietly. This takes time. The Irish Conventuals died out at the Reformation. It took thirty years for the Brown friars to replace the Black. The renewed religious take control of formation. Conry's first move was to open a novitiate and college in Louvain. Janknecht moved the Irish novices to Germany and placed Germans over the student house. The Black friars died out because they could not receive novices. A vital and contemporary vision attracts young men. The dynamic phase of a cycle brings an increase in vocations, resulting in new houses and ministries. We should not evaluate the Order's impact just in numerical terms, but use the statistics to indicate the correlation between the Franciscan vision and the ideals of society.

All visions include prayer and community life. The first friars brought a new style of prayer. The Observants reduced formal prayer in choir and encouraged meditation and contemplation. This is one reason why they moved from towns to houses in the country. Conry and his contemporar-

ies restored prayer in choir, as did the Brown friars. All stressed the quality rather than quantity of prayer. The open style of Franciscan community life was an innovation in the thirteenth century. Observants moved from a stress on ministries to allowing the individual more quality time among the brethren. Conry gathered isolated friars into eight friaries. When numbers were sufficient for a full community, they returned to old sites where there was still a Franciscan ambiance. Similarly the Brown friars, with a monastic idea of religious life, took over Black houses only when manpower allowed.

Every cycle affirmed the value of the individual. This goes without saying for early friars. The Observants wanted space for personal growth and maturity. Every Irish friar was pushed to use all his talents during the golden age. This might involve pastoral work, teaching, returning to old sites, publishing, third level research, or working in other countries. The Brown friars started with pessimism. An individual was sinful, needed safeguards, and was trained to act like a robot. Education brought changes, and friars were called to use most of their talents.

Each cycle corresponds with socio-cultural needs. The first Irish friars settled in towns. They underwent rapid change and satisfied the needs of the new urban people. The Observants came at a time of Irish cultural and political revival. They moved from Anglo-Irish towns into areas where Irish society was strong. The golden age coincided with economic and political recovery after the devastating Tudor wars. One result was a close association between the Franciscans and national aspirations. Even today the friars are seen as being more Irish than other orders. The Brown friars flourished during those forty years after independence when religion, culture, and nationalism were finely integrated.

Stasis occurs when the goals implicit in the vision are fulfilled. Satisfaction with achievements and the synthesis between religious insight and cultural milieu replace creative energy. The family is happy with their car, even if it has to be resprayed after being dented. The friars make minor changes, such as the move from pessimism to limited optimism in mid-twentieth century. A few new foundations are made, such as those by the Conventuals in imitation of the Observants in the late fifteenth century or the three Irish houses in the 1940s. New apostolates are rare, but refinements are made to old ones. Thus the Irish friars built a new secondary school and used the old for an agricultural college in the 1950s. They promoted the sacrament of reconciliation by installing confession bells and duty rooms in the 1960s. The move into parish ministry during the eighteenth century did not come from a new vision, but was a response to the banishment of religious under the Penal Laws. Foreign missions can ab-

sorb surplus manpower, e.g. friars acting as family or military chaplains in Europe during the eighteenth century or move to China in 1935, South Africa in 1947, and Zimbabwe in 1958.

The body may be dented and the engine may be using a little oil, but the family knows and loves its car. Why change it while it keeps going? The friars do not notice the initial decline. They miss the opening gap between religious practice and cultural values because few people are involved. The gap slowly widens. Satisfaction with a glorious past blocks examination of the way forward. The priority after the Black Death was finding warm bodies to fill vacant choir stalls. The priests struggling under Tudor persecution were so busy saying Mass in hidden places that they missed the drastic changes in society. When the Irish friars were forced out of parishes by a renewed clergy early in the nineteenth century, they drifted along, living like diocesan priests ministering in their own churches. Changes were unnecessary because "we've always done it this way," i.e. at least for the last sixty years or as long as the oldest friar remembers. The present decline has been signaled by a decrease in vocations. While retaining respect for the friars, young people see little value in their life and ministry. There will be no crisis while there are plenty of senior citizens to whom we can minister in the old way. Unlike in previous generations, however, the friars have the tools of demography and social analysis to see a little into the future and become aware of the need for a refounding vision.

The Holy Name friars are seeking the vision needed to start their second cycle, while the Irish are looking towards their fifth. A family car is not replaced overnight. What can we learn from history? First, the process cannot be rushed. Patience and prayer are necessary while the prophets pull down the filaments and lay them out for inspection. Second, the new vision will center on the traditional optimistic Franciscan view of the person. A Christian is gifted with God-given talent, which should be used to the full. Young people find it difficult to enter into long-term commitments. Allowances must be made for psychological and spiritual immaturity. Few have experienced the level of family, faith, and prayer that was common in the past. They are much more aware of social and moral issues than of dogma and theory. Thus the vision must present the Gospel as a lived experience. It will also recognize that, while a priest is always a priest, he can change ministries or move from sacramental work.

Vatican II was the Council which returned the Church to the laity. The friar with the new vision will be aware of this and genuinely involve lay persons, particularly the secular Franciscans. He will have a genuine interest in people, affirm their talents, and lead them to God through personal contact. Sin will be there, but the stress will be on the power of God to

overcome it. The third and fourth Irish cycles stressed education, and this will also be part of the next vision. People are more educated now and expect to deal with informed ministers. While study can produce narrow-minded experts, it usually creates more relaxed and aware persons.

Each Irish vision brought new insight into prayer, turning from long formal sessions to briefer personal varieties. The severe nineteenth-century monastic style of living has run its gamut. Flexibility has returned. Community life is not a highly structured shield designed to protect the individual from evil. The new life in common should provide the kind of mutual support which freely enables each friar to mature spiritually and minister effectively. The search for a new vision, whether creative of fresh ideas or responsive to perceived needs, must be rooted in the Eucharist, proclaim the Gospel, and be submissive to the will of the Father. In short the new vision must be positive and flexible. We wait for it. We expect it. It will come.

Endnotes

¹ Anthony M. Carrozzo, OFM, *Refounding in the Franciscan Tradition*, Spirit and Life Series, 5 (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1994).

² Patrick Conlan, OFM, *Franciscan Ireland*, 2nd. ed. (Mullingar, 1988).

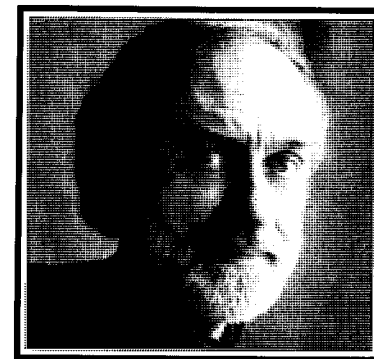
"The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. and the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. and when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world" (Test. 1-3).

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A Biographical Profile

of

**Murray Bodo, OFM
Thomas More College
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Murray Bodo, OFM, is the most recent member to join *The Cord's* editorial advisory board. Born in Gallup, New Mexico, Fr. Murray, a priest and poet, is a member of the Franciscan Academy. He entered the Order in 1955, St. John the Baptist Province, Cincinnati, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1964. Fr. Murray earned a Ph.D. in English from the University of Cincinnati in 1992 and is the author of thirteen books, including the best-selling *Francis, the Journey and the Dream* (St. Anthony Messenger Press).

In 1994 St. Anthony Messenger Press published a twenty-year retrospective of his work, *The Almond Tree Speaks: New and Selected Writings, 1974-1994*. Fr. Murray has published poems in several literary magazines, and his short story, "The Blue Chariot," won *Ambergris* magazine's award for outstanding fiction in 1991. In 1994, three of Fr. Murray's poems were anthologized in *Odd Angles of Heaven: Contemporary Poetry by People of Faith*. His latest book, *A Retreat with Francis and Clare of Assisi* (co-authored with Susan Saint Sing), has just been published by St. Anthony Messenger Press. A selection from this work is featured on page 244 of this issue of *The Cord*.

At present Fr. Murray is a writer-in-residence and assistant professor of English at Thomas More College, Crestview Hills, Kentucky.

Saint Francis's Basilica

Murray Bodo, OFM
Susan Saint Sing

[The following article is a reprint of chapter 6 of *A Retreat with Francis and Clare of Assisi: Following Our Pilgrim Hearts* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996) 67-78. Reprinted here with permission.]

Coming Together in the Spirit

Francis died on the evening of October 3, 1226, at the Portiuncula. The building of his basilica was initiated by Brother Elias, Francis's successor as minister general, under the direct order of Pope Gregory IX to raise a triumphant structure to glorify the gospel poverty of Saint Francis. On May 25, 1230, Brother Elias placed Francis's body in a secret crypt to ensure that no one would steal the saint's remains. The basilica is a treasure of paintings, frescoes, and mosaics, the most famous artists being Giotto, Lorenzetti, and Cimabue. The plan of the church is a double T (the tau symbol), forming an upper and lower church; underneath is the crypt where Saint Francis is buried.

Francis's basilica is truly an architectural fortress built of pink and white stone: two superimposed churches above the crypt where Francis is buried. In Francis's day the site of the basilica was a potters' field where dead criminals and the bodies of the poor whose families could not afford burial were thrown over the city wall to waste away in the sun. Some wish that Francis, too, could have been buried like them, the poor and marginal people he loved, a small wooden cross marking his grave. Then in death as in life he would have been little and poor.

But we do not blame Brother Elias for agreeing to build this basilica. He was trying to do what he thought was best to protect the body of Saint

Francis and to be obedient to the Holy See, as Francis himself directed his brothers to be.

Brother Elias hid Francis's body, burying it deep in the bowels of the basilica, so the rival towns of Perugia and Rome would not try to steal it away or other towns come and strew the relics all over Italy.

Instead, the Basilica of St. Francis becomes *the* reliquary, one of the great reliquaries of Christendom, filled with stunning art that heralds the beginning of the Renaissance.

Defining Our Thematic Context

Pilgrimage is quest is retreat. Retreat is pilgrimage is quest. And this dynamic both affects and is enacted on the dual geography of nature and soul, an interior and exterior landscape. Nature, the exterior landscape, embraces not only the world "out there," removed from me, but the body, as well. We use the word "embrace" to imply the reverence with which the pilgrim, the questor, the retreatant is to approach body, soul, nature. All are good, all partake of the geography of the other. The journey into one's soul is also a bodily journey. The journey into nature is a journey into the geography of one's own body and soul. Unity. Not division. Oneness. Not dichotomy.

Opening Meditation

Today there is nothing, can be nothing, in Assisi but the memory of him who took Lady Poverty to wife. Yet the city we see but little resembles what it was in Francis's day. What we see is not what he saw, but is, in fact, his creation. The city S. Francis knew had no San Francesco, no Sacro Convento, no Santa Chiara and no Rocca towering over all. . . .

And yet one finds oneself on his account wandering up and down the steep and climbing ways, through street and piazza where he played as a child, where he went gaily as a young man, which presently saw him begging his bread, and echoed alike with the scorn of his fellows and the irresistible words of his preaching. Here is the house, here is the stable, in which he was born; here the font in which he was baptised. Just beyond the walls is San Damiano where the Crucifix spoke to him. Here before Santa Maria Maggiore he stripped himself and repudiated his earthly father, Pietro Bernardone. There is the house of his first companion, Bernard of Quintavalle. And there in the Vescovado he lay till they bore him out of Porta Moiano on his last journey when he turned and blessed the city he loved, but could no longer see, on the way to S. Mary of the Angels, where he was to die. And finally, here in the great triple church dedicated in his

honor, on the Collis Inferni, now the Collis Paradisi, we may venerate his dust. . . .

San Francesco is the grandiose tomb of the little poor man, who should have been buried in the lee of some wood where birds sing and the earth is carpeted with primroses.¹

Saint Francis, I know that your real monument was your life and example, the brothers and sisters you left behind, the Rule of Life you gave those who would follow you. Help me to follow in your footsteps by striving to live the gospel instead of building monuments to myself. And may my living of the gospel make a difference among those I live with and bring goodness and peace to the town I live in.

RETREAT SESSION SIX

As Henry James keenly observed, the Basilica of St. Francis is "intended perhaps [as] an image between heart and head. . . . For by way of doing something supremely handsome and impressive the sturdy architects of the thirteenth century piled temple upon temple and bequeathed a double version of their idea. The luminescence of Giotto's frescoes in the upper church's 'well-ordered head' are made more brilliant by way of passage into and through the lower church."²

The Basilica of St. Francis which, as James indicates, is really two churches, one built upon another (three churches if you include the crypt chapel where Francis is buried), a medieval analogue of the journey of the soul from darkness to light, the dynamic of the inner depths of a spiritual retreat. There are doubtless such archetypal analogues in all religions, but your journey to Assisi effects in the end a familiarity with this twofold church of Saint Francis as an apt image of the inner, subterranean workings of the soul on spiritual retreat. We sprinkle this chapter with the words of Henry James whose aspergil like a verbal wand is most apt to hit the mark, and anoint what is seen with the life-giving grace of his precise seeing. Writing of the lower church, James observes:

For the first minutes after leaving the clearer gloom you catch nothing but a vista of low black columns closed by the great fantastic cage surrounding the altar, which is thus placed, by your impression, in a sort of gorgeous cavern. Gradually you distinguish details, become accustomed to the penetrating chill, and even man-

age to make out a few frescoes; but the general effect remains splendidly sombre and subterranean. The vaulted roof is very low and the pillars dwarfish, though immense in girth, as befits pillars supporting substantially a cathedral. The tone of the place is a triumph of mystery, the richest harmony of lurking shadows and dusky corners, all relieved by scattered images and scintillations.

