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A WORD FROM BONAVENTURE

When they arrived in the Spoleto valley, going back to their holy proposal, they began to discuss whether they should live among the people or go off to solitary places. But Christ's servant Francis, putting his trust in neither his own efforts nor in theirs, sought the pleasure of the divine will in this matter by the fervor of prayer. Enlightened by a revelation from heaven, he realized that he was sent by the Lord to win for Christ the souls which the devil was trying to snatch away. Therefore he chose to live for everyone rather than for himself alone, drawn by the example of the one who deigned to die for all.

LMj IV: 2

THE CORD

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Do you understand
what I have
done to you?

John 13:13



• A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW •

The Cord
A Franciscan Spiritual Review

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4. References should be footnoted except Scripture sources or basic Franciscan sources. Scripture and Franciscan source references should be identified within parentheses immediately after the cited text, with period following the closed parenthesis. For example:

(1Cor. 13:6). (2C 5:8). (ER 23:2). (4Lag 2:13).

A list of standard abbreviations used in *The Cord* can be found inside the back cover. Franciscan sources used should be noted in the first reference in a ms and should be taken from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* or *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*.

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FOREWORD

The glorious celebration of Easter and a northeastern spring are in full bloom. Like the economy, nature seems to enjoy presenting us with ups and downs, swinging from moderate to extreme conditions at both ends of the temperature continuum. It seems the only common denominator in this season of contrasts is change.

In this issue we have three new writers gracing us with their insights: Richard Boileau opens up a vision of Francis as a communicator, Dorothy Buck introduces us to an old spiritual concept of substitutionary prayer and Clare Bernadette Knowles reads the *Office of the Passion* in the spirit of another testament from Francis. But before we can get too comfortable with these new writers, some seasoned favorites appear in the pages: Ruth Agnes Evans shines her light on interpreting Clare's *Letters to Agnes*, Girard Etzkorn reminds us of our call to service and Murray Bodo gives the order of the liturgy a contemporary poetic emphasis. To round out this issue we have a review of Dominic Monti's new book, *Francis and His Brothers: A Popular History of the Franciscan Friars*, written by Dan Horan.

Life here at the Franciscan Institute is gearing up for another challenging summer session. The pace of life quickens with the arrival of students who are digging into Franciscan studies for a deeper understanding of their own life's call or for an enriched response to the needs of their ministries within the parameters of an intensive one-week, three-week, or five-week course of study. Driven by personal goals – a Master's Degree, an Advanced Certificate, or personal renewal – the summer session's ambience is studious, the collegiality international, and the communal prayer inspiring. And all of this in the setting of one of the nation's most picturesque campuses—St. Bonaventure University! Why don't you consider joining us this summer for that pause that can refresh and renew?

Daria R. Mitchell, OFM

THE GREAT COMMUNICATOR OF ASSISI: HOW FRANCIS TRANSMITTED HIS SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS INSIGHTS

RICHARD BOILEAU

Francis of Assisi is often praised for the intensity of his spirituality, the depth of his religious insights and his unique blend of fidelity and authenticity, being at once faithful to the Church and to his own conscience. Yet the cleverness and effectiveness of his communication deserves as much attention. By modern communication standards, he could be described as a man who made exemplary use of different media, each converging to deliver a clear, concise and compelling set of messages in a manner that best suited the audiences he carefully targeted to change attitudes and behaviors. This was achieved, not to deceive or manipulate, as often is the case with publicists and advertisers of our age, but to proclaim the Gospel in order to bring people to believe and live freely according to this good news. To understand how he accomplished this, we must go to the very foundations of his message.

Being a Penitent¹ produced in Francis of Assisi a dramatic broadening of horizons and raising of consciousness. This occurred because he approached intellectual, moral

¹ Being a Penitent in thirteenth century Italy created a distinct identity for persons involved. "Francis asked and obtained permission to be accepted at San Damiano as a *conversus*, thus becoming an *oblatus* or *donatus* or *conversus*, an official form of penitent ... Jordan of Giano also affirmed Francis's entrance into the 'life of penance.' He began his chronicle in this way: 'In the year of the Lord 1207, Francis, who was by profession a merchant, with repentant heart touched by the breath of the Holy Spirit, began a life of penance in the habit of the hermit.'" Raffaele Pazzelli, *St. Francis and The Third Order: The Franciscan and Pre-Franciscan Penitential Movement* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), 87. Hereafter Pazzelli, *Francis*.

and religious conversion with the willingness to find God in all things and all people, and the courage to align his life with his evolving outlook on what the Gospel had to say about human nature. He avoided esoteric theology or apologetic theories and relentlessly sought to make decisions that were concrete and authentic when faced with contradictions and dark spaces between daily life, Church life and the Gospel life.

To begin with, this article examines four courses of action that he chose with regard to the Gospel in relation to the faith of his family, the religion of his community and the church that gave form and expression to these. My observations regarding his religious foundation focus on his decisions concerning priesthood, brotherhood, the role of ecclesial hierarchy and other elements often associated with Franciscan spirituality.

Francis's decision not to become a priest must be viewed from at least two angles. First, he does not appear to have felt a call, at least initially, to life within the hierarchical structures of the church. His first impetus was to personal conversion, then came the formation of brotherhood to deal with those that God had sent, and only later – mostly out of obedience – did the question of forming an institution arise. Second, the life and privilege enjoyed by the clergy was not compatible with his view of penance.

The call to living the Gospel in the footsteps of Jesus Christ was of paramount importance for Francis. Without disparaging the call to priesthood or monastic life in others, he vigorously pursued a life in union with Lady Poverty, the mirror of Christ. Consequently, he understood his call as being "to give witness to the Gospel by having nothing and being nothing, by living on the social and geographical margins of urban Italian society."² Perhaps, too, having lived a life of privilege and prestige, he feared remaining too close to familiar habits for fear that he might succumb to temptation and fall into less desirable habits that he saw in some church officials. Regardless of the reason or combination of reasons

² Keith Warner, *Franciscan Spirituality* (Loretto, PA: Institute for Contemporary Franciscan Life [St. Francis University], 1997), 8-4. Hereafter, Warner, *Spirituality*.

for Francis's decision not to seek ordination, there is abundant evidence that he fully integrated this decision into his spirituality. In his various writings, in contrast to hundreds of references to the term "brother," we find comparatively few to clergy. Clearly, he did not count himself among the ranks of clergy:

The relative richness of the vocabulary when it is a question of designating the personnel of the Church is striking when the one who is speaking calls himself *simplex et idiota*, that is, a man without intellectual formation.³

There is ample indication to suggest that he was neither simple-minded nor ignorant. While his schooling was not advanced, he was astute in observation, sound in judgment and able in communication. But this self-understanding of *simplex et idiota* suited him by giving him sufficient freedom to operate authentically in fidelity to Christ and his Church without the inevitable constraints of existing structures. Rather, he settled upon simple evangelical brotherhood.

Francis's spirituality is not fully comprehensible without an appreciation of why he put so much emphasis on fraternal life.⁴ Among other things, he saw in his brothers a divine sign about how he was called to live his faith:⁵ "... the Lord gave me some brothers..."⁶ In fact, it appears that the ar-

³ Warner, *Spirituality*.

⁴ In his modest corpus of writing, he used the word "brother" and its derivatives 306 times. Warner, *Spirituality*, 6-4.

⁵ "Faith is knowledge born of religious love.... Catholic tradition has tended to deal with faith as authoritative knowledge contained in doctrines.... Lonergan has moved below the common sense and theoretical realms in which such a faith is usually located to focus on the gift of divine love.... When faith (self-transcendent falling-in-love) expresses itself to a common culture, it transvalues (re-prioritizes) human concerns. When moral conversion (value) is coupled with religious conversion (faith), there is a shift from the human being (person) as the originating and terminal value to the originating value of God (as good) and the terminal value is the universe (as good)." James Sauer, *A Commentary on Lonergan's Method in Theology* (Ottawa: The Lonergan Website, 2001), 133-34.

⁶ Francis of Assisi, *Testament*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. 1, *The Saint* (New York: New City Press, 1999), 125. Hereafter *FA:ED* followed by volume and page numbers.

rival of these brothers struck Francis, who seemed inclined to a more solitary form of penance, as an unexpected manifestation of his true vocation. Soon brotherhood became his hermeneutical lens and the horizon in which he understood the Gospel and applied its teachings to his own life: "... but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel."⁷ To some degree, Francis's interpretation of Scripture as a call to fraternal living was conditioned by his surroundings. The establishment of Assisi as a city-state breaking away from the feudal system happened before Francis's conversion but its effect was clear. The emerging economic order witnessed tradesmen beginning to gather into guilds.

A sense of the strength found in solidarity was beginning to surface in all aspects of society, no less so for Francis than for Assisi's tradesmen. While he sought to find his true place in a new social order, he intentionally avoided reference to rank in establishing the brotherhood, in contrast to the class system in which he found so much injustice. Among the salvific characteristics of true fraternal living, Francis found the quality of genuine compassion. His was to be a community of equals bonded by a genuine caring for each other: "What a great flame of charity burned in the new disciples of Christ! What great love of devout company flourished in them!"⁸ There is evidence of this affection, among other sources, in his *Rule for Hermitages*: "Let those who wish to stay in hermitages in a religious way be three brothers or, at the most, four; let two of these be 'the mother' and have two 'sons' or at least one."⁹ Warner suggests that his model was the relationship of Jesus, Mary and the early disciples,¹⁰ "which is slightly different than the prevailing monastic understanding which was based on the first century church of the

⁷ Ibid., 125.

⁸ 1C 38, FA:ED 1, 217.

⁹ Francis of Assisi, "A Rule for Hermitages," FA:ED 1, 61.

¹⁰ Warner points to *regula non bullata* 9:5: "He was poor and a stranger and lived on alms - He, the Blessed Virgin, and His disciples." ER IX:5, FA:ED 1, 70.

Apostles."¹¹ We can assume that Francis did not feel called to this *ecclesiae primitivae forma*, with its assured security, but to affirm what he believed to be the true and radical poverty of Jesus. In the process, he appears to have incarnated the relational qualities expressed in a passage in Matthew's Gospel: "Everyone who does the will of my Father is my brother, sister and mother"¹² (Matt 12:50).

Further evidence of the centrality of brotherhood in Francis's spirituality and self-understanding can be found in perhaps his most original work, *The Canticle of the Creatures*, written near the end of his life. In it, he identifies all of creation as one large family, in union with the Holy Trinity, the ultimate form and meaning of relationship: "Francis, therefore, understood himself as a brother: a brother to Jesus, a brother to those in his fraternity, and a brother to all Creation."¹³ From this evidence, we may conclude that one of the key foundations of Francis's spirituality was his insight that, at least for him, "spiritual direction" comes not so much from a "master" but from "living out one's calling to be brother and sister."¹⁴

It is quite understandable, therefore, that Francis would want to lead his Gospel life in a fraternal context, and it is not entirely surprising that he deliberately chose to live that life under the authority of the Pope, despite his disappointment with some aspects of church life. Rather than operate negatively with regard to excesses and laxities in the church, he chose to operate positively in fidelity to Christ's Gospel and to the Pope.

Consciously or otherwise, Francis must have wanted to guard his fraternity from the temptation to evolve into a protest movement. He witnessed first hand the devastation caused by unauthorized reform movements. Francis intentionally chose, therefore, to align himself with the Pope,

¹¹ Warner, *Spirituality*, 6-9.

¹² It is worth recalling here verse 52 in Francis's *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*: "We are brothers, moreover, when we do the will of His Father who is in heaven" (cf. Matt 12:50). 2LtF 52, FA:ED 1, 49.

¹³ Warner, *Spirituality*, 6-11.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6-14.

to pledge the obedience of his brotherhood to the Holy See, and to ask papal permission for his form of life. He knew that the risk of error outside the parameters of the church was significant, as were the consequences of its condemnation. While choosing not to become a priest or a monk, he also decided "to avoid all confusion of his movement with others, such as the Waldensian, with which it could be confused."¹⁵ To make the distinction clear, Francis devoted part of his *Testament* to a testimony of respect and devotion for priests, despite the fact that he was often disappointed by their attitude and behavior,¹⁶ even those chosen to help form his new brotherhood.¹⁷

Francis knew of the position of Cathars. Among other things, Cathars exhibited a profound distaste for the idea of Eucharistic realism. Knowing this makes it relatively easy to understand why Francis integrated so explicitly the official prescriptions of the Fourth Lateran Council regarding the Eucharist into his own writings. For Francis, submission to the authority of the Pope was not only strategically wise to ensure that he could continue on the path to which he felt called without ecclesial obstructions, but also it was a spiritual imperative. It flowed in part from his devotion to the cross that he must have seen at times as the church itself.

In time, the movement became more an ecclesial institution than the *poverello* had first intended. There is no doubt that he initially intended a lay movement, living without ecclesial privileges. Yet his determination to remain faithful to the Holy See remained steadfast throughout.

¹⁵ Raoul Manselli, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 67. Hereafter Manselli, *Francis*.

¹⁶ "At this time, the clergy, often mediocre, ignorant, even scandalous, was the object of the virulent criticism of all reformers' movements. Francis speaks of the intellectual and moral situation which was often deficient: 'even if ... they are sinful,' Adm XXVI, 1; 'if they are sinners,' Ep Fid II, 33; 'I do not wish to consider sin in them,' Test, 9; 'pitiful priests of this world,' Test 7." Thaddée Matura, "The Church in the Writings of Francis of Assisi," trans. Helen M. Eckrich, "L'Eglise dans les écrits de François d'Assise," *Antonium* LVII (Jan-Dec, 1982). Hereafter Matura, *Church*.

¹⁷ Manselli stated "We can imagine that Guido helped, comforted, and counselled him, but not in a way that would satisfy Francis on a spiritual level." Manselli, *Francis*, 69.

For Francis, the Church provided the safest guarantee of fidelity to the Gospel and incorporated all of the mysteries of Catholic faith and presented concrete evidence of God operating among his people. In explaining its importance to Francis, Thaddée Matura referred to it as "space of faith and of evangelical conversion, ... place of the presence of the Son of God, ... the criteria of true faith, ... norm of conduct."¹⁸ The ultimate expression of this reality was the Lord Pope, to whom Francis promised "obedience ... and reverence."¹⁹ Once again, we find in Francis the remarkable wisdom of someone who was sensitive to the complex demands of social, ecclesial and Gospel life, and yet found a system for bringing harmony to these often-divergent horizons without doing violence to any one. With disarming simplicity, he courageously blazed a trail that others would follow precisely because he was so very authentic. His solution was neither opportunistic nor simplistic; rather it revealed the fullness of life and the abundance promised by the Savior whom he strove so ardently to follow in uncompromising fidelity and love.²⁰

Other decisions taken by Francis are noteworthy as well in that they began to characterize his evangelical movement. These amounted to living the Gospel in communion with Christ poor and crucified, in the love of God, in brotherhood with all humanity and all creation, participating in the life and mission of the Church, in continual conversion, in a life of prayer and as an instrument of peace. In his *Testament*, Francis recounted the basis on which his fraternal life was established. He claimed to have received the command to embrace the Gospel as a virtual rule of life from no less an authority than God himself: "And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel."²¹

¹⁸ Matura, *Church*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Matt. 10:10b).

²¹ *Testament*, FA:ED 1, 125.

Francis's spirituality was unequivocally and unabashedly Christocentric: his peace was Christ's; his joy, the Lord's infinite love for him. But it was the texture of that union with Christ that so appealed to his contemporaries as it does to us today. For Francis, Jesus' humanity was palpable. That made the love of the Father *who so loved the world that he sent his only son* (John 3:16) a matter of personal relationship and affection. That made the gift of his Son's birth into abject poverty such an incomprehensible act of unconditional love that he would marvel at it at Greccio three years before his death. It made the Son's passion and death on the cross an unfathomable act of compassionate concern for the salvation of so undeserving a creature as he thought himself to be. Francis's union with Christ had become so complete as to enable him to find satisfaction only in the poverty and cross of his savior: "I, little brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of our most High Lord Jesus Christ ... and to persevere in this until the end."²²

It is worth noting here that what marked Francis's spirituality in a searing way was his passionate love of God, granting equal attention to God the Father, creator of all things and source of all good; to the Son, both Lord and brother to the mightiest and the least of all creatures; and to God's Holy Spirit of Love and Truth. His spirituality was, therefore, markedly Trinitarian. In fact, his *Canticle to the Creatures* is evidence of an amazing insight that would transform Francis's world view. It is at once as soothing as a sonnet and as disturbing as a clap of thunder, urging us to transform our own self-understanding in relation to God and all things created by God: "When Francis referred to *Brother wolf*²³ or *Sister water*,²⁴ he was not just using a clever rhetorical strategy. He meant those titles quite literally. The implications are quite

²² FLCL VI:7, CA:ED, 118.

²³ Probably refers to the legend of "how St. Francis tamed the very fierce Wolf of Gubbio," in *Little Flowers of St. Francis*, in which Francis brings a peaceful solution to the practical problem between the frightened residents of the town of Gubbio and the wolf that threatens their safety. FA:ED 3, 602.

²⁴ Almost certainly refers to "The Canticle of the Creatures," FA:ED 1, 113ff.

extraordinary for one who takes his brotherhood seriously."²⁵ At the same time, it should be noted that despite all of the care and concern that he exhibited toward the smallest of God's creatures, Francis's interest in them stemmed principally from the fact that "they represented moral qualities and teachings, and they also helped lead (him) to a greater understanding and experience of the Father he shared with them."²⁶

Finally, Francis's spirituality is founded on the understanding of penance as conversion or *metanoia*.²⁷ It is a process more than an event, a process that is ongoing. To become a penitent for him was to accept that *metanoia* is fundamentally a way of life.²⁸ It is oriented toward God more than it is away from sin. In this regard, Francis's active participation in the penitential movement reminds us of Lonergan's insight into the nature of not only religious conversion but intellectual and moral conversion as well.

After his conversion, Francis's natural inclination seems to have been oriented toward the contemplative life: "He cultivated the contemplative life in his own soul by ... periodic retreats to hermitages."²⁹ Prayer was so foundational for Francis that he struggled for a time with the question of whether he should pursue a life of prayer exclusively or in combination with apostolic action. He came to understand his vocation to be one of prayer in action. Referring to the return of the early friars from Rome where they had received verbal approval of their fledgling community, Celano noted that, "It was his custom to divide the time given him to merit grace and, as seemed best, to spend some of it to benefit his neighbors and use the rest in the blessed solitude

²⁵ William Cook, *Francis of Assisi: The Way of Poverty and Humility* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2008), 53. Hereafter Cook, *Francis*.

²⁶ Ibid., 52.

²⁷ Reference to Cajetan Esser, "Love's Reply" in Pazzelli, *Francis*, 103.

²⁸ Pope John Paul II echoed this view in addressing contemporary secular Franciscans: "Heirs of that great movement of evangelical life which the *poenitentes de Assisio* embraced, learn to live your vocation ... as brothers and sisters of penance with an enlightened sense of conversion and of continuous renewal." Dedication in Pazzelli, *Francis*.

²⁹ Dacian Bluma, "Franciscan Life of Prayer," *The Cord* 13 (1963): 52.

of contemplation.”³⁰ Celano concluded that Francis’s life was itself a prayer.³¹

Broadly speaking, Francis’s communication is a testament that takes many forms. Here, we explore his use of four media: his way of living, his preaching, his use of drama and his writing, particularly his *Testament* itself.

Evangelical Living

For Francis, authentic communication could no more be detached from how he lived than the act of flying could be detached from the birds to which he preached,³² and it would appear that he understood that very well: “Francis the apostolic man and Francis the mystic were not two sides or phases; they were fused.”³³ So imperative was the need to integrate the form of life he had chosen and the prayer that expressed its value with the content of his apostolic action that he admonished his brothers to preach with their very lives. They were to be not only witnesses but also evidence of the Good News, not only to human beings, but also to all Creation.

His most critical decisions would have less to do with whether or how to preach but how to live in order to preach authentically. Preaching the Gospel would have to mean being the good news to others, much as Jesus had been in his own time as he proclaimed the words contained in the accounts of the evangelists. Like the apostles, Francis preached a message that was simple: Repent and believe in the good news.³⁴

Bonaventure carefully noted the insight Francis developed after struggling with the underlying question, which

³⁰ FA:ED 1, 261.

³¹ Ibid., 310.

³² Refers to a popular legend in 1C XXI, FA:ED 1, 234.

³³ Cook, *Francis*, 84.

³⁴ In the New Revised Standard Version of the bible, there are twenty-six verses of the New Testament that contain the word “repent” and twenty-one that contain the word “repentance,” some specifically mentioning the need to preach repentance.

he put to those he loved and trusted: “What do you think, brothers, what do you judge better? That I should spend my time in prayer or that I should travel about preaching?”³⁵ He had Brother Masseo put the question to his trusted friends Brother Sylvester and Sister Clare, asking whether he should “dedicate myself to preaching or ... only to prayer.”³⁶ Brother Masseo came back with this answer: “(Christ) ... revealed that it is His will that you go through the world to preach, because He has not chosen you only for yourself, but rather for the salvation of others.”³⁷ The insight Francis received was that preaching is a paramount part of apostolic action because Jesus had done so: “... the only begotten Son of God, who is the highest wisdom, came down from the bosom of the Father for the salvation of souls in order to instruct the world by his example and to speak the word of salvation to people ...”³⁸

While his apostolic action took many forms, perhaps Francis’s need for balance between prayer and action was most clearly manifested in his preaching. For a time, he struggled with the stress that the juxtaposition of the two inevitably imposes. But that stress was soon transformed into a singular opportunity to conform his life more fully to Christ, who is the supreme model of harmony between prayer and action, and, despite the great spiritualities that arose during the first millennium, one could argue that this precarious equilibrium had been rarely achieved.

If a significant change occurred in Christendom about the relationship between active and contemplative dimensions of life, it is probably to be traced to Francis of Assisi.... (He) would go into the woods to pray alone but also rebuilt crumbling churches (...) As he ministered to lepers and began to preach, he also continued

³⁵ Bonaventure, “The Major Legend of Saint Francis,” XII:1, FA:ED 2, 622.

³⁶ “Little Flowers of St. Francis,” 16, FA:ED 3, 592.

³⁷ Ibid., 592.

³⁸ LMj XII:1, FA:ED 2, 622.

to withdraw for prayer as well as borrow the liturgical prayer of the older monastic orders.³⁹

In effect, contemplation and apostolic action were not for him competitive realities but absolutely complementary necessities: "Solitude opens out to the world and bears fruit in preaching.... The eremitism of Saint Francis and his followers is deeply evangelical and remains always open to the world, while recognizing the need to maintain a certain distance and perspective."⁴⁰

Preaching

Francis's preaching flowed directly from his mystical prayer, which was decidedly Christocentric. This can be asserted in two ways. First, his preaching touched, not on abstract theological ideas, but on the sacredness and wonder of creation as a mirror of God, its creator. Secondly, he focused on events in Christ's life on earth as much as he did on his teachings. This relentless reference to Jesus as the Word made man was the natural consequence of a prayer and fraternal life centered on the humanity of Jesus. To fully apprehend this focus on the person of Christ in preaching as well as other forms of Franciscan communication, we must take a step back to examine its interior expression, namely prayer. In the realm of mystical prayer, Francis was innovative; his religious experience dramatically shaped the future of Western Christianity as a pioneer of what has been called "the mysticism of the historical event."⁴¹

Up to Francis's time, most Christian prayer had been primarily "soul" mysticism (an interior, neo-platonic, world-transcending prayer) or nature mysticism, which sought contact with God through creation. Francis synthesized

³⁹ Cook, *Francis*, 78.

