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## FOREWORD

There were so many thoughts swirling around in the SBU ethos as the last issue of *The Cord* was in preparation that I forgot to acknowledge one of our generous artists. As I may have mentioned in the past I fell heir to a wonderful file of donated art. Unfortunately I can't always acknowledge each artist because I don't have information about the origination of items in that wonderful file. I am always grateful when someone recognizes his/her work, or that of a brother/sister, and lets me know. Because I received this information I can tell you (and celebrate the work and generosity of) Sister Jane Mary Sorosiak, a Sylvania Franciscan, created the image used on the cover of the January/March 2009 issue of *The Cord*. This issue's cover features the art of Robert F. Pawell, O.F.M.

Along the lines of complete disclosure, I also received word that one of the short bios in April/June's issue had some out-of-date information. Our contributor, Francesco Chiappelli, is no longer the Director of Formation for the Saint Francis Fraternity in Los Angeles, CA. So I thank all of our readers for keeping me up-to-date. Please, keep those calls or emails coming.

Looking at a little respite from the sweltering heat and humidity of this summer – definitely uncharacteristic for our region both in degree and duration – we are approaching the "high holy days" of our summer: the Feast of St. Bonaventure. Filled with celebrative liturgy, communal feasting and academic honors, these days mark the zenith of each summer session. This year we are privileged to celebrate the achievements of J.A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv., the recipient of the 2010 Franciscan Institute Medal, who will deliver a paper at the Academic Convocation in his honor.

Finally, as Fr. Pat McCloskey, O.F.M. reminded us last evening in his lecture titled "Francis of Assisi and Studies: Untying the Gordian Knot," as faithful followers of the Poverello we must always keep alive "the Spirit of prayer and devotion."

*Daria R. Mitchell, O.S.A.*

**THE LOGIC OF THE GIFT:  
CLARE OF ASSISI  
AND FRANCISCAN EVANGELICAL LIFE\***

**MARY BETH INGHAM, C.S.J.**

Members of the Franciscan family, male and female, admit their charism is “a difficult inheritance”<sup>1</sup> – one that involves a thriving on dislocation, on creative tensions that are seen as part of their profound commitment and witness to the Incarnation. Their Incarnational commitment reveals the dynamic, and multiple tensions of a reality that is “already but not yet.” Theirs is a vision of abundance in the midst of scarcity, of infinity in finitude, of God with us, of the divine and human reality we see so beautifully depicted on the San Damiano cross, this mirror into which Clare of Assisi calls us to look, to contemplate, and to imitate.<sup>2</sup>

Today, as it did 800 years ago, the tradition encounters once again the creative tension of self-affirmation and self-

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\*This paper was originally presented at the Huffington Ecumenical Symposium, Women and Church, East and West: a Catholic-Orthodox Conversation, Loyola Marymount University, March 5-6, 2010. Reprinted here with permission.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Chinnici, O.F.M., remarks at the Symposium on the 800th Anniversary of the Origins of the Franciscan Movement, “Living our Evangelical Option: the Logic of the Gift,” August 2009, Aston, PA.

<sup>2</sup> Clare of Assisi, “Third Letter to Agnes of Prague (1238)” in *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, The Lady*, revised and translated by Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., (New York: New City Press, 2006), 51 [hereafter CA:ED]. “Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the brilliance of glory. Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance and, through contemplation, transform your entire being into the image of the Godhead Itself.” For the importance of mirrors and reflection in twelfth and thirteenth century spirituality, see also Regis Armstrong, “Clare of Assisi: The Mirror Mystic,” *The Cord* (July-August 1985): 195-202.

articulation. This has to do with the Franciscan rediscovery of its evangelical identity. Franciscans do not identify themselves as living an apostolic life, but rather as called to live an evangelical life: a life following the Gospel and in imitation of their founder Francis of Assisi. In their most recent reflection on their vocation, they have begun to speak in terms of “the logic of the gift,” their own deep sense of giftedness and the challenge of finding a language appropriate to express the reality to which they are called.<sup>3</sup>

In order to approach this topic, I shall begin, as the Franciscan tradition often does, with a story of Clare of Assisi. Through this story, I hope to offer a metaphor that is both challenging and inspiring for us today. The story relates to Clare’s own experience of her vocation to evangelical poverty for women; to her desire to embrace poverty as fully and completely as Francis had. This desire led her to a life of creative tension: to a struggle with Church leaders to allow women, and wealthy women at that, to embrace a life of complete and total dependence on God’s providence. Clare’s desire to imitate the absolute self-emptying of the Incarnation led her to her own spiritual transformation into a stance of gifted abundance.

## **I. CLARE’S STORY AND THE PRIVILEGE OF POVERTY**

Long before she left her family to join the life of Franciscan poverty, Clare had her own reputation as a woman of integrity, a woman who cared for the poor. After her own conversion in 1212, Clare and a small group of women settled at San Damiano, outside of Assisi, in close proximity to

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<sup>3</sup> William Short, O.F.M., “Give an Account of the Hope that is Within You,” *The Cord*, 53.5 (2003): 252. “To give an account of the hope within us. That is our challenge.... We have hope within us, within our intellectual and spiritual tradition. We have a hopeful word to speak to concerns present in today’s Church and to crises affecting our society.... We are holding inside us a word that can speak to these questions ...”

the Franciscan fraternity.<sup>4</sup> They shared the friars' embrace of poverty, and followed the form of life written for them by Francis. Perhaps as early as 1216, Clare sent some of her sisters to establish similar houses in Foligno, Perugia and Florence.

Meanwhile, a broader penitential movement of women was spreading throughout northern Italy (Tuscany and Lombardy), a movement inspired by Franciscan spirituality, and unrelated to Clare. During his lifetime, Francis had been wary of his brothers having too much contact with these groups of women, for fear that such pastoral duties would distract them from their more important work with and for the materially poor. Around 1218, Cardinal Hugolino dei Segni came into contact with these women and, with Pope Honorius III's permission, began to regularize them according to strict monastic enclosure and following a Cistercian-like reform. Although the rule he provided was of Benedictine origin, they were practically and pastorally associated with the Friars minor, for here the women had strong spiritual affinities. In his organizational efforts, Hugolino made sure that the women depended not upon their local bishop, but directly upon Rome. Scholars refer to these women as the Damianites.<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary scholarly debate suggests that the Poor Man of Assisi never foresaw a distinct, institutional women's counterpart, nor did he view Clare as a foundress of a religious order.<sup>6</sup> For him, the form of life was that of the Gospel.

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<sup>4</sup> Exceptionally good recent historical work on Clare and the early sisters can be found in Maria Pia Alberzoni, *Clare of Assisi and the Poor Sisters in the Thirteenth Century* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2004); Marco Bartoli, *Chiara d'Assisi* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1989); Margaret Carney, *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi and Her Form of Life* (Quincy: Franciscan Press, 1993); Lezlie Knox, *Creating Clare of Assisi: Female Franciscan Identities in Later Medieval Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Lezlie Knox, "Clare of Assisi: Foundress of an Order?" in *An Unencumbered Heart: A Tribute to Clare of Assisi 1253-2003*, Spirit and Life, volume 11, ed. Jean François Godet-Calogeras and Roberta McKelvie (2004), 11-30.