The darkness of vaults and side-chapels is overwrought with vague frescoes, most of them by Giotto and his school, out of which confused richness the terribly distinct little faces characteristic of these artists stare at you with a solemn formalism. Some are faded and injured, and many so ill-lighted and ill-placed that you can only glance at them with decent conjecture; the great group, however—four paintings by Giotto on the ceiling above the altar—may be examined with some success. Like everything of that grim and beautiful master they deserve examination; but with the effect ever of carrying one's appreciation in and in, as it were, rather than of carrying it out and out, off and off, as happens for us with those artists who have been helped by the process of 'evolution' to grow wings. This one, 'going in' for emphasis at any price, stamp, hard, as who should say, on the very spot of his idea—thanks to which fact he has a concentration that has never been surpassed. . . .³

What "stamps hard," in Henry James's words, are four frescoes called the Vaults of Paradise, above the high altar in the lower church of the basilica. They are hard to see in the semi-darkness of the lower church, so unlike the lightsome Giotto frescoes of the upper church. Generally believed to be painted by Giotto, this group of frescoes decorates the ceiling of the room directly above Francis's tomb and was intended to be the most splendid work in the basilica. Three of the rectangular frescoes show the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The fourth portrays Francis in glory, surrounded by angels and dressed in a rich deacon's dalmatic.

In this allegory of Holy Poverty, Lady Poverty is the bride and Francis the groom. She has thorn bushes at her feet; their straggly stems wind up and around her body and blossom into delicate roses at her head. Jesus stands between them giving Francis her hand like a proud father giving his most cherished daughter away.

Woman and symbol, bride and dream—as you have seen on your pilgrimage/retreat, for Francis poverty was the most beautiful, worthy lady any knight ever fought for. Her battlegrounds, the leper colony and the muddled streets were more noble to him than the field of battle. The mud of Rivotorto and the cold, penetrating dampness of mountain caves be-

came the silken tents of the most extravagant tournament. Francis sang her love songs in the night and searched for joy and comfort in her bosom. She was his lady.

All of which sounds glorious and romantic. But, is such a love affair possible for you, pilgrim? How can you experience in your life, on the eve of the twenty-first century, something of the joy and peace and enthusiasm for God that Francis and Clare experienced? The present successor of Saint Francis as minister general of the Franciscans, Fr. Hermann Schalück, gives us a way we can experience the perfect joy of Saint Francis. Fr. Hermann offers us a modern reading of the gospel story of the Good Samaritan:

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead:

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee (Luke 10:30-36).⁴

Brother Hermann points out that in the fourfold ministry of the Samaritan there is (1) contemplative seeing, (2) affective response, (3) practical caring, and (4) sustained assistance, all of which Saint Francis taught and lived out in his ministry to the lepers, the poor and marginated, the outcasts of thirteenth-century Umbria. But this contemplative seeing does not just happen. It is born out of the kind of prayerful retreat/pilgrimage you have made in these pages and in the silence and solitude of your own imagination by meditating on the meaning of the story of Francis and Clare. You have entered these words and placed yourself in the world of Francis and Clare of Assisi. There you have prayed and asked yourself how you could go and do as they did: love God in the poor, in nature, in your own life. Meditating in this way, with an eye and ear toward doing something in your own life to follow in their footsteps, differentiates this kind of medi-

tation from simple imaginative identification with or re-creation of an historical event. Contemplative *seeing* leads to *affective response*. *You* are moved somehow; you are touched with remorse, or compassion, or love. And this movement of the heart leads you to *practical caring* that is merely faddish or transitory self-indulgence if there is not *sustained assistance*—that following-through in charity that is the test of true love, of the divine dimension of your good works. It is the following-through on your good intentions, your charitable impulses, that transforms both yourself and those you try to love. And it is that following-through that leads you back into the silence and solitude of retreat where you can listen to the inner meaning of things again. There you enter a sacred space where you are moved again to contemplative seeing that elicits a response of charity and compassion.

So, in a sense, you go on retreat to learn again how to live, to be inspired and moved to live for something more than your own selfish impulses. To be a part of something bigger than yourself and to live a more interior life.

The interior life. The words are dangerous for a retreatant when they are not balanced by pilgrimage, by taking to the road again like Francis. And this does not mean that you have to be a do-gooder, a religious bore who intrudes on others' solitude to get them to do what you know is best for them.

What then does this taking to the road with Francis mean? Again, Fr. Hermann Schalück instructs us: It means

a contemplative encounter with reality, with the men and women of our time. It is allowing one's heart, mind, and emotions to be touched by what one sees. Prayer is doing the good one can do with his/her own talents, time, and opportunities. It learns how to create a community which will sustain the good which we have begun. . . . [It involves,] through God's grace, the respectful and compassionate look at our world, our reality, our neighbors, the poor, creation.⁵

Respectful, compassionate. How often we pass one another with vinegar on our lips, with dismissal, indifference, or contempt in our eyes. We are not seeing with contemplative eyes. We need to retreat to a space, a quiet, where we can find our own eyes again, where we can learn to see ourselves and others and our world as they really are.

And this seeing, no matter how innocent or endearing it may be, is not contemplative seeing unless the affective response it elicits leads to practi-

cal caring, which may be caring for yourself, learning again to see like a child or perhaps just learning to see a child again.

Sometimes the most practical caring is of the child in you, of the interior person who has not been tended to for a long time. And this child, this "other" self is very likely not some innocent, some precious little thing, but some undeveloped part of the psyche that is a child only in that it has never been allowed to have its say.

Speaking to or out of a part of yourself illustrates graphically that your silent pilgrimage is not a silence that is an absence of all sound, and your solitude is not loneliness. The silence you have experienced on this pilgrimage/retreat has involved the diminution of outer noise, it is true; but the inner speaking of the heart has still been there, the voices that rise to consciousness from within you.

Granted, many traditions endeavor to still inner voices, to become completely quiet, all-listening to something other than the chatter of your own *mind*. But this is not the kind of inner voices we are talking about here. What is meant is the murmurings of the *heart*, the images that rise from the deepest center of the self, the voice of the soul from which and to which the divine speaks.

And you know this inner voice, the voice of the soul, by no other test than the test of compassion and true charity: affective response that leads to practical caring for both yourself and others, a caring that is not just a passing fancy, a feel-good, one-shot doing, but a sustained following-through

The voice that leads only to further introspection, to self-improvement at the expense of others, especially the poor and margined, the outcast and lonely, is full of delusion and does not ring true. To love what is difficult to love and to persevere therein, leads to God. That is the lesson of Francis and Clare. That is where this short but long journey from the Assisi train station to the basilicas of Francis and Clare has brought you. The horizontal journey to a place of prayer and solitude is simultaneously a vertical journey into your heart of hearts, the dwelling place of the *Altissimu omnipotente, bon Signore*, the Most High, Good God.

For Reflection

- *As I contemplate my own death, what "monument" do I hope to be remembered by? How might following in the footsteps of Francis and Clare lead me to that goal?*

- *What images—in nature, art or architecture, literature or everyday life—might I contemplate in order to come to a deeper appreciation of Lady Poverty?*

- *How will I join with other pilgrims and disciples in practicing the fourfold ministry of the Good Samaritan (as outlined by Fr. Hermann Schalück)? How do I hope to be transformed by faithfulness to this process?*

- *What has the voice of my soul been saying to me during this pilgrimage-retreat? How will I attend to that voice?*

Closing Prayer

Though Saint Francis had to moderate his early rigor because of his illness, he continued to say: "My brothers and sisters, let us begin to serve the Lord God, for up to now we have done little, or nothing" (1Cel 103).

Lord, let us never become stagnant in our desire to serve you. Let us not be complacent or rest on our past services or successes. But let us strive to radiate outward, beginning with our own souls, our child within, our neighbors and those along the road, until we lie face up staring at the vaults of paradise you prepare for us at the hour of our death.

Endnotes

¹ Edward Hutton, *Assisi and Umbria Revisited* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1953) 1-3.

² "Italian Hours" in Henry James: *Collected Travel Writings, The Continent* (New York: Library of America, 1993) 498-499.

³ *Ibid.*, 499-500.

⁴ A talk by Fr. Hermann Schalück, quoted in Francisco, Newsletter of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe, August, 1992.

⁵ *Ibid.*

About Our Contributors

Murray Bodo, OFM, is a friar of the Province of St. John the Baptist in Cincinnati and a member of *The Cord's* editorial advisory board. (See biographical profile on page 243 of this issue.)

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Patrick Conlan, OFM, ordained in 1968, has been a member of the Franciscan Institute, Killarney, since 1974. He has taught general and Irish Franciscan history to those in formation since 1969. He is the author of many books and articles on historical subjects.

Susan Saint Sing is a free-lance writer and author of music and books, including *Francis, Poet of Creation*. In 1993 she directed a multimedia presentation at the national Cathedral in Washington, DC, in honor of the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Clare.

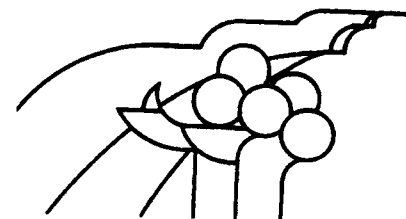
Gabriele Uhlein, OSF, is a member of the Wheaton Franciscans. She is director of New Membership for her congregation and serves in adult spiritual development and the cultivation of Franciscan awareness for the 21st century.

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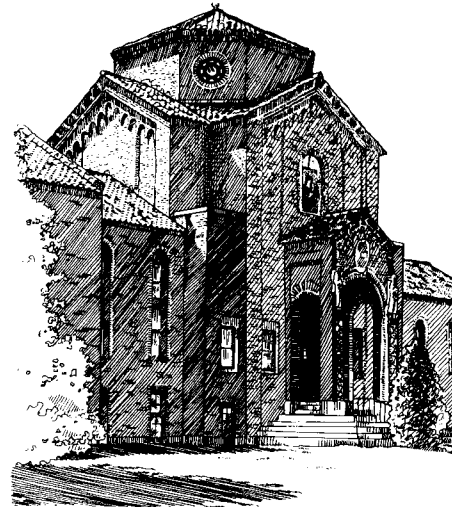
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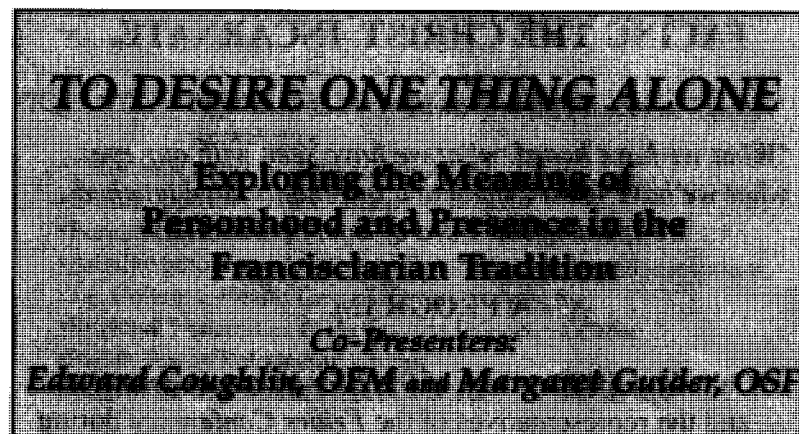
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Writings of Saint Francis

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BenLeo	Blessing for Brother Leo	1Fragm	Fragment of other Rule I
CantSol	Canticle of Brother Sun	2Fragm	Fragment of other Rule II
EpAnt	Letter to St. Anthony	LaudDei	Praises of God
EpCler	Letter to the Clergy	LaudHor	Praises to be said at all the Hours.
EpCust	Letter to the Custodians	OffPass	Office of the Passion
1EpFid	First Letter to the Faithful	OrCruc	Prayer before the Crucifix
2EpFid	Second Letter to the Faithful	RegB	Later Rule
EpLeo	Letter to Brother Leo	RegNB	Earlier Rule
EpMin	Letter to a Minister	RegEr	Rule for Hermitages
EpOrd	Letter to the Entire Order	SalBMV	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
EpRect	Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples	SalVirt	Salutation of the Virtues
ExhLD	Exhortation to the Praise of God	Test	Testament
ExhPD	Exhortation to Poor Ladies	TestS	Testament written in Siena
ExpPat	Prayer Inspired by the Our Father	UltVol	Last Will written for St. Clare
		VPLaet	Dictate on True and Perfect Joy

Writings of Saint Clare

1LAG	First Letter to Agnes of Prague
2LAG	Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAG	Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAG	Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
LEr	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
RCI	Rule of Clare
TestCl	Testament of Clare
BCI	Blessing of Clare

Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2Cel	Second Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
3Cel	Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
AP	Anonymous of Perugia
CL	Legend of Clare
CSD	Consideration of the Stigmata
Fior	Fioretti
JdV	Witness of Jacques de Vitry
LM	Major Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LMin	Minor Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LP	Legend of Perugia
L3S	Legend of the Three Companions
Proc	Acts of the Process of Canonization of St. Clare
SC	Sacrum commercium
SP	Mirror of Perfection