⁴⁰ Thomas Merton, "Franciscan Eremitism" in *The Francis Book*, ed. Roy Gasnick (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 48.

⁴¹ Ewert Cousins, "Francis of Assisi: Mysticism at the Crossroads," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1983), 164.

the two with contemporary themes in theology, especially a devotion to the humanity of Christ ushered in by Bernard of Clairvaux. Francis did this by celebrating concrete details of the life of Jesus infusing them with spiritual energy and meaning.⁴²

Francis's preaching was not only centered on Jesus, it was concise: In the Rule of 1223, we find these words, "Moreover, I admonish and exhort those brothers that when they preach their language be well-considered and chaste for the benefit and edification of the people, announcing to them vices and virtues, punishment and glory, with brevity, because our Lord when on earth kept his words brief" (LR 9: 3). At the same time, his preaching was multi-faceted; today we might even call it multi-media. He preached not only with words, but also with deeds, with drama and with art.

If Francis saw in Jesus the exemplar of authenticity, who did what he preached and preached what he did, then he could expect nothing less of himself and those brothers who also preached. His dearest wish was that no one could accuse them of hypocrisy. "They were penitents preaching penance."⁴³ "(His) original intention was to live the Gospel before announcing it, to be an imitator of Christ before being a preacher, to accomplish works of penance (*facere poenitentiam*) before proclaiming them to others (*praedicare poenitentiam*)."⁴⁴

To do so, "Francis did not employ the *modus praedicandi*, i.e., the accustomed technique of priests, but rather the *modus concionandi*, the technique used to address civic assemblies."⁴⁵ This emphasis on personal testimony to his form of life and the faith that underpinned it gave rise to an uncommon style of preaching. ❧

⁴² Warner, *Spirituality*.

⁴³ Warner, *Spirituality*, 10-3.

⁴⁴ Servus Gieben, "Preaching in the Franciscan Order (Thirteenth Century)," *Monks, Nuns, and Friars in Medieval Society*, ed. Edward B. King, Jacqueline T. Schaefer and William B. Wadley (Sewanee, Tennessee: The Press of the University of the South, 1989), 4. Hereafter Gieben, *Preaching*.

⁴⁵ Manselli, *Francis*, 184.

Francis's way of preaching was no more like the common rhetoric of the moral exhortation of the doctrinal sermon than it was like the old genre of the homily. Technically, his preaching comes much closer to the popular discourse or harangue which was used in the local town hall or on a square of the Italian commune by the *podesta* or his opponents. This kind of popular rhetoric was called *contio* in opposition to the more cleaned and clerical *sermo*.⁴⁶

Although we have no record of sermons delivered by Francis, we do have this first-hand account of his preaching at Bologna in 1222, which underscored the efficacy of his preaching: "Men and women flocked to him; it was a question of who would at least touch the fringe of his clothing or who would tear off a piece of his poor habit."⁴⁷ "His word was like a burning fire."⁴⁸

I saw St. Francis preach in the public square in front of the public place.... His discourse did not belong to the great genre of sacred eloquence, rather they were harangues. In reality, throughout his discourse he spoke of the duty of putting an end to hatreds and of arranging a new treaty of peace.... God conferred so much power on his words that they brought back peace in many a seigniorial family torn apart until then by old, cruel, and furious hatreds.⁴⁹

In effect, Francis preached as though he were a captain exhorting his troops to steel their courage for the battle ahead. But instead of a battle against a human enemy, they needed to gird themselves against evil and its ally, complacency. His goal was to rally his fellow countrymen to undertake conversion and campaign for peace with the same vigor that would be needed to wage a war. Also part of his style was his arresting appearance, his demeanor and his clothing. He

⁴⁶ Gieben, *Preaching*, 5.

⁴⁷ Gieben, *Preaching*, 6.

⁴⁸ 1C X, FA:ED 1, 202.

⁴⁹ Gieben, *Preaching*, 6.

used these purposefully to accentuate the dramatic tone he sought to create.⁵⁰

If his style was unlike that used in standard sermons, so was the content. In his *Early Rule*, we find two chapters that deal explicitly with preaching,⁵¹ and both are evidently influenced by the decisions of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.⁵² The Council had imposed stringent rules about who had the authority to preach because of concern regarding the preaching of heretics.⁵³ But, "the preaching which the Council had in mind dealt with questions of faith and morality, consequently with doctrinal and moral sermons, not with the simple exhortation the friars might offer as they travelled about among country-people and citizens."⁵⁴ To be on the safe side, this *regula non bulata* also included a sample sermon: "And whenever it may please them, all my brothers can proclaim this or a like exhortation and praise among all the people with the blessing of God ..."⁵⁵ In the later rule, solemnly approved by Pope Honorius III in 1223, chapter nine is dedicated to preaching: "From the first sentence on, it appears that the Order is conscious of its apostolic mission, which does not depend on the authority of a bishop, though

⁵⁰ Manselli refers to Boncompagno of Signa, a teacher of rhetoric: "He was a contemporary of the saint and dedicated an entire book in his *Rhetorica novissima* to the art of *concionare* (declamation, haranguing).... The oratorical technique made use above all of means aimed at provoking the sensitivity and imagination of those present. For example, says Boncompagno, if someone wants to advocate a proposal of war, he should show up at the assembly wearing arms. He should then roll his eyes fiercely, speak with an excited voice, flail about, and fling himself in desperation to the ground. The whole time he should be making a racket by rattling his armour and weapons," Manselli, *Francis*, 184-85.

⁵¹ "He was the first to write a chapter about missionary work in a religious rule." Warner, *Franciscans*, 10-1.

⁵² Gieben, *Preaching*, 7.

⁵³ The Council's third decree "had established, besides other sanctions, that 'all those who, unlicensed or lacking a mission, without authorization by the Apostolic See or the catholic local bishop, presume to usurp the office of public or private teaching, be excommunicated and, unless they make a prompt amendment, be punished in another appropriate way.'" Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 8.

his authority must be respected.”⁵⁶ As though to avoid controversy regarding doctrine, this article made it clear that “the friar’s sermons should concern morality and the practice of Christian life.”⁵⁷

Emphasizing his vocation as preacher, early biographers recount his preaching to birds on the road to Bevagna, referred to earlier, as being a pivotal event in his life. Certainly, it is one of the most colorful. Here, we venture out of the realm of verifiable historical fact. While accounts of his preaching to birds are often repeated, embellishments are varied and questionable. But they do give eloquent witness to his loving regard for Creation, whether human or not, animate or inanimate, to the core of the message he conveyed, and to the attentive response that his preaching elicited, a proposition that is surely well founded.

An integral part of the mission that Francis embraced was the building and preservation of the harmony he found in Creation into the brotherhood of humanity. His self-understanding was as an instrument of the peace that God intended for the people he created in the image of the Holy Trinity. Insofar as Christ entered human history in order to bring to an anguished world a peace that is not of this world, Francis was prepared to serve that purpose, which summarizes all of the others, for it is the ultimate harvest of sowing faith, hope, love; pardon, light and joy:⁵⁸ “... [W]henver they entered especially a city, estate, town, or home, they announced peace, encouraging everyone to fear and love the Creator of heaven and earth and to observe the commandments.”⁵⁹ “Francis loved, preached and lived peace, and one cannot understand Franciscan spirituality without an appreciation for a deep sense of peace permeating all aspects of life.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁸ Such are the sentiments expressed in the so-called “Prayer of St. Francis.” Although not written by him, it is generally agreed to have been inspired by him, and does reflect beliefs expressed in the Admonitions.

⁵⁹ L3C X: 37, FA:ED 2, 90.

⁶⁰ Warner, *Spirituality*, 12-3.

In essence, peace was for Francis the litmus test of Gospel living, and the fruit of love: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt 5:9). This implied for him far more than simple self-restraint or episodic moments of respite in an otherwise hostile world. Its active ingredients were understood to be respect and compassion. It called for the humility to serve as lesser brothers and sisters in the spirit of Christ and for self-emptying. Indeed, the deliberate dedication of one’s life to peacemaking represented for Francis a type of *kenosis*.⁶¹

Despite reservations about his ability and worthiness to preach,⁶² Francis was prepared to be regarded as a fool for Christ, poor in ability,⁶³ in order to accept the evangelical challenge to preach repentance and the adoption of Gospel values. Given his emphasis on building community, he could no more refrain from urging others to repent and believe in the Gospel than he could from doing so himself, for this was the basic meaning on his faith. In essence, preaching the Gospel for Francis was inseparable from living the Gospel life. There would be no Gospel to live without the incarnate word, and the incarnate word would have no meaning if it were not communicated. The two were complementary; indeed, the two were indissociable and perhaps even indistinguishable.

⁶¹ Martyrdom appears in many forms in Franciscan life and communications: “Some are martyred in Morocco; some like Giles, embrace what he calls the “martyrdom of contemplation”; some, like Francis and Bonaventure, are martyred in community; some like Clare receive the martyrdom of illness and struggle with the Church; others, by creative work in the world. All are martyred in the cause of peace, searching dominantly for the presence of Christ and a way to make that presence effective.” Joseph P. Chinnici, “The Lord Give You Peace,” *Westfriars*, February 1985, 1. Hereafter Chinnici, *Peace*.

⁶² “I am a poor little man, simple and unskilled in speech; I have received a greater grace of prayer than of speaking.” Bonaventure, LMj XII, FA:ED 2, 622.

⁶³ Judging from the efficacy of his preaching, one might assume that his modest self assessment was more an expression of religious value than the result of authentic subjectivity or critical realism.

Drama

It is for that reason that we must look upon Francis's physical presentation of himself and his message as a deliberate form of communication. There is no doubt that he had an intuitive sense of dramatic style and an astute appreciation of the impact of theatrical devices. One cannot consider his dress and gestures without seeing an intention to create an effect. Similarly, one cannot fail to appreciate the far-reaching impact of so grand a gesture as his foolhardy journey across the frontiers of a holy war to embrace a Moslem prince or his dramatic re-enactment of the Lord's Nativity, not with gold and incense, but with an ox and an ass.

To teach by example, as Francis evidently did, "requires an injection of self into one's social context."⁶⁴ But his injection of self was more than mere example: "The extreme nature of Francis's behavior – having himself dragged naked through the streets like a criminal for having eaten a little meat while ill – led Bonaventure in the *Legenda maior* to caution against viewing his actions as exemplary."⁶⁵

The onlookers were amazed at the extraordinary spectacle and ... they were deeply moved, but they made no secret of the fact that they thought his humility was rather to be admired than imitated. His action certainly seems to have been intended rather as an omen reminiscent of the prophet Isaiah than as an example.⁶⁶

Clearly, Francis's communication was dramatic. To get a glimpse into the effect that he and his first followers had on the citizens of Assisi and surrounding communities, we must think not in terms of the cautious and sober presentation of the Gospel that we find in most churches today, but "as if the friars were a kind of medieval combination of charismatic

enthusiasm and the street wisdom of the Salvation Army. In such a context we may begin to imagine how the theatrical impulse ... may have appealed to Francis of Assisi and his medieval followers."⁶⁷

We know that at this time the Franciscans in Italy were already employing scriptural plays in their evangelical efforts. Secondly, we know that, as in their use of vernacular lyric, Franciscans soon obtained the extensive involvement of laymen through the development of confraternities.⁶⁸

Francis's dramatic presentation of Gospel truths poses for us who view this behavior from afar with a problem of understanding how measured he might have been and how suitable is his communication for our own time. There is no question that he had a monumental impact on people in his day, largely due to his keen abilities in communication, but his use of dramatic gestures to create a desired effect in particular must be evaluated in light of the price he paid for that effect:

Francis of Assisi was an effective teacher who intentionally illustrated the life of virtue in his own way of living. He was a teacher in the sense that the Hebrew prophets, Socrates or Gandhi were teachers. He was a performance artist for whom drama functioned pedagogically. His life was not meant to be an example to his followers; sometimes it was a dramatic lesson, meant to be watched, not imitated. All drama is inherently a distortion of reality because it focuses the attention on one aspect of reality. Francis's dramatized life distorts the importance of poverty, but this is a distortion from which we may be able to learn if we are able to imaginatively identify with Francis. For

⁶⁴ Hester Goodenough Gelber, "A Theatre of Virtue: The Exemplary World of St. Francis of Assisi," in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 15 ff.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁷ David Jeffrey, "St. Francis and Medieval Theatre," in *Franciscan Studies* 41 (1983): 322.

⁶⁸ Jeffrey, 325.

Francis, asceticism was a form of obedience, and obedience a mode of knowledge.⁶⁹

Writing

The *Early Rule* chronicled not only the systematic early development of the Franciscan Order but also "the development of the movement's linguistic culture."⁷⁰ As well, *The Admonitions* presented a lexicon that is key to the proper understanding of Francis's intended message. He adopted words that had particular resonance for his culture, particularly relating to evangelical living (*operibus praedicent*), working (*opera Domini*) and good things (*bona*).⁷¹ To understand the mind of Francis, we must become deeply steeped into the language he used and the purpose for which he communicated:

Franciscan culture is the meaning intrinsic to Franciscan practices. It did not begin with the scriptural passages quoted in Chapter One of the *Early Rule*; it began with their practical interpretation. (We have no Gospel. We only have interpretations of the Gospel).... Francis wanted his brothers to involve themselves in what they all had said and done up to that moment, well reported in the *Early Rule*. Such involvement was an integral part of Franciscan life. And Francis gave his brothers a brace of admonitions (XX and XXI) to help them do it.⁷²

But it is his *Testament* that most concerns us now as we conclude our study of Francis's communication and the long journey that led to it. In fact, at least two documents can be generally called testaments, one being chapter 22 of his

Early Rule, and the message that Francis appears to have dictated near the end of his life. Before we begin an appreciation of it as authentic and effective communication, we must bear in mind David Flood's caution that "we do not know how the text reached its final shape, nor do we know how it began circulating among the brothers. It belonged to the nature of the text as his parting words that Francis exercised no control over its final shape and publication."⁷³

Francis seems to have intended *The Testament* to be read in tandem with the rule: "His words exemplify the brothers' relationship to the rule as we find it in Chapter Twenty-Four of the *Early Rule*."⁷⁴ But, although this latter testament was clearly rooted in memories of the order's origins and the ideas expressed in the *Early Rule*, "from the first lines of the *Testament* on, Francis has in mind the text of 1223. By recalling history and administering a few stern corrections, he integrates a text of compromise (a canonical *regula*) into Franciscan life."⁷⁵ Francis must have felt the dangers of division, as already some brothers were inclined toward the original charism and others toward later developments, a danger he was powerless to prevent as discussions about the rule reached an impasse at the general chapter of 1230, only four years after his death. In fact, Francis had tried to impose unity by giving legal force to *The Testament*, which was crafted as a worthy and masterful attempt to bridge differences, but he lacked the canonical authority to do so.

In *Quo elongati*, Pope Gregory first declared that he knew perfectly what Francis had in mind in wording (in legislating) the rule as he did; and then he brought into operation the culture and the language capable of clearing up the obscurities brought to his attention (more precisely, he said that the brothers had asked him for help because he knew Francis's intentions.) He treated the *Testament* as legally inadmissible and glossed the reference to the Gospel into a legally manageable form. With that done, he addressed the other

⁶⁹ Laura Smit, *The Aesthetic Pedagogy of Francis of Assisi* (online www.sbu.edu/wcp/Papers/Medi/MediSmit)

⁷⁰ David Flood, "Why Francis Talked the Way He Did," in *The Cord* 51:5 (2001), 218-27.

⁷¹ Ibid., 225.

⁷² Flood, *Talked*, 225-27.

⁷³ David Flood, *Regulam Melius Observare* (unpublished essay).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

questions, beginning with money, handling everything in the terms of his canonical and ecclesial culture.⁷⁶

My purpose in citing this here is not to bring into question the suitability of these glosses but to underscore the fact that the *Testament* is an important communication precisely because it disturbed those who had issues with Francis's understanding and communication of Gospel meaning and value. The appeal for such glosses had more to do with the clarity than the ambiguity of his ultimate communication. Pope Gregory's *Quo elongati* was not to be the final word on our understanding of Francis's communication. While Brother Elias dominated the order as minister general during the 1230s and discouraged discussion of the rule, contrary to Francis's explicit wishes, open debate resumed during the 1240s and has continued arguably to our own day.

The question facing anyone wishing to communicate Francis's spiritual insights to our own culture is this one: Was Francis's way of looking at things compatible with our own? Certainly he was not a critical realist in the sense that we understand that expression today – nor could he have been. But relative to the context in which we must situate him, it may be said that he was naturally disposed to such an outlook. His struggle with religious questions was chiefly caused by his determination to be authentic. Can we today authentically appropriate and effectively communicate his spirituality without such an attitude? I suggest that we cannot. It would be folly to simplistically imitate someone from so foreign a culture. Yet it would be equally foolish to disregard his insights and the stunning parallels that exist between his socio-political and ecclesial environment and our own. It would be regrettable to set aside a tradition that carries with it a unique capacity to help us understand the desire that dwells within each of us, namely to find ultimate meaning and to fall in love.

The challenge is to communicate these insights with language that resonates for people today, particularly those who are unfamiliar with the expressions and even the categories

⁷⁶ Ibid.

of traditional religious discourse and the rituals of its celebration and worship. It is also to use the stories of Francis's life in new ways to engender passion in faith and compassion in love. It is finally to leverage genuine conversion in the hearts, minds and spirits of God's people. These challenges call us to be creative in the way we present Francis, always mindful of the adaptations required, and always recalling that Francis communicated by his life more than by his words ... as Jesus had done. While Francis's form of theology can be described as "archaic,"⁷⁷ his spirituality is timeless because it continues to "elicit our wonder and to inspire our feeble attempts to follow (him) in his dedication to the *vita evangelii Jesu Christi*."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ "Francis's form of theology is (...), as Thaddée Matura has put it, 'archaic,' in the sense that it harkens back to the richest forms of early Christian theology, such as we find in the Apostolic Fathers, before the differentiation of individual doctrines has had a chance to develop. Thus, in Francis's writings the many aspects of Christian belief appear together in a rich stew that can be difficult to digest for those who are more used to taking one part of the meal after another, that is, absorbing the distinctions and articulations of themes and doctrines found in most later theology. Hans Urs von Balthasar has shown how the differentiation of spirituality and theology, already at work in the late patristic period, became a separation in the later Middle Ages – a sundering that has had unfortunate consequences down to the present. Francis's archaizing theology is a good antidote to any incipient attempt to separate doctrinal insight and spiritual practice." Bernard McGinn, "Reflections on St. Francis at the New Millennium," in *Franciscan Studies* 58 (2000): 12-13.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 18.

**SUBSTITUTIONARY PRAYER
AND THE STIGMATA OF FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

DOROTHY C. BUCK

There is a series of frescoes by the renowned artist known as Giotto (1266-1327) that is magnificently displayed in the upper church of the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi, Italy. Amidst scenes in the life of St. Francis the one of the saint's visit to the Muslim Sultan in Damietta, Egypt in 1219 stands out. We can see Francis standing before the throne of Sultan Malik-el-Kamil ready to withstand a "trial by fire" to prove the truth of his Christian faith in Jesus Christ, while those witnesses to the scene huddle aside in awe. This event in the life of Francis and the Franciscan movement is a story whose time has come. Recent scholarship exploring this event and its meaning bring to light its implications for our contemporary efforts at dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Indeed it speaks to our need to heal the wounds among all three Abrahamic faith traditions and to see all people everywhere as our brothers and sisters, as did Francis.

Placing this event in the context of the on-going conversion, or spiritual journey, of Francis as well as in the historical reality of his time, allows us to fully appreciate the magnitude of the vision of this great mystic. It will lead us to La Verna, the place of his mystical meditation on the Passion of Jesus Christ, raised on a Cross and crucified for the healing and salvation of humanity, that led to the five wounds of Christ becoming visible on the body of Francis. This stigmata and its meaning has inspired hundreds of years of scholarship and many thousands to join religious communities

Dorothy Buck

dedicated to the vision and charism of their seraphic father, Francis of Assisi.

MYSTICAL SUBSTITUTION

Deep within the heart of Catholic mystical experience and part of the most ancient spiritual tradition of compassion in the church is a calling to substitutionary prayer. We used to refer to those men and women called to this prayer as "victim souls," those who were so spiritually identified with the suffering of the crucified Christ for the salvation of humanity that they took the sufferings of others onto themselves both mentally and physically, healing them by suffering in their place, as did Jesus. This form of love and compassion for others begins with loving God in Christ passionately. Those called to it recognize their own face and Christ's face in the faces of every other human being and see the struggles and suffering in life as intrinsically connected to his. Their tears for the violence we human beings inflict upon one another and their imploring prayers for healing and peaceful resolutions are offered equally for both those who cause suffering and those who are their victims.

J.-K. Huysmans, the nineteenth century spiritual writer once said that in every generation there are such souls, called to quietly suffer in compassionate love for a world fraught with natural disasters and human weakness.¹ Christ said, "there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for another" (John 15:13), and in very human terms we know that a mother does not hesitate to put herself in danger in order to save her child who is running out into the street. Compassionate lovers of God are those who love all others as a mother loves her child and know all those of different faith

¹ Joris Karl Huysmans, *St. Lydwine of Schiedam* (1380-1433), trans. Agnes Hastings (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1979). Lydwine was one of the great sufferers. Her suffering taught her the capacity to assimilate the ills of the earth and consume them in the furnace of her love for the Stranger in her own being.

traditions, different races and nationalities as brothers and sisters.

Louis Massignon, a French Catholic mystic, and scholar of Islamic religion and culture initiated a movement dedicated to substitutionary prayer in Cairo, Egypt in 1934. At that time Christians who had lived in Egypt for generations were leaving as Islam became the dominant religious and political power. Massignon's knowledge of Islamic culture and respect for his Muslim colleagues and friends, along with his love for Eastern forms of Christian worship inspired him to encourage them to stay.

On February 9, 1934 Louis Massignon and an Egyptian Melkite Christian woman named Mary Kalil made a vow together to dedicate their prayer and their lives to their Muslim neighbors. Massignon chose an ancient Franciscan chapel in Damietta, Egypt to make their vow. They gathered other Egyptian Christians together in this prayer of spiritual substitution which gave them support and courage to stay there. They sought ways to engage with their Muslim neighbors, praying for them while working with them, sharing life and "crossing over to the other" as Massignon would say, discovering friendship and common human values. They called their prayer movement the Badaliya, an Arabic word meaning to exchange one thing for another, or substitution.

Massignon's scholarship involved researching the life and writings of a tenth century Sufi mystic called al-Hallaj. He discovered that in the Muslim mystical tradition there were also those called substitutes, or *abdal* in Arabic, which is the root of his term *Badaliya*. Massignon saw al-Hallaj as a true *abdal* since this great lover of Allah was martyred in the year 922 in Baghdad, dying for the sake of the Muslim community because his efforts to bring them closer to God threatened the political establishment. The prayer of the *abdal* is less about consolation and peace in one's heart than it is about entering so deeply into the immensity of God's love for all human beings that one begins to love as God loves, willingly sacrificing oneself if necessary out of compassion for others. Those called want everyone to experience God's love as they experience it, because they know that only this kind of love

can heal the broken hearted and set prisoners free. In 1931 Massignon became a secular Franciscan inspired by Franciscan spirituality that experiences all of creation as sacred and every human being as a brother or sister. The inspiration of St. Francis's visit to the Muslim Sultan in Damietta, Egypt in the year 1219² was especially compelling for Massignon.