<sup>5</sup> See Lezlie Knox, "Clare of Assisi: Foundress of an Order," 28 n. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Lezlie Knox, *Creating Clare of Assisi*, 31. "... [T]he founder of the Order of Friars Minor effectively did little to establish female religious

Truth be told, as Clare describes in her Testament,<sup>7</sup> Francis was hesitant to acknowledge that Clare and her sisters were capable of the sort of poverty he envisioned for the Friars. It was the women's witness that changed his mind about them. When he saw that they had "no fear of poverty, hard work, suffering, shame or the contempt of the world,"<sup>8</sup> he admonished them in his testament "never to depart from this by reason of the teaching or advice of anyone."<sup>9</sup> This is what Clare sought to do for the remainder of her life.

The plot of this story thickens after Francis's death in 1226, when Hugolino (now Pope Gregory IX) directed the Franciscan General Minister to appoint friars to provide pastoral care for his new female religious order (the Damianites), henceforth incorporated spiritually within the Order of Friars Minor. Now we have two sets of women's groups who have been inspired by Francis and the Friars Minor: the Damianites, organized and enclosed by Hugolino;<sup>10</sup> Clare's community, the Poor Ladies, living an enclosed life at San Damiano and elsewhere throughout the region of central Italy.

Up until this point, the community of San Damiano remained independent of all of Hugolino's organizing efforts: Clare and her sisters continued to live under the form of life

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life. It seems that when his female followers included only Clare and her small number of companions, he saw no reason that the friars and sisters should not have a close relationship."

<sup>7</sup> *CA:ED*, 59-61.

<sup>8</sup> "The Testament" in *CA:ED*, 61.

<sup>9</sup> "Form of Life of Clare of Assisi" in *CA:ED*, 118. Clare cites the 1226 Testament written by Francis for the Poor Ladies in her "Form of Life," chapter 6: "Shortly before his death he once more wrote his last will for us that we or those, as well, who would come after us would never turn aside from the holy poverty we had embraced. He said, 'I, little brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of his holy mother and to persevere in this until the end; and I ask and counsel you, my ladies, to live always in this most holy life and poverty. And keep most careful watch that you never depart from this by reason of the teaching or advice of anyone.'"

<sup>10</sup> As early as 1219. A translation of an early edition of this text can be found in *CA:ED*, 71-72.

that Francis had prepared for them.<sup>11</sup> They saw themselves as part of the original Franciscan community, and embraced poverty as sincerely and completely as they could. Gregory IX, however, continued his efforts to bring Clare and her house into his newly established, Franciscan-incorporated monastic women's religious order. According to historians,<sup>12</sup> Gregory had a double motivation for this: first he wanted to simplify the organizational structure of the female houses now formally associated with the Friars Minor – Clare's house would be incorporated into the larger, more monastic model he had established as cardinal. Secondly, this incorporation would provide Clare and her sisters with Constitutions and norms that could then be applied uniformly to all the women, Damianites and Clarians, who were associated with the original Franciscan inspiration. In fact, if Clare's house at San Damiano joined the larger foundation, then all her daughter houses would see a model they would, eventually, follow. The result, from the Pope's perspective, would be a better organized and more uniformly structured female dimension to the Franciscan family.

The San Damiano or Clarian houses, far from representing the founding of a distinct, institutional form of female Franciscanism, had more to do, argues scholar Marco Bartoli, with the unique version of female Franciscans – literally, a feminine counterpart living out of the same vision as the Poor Man of Assisi.<sup>13</sup> To achieve this, Clare had sought to defend, throughout her lifetime, her own Form of Life that

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<sup>11</sup> In "The Form of Life Given by Francis to Clare and Her Sisters" (1212/1213), Francis states: "Because by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and servants of the most high King, the Heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers to have that same loving care and special solicitude for you as [I have] for them." In *CA:ED*, 118. See also Thomas of Celano, *Second Life of Saint Francis* 204, *FA:ED* 2, 378.

<sup>12</sup> See the discussion in Lezlie Knox, "Clare of Assisi: Foundress of an Order?", 18-19.

<sup>13</sup> He uses the term *alter Franciscus*. See Chiara d'Assisi, 171-98.

involved the “Privilege of Poverty” – the highest poverty or absolute dependence upon divine providence.<sup>14</sup>

From Gregory’s papacy through that of Innocent IV, church leaders tried to incorporate these women’s communities (Clarians and Damianites) into the more traditional Benedictine rule, distancing them structurally from the Friars Minor.<sup>15</sup> Facing the attempt at normalization, Clare continued to maintain the exceptional quality of San Damiano, using and quoting Francis again and again in her rule. While it is true that, on September 17, 1228, Gregory IX confirmed the Privilege of Poverty as voluntary privation for her and her sisters, this was not in perpetuity. With each reigning pontiff, the sisters had to confront anew the problem of receiving papal confirmation of their deepest inspiration.<sup>16</sup> And, after Clare’s death (although that is not part of our story), the communities gradually moved back toward the model Hugolino had first championed.

To give one a sense of the dynamic involved here, consider this: Gregory IX signed the privilege of poverty in 1228 and again in 1238. Innocent IV, wrote a new Form of Life in 1247, incorporating the Damianites and Clare’s community under the Rule of Francis, rather than that of Benedict. Although the shift from Benedictine to Franciscan Rule was a step forward, this new Form of Life eliminated the charism of poverty. This oversight was so problematic for the women’s communities, that in response to their appeals, he allowed each community to choose their own form of life. In response

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<sup>14</sup> *CA:ED*, 86 note b. In 1216, Pope Innocent III approved the privilege of poverty for Clare and her sisters: “Therefore, we confirm with our apostolic authority, as you requested, your proposal of most high poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:2), granting you by the authority of this letter that no one can compel you to receive possessions.” This approval was not, however, in perpetuity.

<sup>15</sup> For the details of this history, see Joan Mueller, *The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> The correspondence and texts regarding poverty and the forms of life given by Hugolino (1219) and Innocent the IV (1247) can be found in *CA:ED*, 75-105.



to this remarkable opportunity, Clare of Assisi began to write her own Form of Life (known now as her Rule) in 1250 (now included in her Testament).

On September 16, 1252, Cardinal Raynaldus, the Protector of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano, with the consent of Pope Innocent IV, confirmed both Clare's Form of Life and, more importantly, the Privilege of Poverty she sought to retain as central to her own vocation. Innocent gave papal approval to this document the following year in the bull, *Solet annuere*, brought to Clare on her deathbed on August 9, 1253. She kissed the document several times,<sup>17</sup> and was buried clutching it, as sign of her successful life's effort to remain faithful to her own understanding of the heart of her vocation: an absolute and unwavering poverty, expressing not simply her identification with the Poor Man of Assisi, but with the Incarnate One – the Poor Man of Nazareth.<sup>18</sup>

## CLARE'S FORM OF LIFE

Let us take just a moment to consider this papal document, along with the central set of chapters (6-10) that many historians believe represent the original text of Clare, describing both her form of life and the centrality of the privilege of poverty.

After the introduction, the first five chapters fulfill a type of canonical structure: the name of the order (chapter 1), description and reception of candidates (chapter 2), the recitation of the divine office and fasting, confession and com-

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<sup>17</sup> *Hanc beata Clara tetigit et obsculata(!) est pro devotione pluribus et pluribus vicinis* (Blessed Clare touched and kissed this document many times out of devotion) – written in the margin of the papal bull. For studies on the Form of Life of Clare, see Margaret Carney, *The First Franciscan Woman*, 65-97.