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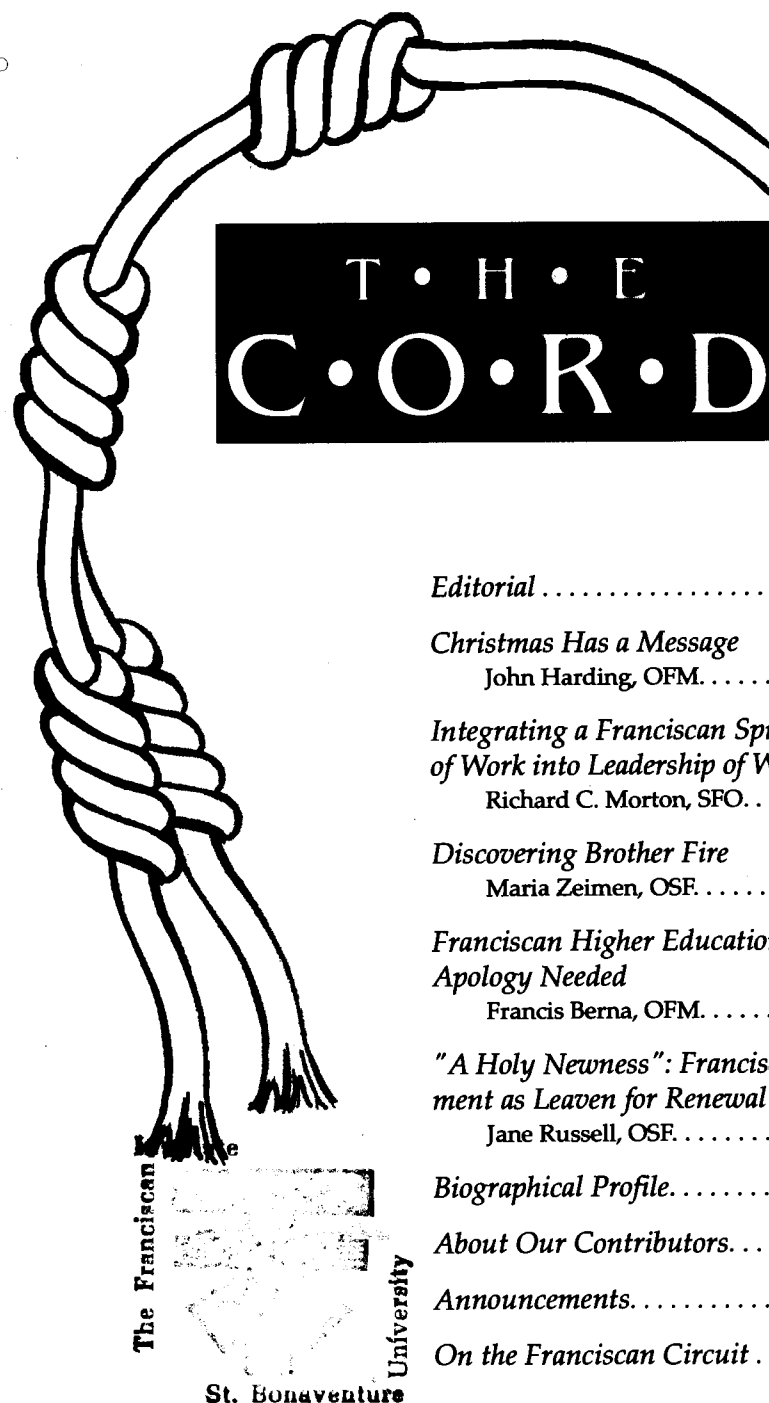
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THE CORD
A Franciscan Spiritual Review

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3. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized or, in typed manuscripts, underlined.
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(1Cor. 13:6).
(RegNB 23:2).
(2Cel 5:8).
(4LAg 2:13).

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The Cord, 46.6 (1996)

Editorial

Recently Cardinal Joseph Bernardin gave an address at Georgetown University in which he included a strong admonition on humans' responsibility to cherish and protect life in all its stages. He ended the talk with a touching reference to his own personal experience of facing death, reconfirmed in his own "conviction about the wonder of human life, a gift that flows from the very being of God." He adds: "It is easy in the rush of daily life . . . to lose the sense of wonder that is appropriate to this gift."¹

One of the things that has made our Franciscan tradition so appealing over the centuries is this very sense of the wonder of life—its pure giftedness. Francis charged his followers to "be conscious . . . of the wondrous state in which the Lord God has placed you, for He created you and formed you to the image of His beloved Son according to the body, and to His likeness according to the spirit" (Adm 5:1).²

Christmas seems a peculiarly apt time to meditate on this wonder. In the mystery of the Incarnation God brings to its highest fulfillment creation itself. In the reality of Christ, our bodies, the body of our universe, and our spiritual being are definitively taken up and taken on by God in an act of love beyond our imagining. When Francis gazed at the infant figure in the crib at Greccio, he was profoundly moved by this reality.

In this issue of *The Cord*, we listen to a "voice from the past" as John Harding, OFM, reflects with us on the mystery of Christmas. Richard Morton, SFO, demonstrates how our Franciscan spirituality is right at home in the dailiness of the workplace. Maria Zeimen, OSF, reminds us that the life force, which is our gift, must be placed at the service of love. Francis Berna, OFM, presents an impressive account of the Franciscan contribution to higher education. Jane Russell, OSF, asks how the Franciscan gift to the Church actually supports genuine renewal. And finally we offer a biographical profile of Julian Davies, OFM, a long-time supporter of *The Cord*.

A word of apology: in the September/October, 1996, issue of *The Cord*, we neglected to acknowledge two artists: the picture of the Stigmata on page 213 is the work of Joseph Dorniak, OFM Conv., and the picture of St. Francis on page 218 is the work of Jane Mary Sorosiak, OSF.

Endnotes

¹"Remaining a Vigorous Voice for Life in Society," *Origins* 26 (Sept. 26, 1996) 242.

²*Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap. and Ignatius Brady, OFM (New York: Paulist Press) 29.

Christmas Has a Message

John Harding, OFM

[This article originally appeared in *The Cord* in December, 1979, pp. 324-7.]

It is true that God is everywhere, but is present to us in many different ways. Thus God provides a variety of opportunities for service. St. Francis of Assisi knew this and found it wonderful to think on. More than this, he found it wonderful to *act* on! One of the ways in which St. Francis acted out this awareness of God's presence was his decision to represent the event wherein God acted decisively: the Incarnation.

The setting of this remarkable event—unfortunately *too* familiar to most of us Franciscans—was a small village named Greccio. It was here that Christmas, an occasion with which almost all Christians had become too complacently familiar, “came alive” in the lives of many people searching for meaning in their lives.

Francis was a natural poet and loved to express outwardly the exuberant thoughts which filled his heart and mind.¹ There are many events in his life which bear witness to this fact, but few are more vivid than his recreation of the scene at Bethlehem. It was in this, and in his re-enactment of the Last Supper, that he expressed most profoundly his tender love for the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord Jesus Christ. This all-consuming love was to reach its fulfillment when Francis was sealed with the Stigmata on the mount of La Verna in 1224.

There had been some strict pronouncements regarding drama, and even though it was made clear that this did not include the Nativity and Easter dramas (providing these were carried out with due reverence), St. Francis, out of respect for the Holy See, as St. Bonaventure informs us, had and obtained permission of the pope for the ceremony, so that he could not be accused of being an innovator, and then he had a crib made, with hay and an ox and an ass” (LM 10:7).² It was a fortnight before Christmas when Francis returned from Rome to the valley of Rieti. He met his friend,

Giovanni da Vellita, lord of Greccio, come and see him at Fonte Colomba; he told him:

“If you want us to celebrate the present feast of our Lord at Greccio, go with haste and diligently prepare what I tell you. For I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he lay upon the hay where he had been placed.” When the good and faithful man heard these things, he ran with haste and prepared in that place all the things that the saint had told him (1Cel 84).

Thus the scene had been set. Word was sent to the friars and to the local people. St. Bonaventure tells us that “the forest resounded with their voices and that memorable night was lit up by brilliant lights and torches” (LM 10:7).

St. Francis, who was a deacon, preached on the humility of the “poor King” in words that were characteristically simple and direct, tender and devout. He succeeded in rekindling the love of his fellow men and women for Jesus Christ and for one another. Francis understood clearly the meaning of Christmas. He knew that it made real again the living memory of God's wonderful gift to humankind: God's very self.

St. Francis was deeply moved by the humble ways through which the “Lord of Majesty” chose to come among us. The crib was one such way. The Lord “made himself lowly for our sakes” and, by doing so, raised us up with him. Francis loved the humanity of Jesus and sought always to bring men and women closer to him by encouraging them to meditate on these lovely mysteries, especially the crib.

Christmas, then, has a message for everyone.

- For those who are poor.
- For those who are broken by anxiety of heart, mind, or body.
- For those who have had their dignity trodden on and their relationships ruptured.
- For those who suffer in their powerlessness to cope, be it socially or in the ordinary problems of their personal lives.
- For those who fear for the future, who do not know hope, who have no one to understand them, to love them for what they are.
- For those who find it impossible to break out of their little world into the freedom of giving and sharing and, by this, to be more human.

- For those who suffer imprisonment for their actions, be it just or unjust; who are forgotten save by a few.

For these Bethlehem has a message: The Christ is born; he will free you!

- For those who are young and have nowhere to go or no one to meet and be with.
- For those who are not so young and want some certainty in life, who worry about the future, but find it hard to cope with the present.
- For those who are elderly and have to face all the difficulties that this entails, for whom the future might be uninviting.
- For those parents who often struggle to provide for their families.
- For those children who feel unwanted or deprived of parental love.
- For those priests and religious who feel that much of the original zeal has gone and life needs a new beginning, who have become burdened with trials, for whom prayer is a pain and community life an endurance, who are lonely in the midst of their fellow priests or brothers or sisters.

For these Bethlehem has a message: God is with us! God will comfort you.

- For those who are divided from their families, friends, neighbors—either through their own fault or for reasons not known.
- For those who cannot forgive, who cannot be reconciled, who cannot celebrate—especially the Eucharist.
- For those who have hardened their hearts to those among whom they live.
- For those who must dominate others—have power, rule, fight.
- For those who prevent Christmas from being a time of rejoicing because they do not understand or do not wish to try.

For these Bethlehem has a message: Peace to all people of good will!

St. Francis understood that all things have their origin in Christ and that, in the fullness of time, they will be brought to completion in him. Francis loved the very humanity of Jesus and sought to imitate it perfectly in his own life that others might do likewise. People—and indeed, all creation—deserve to be loved on account of the Lord who became human in order that “nothing might be lost.”

This model, which has Jesus as its center, is at the heart of the Franciscan vision. Here the human acts of Jesus: his birth, his daily life as portrayed in the Gospel pages, his death as a rejected criminal, and his giving of himself in the Eucharist, all touch the ordinary lives of human beings. Francis was “at home” with Jesus and tried to extend this security to include the whole family of humankind.

Christmas is a time when these and related ideas are once again brought to the fore. Another year has almost passed, and we await the new year of grace. Ours is no easy task. But the events surrounding the Birth of the Messiah indicate how it is possible, in the midst of such hardship, for there to be a peace and a joy which human beings cannot give. This peace is in the sublime mystery of the Incarnation. The crib is a “sign of peace” to the nations and gives us our hope: Jesus Christ, Son of God—Emmanuel, God with us!

Endnotes

¹ See, in this regard, Father Leander Blumlein’s discussion of the poet and dramatist Francis, in *The Cord*, Oct. 1979.

² All citations from sources are from the *Omnibus*.



Integrating A Franciscan Spirituality of Work into the Leadership¹ of the Workplace

Richard C. Morton, SFO

[This paper was originally presented at Religion and Public Life: The Legacy of Msgr. John A. Ryan Conference, September 15, 1995, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota.]

Introduction

Tiny differences in input quickly become overwhelming differences in output—a phenomenon given the name “sensitive dependence on initial conditions.” In weather, for example, this translates into what is only half-jokingly known as the Butterfly Effect—the notion that a butterfly stirring the air today in Peking can transform storm systems next month in New York.²

I contend that St. Francis of Assisi was, in effect, a butterfly who spread his wings in the early 1200s and created currents of spirituality that continue to affect the world to this very day.

Background

St. Francis is probably the world’s best known, most recognized and respected saint. Yet it is difficult to imagine that a spirituality of work could evolve from a saint immortalized all too frequently as a concrete yard ornament with a bird perched on his shoulder and several wild animals gazing at him admiringly. This over-romanticized caricature of the person of Francis could lead one to believe that Francis wasn’t so much a man at all, but some lyric, almost mythic figure whose only love was animals. Quite

to the contrary, Francis was a man of multiple spiritual insights who left a legacy that continues to impact the world in a profound and meaningful way.

Perhaps the most familiar theme in Franciscan spirituality is the sensitivity to all created things and the kinship they share with each other. Francis came to the realization that everything is good and interconnected. He developed this thought to the point where he referred to nature’s constituent parts as brother and sister. His *Canticle of Brother Sun* is the best expression of this theme and is a synthesis of Francis’s own spiritual life.

The *Canticle* is his celebration of God’s goodness experienced concretely in a world that is seen and received as gift. It expresses Francis’s understanding and appreciation of the created world as reconciled space in fraternity. In it he expresses his vision in words: in brotherhood and sisterhood, in reconciliation, peace, and humility, creation reflects the poor and crucified Christ.³

Early in his conversion experience, while praying before an old icon of a crucifix in the abandoned and dilapidated Church of San Damiano, Francis experienced something most unusual. The painted image of the risen Christ crucified moved its lips and spoke. Calling him by name, Christ said: “Francis, go, repair my house, which, as you see, is falling completely to ruin” (2 Cel 10).⁴

Francis, interpreting the command very literally, began the arduous work of piling stone upon stone to repair the foundation and the walls of the building where he had been praying. It wasn’t until later that the full understanding and impact of the words spoken from the cross began to penetrate and enliven his heart. The words, as he later realized, referred to the universal Church “that Christ had *purchased with his own blood*” (2Cel 10). The real meaning of the message was, “Francis, go, rebuild my Church!”