SAINT FRANCIS AND HIS DIALOGUE OF HEARTS

In his lifetime St. Francis was to witness two Crusades initiated by the popes to eradicate Islam and recover Jerusalem from the Muslims. He had grown up with the glitter of shining armor and valiant knights fighting for the glory of Christendom filling his imagination and he longed to join them. He did try, but after a painful imprisonment and a long recuperation he had a transforming conversion experience that shaped the remainder of his life. The call to arms preached in all the French and Italian churches promised salvation to all those who lost their lives in Christ's name. The Holy Land belongs to Christ and should, the preachers maintained, be recovered. The people were told that participation in the Crusades was a way to imitate Christ and that all believers were expected to take up arms and their families to donate funds.

Francis not only heard the pope's call but he also wanted to be a knight battling for the sake of the kingdom of God and he wanted to be a martyr, to give his life for his love of Christ. However he had a very different vision of God. The Fifth Crusade took place from 1217 to 1221. By then Francis, in a radical departure from the Christian cultural norms of his time, was instructing his brothers in his understanding of the meaning of life as a follower of Jesus. The guiding light for Francis came from the Gospel of Matthew, "Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you" (Matt 5:44). His life was informed by these words of Jesus that he took to heart so much so that he considered the Muslims, who the

² Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis* 57, in *FA:ED* 1, 231.

Church insisted were the enemies of Christ, not only friends but brothers. In fact, Francis had come to recognize the universal brotherhood of all human beings because they were all created by the love of God and he extended his understanding to all of creation. The sacredness of all of created life and especially all men and women led him to experience everything that violated this sacred unity as sinful.³

The Christian crusaders captured the city of Damietta, Egypt in November of the year 1219. That June Francis decided to take a few of his brothers to the crusading army encamped there hoping to turn them away from violence. His greatest desire was to visit the Sultan encamped just south of the city. His weapon was a message of peace and his hope was for the conversion of hearts. The Franciscan priest Giulio Basetti-Sani, who was a disciple of Louis Massignon, called St. Francis the first Catholic to initiate dialogue with Islam. He understood that to fully grasp the importance of Francis's actions we have to begin with a story out of the life of the Prophet of Islam.

There is an episode in the life of Muhammad (PBUH)⁴ when he sought the answer to his questions about the Christians and their beliefs about Jesus. A dispute had arisen in front of him between the Jews of Medina and a Christian delegation from Najran about the nature and mission of Jesus Christ. He sought a decisive judgment. On January 15, 631, he challenged the Christians of Najran to invoke the judgment of God through a "trial by fire" called the "Mubahala" in order to know the truth about Jesus. The Christians would agree to walk into a blazing fire and if they emerged unharmed it would prove the truth about Jesus. Muhammad (PBUH) chose five members of his family as witnesses and they gathered together in a tent. He raised his hands in

a gesture of supplication and prayer to call on the judgment of God.

As the Christians approached the tent they saw terrifying bursts of lightning above it, brilliant stars, and birds falling to the ground. Their Christian leader warned them that this was a sign that Muhammad (PBUH) was indeed a Prophet sent by God and that they should leave him to his religion and return home. They decided not to continue the discussion or the trial by fire. Instead they were offered a pact safeguarding the two communities of the Torah and the Gospel by paying a tribute in exchange for their lives and the freedom to practice their religions undisturbed. According to Basetti-Sani this scene was interestingly repeated in the thirteenth century as an important event in the life of St. Francis.⁵

Francis's Visit to the Muslim Sultan

In June 1219, Francis and a few of his brothers went to the camp of the crusading army and stayed with them for some weeks hoping to dissuade them from attacking the Muslims. South of the city the Muslim Sultan, Malik el-Kamil was encamped in a place called al-Marsurra. Francis finally received permission from the army Commander to approach the Muslim camp being warned that he would likely be killed. He took Brother Illuminato with him and once over the line they were picked up by the Muslim guards and after some difficulties were taken to the Sultan's tent.

They were received hospitably and Francis entered into dialogue with the Sultan. He spoke as a brother rather than as an enemy, true to his spiritual experience of God in Christ that even an enemy is a brother. In his effort to convince the Sultan of the truth of his words Francis offered to throw himself into the fire in order that the Muslim Sultan and all Muslims would recognize the whole truth of Christ's life, crucifixion and resurrection. Here Bassetti-Sani suggests that

³ Michael F. Cusato, "Of Snakes and Angels: the Mystical Experience Behind the Stigmatization Narrative of 1 Celano," in *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi New Studies, New Perspectives* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2006), 70.

⁴ Peace Be Upon Him, a standard Islamic response honoring the names of holy souls.

⁵ Cusato, "Of Snakes and Angels," 71.

this was an offering to take the place of the seventh century Christians of Najran in Medina who were unwilling to offer their lives to prove the truth of their faith. In fact Francis was not only willing to risk his life as proof of the truth of his faith, but also in order to save the souls of these Muslim brothers out of love for them, Christ's love. His offering was especially for the Sultan who he had come to know and respect. Now in the thirteenth century, Francis's love for Christ and his recognition of Christ's love for all his human brothers and sisters compelled him to offer this sacrifice himself. His was an act of substitution even if he knew nothing of the seventh century Christians of Najran.

The Sultan Malik-el Kamil and his spiritual advisor Fakhr-el-Din al Farisi refused St. Francis's offer to undergo the trial by fire since it is written in the Qur'an that God reserves the right to reveal the mystery of Christ to the angels and humanity at the Last Judgment. Remaining true to their faith they could not agree to this test of God's intention. Instead they gave St. Francis safe conduct back to the Christian camp in Damietta and some say he was even offered the opportunity to travel unharmed to Jerusalem, although that is likely to be more legend than truth.

For Louis Massignon this event in the life of St. Francis inspired him to become a secular Third Order Franciscan in 1931. It also inspired his choice of an obscure Franciscan chapel in Damietta, Egypt in which to make the original vow of Badaliya. Francis's visit to the Sultan and willingness to sacrifice himself out of love was an example of the prayer of substitution that is the foundation of the Badaliya prayer movement that Massignon and Mary Kalil established in 1934. As followers of Jesus we are called to offer our own lives for our friends. We are even asked to pray for those who persecute us. Doesn't Jesus show his own love of humanity through us and our willingness to love as he did? Even if it means sacrificing our own lives for others, the poor, the refugees, the homeless and even those of other faith traditions?

Bassetti-Sani was convinced that Francis stands as the first model for Muslim Christian dialogue: to have enough love for our brothers and sisters of other faith traditions to

offer our lives for them. He understood Francis's call to reach the Muslims with his message of Christ's love for them as his special vocation, and therefore Francis is our model for engagement with them.

Francis's vision on Mt. La Verna

It is in the light of Francis's great concern for the major conflict in his time between Muslims and Christians that we are invited to view the events in his life that followed. By the year 1224 the tension between Muslims and Christians had increasingly heightened. The Christian army was preparing for yet another violent assault and Francis was particularly concerned for the safety of his brother, Sultan Malik el-Kamil. In fact recent scholars describe him as despairing in heart and spirit as he traveled to the hermitage at La Verna in August accompanied by Brothers Illuminato and Leo and some other companions. His deep despair was fueled by the dissenting voices among his growing community of thousands of brothers and his struggle to maintain his original vision of religious community. On his return from Damietta he learned that the first Franciscan friars were martyred in Morocco by using the Gospel message to challenge the Muslim community rather than witnessing to the truth of Christ by the example of their love. Francis's own love for all of God's creation and his increasing identification with the immensity of Jesus' love for humanity, witnessed by his willingness to suffer death on a Cross, had become the core of Francis's intense meditation and prayer.

We can not know for certain what Francis held in his heart about his first martyred brothers, nor how he would have understood the insistence of his church on violent military solutions to conflict rather than his own vision of Christ's witness to non-violence and universal brotherhood. But we do know that his pain and confusion led him to enter into a time of forty days of fasting and prayer called the Lent of St. Michael. Was this an act of penance for the iniquities of his brothers in Christ, or an act of supplication for the safety

and salvation of his Muslim friend, the Sultan Malik el-Kamil who was faced with another violent onslaught by the crusading armies?⁶

At the end of the forty days of prayer in September 1224, Francis went alone to a solitary place on Mt. La Verna to offer himself in prayer. Recent scholars suggest that this took place on or around the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross in the Roman liturgical calendar. In the intensity of Francis's mystical prayer, presumably meditating on the bloody and beaten body of the crucified Christ with whom he himself was so personally identified, the very wounds of the Crucified One began to appear on his own body. Cusato calls Francis's experience of the stigmata the "deepest and most authentic form of a psychosomatic event." He writes, "... profound, intense, even mystical prayer can begin to literally explode out of one's psyche (one's soul) into and through one's very flesh." He points to the theological insight of Bonaventure who understood that from the time of Francis's conversion he began to internalize the Cross of Christ that gradually permeated his very being until it appeared on his own flesh as the stigmata on Mt. La Verna.⁷

Francis was silent about his mystical experience and did not speak of the stigmata to his brothers who only saw the wounds on his body when Francis died. The earliest attempts by his first biographer, Thomas of Celano, to explain the mystical experience followed by the appearance of the stigmata of St. Francis at La Verna, describes a vision of Christ appearing to Francis in the form of a Seraph. Recent scholarship relates this image to several biblical texts notably John 3:13-17 verse 14 that states. "For just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so too must the Son of Man be lifted up." The reference to Moses is to the story in the Hebrew Scriptures (Numbers 21:4-9) of a snake whose poisonous bite caused a feeling of fiery burning and ultimate death to its Hebrew victims who had escaped with Moses into the Egyptian desert. God instructed Moses to raise up a

bronze image of the seraphic, or fiery serpent, in order that those who looked upon it be healed. Was Francis meditating on the Gospel of John's reference to Moses and the serpent in relation to the crucified Christ? We don't know, but from Celano's early description Francis became known as the Seraphic father of the Franciscan movement.⁸

Filled with joy after receiving the stigmata that assured him of Christ's healing and salvation for all of humanity Francis wrote a prayer of thanksgiving called *The Praises of God* on a small piece of parchment known as the *chartula*. Cusato's current detailed research describes both sides of the *chartula*, including a drawing that can be interpreted as a bearded head wearing a turban, and the writing that could indicate his own tearful prayer for the Sultan's recognition of the fullness of Christ, along with a blessing. These highlight even more definitively the connection of Francis visit to the Sultan in Damietta to his experience at La Verna. His fervent prayer for his Muslim brother who he had come to know and respect was a direct response to the new invasion being organized by the crusader's army now reinforced by the Holy Roman Emperor himself.

Cusato notes that *The Praises of God* have an interesting resemblance in style to the Islamic litany of the Ninety-nine Names of Allah and surely arose out of Francis's experience in Egypt and heartfelt concern for the salvation of his brother, as well as out of joy at the answer to his prayer, God's mysterious gift of the stigmata.⁹ Here was the verification of Francis's vision of what is necessary for the healing of humanity, not violence, but love, even unto death. Francis's prayer was a true Badaliya, or substitutionary prayer, as it came out of the depth of a broken heart torn apart by the reality of human weakness and false solutions to human conflict. The answer for Francis is the Cross of Jesus Christ, the epitome of a non-violent response to the abuses of power and injustice in the world.

⁶ Cusato, "Of Snakes and Angels," 52-53.

⁷ Cusato, "Of Snakes and Angels," 36-44.

⁸ Cusato, "Of Snakes and Angels," 53-68.

⁹ G. Basetti-Sani, *L'Islam et St. François d'Assise: la mission prophétique pour le dialogue* (Paris: Editions Publisud, 1987), 248.

One could say that the stigmata was a sign of Francis's great love, not only for his brothers in Christ but also for the Muslims who he had tried to bring to recognize the fullness of Christ within their own tradition, at Damietta. For Basetti-Sani the stigmata is a new proof of the truth of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. He writes:

These wounds made Francis suffer and bleed in order that he could witness to humanity and the Church, through the centuries, how much he loved the Muslims, and how for them especially the passion and death of Christ was renewed in Francis himself.... In the blood of the five wounds of Francis Islam received a new proof of the love of God for all the descendents of Abraham in the line of Ishmael.... If even into our time Christians have paid little attention to the meaning of this manifestation of Christ and the stigmata of the Seraphic Father as a sign of the mercy of God for Islam, today they should see to it that this call reaches all Muslims invited to dialogue.¹⁰



¹⁰ G. Basetti-Sani, *L'Islam et St. François d'Assise: la mission prophétique pour le dialogue* (Paris: Editions Publisud, 1987), 248.

RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST IN CLARE'S LETTERS TO AGNES

RUTH AGNES EVANS, O.S.C.

I would like to examine the way that Clare looks at relationship with Jesus in her letters to Agnes and the language with which she chooses to do this. She possesses a flexibility of self-expression, which speaks of freedom and the deeply personal nature of her insights. She approaches and explores this relationship in a way that is extraordinarily vivid and atmospheric, creating a very concrete emotional sense of her relationship with Jesus. She passionately justifies her choice of him using a language of extreme love. The context of this love is a strong, unflinching realism. Her letters to Agnes engage the question of relationship to Jesus with intensity and depth, skilfully and creatively seeking to illuminate and penetrate his reality through vivid visual imagery. A key and recurring image for Clare in this engagement with the truth is sight, the act of looking.

Clare's letters, beautiful pieces of spiritual literature, stand at a significant historical moment. Francis died in 1226. Clare was part of a developing Franciscan movement that was undergoing change and conflict; hers was not the freedom of an isolated voice. Clare was under pressure from church authority to depart from or compromise the vision that she had shared with Francis. Given this situation, she would have been acutely aware of her responsibility to inspire and influence her own charism, to direct it in loyal accordance with the inheritance that she had received.

In the first letter Clare is concerned with establishing a relationship to Agnes, a woman she has never met. And the purpose of this first letter is to offer some advice, in a kind

and encouraging form, about how Agnes should approach her relationship with Christ, a sensitive and personal subject. The Princess Agnes of Bohemia, having rejected the hand of the Holy Roman Emperor in marriage, had created a furor in Europe on June 11, 1234 by entering a Franciscan convent she had herself built. Clare's letter was probably sent to Agnes about this time. There is no discernible hesitation in Clare's approach to Agnes and though the subsequent letters grow in intimacy, even this first letter suggests confidence and ease.

The subject matter between the two women is relevant to anyone seeking a deeper union with Christ, but particularly to the woman who enters a monastery nursing the hope that relationship with Jesus will prove equal to a lifetime lived in the Poor Clare context. Perhaps this is why others with whom I have read the letters have been struck by a sense of their immediacy, a sense of becoming involved in the quest to know Jesus, which Clare articulates. It is difficult to imagine that Agnes could have entered her monastery without sensing her own vulnerability and without asking herself how her relationship with Jesus would unfold. Clare approaches the foreign princess with skill and sensitivity, touchingly combined with humility and sincerity. Her treatment of relationship with Christ is very concrete and honest, almost disconcertingly so. Without any artificial self-abnegation, she deals straightforwardly with the questions that we would ask of any relationship of great consequence. Will this make me happy? Is it worth the sacrifice? Such realism makes the letters direct and accessible as a spiritual document. The vital sense of a relation with Christ cherished, lived out and experienced gives the letters their ambience of discovery and excitement. This is true even, perhaps especially, in letter four when Clare is dying. The developing bond between the two women creates an atmosphere of trust and intimacy, an appropriate setting for the convincing sense of who Jesus is to her that Clare communicates.

Clare's use of imagery in the first letter contains some interesting contradictions. She is supporting Agnes in her renunciation of status and a royal marriage with its accompa-

nying adornments, yet chooses to encourage Agnes with an evocative imagery that employs these very things. Taking images of pearls and precious stones based on the metaphors used to describe the popular Roman martyr in the *Office of Saint Agnes*,¹ Clare writes,

Now you are held close in the embrace of him who has adorned your breast with precious stones and given pearls of great price for your ears, and completely surrounded you with spring-like and shining jewels and crowned you with a coronet of gold, as a particular token of holiness (10-11).²

Clare is not, of course, describing actual marriage, actual jewellery. As she comments in verse six, Agnes has "rejected all that." The Latin word Clare uses here for rejected is *re-spungere*, which can mean to spit out, repel or spurn. Clare is talking of a very decisive dismissal. Why then does she use imagery reminiscent of the state of life that Agnes has refused? It is understandable that Clare chose to encourage Agnes by drawing parallels between Agnes and her canonized namesake. Additionally, Clare clearly wanted to use images suggesting the abundant recognition, support and tenderness that a bridegroom showers upon his bride. She employs the imagery of a young woman's need and appetite to be loved. Not everyone finds this romantic imagery easy to relate to as a portrait of vocation. Read in the context of Clare's concern for Agnes, however, the impression is of an instinct for words which will give Agnes confidence, which will help bridge the gulf between what the Princess Agnes was trained to do with her life and what she has in fact chosen. Agnes is now at a distance from every source of previous security, including emotional and economic security. Far from sternly impressing on the younger woman the daunting nature of the realities she has now embraced, Clare writes to her in imagery that is familiar and reassuring. You will be

¹ Joan Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes Texts and Sources* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2001), 122.

² The translation used in quoted passages is that of Sister Frances Teresa Downing, O.S.C.

able to love Jesus; she seems to say. You will understand his approach to you. You will be close to him. He will take good care of you. She gently responds to Agnes in her vulnerability and inexperience. One obvious source of inspiration is Francis, who was quick to perceive the effectiveness of imagery borrowed from a once cherished sphere of hope for concentrating his energies on his present goal. Francis harnessed the harsh life of poverty he had chosen to an image of the woman of his former dreams. This was the ideal woman of the courtly love tradition who was worth everything her knight could suffer.³

Clare is clearly indicating that in her own relationship with Jesus she has experienced great happiness. She is generous in her readiness to open her inner life, the springs of her own heart, to Agnes and in her desire that Agnes should be equally blessed. It is part of the literary beauty and spiritual depth of the letters that this specific visual imagery is so pregnant, leaves so much unfathomed. Since her language is symbolic, the precise character of Clare's mystical experience is not defined but we are left in no doubt of the sense of completion that her relationship with Jesus gives her. There is a refreshing innocence about a spirituality which includes a willingness to receive and to be satisfied, not only eschatologically through hope and faith and loving acts of the will, but experientially and existentially in the here and now. We see how rich and humane Clare's vision of poverty actually is since it includes the eagerness to be fulfilled completely as a human being.

In verse nine, Clare provides a detailed portrait of the beloved.

His resources are stronger, his generosity of a far higher kind, his look more beautiful, love more tender and every grace more attractive.

Clare encourages Agnes to believe in the accessibility of Jesus using imagery that alludes to language from the *Office*

of *Saint Agnes*. The words are startlingly realistic and direct. Love him, she seems to say, because he is more lovable and more worthy to be loved. The argument is touching in view of its very simplicity and ordinariness, its straightforward logic. It is the immediacy of her approach to relationship with Jesus that is striking, her ability to trust totally in her own experience of loving him. Clare's thinking throughout the letters presupposes the need for our redemption, but her delight in encounter with Jesus is not marred by an excessive preoccupation with sin. There is a joy about her language as she recreates the atmosphere of her own discovery of Jesus. And yet this translucent language remains mysterious. Clare's words admit their own limits. Jesus, as bridegroom, does possess these attributes, yet in a different and higher sense. While Clare has listed the desirable qualities of an earthly bridegroom, how are they to be understood as applied to Christ? And how are they present to his spouse? Clearly Agnes has work to do as she ponders these open questions, considers them in the light of the promises and self-revelation of Jesus in the Gospels. Clare is willing to witness to the truth of Jesus' gift of himself to her, just as a woman will guarantee the authenticity of her knowledge of her lover. It is a powerful metaphor. While Agnes could have accessed a great deal of immediately obvious splendor and protection in the form of the emperor, Clare applauds her resolve to look for love with more searching eyes. His contemporaries knew Emperor Frederick II, Agnes's rejected suitor, as *Stupor mundi*, or "the wonder of the world." The possibilities of encounter with Jesus are intrinsically different and greater, Clare is saying, he offers you a much more profound security. Clare keeps encouraging Agnes to look more deeply where she is already focussed, a theme to which she will return.

The beautiful conjugal imagery from the *Office of Saint Agnes* is borrowed by Clare to suggest that relationship with Christ is even more desirable than earthly marriage. We feel that Clare has accepted Christ, not through denying or refusing to appreciate what that other way of life could have meant, but by recognizing the abandoned possibility and yet joyfully choosing Christ in a free act of love. Clare's aware-

³ *The Legend of the Three Companions*, in *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents*, Volume 2, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), 72.

ness of the beauty of earthly marriage is suggested by her use of this vivid imagery.

Loving Him, You are chaste;
touching Him, You are made more pure;
taking Him to yourself, You are a virgin (8).

This description of the surrender of self that takes place in an encounter of profound love is a perfect illustration of Clare's understanding of poverty. The verse expresses the lover's paradoxical discovery and realization of who she is at the very moment when she is totally occupied by the other. More than this, the self that she discovers is the bridegroom's gift, the fruit of their contact. Clare is working within a mystical tradition that used the emotions and experiences of passionate human love as an image for the encounter with God. Bernard of Clairvaux had used the *Song of Songs* as the subject of a series of lectures for his monks from 1135 to 1153. Subsequently, the erotic imagery of the *Song of Songs* was frequently used as a source of meditation and inspiration for the Christian meditating on the love of God.

Clare looks at poverty in the letter from a deeply personal, not a legal perspective. In her hymn on poverty, verses 15-17, she assesses poverty with the eyes of the interior self and illustrates her understanding of poverty as inseparable from relationship with Jesus.

O blessed poverty, who guarantees eternal riches to those who love and embrace her. O holy poverty, to those who hold and long for her, the kingdom of heaven has been promised by God and she has surely shown forth eternal glory and blessed life.

O faithful poverty, because the Lord Jesus Christ, who spoke and they were made, who ruled heaven and earth and still does, held you worthy to be embraced before all else! The foxes have holes, he said, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man, that is Christ, has nowhere to lay his head but bowing his head, he gave up his Spirit (15-18).

The hymn is an answer to a question. What is it that justifies the commitment to Franciscan poverty? Clare reveals the humility and intellectual candor of her teaching method by examining the assumptions behind her choices. With an elegantly graduated and restrained ascent, she brings her hymn on poverty to its culmination.

She begins unashamedly in verses 15 and 16 with an appeal to self-interest; you will ultimately be better off for your poverty, she argues, you will have eternal riches. You will go to heaven. We detect Clare's human wisdom. There is a valid place for our concern for our own destiny, she recognises. It is right that we should ask where we finally shall be and to want this place to be heaven. There is a better grounding for unselfish love, both spiritually and psychologically, she seems to say, when the laws of human growth and legitimate self-interest are respected. But this recognition leads, in the hymn, not to the triumph of self-interest, but to disinterested love. In the final verse of the hymn, poverty is embraced very simply because Jesus embraced it. Clare emphasizes the omnipotence of Christ as God. He created at his word. He rules heaven and earth. And yet he embraced poverty before all else. We sense her awe before the mystery of Jesus and the emotional pull that she experiences in the wake of his self-impoverty. Clare now points to the union of self, of will, with Christ to which he has invited us. Our reason, our powers of calculation, she seems to say, can assist us in loving Christ. They can inform us that ultimately and eternally we will be better off for our choice. At a certain point, however, we become his in a union of identity and resolve which transcends the ego.