<sup>18</sup> In winning papal approval, Clare became the first woman in the church to receive such recognition for her legislation. See Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 230-32.

munion (chapter 3), the election of the abbess, the Chapter, officials and discreets<sup>19</sup> (chapter 4), silence, the parlor and the grille (chapter 5). With chapter 6, however, we recognize a shift of tone that introduces the reader into a much more autobiographical Clarian reflection. No longer the language of canonical organization, the text now speaks in the first person: Clare describes her experience of conversion to absolute poverty and the testimony of Francis:

I, little brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of his holy mother and to persevere in this until the end; and I ask and counsel you, my ladies, to live always in this most holy life and in poverty. And keep most careful watch that you never depart from this by reason of the teaching or advice of anyone.<sup>20</sup>

In chapters 7-10, Clare returns again and again to the centrality of poverty and how this commitment frames their work (chapter 7), begging and alms (chapter 8), penance and those who serve outside the monastery (chapter 9), the admonition and correction of the sisters (chapter 10), the enclosure (chapter 11), and the visitor, chaplain and Cardinal Protector (chapter 12). Poverty, the privilege of absolute poverty that Clare shares with Francis, became the keystone, not only for her self-understanding and her understanding of the life of the community of San Damiano, but for the Form of Life as she envisions it.

The core of this text, that is, chapters 6-10, corresponds in tone and in content, to that found in her testament, where Clare refers to her experience as one of gift:

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<sup>19</sup> The role of discretion in monastic life corresponds to our modern understanding of spiritual discernment. The “discreets” would be those who are meant to be the “discerning ones.” They serve as a counsel to the Abbess.

<sup>20</sup> *CA:ED*, 118.

Therefore, beloved sisters, we must consider the immense gifts which God has bestowed on us, especially those which he has seen fit to work in us through his beloved servant, our blessed father Francis, not only after our conversion, but also while we were still living among the vanities of the world.<sup>21</sup>

Several historians have argued that, taken separately, chapters 6-10 read continuously as do chapters 1-5 + 11-12.<sup>22</sup> In other words, we appear to have two distinct and coherent documents here: one reflecting the core spiritual inspiration (what I am calling the “logic of the gift”) and the other offering the larger canonical context into which this inspiration is, for lack of a more adequate term, enfolded. This context is that of the Church’s organizational and canonical structure, proper to canon law and the categories of religious orders of the period.

Clearly, viewed from a structural vantage point, the document appears as a type of “sandwich,” with the canonical chapters functioning as a type of frame for the central core – chapters 6-10 – that represents the form of life Clare had authored. In this way, the document emerges as the synthesis, or fruit, of the dialogue that had gone before: Clare’s own articulation of her experience and the centrality of the Franciscan vocation to poverty, along with the earlier canonical concerns of Hugolino, the 1252 letter of approbation of Bishop Raynaldus, and the Rule of Innocent IV.

## II. THE LOGIC OF THE GIFT

How does Clare’s story relate to the topic of this Symposium on Women and Church? How do Franciscan women, or all women, take courage from meditating on Clare’s fidelity to her vocation to the highest form of poverty?

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<sup>21</sup> *CA:ED*, 60.

<sup>22</sup> See Jean-François Godet-Calogeras, “Structure in the Form of Life of Clare,” in *An Unencumbered Heart*, 1-10.

As was mentioned at the outset, the past twenty-five years have been a time of rich discovery and reflection for the members of the Franciscan family. In returning to their early documents, they have discovered the key to their own spiritual and religious identity. They speak of it in terms of their own gift of evangelical life – “observing the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his most holy Mother, and the holy Gospel.” Here is a life vision that transcends the duality of “active vs. contemplative,” of “practical vs. theoretical,” of “apostolic vs. cloistered.” This evangelical life is the life of praxis in imitation of the Incarnate word, of divine kenosis (Phil 2:7), the continuous outpouring of divine abundant life and love, an ever widening circle of inclusivity and generosity. Accordingly, Christian life is understood not simply as orthodoxy, but as orthopraxy.

In their own words, Franciscans identify evangelical life as their unique gift to the People of God, and one that is critical to our society and our world in a threefold manner:

First, as a viable religious life-form:

I cannot emphasize enough that the retrieval of our tradition is yoked to our willingness to embody our evangelical life form as a viable religious life in the Church and in society.<sup>23</sup>

Second, as a mode of theological reflection:

[F]or the first time in centuries, we have the capacity to renew the tradition and to restore the evangelical synthesis of theology and lived experience.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Chinnici, O.F.M., “North American Stewardship of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition.” Paper presented at the Franciscan Institute, July 11, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Ilia Delio, O.S.F., “Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: Contemporary Concerns,” in *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition*, Washington Theological Union 2001 Symposium Papers, ed. Elise Saggau, O.S.F. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2002), 14.

And finally, as a way of seeing the world and all persons in it:

This tradition has important insights to bring to the common Christian task of allowing the Christian vision of God, of humanity, and of the world to become an effective participant in the broader human search for wisdom as we struggle with the many crucial problems that tear at the heart of humanity.<sup>25</sup>

In their current work at the Federation level, Franciscans have identified the priority of focus on Evangelical life, for the next three years. Why is this significant, both in terms of Clare's decisive experience and in terms of the current reality?

Franciscans today, and in particular Franciscan women are embracing their own gift as a unique life-form in the Church. Theirs is the gift of Evangelical life, a life in union with Jesus Christ – not framed in terms of the post-Pentecostal life of the Church, complete with the threefold orders of bishop, presbyter, deacon, and the apostolic mandate of “going out to all the world to preach and baptize” – but the Gospel life of the first followers of Jesus – whose mission is the very living out of their intimacy with the Lord.

From my perspective both as an apostolic religious and as a scholar of the Franciscan tradition, the challenge for Franciscan women today lies in their effort to articulate and defend this unique vocation to the evangelical, rather than apostolic life. To see the significance of this challenge, we should remember that according to Canon Law, there are only two types of Institutes of Consecrated Life: the Contemplative and Apostolic. Canons 674 and 675 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law describe the two modes of consecration as exhaustive of the religious state. Contemplative life is, of course, monastic or cloistered life. Apostolic Life is, quite simply, mission driven and defined by the works of an institute.

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<sup>25</sup> Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., unpublished lecture at Alverno College, Milwaukee WI, July 22, 2001.

Now, I think it is important to remember that most religious congregations fall into the category of apostolic life: they were founded with a particular apostolate in mind: teaching, caring for orphans, etc. My own Congregation of St. Joseph is an example of such a religious congregation.

The implications of this distinction emerge more clearly here, when we reflect upon the concrete consequences of an apostolic rather than an evangelical institute. One example should suffice. For an apostolic institute such as mine, community life follows from the apostolate. In other words, how we live and where we live depends upon our apostolic ministry. For an evangelical institute, by contrast, how one lives and where one lives are primary, not secondary. Their form of life is their witness. And, what's more, their apostolic work derives from their community life. At a deeper spiritual level, we might say that their life is their apostolic work, since the praxis of the Franciscan family is to bear witness to their life with one another and in the Lord. As the well-known phrase, attributed to Francis, holds: preach the Gospel at all times, using words if necessary.