The words spoken by Christ from the San Damiano cross are a universal call to action to rebuild and to reinvigorate the Church as a sign pointing towards the realization of the kingdom of God on earth. Now, after nearly eight centuries, this command to rebuild the Church continues to resound around the globe with its need as great as ever.

Today the concept of Church is understood more broadly than in the time of Francis. Vatican II viewed the Church as the “holy People of God shar[ing] . . . in Christ’s prophetic office.”⁵ They are “a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity.”⁶ As a prophetic people, the People of God are expected to lead the way, to become prophets and leaders in the rebuilding process.

I propose that it is through the leadership⁷ activities of the laity in the workplace, when done in collaboration with the sacred vocation of the

ministers of the Church, that the rebuilding of the Church, the People of God, will most effectively be carried out. However, this will not happen until the "stained glass window," which too often separates personal spirituality from its application in the workplace, is shattered.

Contained in a Franciscan spirituality of work are the seeds to begin the process of shattering the "stained glass window" and rebuilding the Church. The integration of a Franciscan spirituality of work into the workplace is most appropriate because of the Franciscan heritage. It has always been a basic tenet of Franciscans that the world is their cloister (SC 63). Therefore, there have never been any boundaries between the dimensions of the Franciscans' spirituality and any other aspect of their life. This concept permits and even demands that we carry our spirituality with us wherever we go.

St. Francis and Work

Quite probably Francis was not brought up with the best of work habits. His father was a prosperous cloth merchant who wanted nothing but the best for his favorite son and was very generous towards him. As a young man, Francis was more preoccupied with living the life of a troubadour and becoming a gallant knight than with working for his father. In fact, he never did apply himself seriously to his father's business. After his conversion and the gathering of some early followers, Francis became serious about work, but it was now the work of his heavenly Father.

Francis quickly learned that work was holy and provided a pathway to achieving sanctity. In the midst of the hard-working townsfolk, Francis and the first friars devoted themselves to the task of sanctifying daily labor and bringing it back to a right relationship with God. The true meaning and value of work had been destroyed by love of gain and personal ambition.⁸

There were practically no limits to where the friars worked or the type of work they did. Every field of activity was open to them, including intellectual work. The only prerequisites were that the work be directed toward the community rather than the individual, that the work be carried out faithfully and with a sense of dedication as the Rule required, and that the work not destroy the spirit of prayer and devotion to God (cf. EpAnt).

A Franciscan Spirituality of Work

A Franciscan spirituality of work evolves from three fundamental concepts of an underlying Franciscan spirituality: a focus on the humanity of

Christ, who is recognized especially in the poor; a sense of the mystery of God experienced in generous, creative love; and a distinctive familial understanding of the created world.⁹ Franciscans recognize the world as good and as gift from a loving Creator.

The foundation for an articulation of a Franciscan spirituality of work for the lay person is contained in the Rule and Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO).¹⁰ Article XVI of the Rule states: "Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community."¹¹ Article 21 of the Constitutions further develops the concept of work.

For Francis work was a gift and to work was a grace. Daily work is not only the means of livelihood, but the opportunity to serve God and neighbor as well as to develop one's own personality. In the conviction that work is a right and a duty and that every form of occupation deserves respect, the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to collaborate so that all persons may have the possibility to work and so that working conditions may always be more humane.¹²

While these words were written for the members of the Secular Franciscan Order, their application is universal in nature. They provide the basis for a spirituality of work that can be followed by any layperson living in the secular world seeking to integrate more effectively personal spirituality into the work place.

Beginning with the concept of human work as pure gift given to us by our creator, it is our unmerited opportunity to reflect the image of Jesus, who, by working as a humble carpenter and itinerant preacher, joined in the stream of work initiated by his Father at the beginning of time.

Work, as an unmerited gift, is effective for our growth and on-going conversion as followers of Jesus and is therefore a grace contributing to our sanctification. In his Rule Francis stated very emphatically: "Those brothers, to whom the Lord has given the grace of working, should do their work faithfully" (RegB 5:1).

The need for human work is imbedded in our very nature. Even before the fall of humanity as recorded in the poetry of the story of creation, "the Lord God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it" (Gen. 2:15). The invitation to cultivate and care for the garden, this work, was part of God's mystery of generous, creative love.

The garden is replete with a treasury of all that is necessary for the further creative development of our home on this planet. Everything has been provided—Brother Sun, Sisters Moon and the Stars, Brother Wind,

Sister Water, Brother Fire, and Sister Mother Earth. We, as sisters and brothers of creation, have been endowed with the capacity to use our skills and abilities to combine, modify, and adapt these resources through the gift of work. It is through our work that God provides us the opportunity to become co-creators.

The co-creative capacity with which we have been endowed is also evident in the arts, music, literature, the sciences, the various structures of society that regulate the relationships between human beings and other arenas of human consciousness. These all serve to enliven the human spirit and add meaning to our existence.

Our human work not only provides an opportunity for us to be co-creators but also to be "co-redeemers." Christ came to "make all things new" (Rev 21:5). During his ministry on earth, he accomplished the redemption of humankind. However, there continue to be areas that need to be made new, to be set free, and to be redeemed. We, as the Mystical Body of Christ, continue his presence in the world and his ministry of ongoing redemption.

Franciscan spirituality recognizes the face of the crucified Christ in the poor and the marginalized, the suffering, and the lonely. This realization provides the motivation to apply our creative energies and resources to relieve the distress and deprivation of the all too many people who are in need. As stated in the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*: "Indeed, we hold that through labor [work] offered to God, man is associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ."¹³

With this in mind, the Christian is challenged to be of service to others. We are to be of the same spirit as Christ, who Matthew defines as "the son of Man who has come, not to be served by others, but to serve" (Mt. 20:28). In the spirit of universal kinship, we serve others by our work. Work unites us with our brothers and sisters around the world. Our collaborative efforts to be of service to one another by our work provides the goods and services needed by the world community to sustain and enhance its existence as the creative expression of God.

The *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* also says: "[Jesus Christ] conferred an eminent dignity on labor when at Nazareth He worked with his own hands. From this there follows for every person the duty of working faithfully and also the right to work."¹⁴ Francis knew that all should work. Those that could work but chose not to, were, in effect, stealing from those that did work. The following story deals with the brother who never worked:

... and yet [he] ate more than several at table. When the saint [Francis] observed that he was a friend of the belly, one who shared

the fruits without sharing the labor, he once said to him: "Go your way, brother fly, for you want to eat the sweat of your brothers and to do nothing in God's work. You are like brother drone who wants to be first to eat the honey, though he does not do the work of the bees" (2 Cel 75).

If work is a duty, then to work is a right. There must be opportunities for work so the duty to work can be fulfilled. When there is a scarcity of work, we are to be concerned enough about the welfare of our brothers and sisters to do whatever is necessary to provide meaningful employment. For without work, it is not possible to confront a primary reality of living in the secular world, namely, that work is the means to provide the basic human necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, health care, and education, to name a few. There are other needs which, while not necessities in the strictest sense, are still desirable and humanizing.

In providing for our own livelihood, however, consideration must be given to the needs of the common good. Work is not meant to be a means by which we maximize our wealth and possessions at the expense of others. It is an opportunity to practice the virtue of moderation out of a concern for the poor in whose face we find Christ.

Integral to providing a means of livelihood is the concept of a just remuneration for the work accomplished. The parallel concern is for the remuneration to be proportionate to the amount of work effort. Both are a matter of justice.

There is another sense to the meaning of the word livelihood and that is the sense of liveliness—to be more fully alive, to be more fully human. From this alternate meaning, we can recognize that livelihood is not only measured in terms of possessions and dollars. It is also measured in terms of personal identity, self esteem, self worth, and personal growth. These qualities are of critical importance to the overall well-being of the individual. Work should contribute to whatever makes a person more human and not be demeaning.

In the distinctive familial understanding of the world of creation, it is an injustice to our sisters and brothers to show disrespect to an individual because of the type of work she/he does. This is especially true when disrespect is shown to the poor and the marginalized of our society who, too often, have the least desirable of jobs. James R. Jennings, Associate Director, Campaign for Human Development, comments on Pope John Paul II's encyclical on work, *Laborem Exercens*, as follows:

The ancient world put people into classes according to their work. Manual work, considered unworthy of free men, was given to

slaves. Christians changed all of this by taking the Gospel as their point of departure. The one who, while being God, became like everyone else in all things, did manual work at a carpenter's bench. This is the eloquent expression of the "Gospel of work": the value of work is not measured by the kind of work, but by the fact that the one who does it is a person.¹⁵

Out of respect for the person of Christ reflected in all workers, our places of work should be places of safety, comfort, and convenience appropriate to the type of work being done. It is the responsibility of all to work together in an effort to obtain the best possible working conditions.

In summary, Francis esteemed work as a gift from a benevolent and loving creator. The centerpiece of a Franciscan spirituality of work is the humanity of Christ as reflected in the worker. In essence, workers collaborate with their co-worker and brother, Jesus Christ, in continuing the creative-redemptive process.

Some Implications from a Franciscan Spirituality of Work

A Franciscan spirituality of work is not meant to be some ethereal, pious statement to be bound in a document and set on a library shelf. It is an invitation and a source of spiritual motivation to help bring about the fulfillment of the Christian disciple's prayer: "Thy kingdom come . . . on earth as it is in heaven." With the vast majority of the laity involved in some type of human work, it can be postulated that the arena of work should be the primary target and focus for the action of "kingdom building."

[Pope John Paul II's] reflections [on work] are not a repeat of what the church has said in the past. Rather, they highlight, more than in the past, the fact that work is probably the essential key to the social question. If the solution to the social questions is to make life more human, then, the key—human work—is fundamental and decisive.¹⁶

If work is such an essential, fundamental, and decisive element in making life more human, the question naturally arises as to why the importance of the place of work in the process of Kingdom building has been recognized only recently. The answer is that

a theology [for work] did not emerge chiefly because of the widespread attitude, derived largely from the monastic tradition, that life in the world and "worldly" work inhibited and did not contribute to the "spiritual life" of the Christian.¹⁷

In the medieval era, the world was thought to be evil in nature and the natural world a place from which to escape.¹⁸ However, Francis managed to overcome the temptation to leave the world for the security of monastery walls (LM 12:1). A dark view of the world was in direct contrast to Francis's view of the goodness of creation and the spiritual value of work in the lives of the people of the day.

Gaudium et Spes, continues to lament the division between faith and work in our daily lives and comments on its consequences as follows:

The split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives is to be counted among the more serious errors of our age. . . Let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one hand, and religious life on the other. The Christian who neglects his temporal duties, neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, which jeopardizes his eternal salvation.¹⁹

Justification for the continued separation between personal sanctity and work, as has existed historically, is now seriously called into question.

Worship, sacraments, and devotions are important for preparation and reflection, but the mandate of Christianity is the work of building the kingdom.²⁰

Let the Christian who listens to the living word of God, uniting work with prayer, know the place work has not only in earthly progress but also in the development of the kingdom of God, to which we are all called through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the word of the gospel.²¹

It is now time for the barrier separating spiritual life from work, the "stained glass window," to be completely shattered if the building of the kingdom is to continue more effectively.

I suggest that we can begin the process of bringing the values of our faith into the workplace by first evangelizing ourselves and then, as individuals and groups of individuals, we return to the excitement of our founding story as a Christian people. We must believe that, in this present day and age, it is possible to lead a life based on the gospel and that it can be done as effectively now as in the days of early apostolic Christianity. When re-energized with this conviction, we will be ready to address the issues of contemporary society at their very roots. To do this, we must be prepared to take the risk of participating in the mystery of God's plan as did the earliest disciples. We need to enter willingly into the paschal mystery so that

new life can emerge. Some would call this entire process "refounding,"²² a more profound concept than rebuilding.

In imitation of the early Christians who gathered in small communities, we will want to seek out other like-minded persons who can support and accompany us on our journey. The possibilities exist for forming new communities or for joining existing small Christian communities. When networked, these communities become an effective base for support and action in any rebuilding or refounding endeavor.

Personal Reflections

I feel it appropriate to share with you some of the personal experiences of my life as a Secular Franciscan who has attempted to integrate a Franciscan spirituality of work into his work environment.

Presently retired, I was formerly an electrical engineer by profession and spent my entire career with one large, multi-national corporation. During the last fifteen years of my career, I served as an engineering manager in middle management. Although my position was not at a level to sway corporate policy to any significant extent, there were always opportunities to affect decisions and activities within my area of influence and responsibility. Each of us has a circle of influence at any particular time. This is the area in our life where our actions, beliefs, and credibility have the most influence and to which the Lord calls us to stewardship. From the Franciscan perspective, this is the concrete reality where we can go "from gospel to life and life to the gospel."²³

While employed, I always looked on my tenure with the company as that of one who was self-employed. As a manager, I behaved as though I owned the business of the group I managed. This gave me a mind-set of independence. I told those working with me that we could do anything we needed to do to be successful as long as it was moral, ethical, and legal. Within these parameters, we were able to assemble a world-class organization while finding opportunities to support policies and programs reflecting the gospel way of life. I had no qualms about seeking out and hiring persons of ethnic or racial minority groups or who had some type of disability. Some of the best employees I ever hired were in these categories.

I found that many corporate policies were based on the best of Christian principles. As a Christian-Franciscan manager, I felt it was my duty to sensitize my co-workers to the value of these principles. Several years ago a program to promote the appreciation of diverse cultures and a diverse workforce made its way through the organization. I thought the initiative was excellent and volunteered to become one of the primary instructors

for the program. Two other programs which I was able to engage in were the promotion of high ethical standards in all phases of the business and the exercise of proper stewardship through recycling efforts. There were also opportunities to encourage the support of worthwhile charitable fund drives such as United Way and the Food Share program. Three or four times our group raised the most money even though we were one of the smaller groups in the building.