At this point love has no motive or argument beyond itself. Like a musician sustaining a pure note, Clare follows her hymn in verse 18 with words from the Gospel. She has chosen one of the very few sayings in which Jesus refers directly to the suffering of his harsh life as a wandering preacher, a popular quote in the early Franciscan movement to justify homelessness or disregard for the quality of one's housing.⁴

⁴ Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes Texts and Sources*, 157-58.

In an original development, Clare then intensifies the image by tersely fusing it with an image of Christ's torment on the cross, underlining both the irrevocable nature of his poverty and his extreme love. The result represents the culmination of Clare's "case" for loving Jesus in poverty, since he handed over everything for us, including his own breath. Speaking from the mouth of Christ adds to the power of the image. Poverty is the true place for encounter with Jesus who was literally unsupported in death. This sudden picture of Jesus in his unmet human need and pain strengthens his presence in the letter and the exigency of his claims. Clare could hardly argue in defence of Agnes's choice to live without material security more movingly or more painfully.

In verse 30, Clare sums up the theme of her letter. She borrows a language of exchange from the world of commerce, to describe the possession of the Gospel and its promises.

Indeed, what a great and praiseworthy piece of commerce it is to leave the temporal for the eternal, to be promised the heavenly in exchange for the earthly, to receive a hundredfold for one, and to possess the blessed and eternal life.

We know that she is expressing in her own words the ideology of the early Franciscan movement, which was not afraid to borrow imagery from the world it contradicted. In so doing, early Franciscanism was able to suggest that loving Jesus, just like commerce in its own sphere, is about the tough and prosaic substance of our earthly existence, it is about risking what you have for your goal, it is about actuality. Through this imagery, Clare is able to suggest, as she has done throughout, that her own vision is more deeply grounded in reality than the seemingly concrete and well substantiated perspective of worldly aspiration.

Clare's language for exploring relationship to Christ is vibrant and realistic, almost disconcertingly so. The freedom with which she expresses herself seems remarkable in view of a culture that encouraged women to disown their femininity in order to develop a "purified" spiritual identity. She can express what she feels for him with a confidence and

innocence that seem utterly unself-conscious and authentic. She believes in her own capacity to love him. With sensitivity and empathy, her language reflects the fresh atmosphere of the discovery of vocation by the young princess. It is the language of generous love, free and trusting in its willingness to confide its secrets. And yet at the same time it is considered, possesses a poise and assurance that demonstrates mature deliberation.

Clare's society was highly conscious of status, as Clare's scrupulous recognition of the titles due to the Princess Agnes in the first letter illustrates. In a feudal society, everyone had their role in the hierarchy and knew how they were placed in relation to other members of the structure. As a member of the noble class, Clare had been part of the system and was aware that it was under threat from social changes and the forces of capitalism. More significantly for Clare, however, current concepts of status and social privilege had been challenged by the example of Francis, a member of the merchant class, through his identification with Jesus. Relationship to Christ was radical and exciting to Clare because Jesus' behaviour in becoming man reversed the very concept of status as normally professed. Far from trying to preserve his privileges, as the nobility to which she belonged was desperately seeking to do, Jesus stripped himself of the privileges of his Godhead in order to become a man and made all people his brothers and sisters. Motivated by this exemplary generosity and boundless love, it became possible to define social relationships in a new way. Francis had understood and enacted this in his life. A key task for Clare in these letters was to express her liberated sense of what a relationship can now mean. In particular, how was she to place herself and Agnes in relation to Jesus?

Within four years of writing her first letter to Agnes, Clare penned the text known as the second letter. There is a change of tone. Its language is less triumphant; a steely determination to pursue her commitment to Christ to the end shines through. Relations with Agnes are even more tender and affectionate. In the first letter Agnes was addressed with the formal form of *you* or *vos*. In contrast, Agnes is now

addressed with the informal *tu*, implying solidarity of purpose, a shared sense of resolve, which is able to dispense with formalities. The women are united by a decision to love Christ come what may that is brave and passionate but also considered, convinced that it carries a wisdom that will bear the test of time and which will triumph in eternity. The letter squarely addresses the issues of perseverance in adverse circumstances. Agnes is facing a struggle with the Pope in her effort to be true to Clare's demanding interpretation of poverty and it would seem that she is experiencing discouragement as a result. Again, Clare is confronted with a particular challenge to articulate and defend her vision. We can be grateful for the tensions that invited Clare to define her understanding of Jesus and relationship with him. Perfection is a loaded word and the expectations it inspires can be a burden. Having spent much of her life resisting notions of virtuous behaviour that were not her own, Clare knew this well. Tension between Agnes and the Pope over the meaning of Franciscan perfection leads Clare to define her own understanding of perfection in greater depth.

The early Franciscans understood perfection to mean following Christ in his poverty.

Clare in this letter associates Agnes's struggle to keep her monastery free from endowments and secure sources of revenue with spiritual perfection. True to the understanding that she shared with Francis, Clare focuses on God as the source of perfection. Just as in the first letter, the bride can only recognize her virginity in the bridegroom, now perfection is to be understood solely as God's gift. Agnes's perfection, then, is not something to be emotionally appropriated as if it were a personal possession or reason for self-regard. Clare writes,

[S]o that, by being made a loving imitator of the Father of perfections, you might merit to be made perfect, lest his eyes should see anything imperfect in you (4).

In the first letter it was already clear that the act of seeing, of looking intently at the one who is loved, is a central theme in Clare's spirituality, as it was for Francis. Again, this is an

immediately recognizable theme from the language of human love. Clare suddenly invites Agnes to consider the perspective that God has as he looks at her, a characteristic deepening of focus. It is his vision, what he sees, which is important for one who loves him. Thus Clare purifies the concept of perfection from all self-seeking since it exists in Agnes only as his gift and for his sake. The search for perfection is to be understood as the need and obligation that Agnes has to become his, totally offered to his gaze. This language excludes the notion of a perfection characterized by narcissistic self-analysis. Just as only God can give perfection, only he can ultimately verify the gift. Clare writes more about the work of internalizing the perspective of God later. And the reward for the perfection that Clare marks out is eternal union.

Characteristically, Clare describes the reward in terms of the relationship. The reward of perfection is the reward of eternal relationship with Christ, a gift so immense that it exceeds the capacity of language. Borrowing imagery of a heavenly bridal chamber and throne of stars from the Office of the Assumption, which suggests the letter may have been written around this time, Clare writes,

This is that perfection which the king himself will share with you in the heavenly bridal chamber, where he is gloriously seated on a throne of stars ... (5).

Notably, the relationship is not merely the reward of perfection but *is* the perfection. Clare does not envisage the quest for perfection as a solitary endeavour. She sees it rather as the consequence or culmination of relationship with Christ. Instead of seeing it as a static flawlessness, a somewhat frightening concept, Clare seems to understand perfection as a principle of growth. We can grow fully as we ought to grow, she is saying, develop our human potential and come to its realization through relationship with Jesus.

Clare continues to speak of relationship with Jesus,

[F]or you have scorned, as insufficient, the pinnacle of an earthly kingdom, the offer of marriage to the Emperor, being made, in a spirit of great humility and

most burning love, one who strives after the most holy poverty, cleaving to the footprints of the one to whom you have merited to be united as in marriage (6-7).

She speaks of humility and burning love. Humility implies a recognition of who we are, our poverty before God who is our source. Burning love indicates the possibility of intimacy, of knowledge, of profound relationship. Clare proceeds to speak of cleaving to the footprints of Jesus. She uses the Latin verb *adhaerere*. As Sr. Frances Teresa has noted,⁵ this is the word used in Genesis 2.24 for a man cleaving to his wife. For Clare then, there is an analogy between possessing Christ and the intimate union, the exclusive commitment of the marriage bond. In the first letter, Clare's dominant imagery was bridal. In this second letter, she expands the metaphor. She portrays a marriage which exacts all that the partners have to give in terms of perseverance, courage and endurance. This image provides a more developed and profound picture of response to Jesus and fleshes out Clare's sense of the all that is due to him.

In verse 17, Clare explicitly addresses the possibility that someone may attempt to divert Agnes from the commitment and perfection that Clare has articulated. Clare tells her not to acquiesce.

sed pauperum Christum, virgo pauper, amplectere.
instead, O poor virgin, embrace the poor Christ (18).

The beautiful symmetry and rhythm of the Latin poetically enacts the union and exchange that Clare is describing. The nouns "Christ" and "virgin" are literally enclosed together within the repetition of the word "poverty." The verb can mean twine around, encircle, esteem, encompass, cherish, clasp. It can mean embrace both with the affection and with the intellect. She continues,

See him, made contemptible for you, and follow him,
being made contemptible for him in this world (19).

Significantly, before Clare invites Agnes to a life of enduring contempt she asks her to look searchingly at what is there, Jesus made contemptible. As always, there is an obvious basis in truth for Clare's conclusions, in this case the historical experience of Christ. This was true of Francis, who always tested his spiritual conclusions against reality, often to the point of extreme harshness towards himself.

Clare goes on to describe how Jesus,

more beautiful than the children of men was made
the least of men for your salvation, despised, beaten
and many times scourged over all his body, dying on
the cross in the midst of anguish itself; O most noble
Queen, gaze, consider, contemplate, longing to imitate
(20).

Clare describes vividly what Jesus suffered, emphasizing his degradation. This grim litany stands in sharp contrast to the earlier poetic portrait of Jesus on a throne of stars. It is important to note, however, that for Clare both descriptions are about reality. Like Francis, she clearly balances the reality of Jesus' suffering and the reality of his final glory and does so repeatedly. Her first descriptive word here, *vilissimum* means "the most worthless." Astonishing as it may be, Jesus did not die as an esteemed human being. Her second word *despectum* means "despised." Clare's reaction to this description of Christ's agony is a plea to Agnes to gaze. The intensity of the appeal and the trusting phrase, "O most noble Queen," indicate the urgency of Clare's request.

How then is Agnes to look at Christ? The first verb Clare employs in verse 20 is *intuere*, which means to look at in the sense of being affected by, internalizing what is seen. Next comes *considera*, to consider in the sense of looking carefully, examining, pondering, reflecting, meditating. The intellect is included in this act. Clare's choice of verbs indicates a movement; describes how the inward faculties of the observer gradually become absorbed in the act of looking. Agnes is then asked to contemplate, *contemplanare*, to gaze attentively, to become one with Christ in contemplation. This carries the sense of union. The one who looks is now inseparable from

⁵ Frances Teresa, O.S.C., *This Living Mirror: Reflections on Clare of Assisi* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995), 15.

what she sees. Finally she is called to desire or yearn to imitate, *desiderans imitari*.

According to the rituals of troubadour love in Clare's society, a woman could yield or withhold her love by meeting or refusing to look into a man's eyes. Clare illustrates how the gift of the whole person is implied, potentially contained, in the simple act of a truthful look. It is a luminously simple study of loving response, of response based on a profound engagement with reality. Clare situates herself in relation to Christ, not on the basis of a rigid inherited hierarchy, but on the basis of a conviction of truth, which her faculties of perception, reflection and contemplation verify. Some of the experiential basis for this teaching may have resided in Clare's experience of loving Francis. She continues,

If you suffer with him, you will reign with him, grieving with him, you will rejoice with him, dying with him on the cross of torments, you will possess heavenly mansions with him in the splendour of the saints ... (21).⁶

This then is how Clare envisages the embrace with Christ. The economy of the Latin poises the contrasts with graceful clarity and symmetry. *Cui si compateris conregnabis, condolens congaudebis* ... Once again we have a profoundly worked out sense of exchange, of transaction. The sister gives herself totally in response to the example of Jesus. He will give her everything he has, himself, heaven. This embrace makes life-long and hard demands. Everything the woman has, including her life, is surrendered to the cost of the embrace. The mark of loving Christ is identity with him in his pain. Clare hauntingly integrates the life Agnes will share with him in eternity and the suffering life she lives with him now, both bear the hallmark of solidarity. Agnes is with him through love in pain, and consequently will be with him in heaven. Heaven is the consummation of a love that has given all. It is a view of heaven that is psychologically persuasive, filling out the earlier image of a starry throne. Agnes will know what

heaven is when her love has been given totally, in faith. Clare expresses a compassion for Jesus that exhausts everything she has to give. She is aware of what he suffered and desires to be with him. This being with him is according to Clare the condition for life itself, whether that is the painful life we experience in this world or the joyful life that is to come. She expresses a simple desire to be with him in a condition that aims at being vulnerable and open to contempt like his, giving us further insight into her understanding of poverty. The idea of being with him is repeated over and over, like a mantra, like a recurring act of the will. The instinct to make life materially secure is abandoned out of loyalty to the relationship, in order to truly share his experience. Clare entrusts Agnes to Christ in the poverty and injustice of his earthly existence. Like Francis, she believes in the salvific life of Jesus literally, in the sense of wanting to totally incorporate it into her own life. It is not possible to do this and be protected.

Clare probably wrote her third letter to Agnes in 1238. She responded to yet another demanding situation. Agnes and her community were still struggling with papal displeasure and lack of understanding. Nonetheless, Clare saw abundant reason to rejoice because Agnes had secured a privilege of poverty from the pope that enabled her to live without revenues from property. The fact that in her effort to be true to Clare's vision of poverty, Agnes faced long-term suffering and conflict, which she could have easily escaped by accepting a more acceptable form of religious life, is an indication of her spiritual sincerity and her total faith in the teaching of St. Clare. Clare nakedly describes Agnes in the opening verse as the one "whom she loves more than any other mortal."

In this letter, Clare defines more explicitly her teaching on prayer. In keeping with her earlier letters, Clare situates prayer firmly within her understanding of relationship to Christ. Interestingly, apart from an appeal to Agnes in verse eleven not to be overwhelmed by bitterness and clouds, she does not speak about the aspects of prayer which often attract a great deal of attention, the fact that in the silence of prayer our experience will be influenced by the state of our interior world with all its disturbances, the fact that we

⁶ See 2Tim 2:11-13.

may encounter God's seeming absence. These are aspects of prayer which can seem momentous, even overwhelming, but which are in fact subjective, conditioned by our perceptions. There is no risk with Clare that her pupil will get lost in the murkiness of prayer seen as an impenetrable obscurity. Writing with great clarity, Clare describes prayer as a meeting in which the protagonists are situated very exactly and objectively in relation to one another. Consequently, the truth of the encounter is emphasized. Interestingly, Clare describes prayer as a place we enter. This characteristic use of material imagery for relationship with God stresses the reality, the dependability of the engagement. For anyone experiencing discouragement or depression, and Clare's words in verse eleven suggest that Agnes was discouraged, Clare makes clear that prayer does not depend on our own stumbling attempt to make a connection with God. Simply by the intention to pray we enter into God's presence, the place where he is. The freedom to be his is always within our power.

Place your mind in the mirror of eternity; place your soul in the splendor of glory, place your heart in the icon of the divine substance and transform your whole self through contemplation into an image of his God-head (12-13).

Clare uses the imperatives, *pone* and *transforma*, emphasizing Agnes's liberty to place herself where she wants to be. (She will return to the verb *ponere* in her final letter.) It is easy to understand how appealing this language must have been to Agnes. Agnes spent her youth as a pawn in her royal father's politically motivated marriage manoeuvres. And yet obviously Clare's words have to be understood in the light of her profound appreciation of the poverty of the human person before God. The power to transform belongs, in fact, not to Agnes but to Christ. Clare is talking of cooperation with him so complete that the recipient becomes an active partner in her own transformation, giving Christ total access to her being. The thought recalls Clare's earlier language of the embrace. For the sister who wants to belong to him the act of surrendering to prayer mysteriously enables her to become

who she wants to be. Clare synthesizes the concept of self-determination and the concept of mystical surrender. In this way, she indicates how Jesus enables us to reach the most authentic self-realization that is possible, the realization of our identity before God.

In verse twelve, Clare introduces the image of a mirror. A mirror is an object we use to enter into relationship with the truth. What we see in the mirror helps us to ascertain who we are, where we are, on our journey through life. A mirror can be challenging, corrective; the reality that it presents to us, whether welcome or unwelcome, is beyond dispute. Clare instructs Agnes to use eternity as a mirror. Eternity is the perspective of God, the perspective from which Agnes can see herself as she really is. It is a perspective from which she can ascertain the true nature of things, distinguish temporal considerations from those that are enduring. It is a perspective that permits her to arrive at true, as opposed to superficial, judgments. It is a perspective that enables her to choose in favor of her own eternal happiness. Agnes is to place her mind in this mirror. Mind or *mentem* here includes all of the intellectual faculties: the reason, understanding, memory, judgment, will, powers of discernment and also the conscience, courage, and the heart. In other words, the responsible and moral powers of the human person are involved in this effort to gain the eternal perspective of Christ through prayer, to view reality as he views it. This is the only perspective, Clare tells Agnes later, that is not transient, that will not betray.

Clare repeats her instruction that Agnes entrust her whole being to Christ in his glory three times. The second time she uses the word *animam* or soul. This can mean the breath, the spiritual principle of life. Clare is well aware of the risk of a misplaced use of our vitality and of the subsequent loss. Agnes is to place the life which animates her inside the one who will sustain and guarantee her life. A word Clare uses for Jesus here is *splendore* suggesting a supreme radiance. Reiterating her theme a third time, Clare teaches Agnes to place her heart inside the form of the divine substance, a very literally worded instruction to locate her-

self inside his very being. Heart or *cor* includes the emotions and carries the sense of the person, the mind, the soul and spirit.⁷ Clare's comprehensive account of a human being as mind, soul and heart suggests her profound and demanding sense of what it means to belong to Jesus. All of our energies and powers of response need to become his. This can only take place "through contemplation." The transformation of which Clare goes on to speak, therefore, is transformation in the most exacting sense, a transformation of everything that we are, all our faculties, everything that constitutes our love, life, thought, behaviour and spirituality.

The transformation that Clare describes sounds attractive and yet, as she well knew, to be penetrated and renewed so deeply and searchingly involves an ongoing courageous trust and surrender. It requires a love of truth to the point of accepting our own image in the light of truth. It implies a willingness to resign the reassuring images of what we are suggested to us by our own ego and to enter the poverty of accepting our true identity as a gift from God. Clare is speaking of an engagement with reality at all costs. The result is the creation of our image anew in Christ. This is the kind of surrender for which Clare is asking. And it is only then, only after this surrender has occurred, that Clare speaks of a hidden sweetness.

Do this in order that you yourself may feel what his friends feel on tasting the hidden sweetness, that which God himself has kept from the beginning for those who love Him (14).

In other words, Agnes is to commit herself totally, in unconditional love. And then there is the joy, the "sweetness" of belonging to Christ. Clare's words implicitly correct the materialism and sensation-seeking of her times and our own. The transformation that she describes is confirmed by sweetness because of the intrinsic authenticity of the surrender and through the generosity of God, not as a result of any quest

⁷ The heart is linked to the vision of God in the sixth beatitude: Matt 5:8.

for experience or affirmation or gratification for its own sake. Clare suggests that Agnes will experience the sweetness of God in this life, but she also stresses the heavenly nature of the reward. God has kept this gift "from the beginning for those who love him." Clare is referring to an eschatological passage in *Corinthians*⁸ totally confident that her teaching is true to the New Testament and its ultimate promises.

Unlike the first letter, she is no longer speaking of love as an enchanting, nuptial potential, but as a mature state of possession. Loving Christ as Clare describes it is equal to every stage of life. In its bridal possibility it surpasses the appeal of the most illustrious suitor, in the second letter it meets the test of endurance through time and suffering, in the third letter it reaps a harvest of contentment. In verse six Clare writes, "that which, under heaven, I had desired, I am already holding." The letters enable us to glimpse the stretch of Clare's entire contemplative journey. In the fourth letter we see her love for Christ meeting the test of death.

This letter repeatedly draws attention to the possibility of ruin.

And completely passing by all those things with which an untrustworthy and perturbed world entangles its blind lovers, love totally the One who gave his whole self for your love ... (15).

Clare's awareness of the value of what is given in Jesus has made her sensitive to the possibility of loss. This danger informs her almost ferocious attachment to poverty. The world and its charms can endanger our recognition of him. Without Christ, we lose clarity and peace, the reverse of Clare's tranquil lucidity. The adjective *perturbabili* or "perturbed" indicates how our relationship with reality can become disturbed through the acceptance of false perspectives, a risk that she strengthens by her use of *caecos* or "blind." It is consistent with Clare's imagery that the price of accepting fallacy is the loss of sight. Agnes's (and our) freedom to receive his measureless love is at stake. Again, Clare stresses

⁸ 1Cor 2:9.

her theme of exchange, the gift of our totality in return for his. His gift of himself is inestimable. Quoting directly from the medieval *Legend of Saint Agnes of Rome*,⁹ Clare uses an image in which the sun and moon are personified. The sun is an image of divine beauty in Francis's *Canticle of Creatures*. In this metaphor the sun and moon gaze at the beauty of Christ and are amazed, an attitude that duplicates Clare's own experience.

the one at whose beauty sun and moon wonder, whose rewards, with their value and greatness, have no end. I am speaking of the one who is Son of the Most High, whom the Virgin brought to birth and after whose birth remained a virgin (16-17).

To express her vision, Clare now looks at the woman whose relationship with Jesus could not have been more firmly rooted in the reality of life. Mary's relationship with Jesus exists within the tangible boundaries of an encounter that one can apprehend, the bond between mother and son. It exists in Christian imagination and thought, not only as a unique privilege granted to the immaculate woman, but as a model of the Christian's relationship with Christ. This model concedes nothing to pessimism about the possibility of relationship with God. It is a model that is concrete and optimistic. Clare uses the image of Mary's maternal and physical relationship with Jesus as a model of authenticity, of truthful response, in order to sustain Agnes in her attempt to live authentically in relation to Jesus. The image of Mary, whose body literally contained Jesus, becomes a metaphor for Clare's Franciscan understanding of what it means to hold Jesus.

Cleave to his most sweet Mother who begot such a Son as the heavens could not contain, and yet received him within the narrow bounds of her holy womb and held him on her young girl's lap (18-19).

And,

So as the glorious Virgin of virgins, materially, so will you certainly always be able to carry him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body, by following in her footprints, particularly the prints of humility and poverty, containing him by whom you and everything are contained ... (24-26).

Clare's images here are spatial, stressing that the encounter with Jesus belongs to this material world, takes place within its dimensions, conditions and restrictions, even though it resonates far beyond. Clare strengthens the link between Mary and the cloistered sister linguistically by using the word *clauastro* for Mary's womb meaning cloister, enclosure or barrier. She stresses that, like Mary, the sister becomes a place within which Jesus is contained, his environment. The image poignantly reverses the earlier image of Agnes placing herself inside the glorified Jesus, a paradox that Clare highlights in verse 26. Through the staggering implications of the incarnation, it becomes possible to contemplate the Creator as dependent and vulnerable, to recognize in our own image an answer to his need. Like Mary, the cloistered sister must be free to give herself totally and this gift necessarily has a material dimension, in a way that is different from, yet modelled by the pregnant Mary. Consequently, Clare can identify her own determination to live in strict poverty with the tender yet powerful image of Mary's maternal receptivity. And so Clare imbues her own seemingly harsh choice with tremendous love, uniting it to the mystery of the incarnation and the inestimable chance of relationship with God made man. Her passion for poverty is made intelligible.