The canonical challenge Franciscan women face today is quite simply this: traditionally, contemplative communities have been identified as those whose life in community (rather than an external apostolate) manifests their vocation. This means that when Franciscans advocate for and defend their life as Evangelical, they fall into neither canonical category. Like contemplative religious communities, their form of life is their central vocation. But like apostolic religious communities, theirs is a life of praxis, not contemplation. Their own sense of their early documents, their spiritual identity and their deepest desire do not fall neatly into the categories of legal distinction, nor indeed to the logical categories of active/contemplative; apostolic/cloistered.

So this is where things stand currently for Franciscan women. How might reflection on Clare's experience of her Form of Life help them, and through them, help us? First, we see in Clare's life the continual effort to remain in dialogue with ecclesiastical authority as she defends and struggles to articulate her own spiritual experience and vocational iden-

tity – not so much as a follower of Francis, but as a follower of Jesus. Clare’s inspiration came from her own experience of the Risen Lord, of God’s abundance and her own giftedness, as well as from her own meditation on the life and witness of Francis. Clare sought to defend that inspiration, the Privilege of Poverty, and that experience as a “gift” she could not deny, as an authentic Franciscan vocation, in the face of well-meaning prelates, who most probably wanted to protect and safeguard her life and that of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano.

The challenge Clare faced lay in the fact that she was doing something radically new for her time. Something unheard of; something that could not be conceived; something for which there were no precedents, and certainly no adequate canonical or legal categories. The challenge of the categories made it difficult both for Hugolino and Innocent IV, and indeed for Clare herself. How does one articulate an inspiration that surpasses or transcends the contemporary categories and models? And, as Franciscan scholar Joseph Chinnici has recently argued, when we take God’s gift seriously, then we must realize that God’s word is never completely revealed: the reality of the gift requires germination and purification, a long organic development, working as God works, with patience and confidence.

This is a particular moment in time when the Franciscan tradition, so beautifully rich, gets a chance to articulate itself. In twenty-five years of reflection and experience on evangelical life we need to ask, “What has changed about ourselves, and what has changed about the Church?”... we need to go to the Tradition to ask, “What are the places where we can go to respond to the new questions of today?... The evangelical life gives expression to God working in the human heart.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph Chinnici, O.F.M., Symposium on the 800th Anniversary of the Origins of the Franciscan Movement, August 2009.

Finally, what has all this to do with those of us who are not Franciscans? I think there are two points of inspiration we can take for our reflection today, and I will conclude with these. The first relates to those of us in apostolic communities, whose foremothers had to struggle for the recognition of religious life for women as apostolic, and not as a form of cloistered or semi-cloistered religious life. The Franciscan experience today, one of dialogue with the institutional Church around their identity as evangelical rather than apostolic can be prophetic for all of us. If we can broaden our categories to entertain the possibility of a deeper integration of the dimensions of prayer and apostolic engagement, then perhaps we can all live into a deeper experience of our vocation to union with the Risen Lord, beyond the dichotomy of prayer/action; theology/experience.

The second relates to the vocation of women in the Christian community today. It seems we are facing an era that is so chaotic, so complex and difficult to understand that there appears to be no other alternative than a return to the structures and attitudes of the past. This is understandable. Clare's personal experience with the women of San Damiano, with Francis and the brothers, and with the prelates and institutional Church, stands as a beacon to light our way. Like her, we have the opportunity to identify and articulate our experience of vocation, with patience and courage, in dialogue with the larger Christian community and ecclesiastical authority. Like her, we are called upon to embrace the Logic of the Gift, a logic that challenges us to deeper reflection, to better language, and to more compassionate action, always embraced by the patience and providence of God, who continually calls us forth from the familiar into the rich future prepared for us all.





## THE EROTICISM<sup>1</sup> OF THE INCARNATION IN FRANCISCAN THEOLOGY

KATHERINE WRISLEY

Franciscan theologians Eric Doyle and Damian McElrath write of the central importance of Christ in understanding the eroticism of God:

In the mystery of Christ it is revealed that we are created. To be a creature is to be loved by the Creator and to have been known forever in the depths of the divine mind. There was never an instant when God did not know us as unique beings. We exist because we are wanted; we are because we are loved. And so the answer to the question about our origin is this: we come from the love of God.<sup>2</sup>

As these two theologians suggest, it is through “the mystery” of Christ’s incarnated flesh that we realize our purpose: as creatures infinitely loved by God, we are to love God in

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: *Eroticism* is used here to denote that love which is a fundamental creative impulse having a sensual element derived from the philosophy of Plato.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Doyle and Damian McElrath, “St. Francis of Assisi and the Christocentric Character of Franciscan Life and Doctrine,” in *Franciscan Christology*, ed. Damian McElrath (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1994), 1. The idea for this paper was first developed in a class entitled The Erotic God during the 2010 Spring Semester at Flagler College. I hold a limitless debt of gratitude to Dr. Timothy Johnson, whose guidance during my four years at Flagler introduced me to the Franciscan way of life and opened my eyes to the beauty and mystery of a life lived beneath the image of the Crucified.

return. If Christ took on human form solely to unite the Creator with the created, then our flesh should cry out for God's flesh, our hands yearn to hold God's hands, and our feet long to walk in the footsteps of the Incarnate who first loved us. The matter of Christ's body begs us to caress God our Lover, and in doing so, we grasp not only our own purpose, but also our connection to all of creation. Yearning for God's flesh and envisaging its presence within the cosmos, we shall desire union with both the earth and our human brothers and sisters.

In an effort to articulate these ideas more deeply, the following discussion will utilize Franciscan sources to claim the Incarnation as an erotic event which brings union to the entire cosmos. First, we will observe St. Francis of Assisi's adoration of the Crucified and will further suggest that this devotion to God's flesh led him into ecstatic harmony with creation, humanity, and the Divine, as exhibited by the event of the sacred stigmata. It will next move forward to discuss the Bonaventurian view of the Trinity as the Fountain-Fullness of love, in which the Incarnate Word represents the point of relation for all of creation, including Godself. Finally, it will conclude by observing John Duns Scotus's claim that the Incarnation would have had to occur regardless of the Edenic Fall, and in light of this assertion, we may learn to understand the Incarnation event as a joyful, ecstatic movement of God towards his creatures which makes possible a cosmological erotic union.

### **STIGMATIZED IN DEVOTION TO CHRIST'S FLESH**

We thus begin our journey by reaching out to touch the wounds of our Beloved along with St. Francis of Assisi. As one theologian notes, "if there is one word which does complete justice to Franciscan theology and spirituality it is christocentric ... because the faith and holiness of St. Fran-

cis were totally centered on Christ.”<sup>3</sup> For the Poverello, “In Jesus Christ the revelation is made to us of what the world, as a whole and in all its intricate parts, means to God,”<sup>4</sup> and it is ultimately this revelation which allows him to serve his human brothers and sisters and enter into a familial relationship with all of creation. Indeed, the entirety of Francis’s ministry begins in his desire to unite himself with the Crucified, for truly, we would do well to realize that “[a]nyone tempted to sentimentalize the saint needs to recall that his life from his youth to his final years forms a great inclusio bracketed by the Crucified One.”<sup>5</sup> We will thus first explore how Francis finds himself united – body and soul – to both creation and God by “nakedly following the naked Christ”;<sup>6</sup> through grasping the significance of the Incarnate flesh, the Poverello finds his own flesh merging with that of the Creator and the created world around him in the erotic event of the sacred stigmata.