Perhaps the greatest challenge I faced as a manager was honoring and enforcing the union contract. As far as I was concerned, the union contract with all of its arbitration decisions was morally and legally binding. Most of my peer managers did not hold similar feelings. There were many times when it was to our department's disadvantage to abide by all the agreements. Nevertheless, nearly every grievance served on our department was resolved without the need to proceed to the next step of an arbitration hearing. In fact, very few disputes ended up in arbitration. My goal was to set an example for the more strident, anti-union managers.

Fortunately, there was never a situation in my career when I was expected to violate any of my own personal standards or values. However, this does not mean that I agreed with every company policy statement or decision. There were times and circumstances where the practice of benign neglect of some directives was appropriate and necessary if I was to conduct my work life according to gospel values.

Conclusion

I have attempted to summarize my understanding of the Franciscan vision of the spirituality of work and its application to leadership in the workplace. I have provided a few examples from my own life where my work was touched by Franciscan influence. The spirituality of Francis as passed down through the centuries contains the wisdom and the power to help us transform by God's grace our views of life, work, and vocation from isolated categories of activity into integrated aspects of a truly Christian life. The realization of a loving, creating Father gifting each of us with brother and sister creatures as helpers and signposts to the suffering and risen Christ can help us redeem and enliven the world around us. But we must embrace Francis's message and put it into practice. As Francis admonished his followers in regard to working for the kingdom of God: "My brothers, we must begin to serve our Lord and God. Until now we have done very little" (LM 14:1).

¹ For the purposes of this paper, I intend the word "leadership" to be used in the broadest application of the term. By virtue of their baptism, all Christians are called to be leaders in the sense that they are to set a good example for others to follow. Very often in many organizations, it isn't necessarily the designated leader (supervisor, manager, etc.) who is the most effective in doing this. For example, it could be a worker on the production line, a secretary, an administrator, or a clerk.

² James Gleick, *Chaos: making a new science*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1987) 8.

³ Michael Blastic, OFM Conv., "Franciscan Spirituality," *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993) 411.

⁴ References to the writings and early sources are from St. Francis of Assisi, *Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).

⁵ *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 12, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966) 29.

⁶ LG, 12.

⁷ LG, 1.

⁸ A. Gemelli, *The Franciscan Message to the World* (London, 1934), 44.

⁹ Zachary Hayes, OFM, "Christ, Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity," *The Cord*, 46.1 (Jan./Feb., 1996).

¹⁰ Lay people, deacons, and diocesan priests are members of this portion of the Franciscan family.

¹¹ *Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*, (National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order, Cincinnati) p. 21.

¹² *Constitutions*, (National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order, Cincinnati) p. 7.

¹³ *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 67 (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965) 71.

¹⁴ *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 67.

¹⁵ "An Outline of On Human Work, II, 6," James R. Jennings, Associate Director, Campaign for Human Development.

¹⁶ Jennings.

¹⁷ William E. May, "Work, Theology of," *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994) 995.

¹⁸ Friedrich Herr, *The Medieval World*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (New York: The New American Library, Inc. 1962) 62.

¹⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, 43.

²⁰ William L. Droel and Gregory F. Augustine Pierce, *Confident & Competent*, (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1991) 42-43.

²¹ Droel and Pierce, 41.

²² Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM, *Refounding the Church: dissent for leadership* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993) and *Out of Chaos: refounding religious congregations* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988).

²³ *Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*, p. 9.



The night is far spent the day draws nigh

Discovering Brother Fire

Maria Zeimen, OSF

[This is the president's address to the thirty-first annual conference of the Franciscan Federation, meeting in Atlanta, GA, August 15, 1996.]

For thirty-one years the sisters and brothers of the Third Order Regular of the United States have been gathering each year. We gather much as Francis and Clare and a few friars and sisters gathered in that wooded area near Assisi eight hundred years ago.

If you recall, after Clare became a Poor Lady of San Damiano, Francis began to neglect going to see her. Even though Francis and Clare had this profound love for one another, Francis had stopped going to visit Clare and her sisters. Clare would send messages by way of the other friars, inviting, pleading with, and almost begging Francis to come see them.

And so it happened on an occasion that Francis sent word to Clare inviting her to a picnic in the woods. They gathered—Francis, Clare, a few friars, and a few Poor Ladies—and began praising God, proclaiming their love for God and forgetting about their bread and water picnic.

In the meantime, the Assisians looked down and thought the woods were on fire. Like most of us, the Assisians were attracted to fires. They came rushing down, only to find the woods were aglow with the fiery love of the early Franciscans.

Do you believe this story? I find it very believable.

First, I find it believable that Francis neglected his relationship with Clare. Have we not done the same until recently? Have we Franciscans not ignored our sister Clare until the last ten or fifteen years? Have we not neglected our relationships with one another—the First Order with the Second Order; the Second Order with the Third and vice versa?

Has not the Franciscan Federation, following in the footsteps of Clare, sent messages to the First and Second Orders, as well as the Secular Franciscans, inviting us to gather as a family?

And when we do gather are we not filled with an energy and desire comparable to a fire? Those of us who gathered in Anaheim last year for the first joint conference with the friars, were not our hearts burning with a desire to reclaim and retrieve our Franciscan tradition, our theology, our Christology?

Francis and Clare had discovered the heart of the matter. Francis and Clare were heart people. They were on fire with love for God, for one another, for all of creation. They were in love with life. They had a passion for life.

I believe that each of us is born with a passion for life. I believe the passion for life, the life force within each of us is strong and ready to burst into flames at any moment. Gandhi called this passion for life "soul force" or "truth force." He went so far as to say that truth force alone exists.

What happens if we don't discover, release, and direct this passion for life? What happens if the passion is merely smoldering within us? What happens if the passion is suppressed, held down?

Eventually it will erupt; it will become violence. The word "violence" comes from a root word meaning life force. Life force cannot be contained or suppressed. Suppressed life force that erupts might look like a Los Angeles riot. Life force used creatively but misdirected might look like an Adolf Hitler.

What does life force, truly tapped into, released, and God-directed, look like? It looks like a Francis and a Clare. It looks like a Gandhi or a Martin Luther King, Jr. It could look like any gathering of Franciscans.

And so, as Francis and Clare gathered with their brothers and sisters in that wooded area near Assisi, we gather in Atlanta, a city that memorializes Martin Luther King, Jr. We gather to discover how to express our passion for life in love and in truth, not in violence. We gather in order to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. We gather to make visible the reign of God, to make visible Christ Incarnate, to make visible the fire of love.

If you commit yourselves to live by this soul force, to live by love and truth, and to give no support to evil, injustice, hatred, and greed, what can I promise you? Being only a novice of active nonviolence, I am not in a position to promise you very much.

But this is what those who have lived lives of nonviolence promise:

- A spirituality of nonviolence will help you grasp fully the depths of God's love (Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB).
- Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend (Martin Luther King, Jr.).

- If you follow your heart, you will have new strength, new clarity, and new vision that you never imagined (Brian Wilson).
- . . . as heat conserved is transmitted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmitted into a power which can move the world (Gandhi).
- Love is strong as death; its flames are a blazing fire. Many waters cannot quench love (Song of Songs).

Teilhard de Chardin told us that when we humans truly discover the power of love, we shall have discovered fire for the second time. Who today should be more anxious to discover Brother Fire for a second time than we Franciscans?

We are called to do it! We can do it! We must do it!



FRANCISCAN HIGHER EDUCATION— NO APOLOGY NEEDED

Francis Berna, OFM

A walking tour of Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, provides a survey of the great Masters of Franciscan Education. Campus buildings bear the names of Bonaventure, Scotus, Bacon, and other giants of the tradition. Founded by the Sisters of St. Francis, the charter of 1937 was given to St. Clare's College. Along with the admission of laywomen some nine years later, came a change in name to Cardinal Stritch College. While the noted archbishop had been a great supporter of the Sisters, and one can appreciate the desire of the Sisters to rename the college in his memory, the change perhaps reflects the ever present challenge to the Franciscan tradition of education. Too often in history Franciscan women and men have felt a need to apologize for their presence in education, most particularly higher education. Feeling a bit apologetic, Franciscans have often allowed their own contribution to higher education to get lost in the larger movements of history.

The call of Vatican II for religious to "return to the sources" for the renewal of their communities raised a significant challenge to Franciscan presence in higher education. The re-examination of the life of Francis challenged communities to examine their commitment and presence to the poor. Education, attracting and furthering the middle class, stood at a distance from the poor whose pressing needs came to the forefront of the American conscience at the same time as the Council. Jacopone da Todi's thirteenth-century lament in seeing "Paris demolish Assisi" was recast from a tension within the Order to a tension between the Order and the wider culture.¹ In a spirit of authentic renewal many Franciscan men and women left all levels of education and engaged themselves in ministries in more direct service to the poor. Often communities shifted the incorporation of new mem-

bers from education to formation. Declining membership, shifts away from corporate ministry to personal apostolate, and increased requirements for accreditation led many communities to close small colleges or entrust ownership to private boards. The cessation of the Franciscan Educational Conference perhaps best reflects the state of Franciscan commitment to higher education in that period.

However, as noted with Jacopone's observation, the tension is not new. The tension goes back to Francis himself. A theologian before joining the Order, Anthony received permission from Francis to instruct the friars in theology. Anthony's new brothers sought his instruction and Francis responded, "It pleases me that you teach sacred theology to the brothers as long as—in the words of the Rule—you 'do not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion' with study of this kind" (EpAnt).² For the most part, education within the Order followed Francis's direction well into the thirteenth century. The friars received a theological education for purposes of preaching. Men coming to the Order, at least those desiring ordination, had their foundation in rhetoric and grammar. Only theological education was given in the context of the Order. Secular masters who joined the community located their studies in the framework of theological conviction. Perhaps the place of other human sciences in the Franciscan tradition has its finest expression in Bonaventure's *De reductione artium ad theologiam*.³ Learning itself was in service to knowledge of God and preaching. However, learning inevitably meant books, houses of study, and status in the university. Jacopone saw Paris destroying the poverty of Assisi.

Confronted by this challenge from within, the friars of Bonaventure's day were also confronted by the external challenge of the Paris masters who refused chairs in theology to Bonaventure and the Dominican Thomas Aquinas. William of St. Amour waged war against these Mendicants, a war that the new Orders won. Bonaventure's talent, however, quickly took him from the university to serve the Order as Minister General. Then followed his service to the Church as cardinal seeking to unify East and West at the Council of Lyons, where he died. His ministries allowed him to support the presence of friars at Paris, and he delivered several series of lectures; but in the course of history Franciscan thought was soon overshadowed by the work of Thomas and his disciples.

John Duns Scotus held a chair of theology at Paris early in the fourteenth century. While the body of his thought is extensive and profound, the popular imagination remembers him, if at all, for his teaching on the Immaculate Conception. That this doctrine would not be universally accepted and celebrated by the Church until centuries after the "Subtle Doctor's" death suggests the impact of his thought in theological circles.

The English friars of this period can boast of Bacon and Ockham. What is striking is that, while these names may be quite familiar to the contemporary mind, the identity of these men as Franciscans is often forgotten. The system of education was that of the local friary school in close proximity to the established university with students receiving their degree from the university or as independent schools granting a teaching license recognized within the Order.

Expansion of the education to include a more general and practical curriculum came through the ministry of Third Order communities of men and women. In the late fourteenth century, Angelina of Marsciano established a community and school for young women at Foligno. The fifteenth century had communities of brothers devoted to educating local youth. The Third Order communities extended education beyond clerical circles and brought the Franciscan influence to what came to be known as elementary and secondary education.

The wider commitment to education, including higher education, marks the growth of the Franciscan tradition of education in the United States. The earliest Franciscan colleges are those established by friars primarily for the education of their own students—St. Francis College, Loretto, Pennsylvania (1850), St. Bonaventure College (later University, 1858), and Quincy College (later University, 1860). All had as their initial purpose the education of men in philosophy to prepare for theological studies and ordination. The curriculum closely followed the program of studies known to the immigrant friars from Europe, who comprised the faculties. While occasional lectures might be given on Franciscan Masters, most of the curriculum followed the Jesuit Ratio, and especially on the theological level, promoted the thought of the great Dominican, Thomas. The colleges established by the friars were reflective of the Medieval friary schools—education by and for their own members.

A notable exception to the above pattern was St. Francis College in Brooklyn (1859). At the invitation of the bishop the college was founded by the Franciscan Brothers for the education of laymen as well as their own members. The non-clerical status of the community undoubtedly influenced the general philosophy of education.

Before long St. Francis College in Loretto expanded its curriculum and became one of the first co-educational Catholic colleges in the nation. Besides the Third Order affiliation of the friars in Brooklyn and Loretto, the pattern of development of their schools parallels the development of the women's colleges. The ministries of Franciscan women in the United States, like most other women religious, were primarily elementary and secondary education, nursing and health care, and in some instances social work.

Thus, the curriculum of the institutions of higher education established by these communities focused more on professional preparation and less on the classical arts curriculum. Nineteenth-century foundations include Silver Lake College, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, (1885) and St. Francis College, Fort Wayne, Indiana (1890). These schools, like many of their sister schools of the early and mid-twentieth century, began as normal schools preparing Sisters to teach. Education in nursing took place in hospitals run by the religious communities. Development from two to four year colleges came with changes in educational requirements and the opening of colleges to laywomen. The curriculum of the women's colleges continued to emphasize professional preparation and expanded to meet the developing missions of congregations and the diverse needs of laywomen. [One might also suggest that the men's colleges were also "professional preparation" for clerical ministry. However, they seem to have retained more of the classical education in the arts while developing professional programs.] The survival and growth of many of these two and four year colleges testifies to their adaptability to the educational goals of the population.