This profound involvement with and participation in Jesus is the destiny for which we are created. It leads to Clare's sense of the greatness of human dignity and the tragedy of its abuse. Clare attaches a great deal of importance to clarity of perspective; to the way we look at reality. Our freedom to see Christ as he is, to discern his love, is coupled in Clare's thought with our commitment to him, the moral and affective priority that we give to him. Looking, for Clare, becomes an image of personal dedication. The intellectual, moral, emo-

⁹ Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes Texts and Sources*, 255.

tional and spiritual strategies that we use in order to penetrate the truth require our earnest attention. We need to be aware of the way that we choose to situate our mind, heart and soul in order to receive Christ. Hence Clare's apposite introduction of the mirror image, a theme that she develops in the fourth letter.

About fifteen years elapsed between the third and fourth letters and it is clear that Clare did not expect to write to Agnes again. Never has Clare's sense of reality been so expectant, so full of mysterious potential, as in this final letter. The advent of the fullness of relationship and of truth that she has anticipated so totally in her earthly experience is almost tangible. The saint's language has always been elegant and lucid, and is so still. But even Clare's pure and sanctified grasp of reality is scarcely equal to the love that is now breaking in upon her and her use of language occasionally exposes a sense of transition or a struggle for expression. From the liturgical references, it would seem that it is Easter. As she opens her letter, Clare speaks of Agnes following the Lamb of God wherever he goes, a play on Agnes's name and a quote from the *Book of Revelation* that clearly places the letter in an eschatological context. Clare tries to articulate the love that she feels for Agnes and finally gives up the attempt. Agnes in the opening words is described as "the half of her soul."

For the last time, the dying woman describes her experience of loving Christ. There is something very solemn about a dying person's words concerning what has motivated them, what matters. Close to death such a statement is no longer subject to the developments or revisions that come with maturity and experience. Clare writes,

Certainly, she is happy, who has been given to drink deeply at this sacred banquet so that she might cleave with all her heart to him at whose beauty all the blessed hosts of heaven wonder unceasingly. It is he whose love stirs, whose contemplation remakes; whose kindness floods; whose sweetness fills; whose memory glows gently; whose fragrance brings the dead to life

again; the glorious vision of whom will make all the citizens of the Jerusalem above most blessed, since she is the splendor of eternal glory, the brightness of everlasting light and an unspotted mirror (9-14).

Again, Clare speaks of the creative love of Jesus, the power that his love has to move, restore and complete. In the third letter, she provided a complete and exacting model of surrender to him, a surrender that taken to its limit will strip us bare. Now she writes a beautiful description of Jesus' power to engage with the depths of the human person. Clare is herself dying and therefore is aware of her own complete dependence upon Christ for the gift of life. There is no hint of anxiety or desperation in her words, only a luminous faith in Jesus, a complete trust in his communication of himself to her. Clare's language resonates with a warm, fathomless benevolence. Through her words, she holds out her own intimate experience, peacefully offering it to Agnes as a final gift.

In this passage the initiative to make us who we truly are belongs as always with Christ. In verse nine, she writes of cleaving to him with her whole heart, stressing yet again the extent of the surrender that is needed, a surrender that excludes nothing and which courageously meets death, the ultimate uncertainty, with the certainty of love. All the hosts of heaven wonder at the beauty of Jesus. It is Clare's last reference to the beauty of Christ and she views him, fittingly through the eyes of the blessed in heaven, as if she can almost apprehend what they behold. This is where her theme of looking at him throughout the journey of life has been going. Relationship with Jesus has been equal to the tasks and tests of time. In heaven it will be equal to the "task" of eternity.

Once again drawing on imagery from the *Legend of Saint Agnes of Rome*,¹⁰ Clare uses verbs that speak tenderly of his profound yet reverent power, his gentle proximity with her depths. The word *afficit* or "stirs" suggests the power of his love to influence, direct the deep movements of the soul. The contemplation of him *reficit* or rebuilds, restores, refash-

¹⁰ Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes*, 133.

ions, recreates, makes new. His kindness *implet* or "floods." He is able to fill up, fulfil, abundantly satisfy, and bring his work to its realization. She uses a language of sensation, of present experience. His sweetness *replet* or "fills again." He can fulfil over and over. His memory *lucescit* or "glows gently." The verb is used for daybreak, an appropriate image of a light that has not yet reached its full strength. This is one of several images of illumination in this letter, contributing to its heavenly atmosphere. Here Clare suggests a softly burning radiance, a lingering light, full of promise. The memory of knowing him is able to sustain the sister as she anticipates heaven. His memory is a source of illumination and comfort for one who awaits death.

Clare continues her litany of praise. It is a litany that shows Christ in action, dynamically engaged with humanity. It is as if Clare is offering us detailed word pictures of him captured in the vital activity of saving a human being. Finally she speaks of his power to return life when it has been lost. The power is native to him; it is his aroma. The vision of him is the realization of the happiness of all the blessed. This is the final fulfilment of the act of looking, an act which encompasses not only our earthly vocation but also our destiny in heaven.

In verse fourteen, Clare twice describes eternity as light, using in the second instance the lovely phrase, *candor lucis aeternae* which could be translated as "the bright daylight of eternity." Eternity then for Clare is the light of day, the vision of the truth of Jesus. The heavenly Jerusalem is "an unspotted mirror" because it reflects this truth. Agnes is told once again to gaze.

Gaze into this mirror daily, O Queen, Bride of Jesus Christ, and continually reflect your face in it, so that you may adorn your whole being, within and without, in robes set about with variety, adorned with virtues like flowers and with garments every bit as ornate as those of the daughter and dearly beloved Bride of the Most High King, for this is only fitting (15-17).

Agnes is to reflect or study herself in Jesus as in a mirror. She is to study herself in this mirror daily and with great attention, as women do. Again Clare uses the verb *intuere* to gaze, with its connotations of earnest intention. Agnes is to reflect herself in him, to find her face, her image, her beauty within him. And the portrait that she finds will be herself. It is a representation of self-discovery, conceived within the discovery of another. It is a description of utter dependence upon Christ's power. He enters the very ground of our self-awareness, our self-knowledge, our search for selfhood in all its vulnerability. He enters our helpless inability to be anyone or anything. He grants life, real and eternal life, through the transforming power of his image. Interaction with him makes us who we are. It is a wonderful description of what takes place in prayer.

Clare draws attention to the two fundamental dimensions of personhood. We have a within and a without. It is from within that we know ourselves and discover our sources of engagement with God and others. From these sources, we move out into our external transactions. Our inner and outer resources are in constant dialogue with one another. Clare teaches Agnes to "adorn" her "whole being, within and without"¹¹ from Christ. Her imagery of flowers and garments suggests a limitless source of beauty and attire, appealing language for any woman who has enjoyed making herself attractive through clothes and ornaments. Christ is ceaselessly available, Clare teaches, in his ability to refine the human person with virtue and to grant us the beauty of conformity with God. Her language addresses the profound existential anxiety that lies behind our clutches at identity, the fear that we are nothing, accomplish nothing, are not worthwhile.

Regis Armstrong writes about the medieval mirror as "a convex surface" with "many dimensions."¹² Some parts of the mirror reflected a clearer image than others. Clare applies the rich metaphor of a mirror that reflects a fluctuating im-

¹¹ This was a popular pairing of words in the early Franciscan movement. See Mueller, *Clare's Letters to Agnes*, 183-84.

¹² Regis Armstrong, "Clare of Assisi: The Mirror Mystic," *The Cord* 35 (1985): 198.

age, an image with varying degrees of clarity, to the mysteries of Christ.

In that mirror then, is reflected blessed poverty, holy humility and love beyond words, as, by the grace of God, you can contemplate in the whole mirror. Turn your mind, I say, to the border of this mirror, to the poverty of him who was placed in a manger and wrapped in tiny garments. O wonderful humility! O astounding poverty! The King of Angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, lay in a manger! Then, in the centre of the mirror, consider the humility, or at least the blessed poverty, the infinite and costly troubles which he took upon himself to redeem the human race. At the edges of that same mirror, contemplate the love beyond words through which he chose to suffer on the Tree of the cross and, on that same Tree, to die the most disgraceful death of any. Therefore, when it was placed on the wood of the cross, that same mirror taught the one who passed by to consider all this, saying: 'All you who pass by the way, look and see if there is any suffering like my suffering!' (18-25).¹³

These are the realities, Clare teaches, which must inform Agnes's deepest self, who Agnes is, who she is becoming. She points to the vulnerability of Jesus in the manger, the demanding effort of his public life, the incomparable anguish of his death. In verse 18, she uses the word *refulget*, "shines back," another metaphor of light, this time a bright, reflected light suggesting the intensity with which the mysteries of Jesus cast light on the obscurity of the human image and our own uncertainty faced with our incomplete and obscure selves.

Clare invites Agnes to *attende*; bend her mind towards Jesus' real and unprivileged experience of the human condition. First, Clare focuses on the helplessness of the baby. Agnes is placed at the border of the mirror, where the image

¹³ Clare's verse 25 is a quote from the Latin Vulgate, Lamentations 1:12, *O vos omnes, qui transitis per viam, attendite, et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus.*

is not fully developed. Like all babies, things are done for him. He is placed, *positi*. He is wrapped, *involuti*. He has no status, is dependent on human care for his survival. This is an astonishing contrast with his status in heaven, where he is Lord of everything. Such a reversal of power and rank could only occur through his consent, a consent that discloses an interior attitude of love, poverty and humility that is equally astounding.

Then Clare invites Agnes to consider the human struggle and difficulties that Jesus accepted in the work of our salvation. Again, she draws attention to the attitude of humility that underlies this gift. He willingly accepted an adult life in which his human resources lay at our service, accepting the cost to himself like a servant. This mature generosity lies at the centre of the mirror where the image would have been easy to access, distinct and strong.

Finally, Clare speaks of Jesus' death on the cross, where he dies the most *turpiori*, the most repulsive, ugly, shameful and disgraceful of all deaths. This occurs at the edge of the mirror, where the image is less clear and defined; hinting at the disturbing nature of this exiled and reviled death, outside the boundary of the city. The *Legend of Saint Clare*¹⁴ points out that Clare, instructed by Francis, understood her vocation from the outset as a journey to join Jesus at the place of his death, the place described in Hebrews as "outside the camp."¹⁵ The edges of Clare's mirror suggest this abandoned place. More application and concentration were required to make out an image reflected from this part of the mirror, indicating the extent of the love, effort and attention that Christ's death demands. Agnes is invited to contemplate this incomparable love, give her whole self up to it. These are Clare's final images of truth, the realities whose contemplation will inform the truth about our selves.

Clare is describing a mirror that interacts dynamically with the one who looks. Normally, it is the image of the be-

¹⁴ *The Legend of Saint Clare*, in *The Lady, Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, Regis J. Armstrong, ed. and trans. (New York: New City Press, 2006), 285.

¹⁵ See Heb 13:13.

holder that impresses itself on a mirror, but in this case the mirror impresses itself, its truth and beauty, on the beholder. The mirror is able to communicate its own captivating beauty to the one who has done nothing, who simply looks. And the image that is imparted is living, ever growing in intensity and depth. Its image moves from that of a helpless child to that of a free adult pouring out his services, to that of a man dying the most hideous death. Jesus is *in ligno crucis positum*, or "placed on the wood of the cross." Again, Clare uses the verb *ponere*, painfully contrasting the care taken by Mary when he was a baby, with the brutality of his executioners who handled him like an object. Agnes is once more invited to look at Christ's breathtaking humility. If the text were to be dramatized, it is easy to imagine a shocked silence at this moment. Out of this sense of shock, without any warning, the mirror, Christ himself, suddenly speaks. The silent mirror breaks its silence, evidence of its vitality, its capacity for response, its sensitivity. We are reminded that Jesus is intimately involved with and present within the text. And we are reminded that Jesus was conscious on the cross; he could speak and react. The mirror does not speak of its own beauty and power. Instead, plaintively, it begs for the compassion of the onlooker in its horrifying pain. It appeals with human urgency for understanding. With terrible irony, the mirror at the centre of all things begs for recognition.

Agnes's task, Clare writes, is to respond.

[She says] let us respond to him with one voice, one spirit, crying out and grieving: 'I hold this memory in my mind and my spirit faints within me!'¹⁶

So may you always more and more strongly catch fire from this burning love, O Queen of the heavenly King! (26-27).

Her words speak of empathy with his pain, an immense desire to be with him and desire for Agnes to be included in this intense union. Clare does not speak of engagement with Jesus lightly, as if the witness to his suffering will emerge

unscathed. The word for faints here, *tabescet* suggests a draining anguish. In verse 33, Clare speaks of Agnes as *posita*, "placed" in this contemplation, the same verb Clare uses for Jesus on the cross. Clare emphasizes the dreadful reality of the demands on Jesus, the reciprocating obligations of the sister. It is from the truth of this union, and ultimately from the "burning love" of the cross that Agnes is to catch fire, be consumed, a love that in verse 31 leads to the wine cellar, an image taken from *The Song of Songs* and the place where love is consummated.¹⁷

Clare's image of the mirror in these verses has an arresting and majestic presence. It stirringly suggests the mysterious imminence, the proximity of Christ to the dying woman. Her mirror imagery is psychologically convincing and authentic. In every key relationship, we receive an image of our self through the other person, both in the sense that we are able to see our image through their eyes, and in the sense that we are changed by the encounter. In a life-giving relationship we have the joy of discovering how much we are loved and our own capacity for love. Human beings have an immense power to nurture or harm one another through their interactions. Jesus is supremely able to give life, to grant us our own image, Clare teaches, not in some remote, vague sense, but in a way that is vital, ongoing, practical, and necessary to our development. In other words, he can give us the help that we desperately need as we struggle to live out our lives in time. He is able to light up and transform the interior places of our heart, including the abandoned places where the image is murky, and undiscerned. In this way, he can transform our engagement with one another and ourselves. The beauty of the image that he confers exceeds everything that we are able to achieve by our own best efforts, since it is his reflection. It is an illusion to think that we are our own ultimate resource. We are created to live in relation to Jesus, to find ourselves in him. We tend to approach reality well established in the myth of our own centrality, but the true mirror, Jesus, exposes the

¹⁶ Lam 3:20, *Memoria memor ero, et tabescet in me anima mea.*

¹⁷ Cant 2:4.

delusion. We belong to him. We exist only in relation to him. We are his likeness.

The letter moves swiftly and urgently, expertly threaded by connecting phrases. It is as if the writer is eager to move, feeling herself on the brink of her eternal destiny. But this does nothing to cool the ardor of her human love. She asks Agnes to remember her,

knowing that I have inscribed the happy memory of you inseparably on the tables of my heart, holding you dearer than all others. What else? Let the tongue of flesh be silent in loving you, let that love be said and spoken by the tongue of the Spirit. O blessed daughter, because love such as I have for you, can never be expressed in its fullness by the tongue of the flesh ... (34-36).

It is a mysterious phrase, "tongue of the Spirit." What does Clare mean? Her call for silence suggests her awareness that she is coming to the limit of her earthly experience and will soon no longer be able to express love in the way she has formerly expressed it. As she lingers between her earthly fulfilment in Christ and her completion in heaven, there is a tension. She senses the realities that await her. She is familiar with them already, yet they are about to materialize in a new way. The earthly effort through language to express the truth of loving Christ, and others in him, must in the end fall silent before his reality.

Through her letters, Clare accompanies Agnes on her journey into relationship with Christ. Each letter takes up the theme of looking at Christ and his realities with lucid depth. Clare's language and imagery are creative and penetrating as she draws on her own experience of Jesus. Clare explores the act of looking at him with absolute dedication. It becomes ever more apparent that the costly struggle for relationship with Jesus is an embrace of reality and of the truth about ourselves. She rejoices with Agnes in the early happiness of her vocation, helping her to meet the maturing demands of the relationship in the third and fourth letters. Finally, she writes to Agnes from the perspective of her own

imminent death. As she does so, she presents a dramatic image of a living mirror, teaching Agnes how contemplating Jesus can take her into the heart of his transforming truth. It is a journey that transforms us in this life and anticipates our life in heaven.



READING *THE OFFICE OF THE PASSION*
AS A TESTAMENT OF ST. FRANCIS

CLARE BERNADETTE KNOWLES, F.M.S.L.

INTRODUCTION

Laurent Gallant, O.F.M. and André Cirino, O.F.M. have shown that St. Francis's *Office of the Passion*¹ corresponds to the medieval art form of a geste; a saga recounting the deeds of a hero. Francis took lines from various places in Scripture, primarily, the book of Psalms, to create fifteen pseudo-psalms. Francis's psalms recreate scenes in the life, Passion and Resurrection of Jesus from the view point of Christ's inner life. In these prayers, Christ the Hero may be heard addressing the Father in words taken from the Biblical Psalms. Jesus is presented in this geste as the Hero on a mission from the Father to overcome the enemy, Satan.

Francis prayed the *OfP* seven times daily. It was unique and personal to him. It was probably composed towards the end of his life, over the years 1215-1224. Cirino and Gallant commented regarding Francis:

his personal experience of the Hero's message would guide him in the selection of the components he would gradually incorporate into this Little Office.²

They concluded that,

... this prayer would reflect some of the major aspects of the gospel way of life Francis proposes.³

¹ Francis, *The Office of the Passion*: hereafter, abbreviated *OfP* throughout.

² Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 24-25.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

These points, if taken further, indicate the possibility of reading the *OfP* as a form of testament of Francis. I intend, therefore to test the following hypothesis: this prayer being so personal to Francis, he compiled favorite lines from the Psalms that resonated with his own spiritual journey. These personal experiences were merged into the story of the cosmic struggle and victory of Christ his Hero. Thus, Francis was brought closer to his "Lord and Teacher"⁴ and his own life offered to the Father through the prayer of Christ, in the words of Scripture. Therefore, there are three simultaneous levels of meaning in the prayer: the experience of the Biblical Psalmist, of Christ the Hero and of Francis. Since Francis taught the *OfP* to St. Clare, who prayed it "with similar affection"⁵ and, presumably, to some of his friars, it would also have functioned as a testimony of Francis's personal charism, handed on to his faithful friends and companions in the Order.

To test this hypothesis, I intend to investigate similarities in theme and content between the *OfP*, *The Testament of Francis*,⁶ Chapter 22 of *The Earlier Rule*⁷ and *The Testament of Siena*.⁸ I shall refer to these texts as the testaments. I shall also refer to parts of sources for the life of Francis that seem to confirm or explain ideas in the testaments.⁹

⁴ Antiphon, Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 222.

⁵ *The Legend of Saint Clare* (1255), XX, in R.J. Armstrong, ed., *Clare of Assisi: The Lady: Early Documents* (New York: New City Press, 2006), 307.

⁶ Francis (1226), *The Testament*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, *The Saint*, ed. R.J. Armstrong, J.A.W. Hellmann, and W. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), 124-27. *The Testament*: hereafter, abbreviated *Test*.

⁷ *The Earlier Rule*, 22, in *FA:ED* 1, 79-81. This Chapter of *The Earlier Rule* is considered by some scholars to be a form of testament, given to the Order by Francis before his expedition to the East in 1219, where he expected to be martyred (*ibid.*, 79, footnote). I shall therefore count it among the testaments of Francis in this study. *The Earlier Rule*: hereafter, abbreviated *ER*.

⁸ *The Testament of Siena, The Beginning of A Mirror of Perfection of the Status of a Lesser Brother* (1318) 87, Sabatier edition (1928), in *FA:ED* 3, 335-36. *The Testament of Siena*: hereafter abbreviated *TestS*.

⁹ Considerations of hagiographical bias in the sources are beyond the scope of this study. However, in my view, just as the sources can shed light on the testaments, conversely, agreement with the testaments can help to

INDICATIONS OF FRANCIS'S TESTAMENT IN THE *OfP*

O God, I have given you an account of my life; you have placed my tears in your sight (*OfP*, PsF 1, v. 1).

come, listen, all you who fear God, And I will recount how much he has done for my soul (*OfP*, PsF 10, v. 4).

The Lord gave me ... thus to begin doing penance ... (*Test*, 1)

All my brothers: let us pay attention to what the Lord says: (*ER* 22, 1)

... I am showing my will and intention to all my brothers present and future. As a sign of my remembrance, blessing and testament ... (*TestS*)

The focus in both the *OfP* and the *Test* begins with God. In both writings, the faith journey of Francis is seen as an effect of God's action. The opening of the *OfP* reflects this order in the original Latin: *Deus vitam meam annuntiavi tibi*.¹⁰

Miccoli argued that among Francis's writings, the *Test* was the most important because it was Francis's own account of his spiritual journey and intentions for the Order.¹¹ The latter function for that document, Miccoli wrote, was affirmed by the *TestS*.¹² The *OfP* appears to serve both purposes of a testament for Francis, containing his journey and his intentions. At the beginning (PsF 1, v. 1) it is addressed to God. In a later Psalm (PsF 10, v. 4) Francis addresses his testament to the faithful and his own narrative comes to the fore with greater prominence than that of Christ the Hero. Considering the statements of intention quoted above from the *ER* 22 and the *TestS*, it is feasible that, "all you who fear

confirm material in the sources as depicting the real Francis. I agree with Miccoli (Giovanni Miccoli, "Francis of Assisi's Christian Proposal," trans. E. Hagman, (1989) *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 3, no. 2: 132), who has argued that the *Test* should be used as a touchstone of authenticity, and I would extend this foundational status to other testimonial writings, including the *OfP*.

¹⁰ Kajetan Esser, ed. (Latin text) in *Françoise D'Assise: Écrits*, ed. Theophile Desbonnets, et al. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2003), 288.

¹¹ Miccoli, "Christian Proposal," 127-72.

¹² Ibid., 133.

God" in PsF 10, v. 4 could refer to members of Francis's Order on the level of his own testament.

I shall assume, therefore, that Francis's testament in the *OfP* is addressed to God as prayer and also handed on to his brothers and close followers as a testimony of his God-given vocation. I shall investigate the *OfP* first, as a testament of Francis's spiritual journey and then as a testament of his will for the Order, although there is bound to be some overlap between these two areas.

THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF FRANCIS

Lepers

I have been numbered with those who go down into the pit; I have become as a man without help, free among the dead. (*OfP*, PsF 2, v. 10)

... for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world. (*Test* 1-3)

Cirino and Gallant have drawn attention to a possible connection between the above Psalm lines selected by Francis and his conversion experience among the lepers, described in the *Test*.¹³ Lepers were treated by the society of Francis's time as people who were already dead. On the diagnosis of the disease, a priest prayed a church rite of separation similar to the funeral rite over the afflicted person. He or she was then obliged to live outside the city or in an area segregated from the rest of the inhabitants.¹⁴ The disease was incurable. "The dead" in the *OfP* and those "without help" could therefore refer to the lepers in Francis's account of his life. Both

¹³ Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 244.

¹⁴ Kenyon College History Students, *Marginality and community in Medieval Europe* <internet source> <http://phi.kenyon.edu/Projects/Margin/lepers.htm>, screen 2, accessed 05/21/07.

passages cited above contain the idea of being "among" and of becoming a changed person. Considering these two extracts in this light, one could speculate that freedom "among the dead" was contrasted in Francis's mind with his former state in "the world," of captivity to sin. He could have seen his experience among the lepers as a form of death to sin, which set him free for a new way of life.