As contemporary Franciscan theologian and spiritual writer Ilia Delio writes,

Living in the Word of God impelled Francis to follow the footprints of Christ because he saw those footprints imprinted on his soul, on the hands of a leper and on the fragile creatures of creation.<sup>7</sup>

The Poverello’s ministry indeed begins in his desire to place his own feet within these physical footprints, and his belief “that God walked in creation in the person of Jesus”<sup>8</sup> serves as the initiator of Francis’s embrace of both creation

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<sup>3</sup> Doyle and McElrath, “St. Francis of Assisi,” *Franciscan Christology*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Doyle and McElrath, “St. Francis of Assisi,” *Franciscan Christology*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence S. Cunningham, *Francis of Assisi: Performing the Gospel Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Cunningham, *Francis of Assisi*, 98.

<sup>7</sup> Ilia Delio, Keith Douglass Warner, and Pamela Wood, *Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Delio, Warner, and Wood, *Care for Creation*, 12.

and his fellow human beings. St. Bonaventure, a medieval biographer of Francis, describes this erotic longing which the Poverello possessed for the Crucified in *The Major Legend*:

Aroused by everything to divine love, he rejoiced in all the works of the Lord's hands and through their delightful display he rose into their life-giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he contuited Beauty itself and through the footprints impressed in things he followed his Beloved everywhere, out of them all making for himself a ladder through which he could climb up to lay hold of him who is utterly desirable.<sup>9</sup>

Francis's Christ is thus a living, breathing, walking Beloved who can be embraced by bending down to observe the footprints of the universe. By first adoring the Incarnate flesh of this Beloved, Francis turns his face to the creation around him in his initial steps towards ecstatic union with the Divine. Passionately devoted to the body of Christ, the Poverello begins a fervent love affair with the creation surrounding him, which bears Christ's flesh.

Indeed, just as he nakedly follows the naked Christ, he bodily submits himself to other creatures in an effort to climb the rungs of creation's ladder and unite himself with his Beloved. Through his ardent love of Christ, he

carefully exhorted all ... insensible creatures, to praise and love the Creator, because daily, invoking the name of the Savior, he observed their obedience in his own experience.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bonaventure, "The Major Legend of St. Francis," in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Volume 2, *The Founder*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), 596. Hereafter referred to as *FA:ED* followed by volume and page number.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas of Celano, "The Life of St. Francis," in *FA:ED* 1, 234.

Whether bowing before the Host – the matter which Christ’s flesh continues to occupy<sup>11</sup> – or reaching out in a familial embrace to worms rotting in the sun,<sup>12</sup> the Poverello seeks to extend his hand to the Crucified through the creation which is united to them both through the Incarnate body of God.

This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in his devotion to the lepers, and the highly erotic language with which Bonaventure describes the Poverello’s adoration of these people’s rotting flesh underscores “his remarkable devotion”<sup>13</sup> to both God and his fellow creatures. Bonaventure writes,

... the lover of profound humility moved to the lepers and lived with them, serving them all most diligently for God’s sake ... washed their feet, bandaged sores, drew pus from wounds and wiped away filth ... [and] even kissed their [the lepers’] ulcerous wounds [my emphasis].<sup>14</sup>

Ever longing to personally caress the bleeding wounds of the Crucified, Francis instead kisses the putrid wounds of the lepers’ decaying flesh. Understanding their bodies to be purified by the Incarnate despite their lingering disease, Francis embraces them as brothers and sisters and subsequently stumbles into the embrace of their common Creator.

Such adoration of Christ through the bodies around him indeed leads the Poverello into an erotic union with the Divine, as exhibited by the event of the sacred and mysterious stigmata. Bonaventure records, “Jesus Christ crucified

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<sup>11</sup> See St. Francis, “A Letter to the Entire Order,” in *FA:ED* 1, 118. St. Francis composes an exquisite piece of prose in recognition of the Eucharist: “O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself that for our salvation He hides himself under an ordinary piece of bread ... Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally!”

<sup>12</sup> Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” *FA:ED* 1, 250.

<sup>13</sup> Bonaventure, “*The Major Legend*,” *FA:ED* 2, 539.

<sup>14</sup> Bonaventure, “*The Major Legend*,” *FA:ED* 2, 539.

always rested like a bundle of myrrh in the bosom of his soul, into Whom he longed to be totally transformed through an enkindling of ecstatic love,”<sup>15</sup> and as a result of Francis’s longing, “he was borne aloft into Christ with such burning intensity, but the Beloved repaid him with such intimate love that it seemed to that servant of God that he was aware of the presence of that Savior.”<sup>16</sup> Desiring to be continuously in the presence of the Crucified, the Poor Man of Assisi indeed experiences the most mystical and dramatic of all encounters with the Divine: stigmatized with the very wounds which were imparted to the flesh of his Beloved, Francis’s body finds union with God, humanity, and creation.

In the event of the stigmata, the cosmos collides as the flesh of humanity meets the flesh of God. Francis’s desire to unite himself with his Beloved culminates in this moment, in which a marriage with the Crucified is consummated before the birds of the air and the grass of the field atop Mount La Verna.<sup>17</sup> Having kissed the flesh of the lepers, exhorted all creation to praise and love their common Creator, and wished only “to be conformed to Christ crucified who hung on the cross poor, suffering and naked,”<sup>18</sup> Francis is granted his heart’s greatest desire by being literally transformed into the likeness of his Beloved. Since “for the sake of love he spared nothing and gave everything he had to the one he loved,”<sup>19</sup> the Divine returns Francis’s all-giving love by granting him God’s fleshly essence. The blood of Christ seeps from Francis’s veins and renews the dust of creation as perfection momentarily explodes: through the Poverello’s body – indeed, through the wounds of the Incarnate – God, humanity, and creation miraculously merge into one.

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<sup>15</sup> Bonaventure, “*The Major Legend*,” *FA:ED* 2, 597.

<sup>16</sup> Bonaventure, “*The Major Legend*,” *FA:ED* 2, 597.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas of Celano, “*The Life of St. Francis*,” *FA:ED* 1, 263.

<sup>18</sup> Bonaventure, in Ilia Delio, *Franciscan Prayer* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2004), 149.

<sup>19</sup> Delio, *Franciscan Prayer*, 150.

**ST. BONAVENTURE: TRINITY, ABUNDANT LOVE,  
AND INCARNATION**

As the flesh of God thus influences Francis's ministry at each junction, first through his desire to climb the rungs of creation's ladder to unite himself with his Beloved and culminating in the dramatic and body-altering miracle of the stigmata, it similarly weighs heavy upon the minds of the Poverello's later followers. Citing the stigmata as a cosmological event, St. Bonaventure writes,

The whole world, therefore, ought to give thanks to the Most High Creator for this sublime gift, that by the stigmata imprinted on Saint Francis, he deigned not only to reveal the way of truth, but to establish it in a wonderful way and for readily intelligible reasons.<sup>20</sup>

*The whole world* ought to find joy in the Most High Creator, for as Bonaventure here affirms, the stigmata extends beyond the body of Francis to remind the cosmos of God's promise to the entirety of his creation. While we have thus already observed how Francis's life avows the importance of the Incarnation in uniting the cosmos through the event of the stigmata, we shall thus now turn to the theology of St. Bonaventure to further articulate such a viewpoint. In the wake of the stigmata miracle, Bonaventure outlines a Trinitarian theology which suggests that creation is first and foremost the out-pouring of God's Fountain-Fullness of love, and as such, the Incarnate Word is the locus point of cosmological unity between the Creator and created.