In the United States the Franciscan Educational Conference attempted to keep a focus on what was Catholic, and even what was truly Franciscan, in higher education. The ending of the conference parallels the ending of speculation about "Catholic approaches to science, psychology, history, sociology, and so forth" in a Franciscan context. Reflecting the growing lack of confidence in the popular imagination of the 1960s and optimistic that colleges and universities might remain Catholic without explicit identification, Catholic colleges and universities began to explore the question of their identity. In many instances this exploration was preceded by examination of the Franciscan, Dominican, or Jesuit character of the institution. [One might speculate about the ordering of the questions. In some instances the religious identity seems to have been an attempt to be something identifiable without being "too Catholic."] Mission statements emerged as institutions attempted both to capture and to express their identity.

A review of the mission statements of Franciscan-sponsored colleges and universities demonstrates that there is both a common understanding and a wide interpretation of the Franciscan mission.⁴ Some of the statements are quite extensive while others consist of a single paragraph. Of the twenty-three colleges and universities participating in a 1993 conference on Franciscan Higher Education, twenty-one claimed their Franciscan identity and twenty claimed a Catholic identity for their mission. Most of the schools emphasized the value of a liberal arts education combined with career preparation and service towards others as dimensions of the educa-

tion. Phrases like "respect for individuals" and "seeking to develop the personal, intellectual, spiritual, and social dimension of the person" frequently appear alongside "community." The overall similarity of terms in extensive and brief statements of mission reflects well-published inquiry on the identity of Franciscan education as well as the kind of discussion which takes place in college and university conversations on values.

However, one must wonder whether or not we have actually arrived at a sound understanding of Franciscan education. Or, do we continue to apologize, albeit with a silent apology? Were one to parallel the Mission Statements of Franciscan colleges and universities with those of Dominican and Jesuit institutions, would there be much difference? One would find the terms "Catholic, community and service." Undoubtedly one would find a commitment to the liberal arts tradition and some references to service and educating the whole person. Smaller schools would emphasize a caring environment and large schools the abundance of opportunity. Probably one could even find at least some vague references to a love and respect for creation. Though obviously the term "Catholic" would be missing, one might project some discoveries of paralleling Franciscan schools to other private colleges.

While a Visiting Professor at St. Bonaventure University in 1988, Ewert Cousins observed how the university had done an excellent job in articulating Franciscan values with regard to student development and fostering a sense of community. However, he noted one glaring lacuna. Little attention was being given to the Franciscan intellectual tradition. The philosophy and theology departments seldom made reference to the Franciscan masters. Despite the presence of the Franciscan Institute on the graduate level, only two elective courses provided a survey of the tradition on the undergraduate level. The state of the question at St. Bonaventure in 1988 is hardly unique to that institution. It would seem that the state of the question is the same as the overshadowing of the tradition in the Middle Ages as well as the early higher education offered in the United States. While a fine education has been and is being provided, it is not all that different from the Jesuit Ratio, general career preparation, or the general theological education of European Catholic seminaries.

It would seem that if Franciscan education is to be a meaningful term academically, something of the Franciscan intellectual tradition must permeate the experience. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, the Soul's Journey into God, provides an excellent means to illustrate this point.⁵ The text offers a unique compilation of some fundamental convictions at the heart of the Franciscan tradition.

The work itself is highly intellectual. One might reasonably wonder why

it is identified as one of the Seraphic Doctor's "spiritual works." The latter identification arises out of its goal—to enable the reader to encounter the depths of the divine Mystery. One finds here the positive expression of Francis's admonition to Anthony that study "should not extinguish the spirit of prayer." In fact, Franciscan education ought to lead to and enhance prayer.

This point becomes clear when one notes Bonaventure's starting point—the created world. Obviously he is building upon Francis's own experience of encountering God in the splendor of creation. Bonaventure explains that this encounter comes not only out of a simple fascination with creation or a moment of poetic insight. The exploration of which Bonaventure writes is the exploration of the human sciences—biology, history, mathematics, and logic.⁶ The hard work of probing the scientific character of reality leads one to at least a shadowy understanding of the nature of God. Bonaventure makes a claim for the sacred character of secular speculation.

Following upon his exploration of the created world Bonaventure calls the reader to consider the human person. Here, he contends, one begins to grasp an even clearer vision of the nature of God. As a spiritual work Bonaventure writes with the hope that the reader may be taken into the experience of which he writes by means of working through the text. The medium and the message are one. The reader must wrestle with the language of Bonaventure's epistemology, for this is the means by which one arrives at a better grasp of the Trinity.

The chapters which explore the mystery of God's being and goodness highlight an understanding which ought to permeate the Franciscan educational experience. On the point of God's being and God's goodness Bonaventure intentionally differs from the Dominican Thomas. The Angelic Doctor claims that Being is the highest, most notable name for God. The most distinctive character of God is that God is. While Bonaventure acknowledges the significance of God as Being, he claims Goodness as God's most notable name. It is not enough that God is. What is particularly wonderful is that God is good! When one identifies Bonaventure's claim, one can almost hear Francis's praise of God, "You are good, all good, the highest good" (*Laud Dei* 3).

The final stage of the journey marked out by Bonaventure offers a further epistemological conviction as well as a conviction of the absolute nature of reality. To enter fully into the mystery of the divine presence one must turn toward Christ crucified. To gaze upon Christ, Bonaventure writes, one must set aside all the speculations and insights generated in the other stages of the journey. While true and significant, this knowledge is but a means to a more profound knowledge gained when one enters the dark-

ness which is true light. In the final analysis mystical contemplation discloses the fullness of truth. While one gains good insight and grasps faint glimpses of the truth on the various moments of the journey, there is the final moment when truth surrounds and envelops the seeker.

Bonaventure identifies the ultimate truth as the mystery of Christ crucified. That is the image which must dominate the Franciscan educational experience. It is an image which takes seriously tragedy, human suffering, and death. It is an image which takes seriously poverty and abandonment. It is also an image which profoundly speaks of the nearness of God to human life—the image of God fully incarnate in every dimension of human existence. The Franciscan tradition makes clear that one can claim the existence of absolute truth. Furthermore, the Franciscan tradition makes clear that not only can this truth be known to us, it graciously dawns upon us and envelops us in love. While much of contemporary speculation would challenge this perception, the careful scholarship of Bonaventure—and the scholarly work of the numerous Franciscan women and men who develop this insight—makes clear that this conviction needs no apology.

While much good is being done in higher education in the Franciscan tradition, the next stage of the journey demands that Franciscans retrieve and reclaim the very best of the intellectual tradition which is their heritage. In addition to the sources of Francis and Clare, Franciscans must return to their intellectual sources as well.

Endnotes

¹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, trans. Serge and Elizabeth Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) 123. Quoted by Dominic Monti, OFM, "Franciscan Education: A 750-Year Tradition," *Spirit and Life: A Journal of Contemporary Franciscanism*, Vol. 2 (NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1992) 60.

² *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap. and Ignatius Brady, OFM (NY: Paulist Press, 1982) 79.

³ *De reductione artium ad theologiam*. A commentary with introduction and translation by Sr. Emma Therese Healy (NY: St. Bonaventure University, 1955).

⁴ "Mission Statements Franciscan Sponsored Colleges and Universities" prepared for Franciscan Identity and Higher Education, a conference sponsored by Neumann College, the Franciscan Federation, T.O.R., USA and the Franciscan Institute, March 27-28, 1993.

⁵ Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

⁶ Bonaventure further explores this theme in a later work, the *Collationes in Hexaemeron*.

Look at . . . the poverty of Him Who was placed in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. O marvelous humility, O astonishing poverty! The King of the Angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, is laid in a manger! (4 LAG 19-21.)

"A HOLY NEWNESS": THE FRANCISCAN MOVEMENT AS LEAVEN FOR RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH¹

Jane Russell, OSF

Like a surfer careening down the slope of a curling wave, I entered religious life just as the "wave" of Pope John's renewal started to break over the Church. I have been living and (in various ways) studying this phenomenon ever since.² A question that particularly intrigues me as a Franciscan woman is whether the Franciscan vision, by its very nature, is meant to transform and renew the Church.

I have not done the empirical study to determine whether or not Franciscans have been a force for renewal in contemporary Catholicism more than other groups (though I will introduce some nuggets of example in the paper.) The prime issue is one of principle: is there anything in the Franciscan heritage which *ought to be* of particular value in renewing the Church? Indeed, is the Franciscan vision meant for the whole Church, or "just for celibate specialists" (as a Mennonite friend phrased the question)?

To talk about renewal at all, we need some working definition. I favor the simple one suggested by Vatican II's opening "Message to Humanity," in which the world's bishops pledged "to inquire how we ought to renew ourselves so that we may be found increasingly faithful to the gospel of Christ." They desired such renewal not only for themselves, but for the whole Catholic people, "so that there may radiate before all men the lovable features of Jesus Christ."³ In this reading, renewal means increasing faithfulness to the Gospel, with beliefs and behavior more evidently in line with those of Jesus.

This definition invites the crucial question: does the Franciscan movement intrinsically call the whole Church to greater faithfulness to the Gospel? Or is it content with the idea of a "two-tiered" Church, in which some

are called to follow Christ closely through the precepts and counsels of the Gospel while others following a looser standard are still counted adequate Christians? My outlook on renewal within Catholicism is thus influenced by the question from radical Protestantism: are not all Christians bound to obey the whole Gospel?⁴

Thomas of Celano hints of the two-tiered model of Church when he says that Francis "was not content with observing the common precepts but overflowing with . . . charity, . . . set out on the way of perfection" (1Cel 90).⁵ Celano contrasts "the more excellent way" with "the lower and easier way" of being a Christian. Although Celano offered Francis as source of "guidance" for both paths, do Franciscans really endorse the idea of "more excellent" versus "lower" paths in the Christian life? As we pursue an "evangelical conversion of life" through the Third Order Regular (TOR Rule, #2), what are we saying about the evangelical obligations of our brothers and sisters in the wider Church?

I will explore this question in two parts: first, what did Francis himself intend and accomplish in terms of renewing the Church at large? Secondly, (in a preliminary way) can we gather any clues about the church-renewing intentions (or lack thereof) of contemporary Franciscans?

1. Francis and Renewal of the Church

If there was ever a preacher and religious founder who had an impact on renewal of Christian life and fervor, it was Francis of Assisi. Such renewal was a major theme in Francis's life and work. It started with the "mission call" from the crucifix in San Damiano: "Francis, go, repair my house, which, as you see, is falling completely to ruin" (2Cel 10). Although Francis at first interpreted that literally, with a brick-and-mortar repair job on several crumbling churches, he came to understand the larger call—to address rather the moral ruin of "the church that Christ had purchased with his own blood" (2Cel 11).

Why was renewal needed among the followers of Jesus Christ? Celano, in the first paragraph of his first *Life of Francis*, refers to the evil customs of child-rearing among "those who are considered Christians in name"—apparently the majority of Christians in Assisi and "everywhere." Celano portrays allegedly Christian parents as passing on such wicked habits to their children that, in adolescence,

tossed about amid every kind of debauchery, they give themselves over to shameful practices. . . . For once they become the slaves of sin by a voluntary servitude, they give over all their members to be instruments of wickedness; and showing forth in themselves

nothing of the Christian religion either in their lives or in their conduct, they take refuge under the mere name of Christianity.

Francis dismisses his own early life with the phrase "while I was in sin. . ." (Test 1).⁶ Today's culture would call Francis's early years a pursuit of "the good life," with some soldiering thrown in as the times demanded. For Francis, after conversion by God's mercy, those years appear starkly as a life of sin. Thus Francis supports the credibility of Celano's picture of a Church "grown calloused," peopled by multitudes "Christian in name" only.

Into such a "calloused" Christendom came the converted Francis, like a new light in the general darkness. As Celano summarizes :

For when the teachings of the Gospel, . . . taken generally, had everywhere failed to be put into practice, this man was sent by God to bear *witness to the truth* throughout the whole world in accordance with the example of the Apostles. . . . For in this last time this new evangelist . . . diffused the waters of the Gospel over the whole world by his tender watering, and preached by his deeds the way of the Son of God and the doctrine of truth. Accordingly, in him and through him there arose throughout the world an unlooked for happiness and a holy newness, and a shoot of the ancient religion suddenly brought a great renewal to those who had grown calloused and to the very old. A new spirit was born in the hearts of the elect . . . when the servant . . . of Christ, like one of the lights of the heavens, shone brilliantly with a new rite and with new signs (1Cel 89).

Passages such as this suggest that Francis brought renewal to a wide strata of the Church, not just to those (many as they were) who entered his Orders.

The message of the converted Francis to the people echoes the Synoptics' account of the early preaching of Jesus and of the apostles after the resurrection.⁷ When the number of friars reached eight, Francis sent them out to proclaim the basic Gospel: "Go, my brothers, two by two into the various parts of the world, announcing to men peace and repentance unto the forgiveness of sins" (1Cel 29). The brothers' preaching had results: "There was . . . great wonder among the people of the world over all these things and the example of humility led them to amend their way of life and to do penance for their sins" (1Cel 31).

After this, Celano reports that

many of the people . . . began to come to St. Francis, wanting to carry on the battle constantly under his discipline and under his leadership. . . . To all he gave a norm of life, and he showed in truth

the way of salvation in every walk of life (1Cel 37).