Conflict with his father and trial before the bishop

My enemies have been strengthened,
those who persecuted me unjustly;
then I was repaying what I did not steal.
(OfP PsF 5, v. 12)

When the father saw that he could not recall him from the journey he had begun, he became obsessed with recovering the money. The man of God had desired to spend it on feeding the poor and on the buildings of that place.... Then he led the son to the bishop of the city to make him renounce into the bishop's hands all rights of inheritance and return everything that he had.... When he was in front of the bishop he ... immediately took off and threw down all his clothes and returned them to his father. He did not even keep his trousers on, and he was completely stripped bare before everyone. (1C 14-15)

The line quoted above, which Francis selected for his fifth psalm, seems more directly applicable to his own story than to that of Christ's Passion. *The Life of St. Francis* by Thomas of Celano recounts Francis's conflict with his father, Pietro di Bernadone, in the early stages of Francis's conversion. Pietro, angered at Francis's change of direction, demanded repayment of the money Francis had taken from him for the maintenance of a church. Then he demanded that Francis renounce his right of inheritance in public before the Bishop of Assisi. Francis responded by stripping himself of all

his clothes and returning them to his father as well as the money (1C 14-15). The correlation with PsF 5, v. 12 of the *OfP* is striking: Pietro, in Francis's own view, persecuted him unjustly, accusing him of theft, and Francis returned what he did not steal: money, inheritance and clothes.

I will call to my Father most
holy, most high,
To God who has done me
good. (OfP PsF 3, v. 3)

... he declared: "From now on I will say freely: 'Our Father who art in heaven', and not 'My father, Pietro di Bernadone.' Look, not only do I return his money; I give him back all my clothes. I will go to the Lord naked." (2C 12)

At this moment of public trial, Francis renounced his own father and claimed God as his only Father. This claim could be evoked in PsF 3, v. 3. "God who has done me good" is translated in the singing version of the Psalm as, "God my benefactor."¹⁵ This also captures the sense of the Latin, *Dominum qui benefecit mihi*.¹⁶ *The Legend of the Three Companions* tells us that up to this point, Pietro provided for his son's lavish lifestyle (L3C, 2). Having renounced his claim as Pietro's heir, Francis called on God to be his only benefactor in his new life as a penitent (PsF 3, v. 3).

And in the shadow of your
wings will I hope,
until iniquity passes by.
(OfP, PsF 3, v. 2)

... as he heard the threats of his pursuers and knew beforehand of their coming, he left room for his father's anger; and, going to a secret cave which he had prepared for this, he hid there for a whole month ... Lacking confidence in his own effort and strength, he cast his hope completely on the Lord who filled him with an inexpressible happiness and enlightened him with a marvellous light, even though he still remained in darkness. (L3C 16-17)

¹⁵ Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 56.

¹⁶ Desbonnets, *Écrits*, 294.

The *L3C* recounts that Francis heard of his father's anger and hid himself in a cave, hoping it might pass (*L3C* 16-17). Correspondingly, in *PsF* 3, the verse preceding that in which he names his father conveys a sense of hiding and hoping in God until a threat should pass (*PsF* 3, v. 2).

He sent from heaven and
delivered me,
He disgraced those who
trampled me. (*OfP*, *PsF* 3, v. 4)

They dug a pit before my face,
and into it they have fallen.
(*OfP*, *PsF* 3, v. 7)

They rigged a trap for my feet
and they buckled my soul.
(*OfP*, *PsF* 3, v. 6)

Then his father, overcome
with unbearable pain and
anger, took the money and all
the clothing. While he was
carrying these home, those
who were present at this
spectacle were indignant at
him, for he left nothing for his
son to wear. (*L3C* 20)

With no pity, he shut him
up for several days in a
dark place. Striving to bend
Francis's will to his own, he
badgered him, beat him, and
bound him. (1C 12)

The verse (4) after God the Father is named attributes the disgrace of his persecutors to God's help. The *L3C* (20) describes how Pietro himself was disgraced in this public spectacle by the actions of his son, whom he intended to humiliate. *PsF* 3, v. 7 could refer to this backfiring of Pietro's plan. The previous verse (v. 6) referring to the same enemy, describes how the narrator was confined physically and spiritually. Correspondingly, Celano recounts how Francis's father kept him chained as a prisoner, which prevented him physically from following his vocation and tried to change his mind by bullying, which also confined his soul (1C 12).

He sent from heaven and
delivered me...
(*OfP*, *PsF* 3, v. 4)

And the Lord has become a
refuge for the poor,
A helper in times of
tribulation...

The bishop ... gathered
him into his arms, covering
him with his mantle.... And
so, from that moment, he
became his helper, exhorting,
encouraging, loving and
embracing him with the depths
of his charity. (*L3C* 20)

Blessed be the Lord my God
because he has become my
protector and my refuge in the
day of my tribulation.

Let us have recourse to Him
as to the Shepherd and
Guardian of our souls...
(*ER* 22, 32)

O my helper, I will sing to you,
For you, O God, [are] my
protector
my God, my mercy!
(*OfP* *PsF* 11, vv. 7-9)

... the Lord of Ostia, who
is the Lord, the Protector
and the Corrector of this
fraternity. (*Test* 33)

Be for me a protector-God and
a fortress,
so that you may make me safe.
(*OfP* *PsF* 12, v. 3)

... may they always remain
faithful and subject to the
prelates and all the clerics of
holy Mother Church. (*TestS*)

Celano describes how Bishop Guido of Assisi covered Francis with his own mantle after he had stripped off his clothes (1C 15). This was a graphic demonstration of the legal situation: Francis was now under the protection of the Church. The *L3C* states that, from then on, the Bishop was a helper and counsellor to Francis (*L3C* 20). We can assume that Francis saw this protection as coming from God because, in the *OfP*, he wrote: "He sent from heaven and delivered me" (*PsF* 3, v. 4). The importance he attached to the Church as protector extended to all representatives of the hierarchy. Hence, he sought the Pope's approval for his *propositum vitae*, as mentioned in the *Test* (15). Later Francis petitioned the Pope and obtained a Cardinal Protector for the Order, also named in the *Test* (33). The *OfP* explains these actions, as Francis dwells on God as his helper and protector in *PsF* 11, vv. 7-9 and in *PsF* 12, v. 3. In the passage quoted from the *ER* 22, he exhorts the brothers to remain under their divine protector, imagined as Christ, the Good Shepherd. The word for "Guardian" in the Latin text is *episcopus*, the word for "bishop." This makes clear the mental association of God's protection with the hierarchy. This divine protection through the Church being so important to Francis, he dictated the tenet quoted above as one of his essential three in the *TestS*. The emphasis on the Church's protection found in the testaments agrees with the *L3C* 65-67.

The House of God

Holy Father, zeal
for your house has
devoured me,
and the abuses of
those who have
attacked you have
fallen upon me.
(OfP, PsF 5, v. 9)

And from his holy
temple he heard my
voice
and my crying out
in his sight. (OfP,
PsF 10, v. 6)

May he send you
help from the holy
place,
and from Zion may
he care for you.
(OfP, PsF 11, v. 2)

And the Lord gave
me such faith in
churches that I
would pray with
simplicity in this
way and say: "We
adore You, Lord
Jesus Christ, in
all Your churches
throughout the
world..."

Afterwards the Lord
gave me, ... such
faith in priests who
live according to
the rite of the holy
Roman Church
because of their
orders that, were
they to persecute
me, I would still
want to have
recourse to them.
(Test 4-6)

Let us always
make a home and
dwelling place there
for Him Who is the
Lord God Almighty,
Father, Son and
Holy Spirit... (ER
22, 26-27)

...the image of
Christ crucified
spoke to him.
"Francis," it said
... "go rebuild my
house; as you
see, it is all being
destroyed." ...
Although the divine
word spoken to
him was really
about that Church
which Christ
acquired with his
own blood, he did
not immediately
reach that level,
but moved
gradually from
flesh to spirit.
(2C 10-11)

Francis's attachment to the Church and its representatives developed from a practical attention to the state of church buildings. Cirino and Gallant rightly connected Christ's zeal for His Father's house in the *OfP* (PsF 5 v. 9) with Francis's zeal for rebuilding ruined churches in the early part of his converted life. In Celano's legend (2C 10) the call to rebuild the House of God comes from Christ in the ruined chapel of San Damiano, after Francis prays there before the

crucifix.¹⁷ Francis begins by repairing that chapel and goes on to repair two others (1C 21). The concept of the House of God remained loaded with meaning for Francis throughout his life and he expressed it in the *OfP* (PsF 10, v. 6; PsF 11, v.2). The House of God is the place in which God heard Francis' prayer and called him to mission. It also referred to the Church, whose representatives, such as Bishop Guido, ministered God's help and protection to Francis. Celano ended his account of the call in San Damiano by describing how Francis's understanding of God's House progressed. At first, Francis understood it as the chapel building surrounding him but later, came to see it as the Church of Christian believers. This interpretation is confirmed by the *Test*. Francis recalls that the Lord first gave him faith in churches (*Test* 4) and then in the clergy (*Test* 6), representatives of the Church of Christ. In the *ER* 22 (26-27), it extends to individual believers as living temples of the Holy Trinity.

Since it is you
who drew me from
the womb, you,
my hope from my
mother's breasts,
from the womb I
was projected into
you.

From my mother's
womb you are my
God; do not move
away from me. (OfP
PsF 2, vv. 4-5)

...may they always
remain faithful
and subject to the
prelates and all
the clerics of holy
Mother Church.
(TestS)

Mary, holy Mother
of God, Who are
the Virgin made
Church, chosen
by the most
Holy Father in
heaven whom he
consecrated with
His most holy
beloved Son ...

"I will go and
recommend the
religion of the
Lesser Brothers
to the holy
Roman Church.
... from now on,
let the children
acknowledge their
mother's sweet
favor, and always
follow her holy
footprints with
special devotion.
For with her
protection, nothing
evil will happen to
the Order... (2MP
78)

¹⁷ 2C 10, FA:ED 2, 249.

In you I have been
fortified from the
womb, from my
birth you are my
protector; of you
my song will always
be. (*OfP*, PsF 12,
v. 5)

Hail His Palace!
Hail His
Tabernacle!
Hail His Dwelling!
Hail His Robe!
(*SalBVM* 1-2, 4-5)

All those ... who
receive the Body
and Blood of our
Lord Jesus Christ
... are ... mothers
of our Lord Jesus
Christ.
(1LtF 1-2, 7)

Blessed Francis
was overjoyed
at the place
granted to the
brothers, because
of the name of
this church, of
the Mother of
Christ... This name
foreshadowed that
it was to be the
mother and head
of the poor Lesser
Brothers. (AC 56)

Francis's use of the words, *mater Ecclesia* in the *TestS* (5) shows his association of the Church with a mother. The *OfP* reveals that, for Francis, this association ran much deeper than a traditional title. In the *OfP*, PsF 2, vv. 4-5 and PsF 12, v. 5, Francis links God's protection with the safety of his mother's womb. This could have stemmed from his mother's sympathy for his vocation in contrast to his father's hostility. Celano relates how Picca, Francis's mother, released him from imprisonment by his father (1C 13). When he thinks of motherhood, the Mother of Christ is his archetype. In his *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Francis merges the ideas of the Mother of Christ and the Church.¹⁸ The *Assisi Compilation* (AC 56) tells us of Francis's strong attachment to the little chapel of St. Mary of the Portiuncula because of its dedication to the Mother of Christ. It was to become the *caput et mater* of the Order and Francis even made a testament about it.¹⁹ Both Mary and the Church are dwellings for the Word incarnate. This is what makes them holy. In the *Test* (5), Francis recites his prayer adoring Christ in all the churches of the world. This presence of Christ is his reason for honoring the clerics of the Church who minister it (*Test* 10). He is therefore concerned that Christ, present in His Word and His holy Body and Blood, should be kept in

¹⁸ Francis, *SalBVM*, *FA:ED* 1, 163.

¹⁹ *2MP* 82-83, *FA:ED* 3, 328-30.

"precious places" and honored (*Test* 11-12). Finally, Francis understands that each believer can be a temple for the Holy Trinity because of the ministry of Christ's presence through the clergy. Similarly, because of the ministry of priests, each believer can be a mother to Christ, after the example of Mary, as Francis explains in *The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful* (1-10).²⁰ Therefore, the testaments, including the *OfP*, compared with the sources, can help us understand the meaning Francis attaches to "The House of God." In general, the associations are: God's help and protection – Mother (of Christ)/ – churches/the Church – hierarchy/clergy – the presence of Christ – the Christian believer. Following the abjuration of his father, which is reflected and confirmed by the *OfP*, Francis would probably have been barred from contact with his mother and this must have been painful. Therefore, in his new life, it appears that he claimed God as his Father and benefactor and the Church as his Mother, in whom the life of Christ is contained. Hence, one could discern some emotional reasons for Francis's wanting himself and his brothers never to stray from the obedience and orthodoxy that kept them in the protection of the Catholic fold. This would help to explain his motivation for repairing the House of God from the inside. The protection of the Mother of Christ as an archetype of the Church could be signified in the structure of the *OfP*. The Marian antiphon at the beginning of the Psalms and repeated the end is unexpected in an Office devoted to Christ's Passion. But perhaps, in Francis's mind, it enclosed his prayer with Christ in the protection of the Blessed Mother, as she enclosed the life of the incarnate Word and was also present at His birth and death; and as the Church is also "Mother," bearing Christ and protecting all her children.²¹ Therefore, the *OfP* and other testament texts

²⁰ Francis, 1LtF, 1-10, *FA:ED* 1, 41-42.

²¹ In Francis's way of praying the Office, these antiphons would actually have enclosed three Psalms: one dedicated to the Mother of God; one expressing a private devotion according to the liturgical season; and one of Francis's own psalms in honour of Christ's Passion (Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 28).

confirm Francis's view of the Church as Mother and protector of the Order, as recounted in 2MP 78.

Loss of friends and family

My friends and companions
drew near and stood against
me; and my neighbours stayed
far from me.

You kept my friends far
from me, they made me an
abomination to themselves; ...
(*OfP*, PsF 1, vv. 7-8)

All who saw me laughed at me
and they spoke with [their]
lips and shook [their] heads.

But I am a worm and not a
man, The disgrace of men and
an outcast of the people.

Far more than all my enemies,
I have become a total disgrace
to my neighbors and a dread
to my acquaintances.
(*OfP*, PsF 4, vv. 6-8)

I looked to my right and I saw,
and there was no one who
knew me.

For on your account I have
sustained disgrace, confusion
has covered my face.

I have become a stranger to
my brothers, and a pilgrim to
the sons of my mother.
(*OfP*, PsF 5, vv. 5+7-8)

... whenever his father met
him, overwhelmed with great
sorrow, he would curse him.
The blessed man, however,
took with him a poor old man
named Alberto and asked him
for a blessing. Most people
used to laugh at him, insulting
him with spiteful words.
Almost everyone considered
him mad. (AP 9)

When all those who knew
him saw him, they compared
his latest circumstances with
his former and they began
to reproach him harshly.
Shouting that he was insane
and out of his mind, they
threw mud from the streets
and stones at him.... God's
servant showed himself deaf
to all of them, and neither
broken nor changed by any
wrong to himself, he gave
thanks to God for all of them.
(1C 11)

His brother in the flesh, just
like his father, hounded him
with poisoned words.... When
the man of God heard this, he
was very happy, and answered
with a smile... (2C 12)

The sources describe how the poverty and degradation of Francis's new life as a mendicant made his father and brother, his former friends and acquaintances ashamed of him and they turned against him (*The Anonymous of Perugia*

9;²² 1C 11; L3C, 23). These sources portray Francis as coping admirably with this rejection. Apparently undisturbed, Francis relies on God, giving thanks. He adopts a poor man to act as his father by countering Pietro's curses with blessings.

Contrastingly, the *OfP* reveals an interior and subjective experience of loss of family, friends and reputation, as can be seen in the quotations above. One could speculate that Francis did not wish to reveal this in his other testament texts intended for the instruction of the Brothers, as indeed he does not. However, in this prayer form, he can merge his own experience into the narrative of Christ the Hero. The number of Psalm verses selected on this theme suggests that it affected him deeply, as would be natural and human. The words of the Psalm lines express the anguish of isolation and loss.

THE WILL OF FRANCIS FOR THE ORDER

Their divine vocation

While my spirit was failing
within me, and you, you have
known my paths. (*OfP*, PsF 5,
v. 3)

Reject your bodies and take up
his holy cross; and follow his
most holy commands to the
very end. (*OfP*, PsF 7, v. 8)

And the Lord Himself led
me... (*Test* 2)

And after the Lord gave
me some brothers, no one
showed me what I had to do,
but the Most High Himself
revealed to me that I should
live according to the pattern
of the Holy Gospel. (*Test* 14)

But as the Lord has given me
to speak and write the Rule
and these words simply and
purely, may you understand
them simply and without
gloss and observe them with
a holy activity until the end.
(*Test* 39)

²² AP 9, FA:ED 2, 37.

Francis may be heard in the *OfP* describing his vocation and that of his Order. In the *Test* (2 and 14) he is clear that God directly guides and instructs him in the Gospel way. Similarly, Francis addresses God in his *OfP*, ... "you, you have known my paths" (*OfP*, PsF 5, v. 3). In PsF 7, v. 8 he steps out of the Christ narrative and exhorts his brothers to follow the same path. Unlike most of the *OfP*, this passage draws on the Gospels of Matthew (Mt 16: 24) and John (Jn 15:10), thus indicating a Gospel way of life. As the *ER* (22, 9 and 41) teaches, to follow Christ is to follow His teaching and example in the Gospels and to do God's will. For the brothers, this should mean faithfully following Francis's guidance for their way of life: his Rule,²³ which he has received from the Lord and the *Test*, which explains it (*Test*, 39). In exhorting the brothers to follow the Lord's commands (*OfP*, PsF 7, v. 8) and to follow the words of the Rule and *Test* (*Test*, 39), Francis uses the same ending phrase, *usque in finem*.²⁴ It is drawn from a teaching of Christ:

... you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved (Matt 10:22).²⁵

In this passage, and in the *OfP* and *Test*, "to the end" implies "to death," even if that should mean martyrdom after the example of the Lord's Passion. Francis in the *ER* (22, 2) directly states this implication of their vocation. Therefore, these testaments together can tell us about Francis's understanding of his own vocation and intention for the Order. Francis himself intends to follow Christ by observing the Rule and Life of the Friars Minor to the end of his life just as he believes the Lord has given it to him. This Rule and Life is essentially ... "to observe the Holy Gospel" ... as *The Later Rule* (LR 1, 1) clearly states.²⁶ Whatever risks and suffering this may incur, even martyrdom, are the realization of his following in the footsteps of Christ. Francis wishes all his brothers to be similarly committed to his *Rule and Life*. How-

²³ Francis (1223), *The Later Rule*, FA:ED 1, 100-06.

²⁴ Desbonnets, *Écrits*, 210 and 304.

²⁵ Matt 10:22

²⁶ Francis, *LR*, I, 1, FA:ED 1, 100.

ever, there is evidence in his writings and the sources, which will be examined later, that some brothers are dissenting and straying from the Life as he understands it. This would seem to be a large part of Francis's own suffering in following his vocation during the years when he composes the *OfP*. That the "way" of his vocation leads him into opposition and suffering is suggested in some lines of the *OfP*, as Cirino and Gallant have noted.²⁷ The first of the following quotations is addressed to God; the second could be addressed to the brothers who have vowed to travel along the same Gospel "way":

On this road on which I was walking
The arrogant have hidden a trap for me (*OfP* PsF 5, v. 4).²⁸

O all of you who pass along the way,
consider and see if there is a sorrow like my sorrow
(*OfP* PsF 6, v. 1).²⁹

Poverty

Poverty is one of the defining features of Francis's movement and it appears in all of the testaments under consideration. It is also one of the most controversial features, causing debate and conflict down the centuries as to Francis's real intention in this regard. I shall now focus on some insights that the *OfP*, considered with these other testaments, could provide into Francis's view of the role of poverty.

For the most holy beloved
child is given to us, and he
was born for us along the
way and placed in a manger
because he had no place at
the inn.
(*OfP*, PsF 15, v. 7)

Let the brothers be careful not
to receive in any way churches
or poor dwellings or anything
else built for them unless
they are according to the holy
poverty we have promised
in the Rule. As pilgrims and
strangers, let them always be
guests there. (*Test* 24)

²⁷ Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 260-61.

²⁸ Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 261.

²⁹ Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 270.

The *imitatio Christi* is the primary reason for the importance given to voluntary poverty. To make this key point about his vocation, Francis, in PsF 15 v. 7, departs from the Book of Psalms and draws on the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:7, 12, 16). This passage describes how Christ was born "along the way" into a situation of poverty as a homeless traveler. Therefore, in the *Test* (24), he admonishes the brothers that their dwellings should reflect the poverty they have professed. They should not appropriate these habitations but live there as "pilgrims and strangers," following the example of Christ.

For what is there in heaven for me, and besides you, what have I wanted on earth? (*OfP*, PsF 6, v. 13)

And those who came to receive life gave whatever they had to the poor and were content with one tunic, patched inside and out, with a cord and short trousers. We desired nothing more. (*Test* 16-17)

... the devil wishes to take away from us the love of Jesus Christ ... (*ER* 22, 5)

But, in the holy love which is God, I beg all my brothers, both the ministers and the others, after overcoming every impediment and putting aside every care and anxiety, to serve, love, honour and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind ... (*ER* 22, 26)

PsF 6, v. 13 summarizes Francis's view of the function of poverty: it is ordered to the ideal of desiring God above all and wanting to have nothing else on earth. The connection of poverty with desire is also found in the *Test* (16-17). Francis recalls the ideal of desire in the early fraternity whose members were content with the essentials for life and ... "desired nothing more." The proper object of love is God, as the *ER*

(22, 5) tells us. But Satan wants to prevent people from focusing their minds and hearts on God (*ER* 22, 19). He does it by attracting people to "inordinate desire" for things in this world so that their minds and hearts are caught up with how to keep and increase them. When a person desires God above all, the Trinity finds a home in his/her heart (*ER* 22, 26-27). But Satan also wants to occupy hearts with desires for worldly things (*ER* 22, 20). Therefore poverty, for Francis, is all about desire. It is a protection for the heart, to keep its desire focused on God.

But as for me, I am needy and poor; O God, help me. (*OfP*, PsF 8, v. 7)

And the Lord has become a refuge for the poor, a helper in times of tribulation; and may they, who have come to know your name, hope in you. (*OfP*, PsF 11, v. 7)

Let the poor see and rejoice, seek the Lord and your soul will live.

For the Lord heard the poor, and has not despised his captives. (*OfP*, PsF 14, vv. 5-6)

And let us beware of the malice and craftiness of Satan, who does not want anyone to turn his mind and heart to God. And prowling around he wants to ensnare a person's heart under the guise of some reward or assistance ... (*ER* 22, 19-20)

When the brother ministers urged him to allow the brothers to have something at least in common, so that such a great number would have some resources, Saint Francis called upon Christ in prayer and consulted Him about this. Christ immediately responded that He would take away everything held individually or in common, saying that this is His family for whom He was always ready to provide, no matter how much it might grow, and He would always cherish it as long as it would put its hope in Him. (*AC* 16)

The *OfP* teaches that the poor need not become enmeshed in the cares of the world: while setting their minds and hearts on God, they must rely on God to take care of their needs and worries. And so, Francis calls on God in his poverty and need, "O God, help me" (in Latin, *adiuva me*, PsF 8, v. 7).³⁰ Then he speaks in PsF 11, v. 7 of how God becomes a refuge and helper (*Adiutor*) for the poor.³¹ But Satan uses the appearance of help as a deception "to ensnare a person's heart," as Francis wrote in the *ER* (22, 19-20).³² To emphasise this warning, he repeated it further on (*ER* 22, 25). This kind of help is not God's help but worldly assistance in the form of riches that make life more secure and comfortable. Used by Satan, they occupy our hearts and make us forget our need for God. Poverty is intended to guard against this kind of deception. One could speculate that Francis associated false providence with his father, the worldly benefactor he renounced in favour of God. As mentioned by Cirino and Gallant, 2C (70) recalls how he most enjoyed praying Psalms that glorified poverty.³³ Celano quotes, as an example, the line from Psalm 68 included in PsF 14, v. 5. This verse encourages the poor to "seek first the Kingdom" (cf. Matt. 6:33) and trust in God's providence. God may be relied upon to hear the prayer of the poor (PsF 14, v. 6). This reliance on God's providence agrees exactly with Francis's intention regarding poverty as stated in the AC (16).