Theologians Ilia Delio, Keith Douglass Warner, and Pamela Wood rightly comment that "[i]t is Bonaventure who helps us understand more clearly the integral relationship between creation and Incarnation through his theology of the Trinity"<sup>21</sup> since his theology informs us that "every grain of sand, every star, every earthworm, reflects the Trinity as

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<sup>20</sup> Bonaventure, "The Major Legend," *FA:ED* 2, 514.

<sup>21</sup> Delio, Warner, and Wood, *Care for Creation*, 41.

its origin, its reason of existence and the end to which it is destined.”<sup>22</sup> For Bonaventure, all of creation – humanity included – reflects this Divine, Trinitarian relationship. As Delio, Warner, and Wood continue, “[t]he possibility of God’s creative activity rests in his being Triune, which is to say that God could not communicate being to the finite if God were not supremely communicative in himself,”<sup>23</sup> and resultantly, “creation expresses who God is as love in such a way that God who is Trinity loves the world with the very same love with which God eternally is.”<sup>24</sup> Herein rests the source of Bonaventure’s descriptions of both Francis’s stigmata and his devotion to creation, for truly, the Seraphic Doctor understood the entire cosmos to revolve around such an erotic expression. God is the “Fountain-Fullness”<sup>25</sup> of love, and the universe explodes into being as a result of the communicative passion of the Trinity, which cannot possibly contain itself.

Bonaventure’s descriptions of the Trinity speak only in terms of such love, and it is this self-communicative goodness which forms the basis for grasping the significance of the Incarnation in providing ecstatic union to the entire cosmos. He writes,

Infinity is affirmed in God not because of defect but because of excess ... and since the divine being in its immensity cannot be duplicated but is only one, it follows necessarily that in God there is only one pater-nity, only one filiation, and only one procession.<sup>26</sup>

God, overflowing in this excessive love, must necessarily exist in communion with Godself as a triune deity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet, staying true to the Poverello’s devo-

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<sup>22</sup> Delio, Warner, and Wood, *Care for Creation*, 44.

<sup>23</sup> Delio, Warner, and Wood, *Care for Creation*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> Delio, Warner, and Wood, *Care for Creation*, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Delio, Warner, and Wood, *Care for Creation*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, WSB III, trans. Zachary Hayes, ed. George Marcil (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2000), 198.



tion to Christ, Bonaventure simultaneously stresses the fact that the Word of the Trinity – or the Son – exists as the central, unifying force in this self-communicative relationship between Godself. The figure of the Word indeed mediates this relationship by representing the characteristics of both the Father and the Spirit, since “[w]ith the Father, the Word shares the ‘property’ of being the source of others” through the spiration of the Holy Spirit but “also shares, with the Spirit, the ‘property’ of receptivity, since, like the Spirit, the Word is generated by the Father’s self-diffusive goodness.”<sup>27</sup> The Word therefore reflects all personalities of the Trinity while uniting them in ecstatic union.

As such, the Incarnate Word represents the fullest expression of God’s goodness to creation since “this Fountain-Fullness expresses itself perfectly in the one who is Son and Word.”<sup>28</sup> As the central figure of the Trinitarian relationship, the Incarnate Word is the only member of the Trinity capable of uniting Godself with the cosmos. Thus, since “Bonaventure saw that just as the Word is the inner self-expression of God,” he also articulates that “the created order is the external expression of the inner Word.”<sup>29</sup> Not able to contain itself solely within the relationship of the Trinity, the Fountain-Fullness of God’s love must also necessarily create the cosmos in a longing for companionship, and the Incarnate Word magnificently stands at the central meeting point of all these relationships. We thus ought to take seriously the Seraphic Doctor’s

exegesis of the term ‘Word’ to designate the Second Person of the Trinity [which] places the Logos in *medi-as Trinitatis* as the ‘expressed Likeness’ of the Father

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<sup>27</sup> Ilia Delio, *Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to His Life, Thought, and Writings* (New York: New City Press, 2001), 47.

<sup>28</sup> Delio, Warner, and Wood, *Care for Creation*, 42.

<sup>29</sup> Delio, Warner, and Wood, *Care for Creation*, 43.

within the Godhead, and the 'expressed Image' of the Father in creation.<sup>30</sup>

As the Incarnate's flesh falls onto the ground of God's creation, he ecstatically combines all matter with the Trinity and washes "every person, plant, animal, and star"<sup>31</sup> in the Fountain-Fullness of God's love.

From Bonaventure's Trinitarian theology, we are thus in a better position to understand the eroticism of Christ's presence within the cosmos. As we contemplate the blood seeping from Francis's wounds and soaking the dust of creation, we similarly begin to bow before the image of the Incarnate as his flesh becomes our flesh while God's blood merges with our own. The pain of the stigmata reminds us of the Trinity's self-communicative love, and

[t]o say that creation shares in the mystery of the Trinity means that it is caught up in the dynamic process of self-transcendence and self-communication of interpenetrating relationships and creative love.<sup>32</sup>

Bonaventure reminds us that like Francis, we are to mirror the Trinity by entering into relationships with even the most despicable parts of creation surrounding us. By kissing the leper's boils, showing concern for a miserly worm, or lifting our praises to Brother Sun, we may demonstrate our appreciation of the Incarnate, whose very footprints kiss us all. In seeking to caress the flesh of Christ, we shall thus truly enter into union with the whole cosmos.

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Herbst, *The Road to Union: Johannine Dimensions of Bonaventure's Christology* (Quaracchi: S. Bonaventure College, 2005), 151-52.

<sup>31</sup> Delio, *Simply Bonaventure*, 84-85.

<sup>32</sup> Delio, Warner, and Wood, *Care for Creation*, 43.

## JOHN DUNS SCOTUS: AN EROTIC INCARNATION

Joining the stigmatized Francis to contemplate the materiality of the Crucified's body and recognizing the Incarnate Word as the purest expression of God's Fountain-Fullness of love along with Bonaventure, we now turn to the Subtle Doctor, John Duns Scotus, in order to fully grasp the erotic implications of the Incarnation event. Indeed, while Francis and Bonaventure certainly hint at Scotus's subsequent claim, the latter allows his prayers to become so infused by his ecstatic love of the Divine that he completely restructures the typical interpretation of the reason for the Incarnation – that it occurred primarily to redeem humanity from its fallen state – in light of his joy, instead claiming that Christ would have taken on a fleshly form irregardless of the Edenic Fall. Reflecting the lives and prayers of his famed predecessors, the Subtle Doctor's claim concerning the Incarnation underscores the event's erotic nature. Rather than focusing on God's flesh merely for its ability to deliver creation from its sinful state, Scotus begs us to recall our yearning for wholeness which can only be discovered in the ecstatic joy of following Francis up Mount La Verna. In joy and not in fear do we approach the Incarnate, for in the Incarnate, we find union with all.