This could be a description of Francis's instructions for the renewal of the life of Catholics in general; in fact it seems to be a first reference to those who will be called "the Order of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance." Apparently Francis moved into and galvanized a pre-existing "penitential movement" which had developed out of the ancient disciplines of canonical penance. The penitents

were lay people, from different levels of society, who shared a desire to live according to the Gospel as they understood it: giving up property, dedicating themselves to prayer and fasting, working for their sustenance, sometimes preaching.⁸

We have a record of Francis's message to the Church at large—specifically, to those who want to live the "life of penance"—in his "Letter to the Faithful." Both extant versions show Francis's strong views about the necessity for *all who would be saved* to

love the Lord with their whole heart, . . . love their neighbors as themselves and hate their bodies with their vices and sins,⁹ . . . receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of repentance (1EpFid 1:1-3).

People "who do these things" will be "happy and blessed," for they will have "the Spirit of the Lord . . . rest upon them" and will be "children of the heavenly Father" and "spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1EpFid 1: 5-7).

Francis contrasts those who do not do these things:

All those men and women who are not [living] in penance, and do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who practice vice and sin and follow wicked concupiscence, . . . who do not observe what they have promised to the Lord . . . are held fast by the devil [and will] lose [their] souls (1EpFid 2:1-10).

An exhortation near the end of the Earlier Rule similarly enjoins "all those who wish to serve and love God within the holy, catholic, and apostolic Church"—enumerated in a list of groupings—to "persevere in the one true faith and in penance, for otherwise no *one* will be saved" (RegNB 23:7, emphasis added).

These exhortations allow for no state of mediocre but acceptable Christianity "in between" the life of penance and the life of wickedness. In both versions of his Letter to the Faithful, Francis describes the life of "wicked

concupiscence" and complacency literally as a hell-bent path. One either lives the life of penance, i.e. the life of obedience to "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and the words of the Holy Spirit" (2 EpFid 3), or one will be lost. Francis intended his preaching and example as an eye-opener for these "blind ones" to call them back into the saving way of penance.

What did this "life of penance" look like in practice? The Letters to the Faithful give few behavioral specifics: love God and neighbor, turn away from sin, receive the Eucharist, and "produce worthy fruits," which are not detailed. The later version specifies more on receiving the sacraments of Eucharist and reconciliation from official ministers—in clear contrast to the practices of Cathari and Waldensians.

We learn more specific attitudes and behaviors of the Franciscan renewal from other sources. A first trait to note is how Francis took direction from literal commands of the Gospels, as shown in several examples: "To him who asks of thee, give; and from him who would borrow of thee, do not turn away" (Matt. 5:42; see 1Cel 17). "Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts . . . As you enter a house, wish it peace" (Matt. 10:9; see 1Cel 22). When Bernard of Quintavalle wanted to associate himself with Francis, "he hastened . . . to sell all his goods and gave the money to the poor," thereby carrying out "the counsel of the holy Gospel: 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, . . . and come, follow me'" (Matt. 19:21; 1Cel 24).

These examples show Francis and his followers obeying the Gospel commands / invitations in a simple spirit of unrationalized obedience. What the Gospel calls for, Francis and followers do—specifically, they go forth in poverty in imitation of Christ for the sake of the dawning Kingdom of God. "The highest poverty," self-emptying to be like Christ who emptied himself for us, becomes the epitome of Francis's (and Clare's) system of values.

Other characteristics of the Franciscan preaching and communities carry out specific themes from the Gospels. We note particularly the themes of peace and nonpossessiveness; of servant leadership; and of repentance.

Peace, nonviolence, nonpossessiveness. One startling section in the Earlier Rule reads:

The brothers should beware that, whether they are in hermitages or in other places, they do not make any place their own or contend with anyone about it. And whoever comes to them, friend or foe, thief or robber, should be received with kindness (RegNB 7:13f).

This is an amazing image, to receive robbers with kindness! It sums up so much of Francis's thought. If we own nothing and don't cling to things

we use, we won't need to fight with anyone over them. This grounds an attitude of peaceableness toward all.

The attitude of peace and nonresistance to evil is spelled out further in the Rule, with quotes from Christ's Sermon on the Mount and missionary discourses. The Francis who once dreamed of battlefield glory was disarmed in conversion, to become a man of peace, an ambassador of reconciliation. "Peace" was the greeting on his lips, whether in the towns of Umbria or when he went unarmed to convert the Sultan. As he says:

All the brothers . . . should remember that they gave themselves and abandoned their bodies to the Lord Jesus Christ and for love of Him they must make themselves vulnerable to their enemies (RegNB 14:10f).

Servant leadership. Francis describes the general and provincial leaders as "ministers and servants of the other brothers" in the mode of Christ who came "not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20:28, quoted in RegNB 4). Clare similarly envisions the abbess as an approachable servant of her sisters (RCI 10:3).

Repentance. As we saw in the Letters to the Faithful, people cannot really be Christians until they make a conscious decision to be—to turn from their former sinfulness and indifference and consciously choose to serve God through following his Son Jesus Christ. Francis does not envision this as a kind of Pelagian self-conversion, but always as a response to the mercy and call of God.

In sum, this overview of "the holy newness" Francis brought shows how seriously Francis took "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and the words of the Holy Spirit" (2EpFid 3). While he accepted the sacramental life and pastoral institutions of the medieval Church (he is no Church reformer in the Protestant sense) he breathed into the whole edifice a refreshing spirit of evangelical simplicity. Francis took the spiritual and ethical demands of the Gospel with such seriousness that he could summarize the brothers' way of life as living "according to the form of the holy Gospel" (Test 14; see RegB 1:1).

These themes show the Franciscan way of life as a clear attempt to renew the Church by inviting its sons and daughters into a serious living of the Gospel. History says that thousands upon thousands responded to the stirring call. Men flocked to join Francis's family of brothers; women founded and flowed into convents of Poor Ladies; and, as Bonaventure tells us, "great numbers of people adopted the rule of penance according to the form instituted by St. Francis which he called the 'Order of the Brothers of Penance'" (LM 4:6). This was a call to repentance addressed to the

whole Church, which indeed generated a mighty spiritual renewal in the day.

Reflecting on the intervening centuries, one wonders how a renewal movement like Franciscanism grows old, cold, complacent. It would seem that every new member in joining the Order(s) makes a personal commitment to the founding ideals. Yet the original fire cooled—as demonstrated, for instance, in bitter struggles over the right way to live evangelical poverty. Moreover, in recent centuries there was a "homogenizing" of Franciscans with other families of religious, as codified in the 1917 Code of Canon Law.

2. Franciscans Today: Leaven for Renewal?

Although this study is framed as primarily a question of the principle of the Franciscan vision, let us get some sense of how this plays out today. In the post-Vatican II era, how are Franciscans servant leaders, living the life of the holy Gospel—especially in the areas of personal conversion, evangelical poverty, nonpossessiveness, peace and nonviolence? Do we call the rest of the Church to live this way?

Before considering how Franciscans may help renew the larger Church, we should give credit to the larger Church for helping to renew Franciscanism. Much of our current understanding of the Franciscan tradition and the closer ties among different branches of the Franciscan "family" stem from Vatican II's call to religious to renew their life and spirit through recovering the charism of their founders.

Third Order Regular Franciscan sisters, in particular, sometimes found themselves knowing very little about that charism. Sister Margaret Carney tells of attending a meeting of OSF formation directors in 1968 and asking them: "What does TOR mean?" Nobody knew!

Soon after that, however, a surge of research on Franciscan topics began to bear fruit in the publication of sources and critical studies. The U. S. Franciscan Federation of the Third Order Regular was formed in 1965 and began to call sisters and brothers together for study conferences.¹⁰ At a more grassroots level, Midwest Franciscans in Collaboration assembled members of the Franciscan family for a number of events, including the 1993 "Clarefest," before being absorbed into the regional structure of the Federation. An important fruit of these conversations and researches was the recognition that the 1927 Third Order Rule was inadequate and that a new international rule for the TOR should be written by the sisters and brothers themselves. After three years of work, the new Rule—better incorporating the spirit and words of Francis—was adopted in March 1982

at an assembly of ministers general of TOR institutes and promulgated by Pope John Paul II in December. This Rule will supply data for our questions about Franciscans and ecclesial renewal today.

Personal Conversion

The TOR Rule is prefaced with the first half of Francis's "Letter to All the Faithful" (1EpFid), which, as we saw, is a strong exhortation to wholehearted love of God and neighbor, firm rejection of sin, and commitment to "bring forth from within . . . fruits worthy of true penance." The Rule proper admonishes: "With all in the holy Catholic . . . Church who wish to serve the Lord, the brothers and sisters of this order are to persevere in true faith and penance" (#2). New members who come to live "this way of life" are exhorted to "begin a life of penance conscious that all of us must be continuously and totally converted to the Lord" (#6). Franciscan formation programs are designed to set new members firmly on this path to continuous conversion. Chapter 3 on "The Spirit of Prayer" addresses another aspect of conversion: nourishing through continual prayer the positive relationship to "our most high . . . God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

To be a Franciscan is to commit to a lifelong pilgrimage of being "continuously and totally converted to the Lord." The 1966 Constitutions of the School Sisters of St. Francis (Milwaukee) included a stirring call "to move into [Christ's] risen life with faith and hope in the future, knowing that He may require something of us tomorrow that He does not today."¹¹ At the 1993 gathering of this same group, the words "personal renewal" were changed to "personal conversion" precisely to keep before us this Franciscan and Gospel call.

The Franciscan spirit of ongoing conversion was also highlighted in a statement from the Second Congress of Franciscan History, which met in 1992 in Quito, Ecuador, with the theme "Utopia: 500 Years." Participants called one another to "the spirit of detachment and total expropriation of any place, of posts and jobs" which might give security.¹² They comment:

The commitment to this project of life, i.e. to "follow the doctrine and footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ," constitutes the "life of penance" understood as a constant new beginning. As "pilgrims and foreigners in this world," we consider the response given until now as "little or almost nothing done."

These examples show Franciscan women and men of today affirming their own commitment to "the 'life of penance' understood as a constant new beginning." What about the other part of the question: are we calling

the rest of the Church to an ongoing personal conversion?

We could cite the efforts of our brothers and sisters in retreat work and the preaching of parish missions, which has been a traditional apostolate of the friars in this country. A parish mission is nothing if not an attempt to reach "the people in the pews" with the call to personal conversion and renewal. The work of Franciscan Renewal Centers is another approach to the same kind of work.

The contemporary trend in women's communities (Franciscan and otherwise) towards having "Associates" is another way of reaching out and inviting the wider Church to a more intense conversion. The idea of Association with Franciscans is not as developed in Europe. However, a young Swiss woman responded favorably after spending a weekend with the Erlenbad Franciscans. She wrote that the experience had nourished her

desire for a community of like-minded women who, because of profession or work or for some other reason, do not join a religious community, but who nevertheless want to live according to the Gospel. How alone one often feels! How difficult it is, in the midst of a stressful life, to find longer periods of time for prayer and reflection. In general, we no longer know how to speak about the most important thing in our lives, our faith.¹³

Evangelical Poverty and Nonpossessiveness

The TOR Rule states:

All the sisters and brothers zealously follow the poverty and humility of Our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Let them be happy to live among the outcast and despised, among the poor. . . (#21)
The truly poor in spirit, following the example of the Lord, live in this world as pilgrims and strangers. They neither appropriate nor defend anything as their own (#22).

In this regard, one could cite innumerable examples of Franciscan communities today redoubling their efforts not only to simplify lifestyles, but to stand with the poor and join in their struggles. Franciscans International, a Non-Governmental Organization at the United Nations, takes concern for the poor as one of its three foci, along with peacemaking and the care of creation.

There are many examples of actions which flesh out these words in Franciscan sisterhoods and brotherhoods. It is not surprising that Frederick Ozanam, founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul whose members serve the poor in so many parishes, was fascinated with Francis and "affili-

ated to the Friars Minor."¹⁴ Franciscan sisters have operated numbers of hospitals whose original purpose was to serve the sick poor. The LaCrosse Franciscans have returned to that purpose with the opening of the "St. Clare Health Mission" in La Crosse. Open two nights a week, it provides basic health care to people lacking adequate financial resources or insurance. In mid-town Manhattan, three friars spearheaded "St. Francis Residences" for the mentally ill homeless.

Another current example of evangelical poverty in action is working with persons who live with AIDS. Sister Jeanne Schweickert, OSF, testifies that Franciscans were prominent early among those responding compassionately to this need.

Of course, not all in our communities respond well to either the call for a simple lifestyle or the preferential option for the poor. Franciscans have long served a variety of people. Thus as we wrestle with the idea of solidarity with the poor, we tend either to broaden the idea of "the poor" until it covers almost everyone or stress how those working with the middle and upper classes must keep the perspective of the (economically) poor always in mind.

Our lifestyles vary, too. Although sisters have worked over the years for extremely small stipends in parish schools and pastoral work (leading to the current problem of staggeringly underfunded retirement needs), today some of those who serve comfortable people live comfortably themselves. It is an ongoing struggle to "simplify our lifestyle"; congregational leaders have to keep encouraging sisters to work on their own lifestyles and attitudes, and not make judgments about other sisters.

Assuming, nonetheless, that Franciscans on the whole do fairly well in attitudes and behaviors of nonpossessiveness, evangelical poverty, and solidarity with the poor, how do we call other Christians prophetically to a similar stance? This is not clear. One thinks of the Associates of Franciscan communities, as well as volunteers, donors, and benefactors; all of these are invited to share our mission among the poor in one way or another. We cannot tell how deeply affected are the entire value systems of persons who work with us in one of these ways.