Francis urged the brothers to "love ... Lady Poverty," in his *TestS*. Like Mother Church, this feminine concept is also a protector, as has been shown. In his *Salutation of the Virtues* (11) he wrote that "Lady Holy Poverty ... confounds the desire for riches, greed and the cares of this world."³⁴ Paradoxically, Lady Poverty is also an object of desire in Francis's thought because she is a virtue and so, an attribute of God. Since Christ chose poverty in the world, love of poverty is part of the love for God through the *imitatio Christi*.

³⁰ Desbonnets, *Écrits*, 308.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 318.

³² *Ibid.*, 164.

³³ Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 338.

³⁴ Francis, *A Salutation of the Virtues* 11, *FA:ED* 1, 164-65.

It is notable from an examination of poverty in these texts that Francis did not condemn material goods or even possessions in themselves. He was concerned with their potential effects on the heart because inordinate desire for things can take one away from the love of God. The false security of property and privilege causes pride and self-reliance. Poverty helps to guard against these dangers. Francis's imaginative spirituality sees poverty in positive terms. It is even conceived as a Lady to be loved. It must have been hard for Francis to understand those in the Order who complained that their observance of poverty was too strict.

'Enemies'

The "Enemy" of Francis's geste is Satan. It is Satan working through human agents: the Pharisees and Sanhedrin, Pilate and the Roman soldiers, who brings about the death of the Hero. These agents of Satan are the "enemies" frequently mentioned on the level of the Christ narrative. It is easy to read the enemies who plot together and slander the narrator as the Jewish authorities. However, it is a little surprising to find "enemies" with reference to their arrogance, interrogation and slander in *PsF* 5 which deals with Christ on the cross. These references to enemies seem to be concentrated in Francis's first five Psalms, especially PsF 4 and 5.

Once a brother asked him why he had renounced the care of all the brothers and turned them over into the hands of others, as if they did not belong to him. He replied; "Son, I love the brothers as I can but if they would follow in my footsteps, I would surely love them more, and would not make myself a stranger to them. For there are some among the prelates who draw them in a different direction, placing before them the examples of the ancients and paying little attention to my warnings. But what they are doing will be seen in the end."

A short time later, when he was suffering a serious illness, he raised himself up in bed in an angry spirit:

"Who are these people? They have snatched out of my hands my religion and that of the brothers. If I go to the general chapter, I'll show them what is my will." (AC 44)³⁵

I propose that the "enemies" on the level of Francis's narrative in the *OfP* are his own brothers in the Order who oppose his ideals and leadership, as the above quotation suggests. During the time the *OfP* was written (1215-1224) the Order was expanding rapidly and focusing increasingly on clerical ministry and preaching.³⁶ In these circumstances, many brothers regarded the primitive observance of poverty as no longer possible (AC 106). Because Francis firmly believed that God directly inspired his Rule and Life as a literal following of the Gospel, he saw those who opposed this way as acting against Christ. In this sense, they were his enemies. The pain this dissension caused Francis was his personal crucifixion and so he included it extensively in his *OfP* and especially in the fifth psalm.

³⁵ AC 44, FA:ED 2, 145-46.

³⁶ In 1209, there were around 11/12 friars in the Order. At the Chapter of 1217, the Order was divided into 11 provinces. By 1226, there would be around 5000 friars.

The number of clerics in the Order greatly increased as it grew. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 identified a need for more and better preachers in the Church (Lateran IV, Constitutions 10 and 11; cf. Tanner, N.P., ed., 1990, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (London and Washington DC: Sheed and Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), 239-40. In 1219, Pope Honorius III issued the Bull, *Cum dilecti*, which recommended the friars as preachers to all the bishops of the Church (Honorius III, 1219, *Cum dilecti*, FA:ED 1, 558). Some time after November 29th, 1223, Brother Anthony of Padua obtained permission from Francis to teach theology to the brothers (Francis, *A Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua*, FA:ED 1, 107). But study for preaching and clerical ministry required books and buildings in which to keep them. This led to tensions in the Order concerning the friars' observance of absolute material poverty.

All my enemies
were conjuring evil
thoughts against
me; they took
counsel together.
(*OfP*, PsF 1, v. 2)

All my enemies
[were] against me,
they were thinking
evil things of me;
they agreed upon a
hateful word about
me.

Those who were
guarding my life
were taking counsel
together.

They were going
outside and were
speaking among
themselves.
(*OfP*, PsF 4, vv. 3-5)

And the brothers
may not say: "This
is another rule."
(*Test* 34)

...a great many
ministers gathered
around Brother
Elias, who was the
vicar of blessed
Francis. "We
heard that Brother
Francis is making
a new rule," they
told him, "and we
fear that he will
make it so harsh
that we will not be
able to observe it.
We want you to go
to him and tell him
that we refuse to be
bound to that Rule.
Let him make it for
himself and not for
us." (AC 17)

This passage from the AC (17) about those ministers who objected to the *Rule*, seems to correspond with Francis's concentration in PsF1, v. 2 and PsF4, vv. 3-5 on enemies who are plotting against him in his absence. As the AC (44) makes apparent, Francis viewed these factions as leading all the brothers astray from his way of life and this tormented him. The passage from the AC (17) also explains Francis's words in the *Testament* (34), "and the brothers may not say: 'This is another rule.'"

The focus on malediction in PsF 4 can be understood in the light of the traditional connection of the hour of terce with the Passion story of Christ. At this hour, Christ was thought to have undergone a form of mental crucifixion before his physical death, through the words of his enemies: 'Crucify him!'³⁷ Therefore, it appears that Francis felt himself

³⁷ Leonard Lehmann, "Francis's Office of the Passion," P. Barrett, trans., *Greyfriars Review*, Vol. 12, no. 2, (1998): 154.

crucified by the tongues of his opponents.³⁸ Francis detested malediction as the *ER* 11 reveals and he denounced its presence in the Order, as Celano described (2C 182).

For the reason
for which they
should have
loved me, they
slandered me;
(*OfP*, PsF 1, v. 4)

They were
repaying me evil
for good, and
were slandering
me because I
was pursuing
goodness. (*OfP*
14, PsF 5, v. 14)

While my spirit
was failing within
me, and you, you
have known my
paths.

On this road
on which I was
walking, the
arrogant have
hidden a trap for
me. (*OfP*, PsF 5,
vv. 3-4)

And let the general
minister and all
the other ministers
and custodians
be bound through
obedience not to
add to or take away
from these words.
(*Test* 35)

And I strictly
command all my
cleric and lay
brothers, through
obedience, not to
place any gloss
upon the Rule
or upon these
words saying:
"They should be
understood in this
way." But as the
Lord has given me
to speak and write
the Rule and these
words simply and
purely, may you
understand them
simply and without
gloss and observe
them with a holy
activity until the
end. (*Test* 38-39)

Although the
ministers knew
that, according
to the Rule of the
brothers they were
bound to observe the
holy Gospel, they
nevertheless had
that chapter of the
Rule where it says
"Take nothing for
your journey, etc."
removed, believing,
despite it, that they
were not obliged to
observance of the
perfection of the holy
Gospel. (AC 102)

He often said to his
companions: "Here
lies my pain and
grief: those things
which I received
from God by His
mercy with great
effort of prayer
and meditation for
the present and
future good of the
religion ... some
of the brothers on
the authority and
support of their
knowledge nullify
and oppose me
saying: 'These things
must be kept and
observed; but not
those!'" (AC 106)

In view of the ministers' dissent, the "goodness" that Francis was "pursuing" (PsF 5, v. 14) could be understood as the perfection of poverty and this would be his reason why the brothers should have loved him but slandered him (PsF1, v. 4). The AC (102) claims that the ministers removed a passage on poverty from the Rule. To this action, Francis's command in the *Test* (35) could have been a response. In PsF 5, v. 3, Francis seems to be addressing Christ, who has known the same path of poverty and the suffering it entails. On this path, "the arrogant have hidden a trap" (PsF 5, v. 4). "The arrogant" could be some of the increasing numbers of learned and clerical brothers who attempted to impose non-literal interpretations of Francis's words in the Rule.³⁹ These are admonished in the *Test* (38) to observe the Rule ... "simply and without gloss." They are "arrogant" because, as Francis complains in the AC 106, they rely on ... "the authority of their knowledge."

Holy Father, keep in Your name
those You have given me that
they may be one as We are.
(John 17:11, in: *ER* 22, 45)

I ask ... that they may be
brought to perfection as one...
(John 17:23, in: *ER* 22, 53)
... Love your enemies and do
good to those who hate you⁷² for
our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose
footprints we must follow,
called His betrayer a friend
... Our friends, therefore, are
all those who unjustly inflict
upon us distress and anguish,
shame and injury, sorrow and
punishment, martyrdom and
death. We must love them
greatly for we shall possess
eternal life because of what they
bring us. (*ER* 22, 1-4)

...because he feared scandal
for himself and for the
brothers, he did not want
to argue with them; but he
complied with their wish,
although not willingly, and
excused himself before the
Lord.
(AC 101)

He said: "My office, that is,
a prelaty over the brothers,
is spiritual, because I must
overcome vices and correct
them. Therefore, if I cannot
overcome and correct them
by preaching and example,
I do not want to become an
executioner who beats and
scourges, like a power of
this world." (AC 106)

³⁸ Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 251.

³⁹ Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 260-61.

As already observed, in PsF 5, Francis recalls the conflict with his father, his trial before the bishop and subsequent rejection by his family and friends, resulting from his "zeal" for God's House. Into these memories is mixed the more recent pain of his rejection by the brothers. As this is the Psalm of Crucifixion, Francis may have included what was for him, the worst pain: rejection and alienation. We know from all his writings that to be in relationship; to be part of a larger family was crucial for Francis. With the exception of the Psalms of his *OfP* and *The Prayer Before the Crucifix*, his prayers are never in the first person.⁴⁰ In the *Praises* that he wrote to precede all of his psalms, he involved himself with the worship of the entire celestial court and all of creation, as Cirino and Gallant have shown.⁴¹ Francis's *Canticle of the Creatures* was also a hymn offered to God as part of a vast fraternity involving the whole cosmos.⁴² He was solicitous that his brothers should be one, as Christ prayed (*ER* 22, 45 and 53). Therefore, seeking to avoid conflict, he gave in to their demands (*AC* 101) and also resigned leadership of the Order so he would not have to enforce his will by punishing his brothers (*AC* 106). His first wish for all the brothers in the *TestS* was ... "may they always love one another as I have loved and love them."⁴³

To love all his "enemies" after the example of Christ was Francis' way of dealing with conflict, which he passed on to the Order in the *ER* 22, (1-4). In his spirituality, enemies became friends because they made him suffer and thus united him more closely with Christ in His Passion and also, in His Resurrection and glory. This is Francis's reason for pouring out his sufferings from enmity in prayer merged into the Passion story. His sixth psalm contains the starkest representation of Christ's suffering and moves into His resurrected glory (*PsF* 6, vv. 11-16). The seventh psalm of Francis depicts the cross precisely as Christ's glorification, in the manner of John's Gospel, so that "the Lord has reigned from the wood"

⁴⁰ Francis (1205/06), *The Prayer Before the Crucifix*, *FA:ED* 1, 40.

⁴¹ Cirino and Gallant, *The Geste of the Great King*, 211-16.

⁴² Francis (1225), *The Canticle of the Creatures*, *FA:ED* 1, 113-14.

⁴³ *2MP* 87, *FA:ED* 3, 335-36.

(*PsF* 7, v. 9). In this way, Francis envisioned his sufferings transformed into glory with Christ.

Therefore, he observed the holy Gospel to the letter from the day he began to have brothers until the day of his death (*AC* 102).⁴⁴

CONCLUSIONS

This study has led me to conclude that the *OfP* can be read as a testament of Francis expressing his spiritual journey in prayer and the charism given by God to the Order. This conclusion has been shown to be reasonable because similar themes and pivotal events were found in the *OfP* and the other testament texts and many of these could be explained or confirmed by passages from the sources for the life of Francis. Furthermore, in parts of the *OfP*, the story of Christ the Hero is not so obvious as the voice of Francis, which betrays the presence of this underlying meaning.⁴⁵

Aspects of Francis's testament found in the OfP

I shall now summarize what the *OfP*, read among Francis's testaments, has revealed or confirmed about the mind of Francis. Francis saw his experience with the lepers as a liberating death to the world and to sin. The pain of his alienation from family and friends affected him profoundly. Francis's adoption of God as Father and Provider and the Church as Mother/Protector has been signified. Francis's desire for poverty stemmed from his desire to follow Christ as closely and practically as possible. This is why his image of "Lady Poverty" is so positive. The function of poverty in his thought was to protect the heart from occupation with worldly things so that God could occupy it. Francis's intention was to follow the Gospel way of life, as given him by the Lord, with all the persecutions this might entail, unto death. Francis suffered mental anguish on account of the opposition of many min-

⁴⁴ *AC* 102, *FA:ED* 2, 207.

⁴⁵ Some examples already given were *PsF* 10, v. 4 and *PsF* 7, v. 8.

isters, especially to poverty. Nevertheless, he believed this suffering was changed to glory in union with the Passion of Christ.

THE UNIQUE VALUE OF THE *OfP* AS A TESTAMENT OF FRANCIS

Despite its limitations as a testament due to its liturgical and literary forms, this prayer has unique value among the writings of Francis and even among his testaments.⁴⁶ It was a core element of Francis's prayer routine for around nine years, as he composed it and prayed it seven times daily. Consequently, it was a familiar and integral part of his spiritual life. Apart from the *PrCr*, the psalms of the *OfP* are the only prayers of Francis written in the first person; in which Francis speaks to God about himself, as has been shown. Therefore, it is the most personal of his testaments. Even in his main *Testament*, Francis did not reveal anything of the conflict with his father or the rejection by his family and friends that shaped his spiritual journey. This is probably because that *Testament* was written purely for the edification and instruction of the brothers and was not also addressed to God as a personal prayer.

⁴⁶ I have found that the *OfP* has some drawbacks as a testament. One disadvantage is that it is composed from Scriptural quotations, mainly, of whole lines from the Psalms. Francis made only slight changes to the original texts and so was limited in the expression of his story to words already written by the Psalmist. They would not always have provided exactly what he wanted to express so we cannot be sure that this precisely is what he intended to say. A further complication from this viewpoint is Francis's construction of the geste of Christ the Hero in this prayer. It was necessary to search beneath this narrative for the self-revelation of Francis in the lines selected. Thus, each line and Psalm needs to be de-coded and one must ask, to whom does this refer: to Christ, to Francis, or to both? Lines may have various possible interpretations. By reason of these limitations, I found it more effective to probe the mind of Francis in this text by searching for recurring themes and patterns overall than by trying to pinpoint the precise meanings of words in isolation. For the same reason, it was advantageous to compare the *OfP* with other testaments and establish similarities in order to de-code Francis's testimony. While Francis's testament in the *OfP* was not always obvious from looking at individual verses of his psalms, it became increasingly apparent from establishing patterns of themes in the whole *Office* by comparison with other testaments and with the sources.

Within the scope of this study, the number of texts, both testaments and sources, which could be compared with the *OfP* was limited. However, my conclusions suggest that further research reading the *OfP* as a testament could uncover more of the authentic Francis.

MASS FOR THE FEAST OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI IN HONOR OF THE 800TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS RULE OF LIFE, 1209-2009

Introit

In fall ginestra on Mount Subasio
fades, and poppies on the plain below
are gone till seeds rise where they fell

Kyrie

For the homeless man who sleeps
on the steps of the building we pass
on our way to concerts,
Kyrie Eleison

For us who pass by the homeless woman
who sleeps on the steps of the building we pass
on our way to ball games,
Christe Eleison

For rich nations
who let the homeless sleep soundly on steps
of the buildings they pass on the way to war,
Kyrie Eleison

Gloria

Here is robin digging for worms.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is worm fattening on soil.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is fox who reddens lamb hill.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is sun warming the earth
that fattens the worm.
Praised be to you, O Lord.

Here is moon
that lights the way of lamb hill fox.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is lark,
angel who sings Glory to God in the highest.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is the highest, Lord God,
Almighty Father.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is Most High
made most low, a worm in the hands of enemies,
Jesus Christ, only Son
who descends to worm to fox and robin and us.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is Jesus Christ, God and Man,
Peace of His People on earth.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is the Holy One,
Jesus Christ, the Most High.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is Jesus Christ
with the Holy Spirit breath of the Father.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is the Father, Creator of all.
Here is the Son, Who takes away sin,
gives us His Spirit.
Praised be you, O Lord.

Here is Trinity in Unity.
Be our Mercy receive our prayer.

Praised be you, O Lord,
through worm and fox
robin lamb and us.

Praised be you, O Lord,
Hill and Altar. Amen.
Praise to you, O Lord
tree branches burning. Amen.
Praise to you, O Lord,
Risen Lamb, Heavenly Food. Amen.

Credo

We believe in God
who falls in night
from Mary's womb onto the manger's cold floor

We believe in God
who sends God who falls in night
from Mary's womb onto the manger's cold floor

We believe in the Spirit
sent by God who rose from the tomb of God
who fell in the night
from Mary's womb onto the manger's cold floor

We believe in God
who lives in those who believe in God
who fell and rose and sent the Spirit
to all who believe in God who fell from
the cross into Mary's arms
from whose womb he fell
in night into the cold dark tomb

We believe in God
of bread and wine that becomes God who fell in night
from Mary's womb onto the manger's cold floor
that became his tomb

We believe in God who
forgives the sins of those who believe in God
who fell in night from Mary's womb into the cold earth's tomb

We believe in God
who rose from death's tomb taking with him
those who believe in the God who fell
in night from Mary's womb into the cold tomb

We believe in God
whose Church is all who believe in God
who fell in night from Mary's womb onto death's bright floor

Homily

The greatest evil is the refusal of repentance,
to deny the truth of your sins and thereby
to create your own truth.

And if you are powerful enough, your own
truth becomes the truth and therefore
no one is guilty.

What would have been repentance
becomes the transference of evil onto
those whose actions remind you of

what you deny in yourself
to prevent guilt and repentance
and God's forgiveness.

Sanctus

Kadosh, Sanctus, Holy
Breaker of Bread, God of all.
Heaven and earth are your glory.
Hosanna inside us and in the highest.

Blessed is He whose
Name is the Highest.
Hosanna to the Highest inside us.

Agnus Dei

You, God, are Lamb
led willingly to slaughter silent not bleating.
Miserere nobis.

You, God, lie on the altar
a sacrifice for us silent singing.
Miserere nobis.

You, God, submit to fire that burns our sins.
Bleating Spirit
Dona nobis pacem.

Meditation After Communion

Like this the laying down of life
Like this diminishment
Like this the lying down in death
Like this laying down the surrender
Like surrender this laying down of life
Like this the surrender
the laying down the lying down
Like this the increase that is diminishment
Like this the loving
Like this is God
Like us

Murray Bodo, O.F.M.

LEADERSHIP AS SERVICE: OUR FORGOTTEN HERITAGE

GIRARD ETZKORN

It does not take a professional scripture scholar or an STD in theology to know that Jesus fostered and required in the apostles a "program" of leadership as service. In the Gospel of Mark, there is an extended treatment of how Jesus expected leadership to be conducted by his followers. It was triggered by the request of apostles James and John that they sit at the right hand of Jesus when he came into his glory. The reply was quick to come: You don't know what you're asking, as much as to say James and John, if you're going to follow me, then you will likewise have to pay for what you say.

It is significant that these events seem to have occurred in close proximity to Christ's passion and death. Jesus' follow-up was: "Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized" [Mark 11, 38]. Better to suffer from injustice than to resort to a questionable use of power. "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all" [Mark 10, 42-44; see also Luke 22, 24-28].

Not long after this Jesus gave a dramatic example of service by washing the feet of his apostles, a task normally allotted to slaves. When he had finished, he said: "Do you realize what I have done for you? ... If I your master and teacher have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet" [John 13, 12-14]. Well, it was questionable as to whether the

apostles "got it" and, as we shall see, whether all too many of their successors have "gotten it."

The Roman Catholic Christian legacy purports to be based on scripture and tradition. While the scripture part has its own set of problems regarding interpretation, tradition is a mixed bag. There's good tradition and bad tradition. The main thrust of tradition in Roman Catholicism, it would seem, has been based on the "power of the keys": "Whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" [Matt 16, 19].

With the "liberation" of the church from oppression and persecution in the wake of the reign of Constantine, certain theologians orchestrated a hierarchical model according to which power was bestowed by Christ to Peter and the apostles and this was passed on to the popes and bishops cascading down to the clergy where the power stopped. The laity were regarded as passive and receptive and having no power, particularly regarding the daily workings of Roman Catholicism. It didn't seem to have occurred to many theologians and canon lawyers that the "power of the keys" should be regarded as one of service.

In the tradition of the early church, prior to the respectability consequent upon Constantine's termination of persecution, it would be difficult to find, much less defend, a hierarchical mind-set. Certainly, the apostolate of Paul was one of service and support with the help of colleagues both male and female. On my reading of the efforts of Paul, if his message of the "good news" was not accepted, he simply left town, at times he "dusted off his feet," but he suffered violence rather than resort to force or violence. If I read the Acts of the Apostles correctly, differences in the early church were settled collegially and not by some petrine edict. It is worthy of note that the successor of Judas, namely Mathias, was not picked by a petrine edict nor by a vote of the eleven, but by lot. The decision not to impose Jewish ritualistic prescriptions on the Gentiles was settled by consensus and not by a petrine fiat.

By the time of the High Middle Ages, the prevailing mind-set of the papacy and, one might say, the majority of the

hierarchy became one of power and control. In the thirteenth century certain theologians and canon lawyers claimed that the Pope possessed a *plenitudo potestatis*, that is total control or fullness of power, not merely in the ecclesiastical realm but in the secular realm as well. Certain popes such as Innocent III, Boniface VIII and John XXII behaved according to this prevailing control mind-set.

One of the monikers attributed to the pope is *servus servorum Dei*. I doubt if this would be the first thing that comes to the mind of some outsider viewing papal behavior. Servants don't get their hands kissed – much less their feet – and servants all decked out in pompous paraphernalia don't get carried around by litter-bearers. The title *pontifex maximus* better fits the mind-set and behavior. Voices like that of William of Ockham, who found such claims to a fullness of power abominable, were of little avail. Ockham had to remind those who read him that the indefectibility of the church resides in the community of believers and not in the papacy, hierarchy or clergy except insofar as they are in harmony with the community of the faithful. The faithful must be united to the hierarchy, but the hierarchy must be united and in tune with the faithful as well.

Francis of Assisi in his own inimitable way – namely more by example than by words – tried to invite the hierarchy and papacy to return to the Gospel message of leadership by service. Francis instinctively knew that Jesus exemplified this by helping, healing and providing spiritual nourishment by teaching. For example, with regard to faith, Jesus cajoled others to faith, invited to faith, tried to shame those of little faith and praised those of great faith, but he never resorted to force! Francis understood this as exemplified by his crusade. He and his ragamuffin followers, powerless and without arms, invaded the territory of the Sultan with only the gospel as their weapons and the Sultan was amazed if not converted. What a wholesome contrast to the multiple war-like crusades which failed miserably to accomplish their purpose! Incidentally, Francis's love of and dedication to poverty needs to be expanded to a love of powerlessness, viz. you want my book, take it; you want our building, take it; you

want my sweater, take my jacket as well, but you can't have my spirit or my faith.