For Scotus, God's preliminary choice to create the cosmos underscores the love of the Creator for his contingent creatures. As dependent beings upon God's choice, therefore, we are able to rationalize the existence of God, and we must likewise continue to grasp the inherent connection between this contingency, God's choice in creating us, and subsequently, God's overwhelming love.<sup>33</sup> Franciscan scholar Mary Beth Ingham indeed points out the consequences of this viewpoint

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<sup>33</sup> See Mary Beth Ingham, *Scotus for Dunces: An Introduction to the Subtle Doctor* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2003), 38.

upon Scotus's personal prayer life, noting especially how the Subtle Doctor's prayers end "with shouts of praise."<sup>34</sup>

His is no mystical night; we enter rather the mystical day. It is a mysticism of praxis, not of theoria; it is action, not contemplation that completes the spiritual journey for Scotus.... The final prayerful experience is not the silence of the mystic, but the joyful praise of the lover. True to his Franciscan identity, Scotus never leaves this world, but takes it along with him into the highest realm of loving communion with God.<sup>35</sup>

God chooses to create the cosmos because Godself cannot act otherwise out of God's nature, which is pure goodness, affirming Bonaventure's view that God is the Fountain-Fullness of love. Scotus's rationalization of God thus culminates in the sweetness and light of God's merciful and creative action, further causing him to recognize the love relationship God desires to show towards all contingent beings as their Creator. As Ingham affirms, Scotus's prayer is "the joyful praise of the lover" taken into complete ecstatic union with the God who willed the universe into existence out of a desire for community. God chooses to create because above all, he loves; creation shouts this message to Scotus as he lifts his eyes to praise a God who takes on a fleshly form out of passion for the cosmos rather than compunction.

Not forsaking the Christocentric legacy of his Franciscan forefathers, Scotus therefore utilizes his knowledge of this passion to further rationalize the purpose for the Incarnation. As the Subtle Doctor's prayers begin in the created order and lead him onward to this mystical day of praxis rather than theoria, he begins to understand the entire universe – including God – in light of this joyous, celebratory philoso-

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<sup>34</sup> Mary Beth Ingham, "Fides Quaerens Intellectum: John Duns Scotus, Philosophy and Prayer," *The Medieval Franciscans*, Volume 4, *Franciscans at Prayer*, ed. Timothy J. Johnson (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 191.

<sup>35</sup> Ingham, "John Duns Scotus, Philosophy and Prayer," in *Franciscans at Prayer*, 191.

phy. While Bonaventure begins the process of redefining the Incarnation in terms of its representation as the culminating point of God's Fountain-Fullness of love, Scotus allows himself to become so overwhelmed by this self-diffusive goodness that it leads him to restructure the entire purpose of the cosmos around its existence.

Indeed, his love for his Creator overflows to such a point that he deduces God's intentions for creation must necessarily be positive before they are negative. Paying heed to Bonaventure's claim that God is the Fountain-Fullness of goodness while also holding true to Francis's adoration of Christ, the Subtle Doctor ruminates over the love of God so intensely that he arrives at a consideration of the First Principle which necessitates that it take on a fleshly form primarily to perfect and fully express the love of the Creator. In Scotus's eyes, if we interpret "human sin" as the primary motive for the Incarnation, then "it makes sin a requirement for the highest act of divine presence in our world."<sup>36</sup> Our very existence is contingent upon the goodness of our Creator, and to claim our sin as the primary motive for the most supreme act of love would be to simultaneously denounce that contingency.

Our union with God should therefore be viewed from a standpoint of joy and not compunction, leading Scotus finally to his assertion that "the incarnation of Christ was not foreseen as occasioned by sin, but was immediately foreseen from all eternity by God as a good more proximate to an end."<sup>37</sup> We need the Incarnate flesh to infiltrate the cosmos, not solely for the redemption of our spirits, but for the ecstatic, mystical joy of our bodies when they discover Divine union with each contingent creature in the universe. Lovingly following Francis to his physical encounter with God and allowing himself to be purified by the waters of Bonaventure's Fountain-Fullness of Trinitarian excessiveness, Scotus grasps the deepest purpose of the Incarnation: to unite

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<sup>36</sup> Ingham, *Scotus for Dunces*, 76.

<sup>37</sup> John Duns Scotus, "Redemption and the Incarnation," in *Franciscan Christology*, 153.

the entire cosmos with the God who so loved the world that he joyfully and wonderfully placed his flesh within its dust.

## **INCARNATION**

By observing medieval Franciscan sources, we are thus led to understand the Incarnation as an erotic event which brings cosmological union. Joining Francis to nakedly follow the naked Christ – our common Beloved – we recognize the capacity of our flesh to be fused with our Creator's through the event of the sacred stigmata, in which God's blood seeps from the skin of a human to quench the thirst of creation's longing for wholeness. Contemplating the eroticism of this bodily union, we begin to comprehend Bonaventure's description of the Incarnation as the meeting point of Godself and the cosmos, through which the community of the Trinity expresses its excessive love by taking on the flesh of its creation. Finding joy in our new-found understanding of God as a Fountain-Fullness of goodness, we redefine the primary purpose of the Incarnation along with Scotus, claiming that it had to occur regardless of the Edenic Fall in order to fully manifest God's love. Along with Francis, Bonaventure, and Scotus, we thus arrive at an understanding of the Incarnation as the ultimate signifier of God's love for the cosmos. With the joyful realization that God desires his own flesh to embrace ours, a yearning for the Incarnate is ignited within our very skin, our bodies all aflame with love for the God whose excessive passion completes our existence by being physically present among us. To find our hands in God's shall be our greatest pleasure, and feeling his skin against our own as we brush our fingers over the wounds in his hands, we finally understand what it means to be whole. One with God, we turn with Francis to face the world.

**SULTAN AL-MĀLIK MUHAMMAD AL-KĀMIL  
AND SAINT FRANCIS: INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE  
AND THE MEETING AT DAMIETTA**

**FAREED Z. MUNIR, PH.D.**

In September 1219 CE, amid the bloody warfare of the Fifth Crusade, two men from opposing sides met in Damietta, Egypt, to discuss peace. They were Sultan al-Mālik Muhammad al-Kāmil (1180-1238 CE) of Egypt and St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226 CE). Damietta, a diverse, important port,<sup>1</sup> was a military flashpoint, and St. Francis had tried and failed to reach the city twice before, because of hostilities. The meeting was not a peace negotiation but a broader dialogue, and it required special arrangements.

This event raises fundamental questions: How does productive, thoughtful conversation arise across two warring missionary religions? What similarities open the channel and let transformative ideas flow back and forth? The perspectives of the sultan and the saint are crucial in understanding how they could have had a genuine dialogue against the polarizing backdrop of the Crusades.

Most existing scholarship about the meeting comes from a Christian perspective, especially a Franciscan one. Franciscans have written much about it because the saint founded their order and still occupies a luminous place in Christian minds and hearts. However, the event was not primary for Islamic writers and hence we know much less about the sultan's role today. In fact, Islamic academics have not yet fully examined this interesting ruler's thoughts about God and

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<sup>1</sup> Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 242-43.

the betterment of humanity. Yet Franciscan writings have definitely encourages them to look at the sultan's side of the conversation more seriously. It required two, and the Islamic dimension is vital to understanding it.