Peacemaking and Nonviolence

Article 30 of the TOR Rule is a wonderful call, which draws from Chapter 16 of the Earlier Rule of the Friars Minor:

As they announce peace with their lips, let them be careful to have it even more within their own hearts. No one should be roused to wrath or insult on their account, rather all should be moved to

peace, goodwill and mercy because of their gentleness. The sisters and brothers . . . should recall that they have given themselves up completely and handed themselves over totally to Our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, they should be prepared to expose themselves to every enemy . . . for love of him because the Lord says: Blessed are they who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This theme of peacemaking and nonviolence is one which particularly invites empirical study. The "disarmed heart" was strong in Francis; how faithfully have his followers carried this out? What percentage of Franciscans today really believe in or actively practice nonviolence in their own lives, let alone preach it to the rest of the Church?

Franciscan sisters and friars have been active in the peace movement in the United States—for example, in the Nuclear Freeze campaign. The late Patricia Peschauer, OSF, got very involved in social issues and peace actions through the Catholic Worker house in Milwaukee; she was arrested several times for civil disobedience. Dubuque Franciscan Shirley Waldschmit was similarly active in the "faith and resistance" community in Omaha.

Probably the best-known Franciscan involvement in the peace movement is the Nevada Desert Experience, originated by the Friars Minor of the Santa Barbara province. According to their brochure, "The Franciscan community of Las Vegas began holding vigils at the [nuclear] test site in the late '70s," after the production of the neutron bomb. "In 1982 the first Lenten Desert Experience brought people from varied religious communities into prayerful protest at the site." In 1984 the "Nevada Desert Experience" formed as an organization with many sponsors. It conducts a variety of commemorations and protests. Participation in the Nevada Desert Experience by individual Clinton (Iowa) Franciscans led that entire congregation to commit itself in 1992 "to a deeper understanding of active nonviolence" (1992 General Chapter directive).

Internationally, the Franciscan presence as a Non-Governmental Organization at the United Nations tries to assist that organization in its basic task of promoting dialogue and cooperation among the nations of the earth. Naturally the Franciscans at the U.N. list peacemaking as one of their principal foci. In relation to our question about inviting the wider Church to Gospel faithfulness, it is worth noting that all members of the Franciscan family (religious or lay) are invited to become regular members of Franciscans International, while other "friends who are not Franciscans" are invited to Associate membership. Thus we see Franciscan men and women among those who take the Christian commitment to nonviolence seriously and try to live out its implications for our violent times.

Chapter 8 of the TOR Rule gives a beautiful description of "The Obedience of Love" and the kind of authority which lovingly corresponds to such obedience.

For God, they should give up their own wills. . . . Let them neither dominate nor seek power over one another, but let them willingly serve and obey each other with that genuine love which comes from each one's heart (#25).

Those who are ministers and servants of the others should visit, admonish and encourage them with humility and love. . . . The ministers are to be servants of all (#27).

We can rate the spirit of the leaders in our own communities, but the more interesting question is, how well do we call the rest of the Church to exercise this kind of authority? Francis did not critique the clergy and hierarchy of his time, offering them instead a humble submission. Yet he had an uncanny feel for the Gospel way of exercising authority in the community of Christ's followers—i.e., in the Church. Church leaders who encountered Francis were influenced in the exercise of their own ministry. Can this implicit corrective become explicit in our theology and in our fraternal/sororal dialogues with Church leadership?

One contemporary Franciscan theologian who has taken on this theme is Leonardo Boff. Unfortunately his brand of Franciscan liberation ecclesiology has not found a favorable reception in hierarchical circles. Perhaps more of us should take up the struggle of calling our Church leadership into the stance of servanthood.

3. Conclusion

If renewal in the Church means "increasing faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ," I believe that the Franciscan movement is, from the outset, a powerful instrument for that kind of renewal. The life of penance which Francis entered into and propagated is another name for serious personal conversion, a commitment to God as known through Jesus, by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit.

Although Francis formed an Order of Lesser Brothers and Lesser Sisters or Poor Ladies who would live this life of penance in particular communities of obedience, poverty, and chastity, his concern was always for the whole Church. As he makes clear in his Letters to the Faithful and in the exhortation at the end of his Earlier Rule, "all of us [must] persevere in

the true faith and in penance, for otherwise no one will be saved" (RegNB 23:7; emphasis added). While Francis did not use his energy trying to reform the structures of the larger church, the inner logic of his preaching, community-forming, and writing is an appeal to all Christians to love God through Christ, and to commit themselves to a serious living of the life of the Gospel.

I have sketched broadly how four dimensions of the Franciscan understanding of the Gospel are playing out among Franciscans today and questioned how these are being urged upon the rest of the Church. I hope that this initial exploration may at least open conversations about our role as Franciscans in the renewal of the Church today.

Endnotes

¹ An earlier version of this paper was given at the September, 1993, Symposium at the Washington Theological Union, on "The Franciscan Movement and the Institutional Church."

² See especially Jane Russell, *Renewing the Gospel Community: Four Catholic Movements with an Anabaptist Parallel*, dissertation (University of Notre Dame, 1979).

³ Message to Humanity," *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott, SJ (America Press, 1966), 3-4.

⁴ See Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1968). Ernst Troeltsch earlier identified this same intense perspective as "Sect-type" Christianity. The more tolerant approach, which relies more on the sacraments and other objective channels of grace, he termed simply the "Church type" of Christian organization. See Troeltsch's *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: MacMillan, 1931), 328-43; 694-706.

⁵ *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972) 305. Unless otherwise noted, quotations of the early biographies are from the *Omnibus*.

⁶ In *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap. and Ignatius Brady, OFM (NY: Paulist Press, 1982) 154. Quotations from Francis's writings will be from this work.

⁷ See Mark 1:14f; 6:7-12; 16:15f; Matthew 4:17; Luke 24:47.

⁸ William Short, *The Franciscans* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989) 9. See also Raffaele Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order* (Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), which studies Francis's relationship to this "penitential movement."

⁹ Changed in the 1982 TOR Rule to "despite the tendency in their humanity to sin."

¹⁰ See Elise Saggau, OSF, *A Short History of The Franciscan Federation: 1965-1995* (Washington, DC: Franciscan Federation Third Order Regular, 1995).

¹¹ *Response in Faith*, School Sisters of St. Francis, (Milwaukee, WI: 1966) 10. A number of my examples are drawn from this, my own congregation, because this is the group I know best. I trust that other Franciscan groups could supply comparable examples.

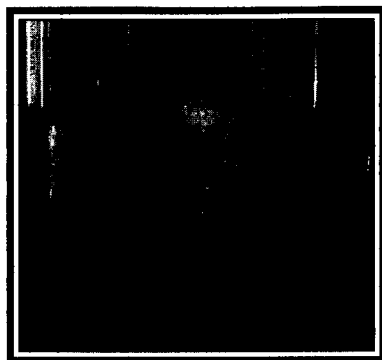
¹² "Memory of the Franciscan Utopia in Indo-Afro-America: The Roots of Our Future," Report in the *Newsletter* of the Franciscan Federation, TOR (Spring/Summer 1993) 6-8.

¹³ In *Erlend Today* (Summer, 1993). Available from School Sisters of St. Francis Generalate, Milwaukee, WI, 53215.

¹⁴ Short, 98.

A Biographical Profile of

Julian Davies, OFM
Siena College
Loudonville, NY



Father Julian Davies, OFM, was born in Utica, NY, on January 25, 1933. He joined the Holy Name Province of the Friars Minor and was ordained a priest on March 12, 1960. He earned his doctoral degree in philosophy at Fordham University in 1970.

Father Julian taught at the Franciscan Institute during the summers of 1975, 1987, and 1991. He translated *Ockham on Aristotle's Physics*, published by the Franciscan Institute in 1989.

He is currently Professor of Philosophy at Siena College in Loudonville, NY, and serves as editor of the provincial Annals of Holy Name Province. He is also Spiritual Assistant to the St. Bernardine of Siena Secular Franciscan Fraternity and works with married couples in Marriage Encounter and Retorno. His hobbies are sports and travel (he loves to do God's work elsewhere!).

Father Julian is a long-time supporter of *The Cord*. In 1967 he began contributing book reviews and in 1969 became Book Review Editor. From 1971-1994 he served as Associate Editor and is now a member of the Editorial Board.

*For us, caught in the heart of this process [of conversion], prayer is advent, prayer is waiting, prayer can be winter. Like the Jewish people, we know that the Messiah will come one day; like the Magi, we hope we are travelling to meet him; like Mary, we know he is coming to us. We may continue with familiar motions of prayer, to light our candle and gaze at our icon or crucifix and try not to check the movements of the clock, but in reality, we are awaiting the end of winter and the coming of our God. Nothing can hasten this process which both Francis and Clare called conversion. For them, this total surrender of mind and heart was a life-long work (Frances Teresa, OSC, *Living the Incarnation* [Quincy: Franciscan Press, 1996] 15; reprinted with permission. Copyright 1993 The Community of Poor Clares, Arundel, West Sussex).*

About Our Contributors

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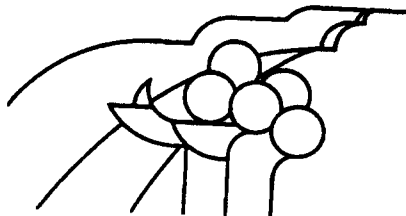
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Program Coordinator: Kathleen Moffatt, OSF
Program Facilitator: Mary Arghittu, OSF

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June 1-7, 1997 - Fr. Giles Schinelli, TOR

Directed Retreat

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Bro. Malachy Broderick, FSC
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For further information on these and other programs, please contact:

Sr. Barbara Zilch, OSF, Director
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*May you cling
to His most
sweet Mother
who gave birth
to a son
whom the heavens
could not contain,
and yet
she carried Him
in the
little enclosure
of her womb
and held Him
on her
virginal lap
(31A, 18-19).*



Sister Mary Regina, PCPA

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"Facing the Christ Incarnate." Franciscan Federation at Franciscan Renewal Center, Andover, MA. (See ad p. 306.)

Sunday, December 8-Saturday, December 14, 1996

Bringing Forth Christ. Bonaventure's Five Feasts of the Child Jesus. Retreat conferences by André Cirino, OFM; art meditations led by Karen Kappell, FSPA. Cost: \$375. Tau Center, 511 Hilbert St., Winona, MN, 55987, ph. 507-454-2993; FAX 507-453-0910.

Friday, December 13-Sunday, December 15, 1996

The Word Becomes Flesh. Edward Coughlin, OFM. \$80. Spirit and Life Center, Pittsburgh. (See ad p. 307.)

January 13-March 31, 1997

Sabbatical for Contemporary Franciscans. Franciscan community setting with lectures and study. Tau Center, Winona, MN. (See above for contact information.)

Sunday, February 2-Friday, February 7, 1997

Franciscan Gathering XVII. "To Desire One Thing Alone." Edward Coughlin, OFM, and Margaret Guider, OSF. Franciscan Center, Tampa. (See ad p. 305.)

Thursday, February 20-Sunday, February 23, 1997

The Enkindling of Love. Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap. Tau Center, Winona. (See ad p. 308.)

Friday, February 21-Wednesday, February 26, 1997

Crucifix of San Damiano. André Cirino, OFM. Spirit and Life Center, Pittsburgh. (See ad p. 307.)

Friday, March 14-Sunday, March 16, 1997.

"Facing the Christ Incarnate." Franciscan Federation at St. Joseph Renewal Center, Tiffin, OH. (See ad p. 306.)

Friday, March 21-Saturday, March 22, 1997

Meeting Myself in Christ. William Short, OFM. The Franciscan Center, 2500 Grant Blvd., Syracuse, Ny 13208, ph. 315-425-0103. (See ad p. 301.)

Thursday, April 4-Saturday, April 6, 1997

"Facing the Christ Incarnate." Franciscan Federation at Avila Retreat Center, Durham, NC. (See ad p. 306.)

Writings of Saint Francis

Adm	Admonitions	FormViv	Form of Life for St. Clare
BenLeo	Blessing for Brother Leo	1Fragm	Fragment of other Rule I
CantSol	Canticle of Brother Sun	2Fragm	Fragment of other Rule II
EpAnt	Letter to St. Anthony	LaudDei	Praises of God
EpCler	Letter to the Clergy	LaudHor	Praises to be said at all the Hours.
EpCust	Letter to the Custodians	OffPass	Office of the Passion
1EpFid	First Letter to the Faithful	OrCruc	Prayer before the Crucifix
2EpFid	Second Letter to the Faithful	RegB	Later Rule
EpLeo	Letter to Brother Leo	RegNB	Earlier Rule
EpMin	Letter to a Minister	RegEr	Rule for Hermitages
EpOrd	Letter to the Entire Order	SalBMV	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
EpRect	Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples	SalVirt	Salutation of the Virtues
ExhLD	Exhortation to the Praise of God	Test	Testament
ExhPD	Exhortation to Poor Ladies	TestS	Testament written in Siena
ExpPat	Prayer Inspired by the Our Father	UltVol	Last Will written for St. Clare
		VPLaet	Dictate on True and Perfect Joy

Writings of Saint Clare

1LAg	First Letter to Agnes of Prague
2LAg	Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAg	Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAg	Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
LEr	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
RCI	Rule of Clare
TestCl	Testament of Clare
BCI	Blessing of Clare

Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2Cel	Second Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
3Cel	Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
AP	Anonymous of Perugia
CL	Legend of Clare
CSD	Consideration of the Stigmata
Fior	Fioretti
JdV	Witness of Jacque de Vitry
LM	Major Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LMin	Minor Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LP	Legend of Perugia
L3S	Legend of the Three Companions
Proc	Acts of the Process of Canonization of St. Clare
SC	Sacrum Commmercium
SP	Mirror of Perfection