Faith by force is an oxymoron. The great philosopher-theologian Søren Kierkegaard once said that "faith is a leap in the dark"; another unknown author said that "faith is a shout without an echo." In spite of this and the examples of Jesus, Paul and others, we have a tradition capable of spawning the inquisition. I think it would be fair to say that the inquisition is the illegitimate offspring of hierarchical power-abuse. There have been horrible mistakes made by this institution: three unlettered friars, who probably didn't know what heresy was, were burned at the stake. Joan of Arc, whose heresy appears to have been that women shouldn't wear men's clothes or lead armies, was executed. What was Galileo's heresy? The earth is not the center of the universe. The beat still goes on for folks like Hans Küng. Like the institution of the death penalty, one execution of an innocent person is one too many. The basic fallacies of the inquisition lie in two unproven assumptions, namely 1) the inquisitors are presumed to have a better grasp of the faith than the one on trial and 2) that faith can be corrected or enhanced by force, whether physical or psychological. Contemporary inquisitorial processes allow for accusers to remain anonymous whereas secular tribunals have a finer sense of justice in that they require the accusers to confront the accused! Of course, the fact that the inquisitors in the Middle Ages turned over the accused to the secular arm for torture and execution was nothing but institutionalized hypocrisy. The inquisition is a human institution; it was and still is a bad tradition and can find no reasonable support in the Christian scriptures.

The magisterium is often proposed as a guideline for true faith, but this is ill defined to say the least. The consensus of the faithful might be a better norm, but this need not lead to an inquisitorial mode of safeguarding the faith, which faith, let it be said, can fall into fundamentalism and even fanaticism unless accompanied by rational inquiry. All believers must be [amateur] theologians.

The ideals proposed by the proceedings of Vatican II offered much hope to Roman Catholic believers. We were characterized as the people of God, the priesthood of the faithful. There was even hope that the hierarchy and clergy should be responsible to the faithful and not just for the faithful; that the faithful should have some voice regarding the functioning of the institutional church, although no means were provided to insure effective participation by the faithful. We were led to believe that the days of pray, pay and obey were over, but with the backsliding from the ideals of Vatican II over the last four decades, it has become business, namely power and control, as usual.

So it seems we are stuck with the hierarchical model of our Roman Catholic institution. Our hope now lies in those priests and bishops who understand and practice leadership as service and that they will be models to those who follow in their wake. I believe it was Gregory the Great who once said that if those in the [priestly] office cannot beget spiritual children, they should be deprived of their office. I suspect that if this were enforced there would be a great deal of unemployment among the clergy and hierarchy. By begetting spiritual children, I understand the providing of spiritual nourishment for their listeners. While the administration of the sacraments is a great service, it requires little effort by the priest, the most challenging and perhaps most necessary is the providing of food for the souls of the faithful. This requires a lot of reading and reflection, for no one is his own boundless source of inspiration.

The listening faithful are no longer uneducated and illiterate, and this presents an even greater challenge for the preacher, but the listeners still need spiritual nourishment and if they're not getting it, they will seek it elsewhere, and this is particularly true of the young. It should be noted that if, in the weekend liturgies, the liturgy of the word is desultory and almost meaningless, then the liturgy of the eucharist easily degenerates into a mindless going through the motions without much reason to celebrate. The providing of spiritual nourishment also includes the obligation(!) of informing the consciences of the listeners. In one dramatic instance, this

was seriously neglected prior to the invasion of Iraq. According to just-war ethicists, such as Cicero, Augustine of Hippo, Isidore of Seville and Thomas Aquinas, the Iraq invasion did not meet the two criteria, namely 1) either the recovery of ill-gotten territory, goods or people (prisoners, slaves) or 2) the defense of one's legitimate territory by an invading aggressor. Clearly, neither of these criteria were valid prior to the invasion. The silence from the pulpits of our land was deafening! So many who claimed to be spiritual leaders failed miserably. The cost of their failure has been terrible: thousands of lives lost in the military and thousands more of innocent non-combatants to say nothing of the trillions of dollars, still mounting, in this unjust enterprise. The same thing might be said concerning so many instances of abusive capitalism, where there was little informing of consciences from the pulpits regarding the Enron, Worldcom and Adelphia scandals. Pointing to the example of Francis of Assisi on such occasions would surely have been conscience-informing. One is left to wonder if the silence from the pulpits stemmed from a fear that Christians of laissez-faire capitalistic persuasion might boycott the collection baskets!

And so the back-to-the-Gospel appeal of Francis needs to be heard again so that a leadership as service can prevail. Tradition is good when it is in accord with the ideals proposed by Christ our founder, otherwise as in the case of a control and power-addicted mind-set, it needs serious reforming. *Ecclesia semper reformanda*.

BOOK REVIEW

Francis and His Brothers: A Popular History of the Franciscan Friars, Dominic V. Monti, O.F.M. (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2009), x + 166 pp., \$14.95 paper.

With 2009 marking the 800th anniversary of the founding of the Order of Friars Minor by Francis of Assisi with the approval of Pope Innocent III, it is fitting to celebrate this milestone with the publication of a popular history that introduces the legacy of the Franciscan movement to a broad audience. The book *Francis and His Brothers*, commissioned and published by St. Anthony Messenger Press, is the only book of its kind currently in print in English. Dominic Monti, a veteran friar and prominent scholar of ecclesiastical and Franciscan history,¹ accomplishes the nearly insurmountable task of presenting a survey of the complex and colorful history that spans more than 800 years in less than 200 pages. Furthermore, Monti successfully invites the reader to enter into the world of the Franciscan family by skillfully navigating the development of the three branches of the First Order (Friars Minor, Friars Minor Conventual, and Friars Minor Capuchin).

¹ Monti's scholarly accomplishments are too numerous to mention here in full. Some highlights of his career include teaching ecclesiastical history at Christ the King Seminary (East Aurora, NY) and the Washington Theological Union (DC), serving as professor of theology and interim president of St. Bonaventure University (NY), teaching as an adjunct professor at the Franciscan Institute (NY), delivering academic papers at conferences including the Medieval Congress (Kalamazoo, MI) and the WTU Franciscan Symposium (DC), in addition to publishing two volumes of the Bonaventure Texts-in-Translation series as well as an array of scholarly articles.

To appreciate this text more fully it might be helpful to first state what this book is not. In his introduction, Monti contrasts what follows with two other books, Bill Short's *The Franciscans* (Michael Glazer, 1989) and Damien Vorreux and Aaron Pembleton's *A Short History of the Franciscan Family* (Franciscan Herald, 1989). Both of these texts are currently out of print. Monti is forthcoming and clear about the restrictive scope of his project, admitting from the start that limitations on length necessarily prohibit substantial depth and breadth that extends beyond an overview of the birth, expansion and development of the Franciscan First Order. Therefore, this text is neither an extensive study of the entire "Franciscan movement" as it pertains to all branches of the Franciscan family, nor is it an exhaustive scholarly work on the friars. It is exactly what the subtitle of the book states, "a popular history of the Franciscan friars."

It is important to mention another recently published book, this one by Maurice Carmody titled *The Franciscan Story: St. Francis of Assisi and his Influence since the Thirteenth Century* (Athena, 2008). Carmody's text varies significantly in both scope and style from Monti's *Francis and His Brothers*. Carmody's book, weighing in at a little over 500 pages, attempts to tackle the juggernaut that is the history of the entire Franciscan family. Carmody's *The Franciscan Story* might be considered more a successor to the works from Short and Vorreux/Pembleton than a competing volume to Monti's book.

The book is organized into ten chapters with an introduction and conclusion. The first two chapters are concerned with introducing the person of Francis and outlining the genesis of the Franciscan movement, sections titled "leaving the world" and "the Lord gave me brothers" respectively. The third chapter, titled "two saints" referring to Francis and Anthony as the two paradigmatic pillars of Franciscan charism(s) and future tension, covers the early years of the transformation of the Order from a band of loosely organized penitents to an increasingly accepted institution within the Church. This section ends with the death of Francis and the immediate and tumultuous post-Francis years of Pope Greg-

ory IX's (Ugolino) intervening interest in the Order, the building of the great basilica and the successive line of Ministers General.

The fourth chapter, "evident usefulness to the Church," covers the spread and growth of the Order largely attributed to its increased missionary enterprise from the 1230s on. This chapter traces the challenges of leadership that paralleled the Order's expansion throughout Christendom and concludes with the famous deposing of the Joachite John of Parma and the appointment of Bonaventure as Minister General in 1257. Monti's treatment of Bonaventure is brief, totaling less than two pages (58-59), before moving to chapter five, "crisis of identity." Aside from a succinct introduction to the Asian missionary ventures of the time, chapter five primarily deals with the explosion of the poverty controversies, including the emergence of the so-called Spirituals. Chapter six, titled "reform and division," might also have been called "picking up the pieces." After the veritable chaos of the poverty controversies of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the Order was now reforming and splitting into what will become the Observants and the Conventuals, a move that was concretized with the papal encyclical *Omnipotens Deus* (1517).

Chapter seven, "forging spiritual weapons," chronicles the aftermath of reform and surveys regional development of the Order's branches around the world. The most significant discussion of the chapter has to do with the continued splintering of the Franciscan Order into additional factions, most notably the Capuchin reform. Chapter eight, "all peoples and tongues," returns to the theme of mission as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed worldwide Christian missionary efforts and European colonialization of the Americas and Africa that often included Franciscan friars of various branches.

The ninth chapter, "tribulations and dreams," deals with the repercussions faced by the friars as the result of such tremendous growth in number. Buttressed by newly emerging Enlightenment thinking, the backlash experienced by the friars ushered in a new era of cynicism and caution of the

Church and the Order. Additionally, Monti covers the role of the friars in immigrant ministry in the nascent United States, something that is often neglected in previous histories of the Order. The last chapter, "rediscovering the charism," picks up at Vatican I and covers the (relatively) recent themes of the Leonine Union (1897) and the expansion of the Order in North America, key figures of the last century such as Padre Pio and Maximillian Kolbe, and the impact of Vatican II on the friars. Monti ends the final chapter on a curiously optimistic note, choosing to focus on the surge in vocations in certain parts of the world (e.g., Poland and India) rather than on the often cited "vocation crisis" of the Americas and Western Europe.

Monti concludes *Francis and His Brothers* with a reflection on the meaning of the Franciscan charism as it is lived today in light of the 800 years of history. Drawing on the foundational image of Gospel life laid out by Francis of Assisi as found in the early writings, Monti concludes that Franciscans will continue to proclaim Francis's message of "peace and good" to the whole world for many years to come (154). The annotated bibliography, while in no way exhaustive, provides the reader with the essential Franciscan resources in English for further study. The index is also limited, but helpful nonetheless.

Francis and His Brothers is laudable for both its content and style. Monti's writing is accessible and pleasant to read, an asset for a text aimed at such a wide audience. While much of the book will be review for those steeped in the Franciscan tradition by way of the academy or religious profession, *Francis and His Brothers* provides a refreshing overview of the 800-year history of the Franciscan First Order. This book will certainly become a standard resource for those just beginning their own Franciscan journey or anyone who is interested in knowing more about those men who dress like that guy posing in the birdbath of the garden next door.

Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M.
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Josie Setzler comes to her interest in "Gospel Economics" through many years of work in the local and national peace and justice movement. She leads two community peace groups: Tiffin Area Pax Christi and People for Peace and Justice Sandusky County. Over the years she has done advocacy work for mental health and the environment as well. Josie is certified as a nonviolence training facilitator in the nationwide program *Creating a Culture of Peace*. Josie is a former college educator and scientist. She is active in her Catholic parish and co-leads a local contemplative prayer group. She lives in Fremont with her husband Denny and the youngest of their four children.

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Day 1 Departure for England • **Day 2** Bus to Canterbury, orientation • **Day 3** Lecture "Coming of the Friars to England", depart for Greyfriars • **Day 4** Oxford University Blessed John Duns Scotus and Roger Bacon • **Day 5** Canterbury Cathedral • **Day 6** Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham: Lectures, historical visit to Cathedral, Eucharist • **Day 7** General Minister of the Order, Haymo of Faversham • **Day 8** Cambridge University • **Day 9** William of Ockham • **Day 10** Greenwich, London • **Day 11** Feastday of St. Bonaventure, closure.

This pilgrimage has been designed to address the call to retrieve the Franciscan intellectual tradition. Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs, Inc. is offering an opportunity to learn about some of the great scholars in the intellectual tradition by visiting the historical centres in England where their spirit can be felt even today. Pilgrims will spend time with the lives and theologies of John Duns Scotus, Haymo of Faversham, William of Ockham, Roger Bacon, Peckham and more modern-day theologians such as Davenport and Eric Doyle. Lectures will address the coming of the friars to England and Cambridge, the origin of the intellectual tradition, the Oxford tradition, and the Age of Controversies, the Reformation and the Persecution.

From	Cost
New York	\$3015
Chicago	\$3115
Land Only	\$2380
Single Room	\$150

Franciscan Intellectual Tradition Pilgrimage • Part Two

This pilgrimage which will include the cities of Cologne, Lyon, Paris and Avignon will be offered in 2010.



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Filling the World with the Gospel:
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Time: June 10-13, 2009

Place: Franciscan Sisters Retreat Center
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Participants: All Franciscans are welcome

Sponsored by: Holy Name Province
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Complete details later
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MAY 19 - 29, 2009

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Andre Cirino, OFM and
Josef Raischl, SFO

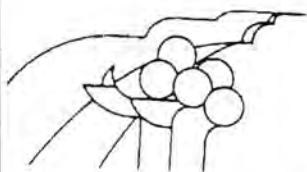
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Mark your calendars!
The Franciscan Institute
announces two one-week
courses for Summer 2009:

Franciscan Solitude

André Cirino, O.F.M.

June 29-July 3, 2009

8:30-11:15 a.m.

Angela of Foligno

Diane Tomkinson, O.S.F.

July 6-10, 2009

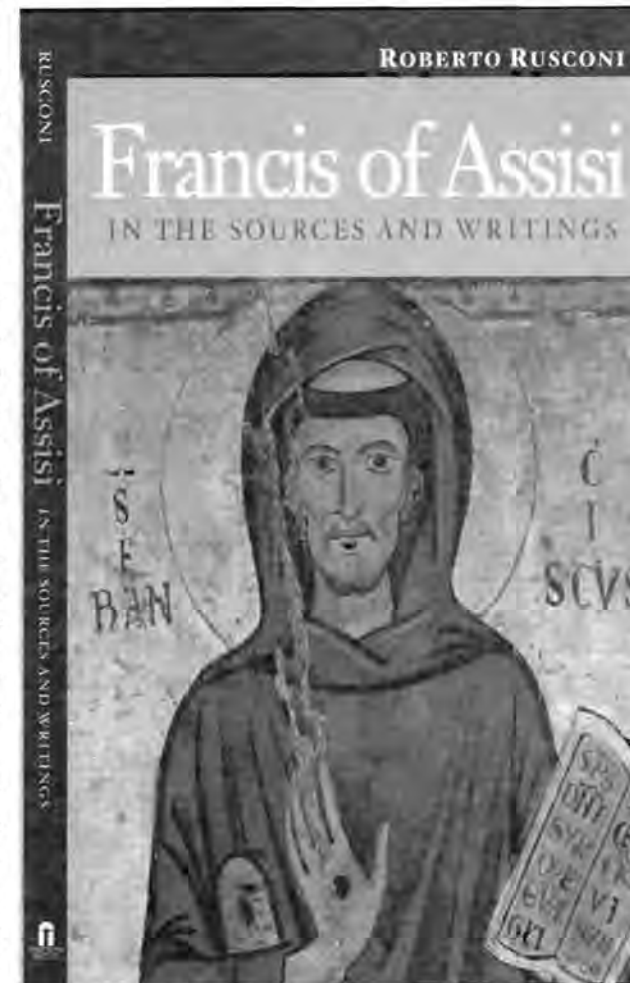
8:30-11:15 a.m.

See the forthcoming Program Booklet for complete details about all courses being offered in Summer 2009.

RECENT RELEASE
FROM FRANCISCAN INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS

Just in to our warehouse, *Francis of Assisi in the Sources and Writings* is a translation of a work by Roberto Rusconi. This brief biographical sketch of Francis of Assisi retells a story both familiar and new but then goes a step farther by providing selections from thirteenth and fourteenth century manuscripts which give the reader a priceless glimpse into what scholars call the *sitz im leben* of early passages from which traditional interpretations of the Franciscan charism have developed.

The fruit of several years of translation and compilation, this work will be of interest to those who are first encountering the phenomenon of Francis of Assisi, as well as those looking for a new insight into an established relationship. Available for \$20 plus shipping from our shopping cart: franciscanmart.sbu.edu or our website: franciscanpublications.sbu.edu



HOT OFF THE PRESS
FROM FRANCISCAN INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS

Grado Giovanni Merlo's monumental work *In the Name of Saint Francis*, translated by Raphael Bonnano, O.F.M. and edited by Robert J. Karris, O.F.M. and Jean François Godet-Calogeras is now available in English.

The fame and status of Franciscan studies among medievalists comes first of all from, as it were, two objective conditions: There is the figure of Francis, fascinating in itself. There is also the Order of Friars Minor that took its first steps under his guidance. Both of these are a special point of reference and a fundamental part of the religious and social history of the last centuries of the Middle Ages.

The present book gathers all the best of Merlo's, and that of others, most recent research on the first three dramatic centuries of Franciscan and Minorite history into one synthesis.

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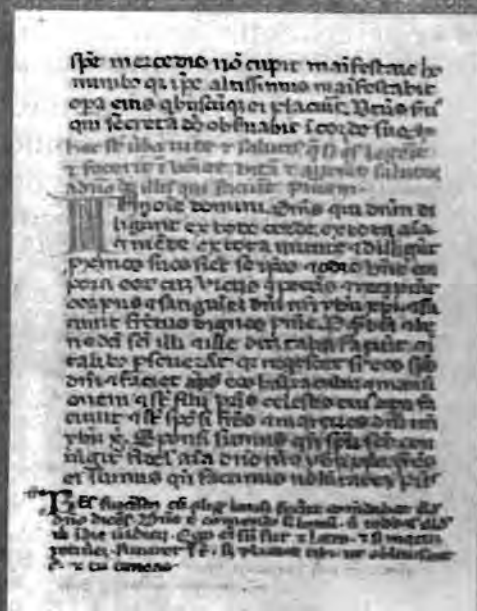
The Third Order Regular Franciscan Common Novitiate (TOR FCN) in St. Louis, Missouri is seeking a full-time on-site novice minister to begin January, 2010. The TOR FCN is a collaboration of thirty-one Franciscan women's congregations from the East and Midwest U.S., continuing a more than ten year tradition of providing a quality canonical novitiate for member congregations. Qualified candidates would hold a Master's degree or equivalent in theology or spirituality, have knowledge of and ability to work with Franciscan sources, possess administrative skills, demonstrate an ability to mentor and teach through adult methods, be committed to ongoing personal and professional growth, and preferably have some prior experience in formation ministry. The novice minister would live in community with the novices and other professed sisters.

This is a wonderful opportunity for a special person to mentor the next generation of Third Order Regular Franciscan women. If you want to be a part of this exciting collaborative ministry, please send a cover letter and resume by June 1 to:

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Springfield, IL 62707

Phone: 217-522-3386, ext. 610
Fax: 217-522-2483
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INFORMATION: Kathleen Moffatt OSF. skmoffatt@aol.com; 302-559-0952/302-764-1090

Schedule, costs, Center info available late 2008; however, it is BEST to register early with Center capacity at 55.

Cathy Cahill, Allegany Franciscan, DIRECTOR of Franciscan Center, Tampa FL., franctr@tampabay.rr.com 813-229-2695 fax 813-228-0748

On the Franciscan Circuit

Building Franciscan Ecological Consciousness

May 29-31, 2009
San Damiano Retreat
Danville, CA

See ad page 240

Gospel Economics in a Time of Meltdown: Fueling the Fires of Real Change

May 13, 2009
St. Francis Spirituality Center
Tiffin, Ohio

See ad page 241

Poverty and Prosperity: Franciscans and the Use of Money

May 22-24, 2009
Washington Theological Union
Washington, DC

See ad page 245

Filling the World with the Gospel: Past, Present and Future

June 10-13, 2009
Franciscan Sisters Retreat Center
Colorado Springs, CO

See ad page 249

Women's Summer Contemplative Retreat

June 15-19, 2009
Portiuncula Center for Prayer
Frankfort, IL

See ad page 244

God's Extravagant Love: Reclaiming the Franciscan Tradition

July 15-21, 2009
Portiuncula Center for Prayer
Frankfort, IL

See ad page 244

ABBREVIATIONS

Writings of Saint Francis

Adm	The Admonitions
BL	A Blessing for Br. Leo
CtC	The Canticle of the Creatures
CtExh	The Canticle of Exhortation
1Frg	Fragments of Worchester Manuscript
2Frg	Fragments of Thomas of Celano
3Frg	Fragments from Hugh of Digne
LtAnt	A Letter to Br. Anthony of Padua
1LtCl	The First Letter to the Clergy (Early Edition)
2LtCl	The Second Letter to the Clergy (Later Edition)
1LtCus	The First Letter to the Custodians
2LtCus	The Second Letter to the Custodians
1LtF	The First Letter to the Faithful
2LtF	The Second Letter to the Faithful
LtL	A Letter to Br. Leo
LtMin	A Letter to a Minister
LtOrd	A Letter to the Entire Order
LtR	A Letter to Rulers of the Peoples
ExhP	Exhortation to the Praise of God
PrOF	A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father
PrsG	The Praises of God
OP	The Office of the Passion
PrCr	The Prayer before the Crucifix
ER	The Earlier Rule (Regula non bullata)
LR	The Later Rule (Regula bullata)
RH	A Rule for Hermitages
SalBVM	A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
SalV	A Salutation of Virtues
Test	The Testament
TPJ	True and Perfect Joy

Franciscan Sources

1C	The Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2C	The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul
3C	The Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
Lch	The Legend for Use in Choir
Off	The Divine Office of St. Francis by Julian of Speyer
1JS	The Life of St. Francis by Julian of Speyer
VL	The Versified Life of St. Francis by Henri d'Avanches
1-3JT	The Praises by Jacopone da Todi
DCom	The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri
TL	The Tree of Life by Ubertino da Casale
1MP	The Mirror of Perfection, Smaller Version
2MP	The Mirror of Perfection, Larger Version
HTrb	The History of the Seven Tribulations by Angelo of Clareno
ScEx	The Sacred Exchange between St. Francis and Lady Poverty
AP	The Anonymous of Perugia
L3C	The Legend of the Three Companions
AC	The Assisi Compilation
1-4Srm	The Sermons of Bonaventure
LMj	The Major Legend by Bonaventure
LMn	The Minor Legend by Bonaventure
BPr	The Book of Praises by Bernard of Besse
ABF	The Deeds of St. Francis and His Companions
LFI	The Little Flowers of St. Francis
KnSF	The Knowing of St. Francis
ChrTE	The Chronicle of Thomas of Eccleston
ChrJG	The Chronicle of Jordan of Giano

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 St. Clare
TestCl	Testament of St. Clare
BCI	Blessing of St. Clare