This paper examines the meeting in the context of inter-religious dialogue, called *da'wa* in Islam and "mission" in Christianity. Interreligious dialogue is "a conversation among persons or groups ... [and its] ... primary purpose ... is for each [person or] party to learn from the other."<sup>2</sup> Kathleen A. Warren's text *Daring to Cross the Threshold: Francis of Assisi Encounters Sultan Mālek al-Kāmil* provides the starting point for this examination. Warren asserts that St. Francis dared to cross the threshold, whose meaning implies "crossing over to a new place" or a new beginning.<sup>3</sup> In fact, each was challenged by his faith community's limited worldview to brave the ignorance and divisiveness of the day. They succeeded because they chose to believe in God's way and promote service to humanity.

## ISLAM AND *DA'WA*

Ye have indeed in the Apostle of Allah a beautiful pattern of (conduct) (Qur'an 33:21).

Approximately 1.3 billion Muslims live on earth today. There are more than forty-four Muslim countries, from Senegal to Indonesia. Major Muslim populations dwell in such diverse nations as China, India, Russia, and Britain, and six to eight million Muslims live in the United States. Indeed, Islam is the second largest religion on the planet – next to its older sibling Christianity, with 1.8 billion adherents.

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<sup>2</sup> Arlene and Leonard Swidler, "Journal of Ecumenical Studies," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Institute for Interreligious, Intercultural Dialogue (Philadelphia, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen A. Warren, O.S.F., *Daring to Cross the Threshold: Francis of Assisi Encounters Sultan Mālek al-Kāmil* (Rochester, MN: Sisters of Saint Francis, 2003), 18.



Muslims believe in the sacredness of the Qur'an's 114 chapters (called *suwar*, singular *sūra*) and over 6,000 verses (called *ayāt* or "signs," singular *aya*). Each chapter was a revelation from God to Prophet Muhammad (571-632 CE), and Muslims accept that by reading and discussing these *suwar* one crosses over into the light of God, which provides greater meaning for life. Human beings are God's summit of creation<sup>4</sup> and, as such, intrinsically deserve respect.

"We ... have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another (not that you may despise each other)," says Qur'an 49:13.<sup>5</sup> This verse tells us to engage with one another, learn, and know one another through conversation. In the spiritual context, it is a prescription for interreligious dialogue. Islam, like its family members Christianity and Judaism, urges people to leave ignorance and isolation behind for the sake of unity and its deep satisfactions. Over a span of twenty-two years, Prophet Muhammad received other revelations on the importance of interreligious dialogue. In an early verse, the Qur'an 16:125 states:

Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching [Muhammad]; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious; for thy Lord knows best.

The Qur'an further states:

And say to the People of the Book [Jews and Christians] and to those who are unlearned and [isolate themselves]: ... Thy duty [only] is to convey the Message [of Peace].

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<sup>4</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, ed., *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 57-58 and 121-27.

<sup>5</sup> All quotes of the Qur'an are from 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning (Interpretation) of the Holy Qur'an*, 10th ed. (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2001).

In theory and practice, Islam regards the exchange of ideas between people as a sacred duty and a form of respect for humanity. *Da'wa* commands Muslims to expand beyond a blinkered outlook and enter the world of light and unity, and it is not an afterthought in the history of Islam.<sup>6</sup>

Prophet Muḥammad died in 532. He had “dared to cross the threshold,” and his religious light shone within the Islamic community while he lived. After his death, however, that light grew refracted and darkness began to descend in the minds of some believers. “Oh, Allah! They mourned. Who will guide us now?”

There is a wonderful story about this poignant moment. 'Umar (Omar) Ibn Khattāb was a companion of the Prophet who would become the second Caliph (634-644 CE). In his love for the Prophet, he dared anyone to say that Muḥammad was dead. Abu Bakr, who became the first Caliph and is the only companion mentioned in the Qur'an, saw Umar's pain in a world of darkness and said softly, “Know that Muḥammad is dead. But if you have been worshipping God, then know that God is living and never dies.” He then recited the Qur'an 3:144: “Muhammad is no more than a Messenger [and a human being].”<sup>7</sup> The people received light in their darkness from Abu Bakr's insight. It was as if they had never truly heard these verses before. His words enabled them to cross the threshold of darkness into an understanding of the importance of belief in God, and, in this case, of Abu Bakr's insight. He had served them well.

After the Prophet's death, the *Rashidūn* or “rightly guided” caliphs headed the Muslim community (*umma*) from 632 to 661. Also called *aṣ-ṣahāba*, “companions of the Prophet,” these four consecutive leaders – Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthmān, and 'Alī – had all known him personally. They lived as witnesses to his words, deeds, and meanings, and this fact brought heavy responsibility. Their role was to reflect on the

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<sup>6</sup> T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith* (London: Constable & Company, 1913), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Muḥammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muḥammad*, trans. Isma'īl Ragi A. al Faruqi (North America Trust Publications, 1976), 506-07.

*Sunnah* he left, considering established precedent and reasoning with their minds and hearts.

This period also saw a vast expansion of the Muslim realm, and within eighty years Islam had spread from Iran to Spain. This enormous, variegated swath of territory raised questions about interreligious dialogue. How did the diversity of peoples relate to the Qur'an and the Prophet's *Sunnah*? Once again, Muslims were challenged to cross the threshold of darkness. Their regard for God obliged them to be fair to diverse religious communities and develop a balanced way to deal with God's people. Muslims conscientiously attempted both to respect separate communities and to create a collective identity, and that effort complements the Qur'an's verses exhorting Jews and Christians to leave aside their differences and return to the pure monotheism of Abraham, their common ancestor.<sup>8</sup> The Qur'an 3:64 states:

Say: Oh People of the Book (Jews and Christians)! Come to common terms as between us and you; that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves Lords and patrons other than God.

As an invitation to bring diverse people together, the Qur'an lays out the bases for a sincere, profound unity between people with a common interest in God.<sup>9</sup> This is not to suggest in any way that all Muslims during this period followed this ideal of dialogue. Nevertheless, it is an example and the Sultan's life seems to draw on it.

Interreligious dialogue succeeded in reaching others' hearts and it helped make Muslims welcome in other lands. The Qur'an 2:256 says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion." And while European warrior-kings like Charlemagne

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<sup>8</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *Islamic History as Global History* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1990), 20-22.

<sup>9</sup> Michael L.H.E. Archbishop Fitzgerald, President, "Continuing the Dialogue," in *Message for the End of Ramadan Id al-Fitr 1426 A.H. /2005: Continuing the Dialogue* (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2005).

were giving conquered peoples a choice between Christianity or execution, Muslims throughout their great realm refrained from forced acceptance of Islam. After Umar conquered Jerusalem, for instance, word of his tolerant treatment of Monophysite Christians spread quickly to the Nile Delta and helped Muslims enter Egypt.<sup>10</sup>

In Spain, Muslim acceptance of Jews was crucial to the conquest. The Christian King Egica had attempted to enslave all unconverted Jews, hand their children over to Christian families, and confiscate their property.<sup>11</sup> As a result, aggrieved Jews hailed the Muslims as liberators and gave them eager, critical assistance from within. The notion of Islam as a religion of the sword arose mainly in response to the speed of conquest itself, and the implications of compulsory conversion have always been incorrect.

After 'Alī, the center of the *umma* shifted from Medina (in full, "city of the Prophet") to Damascus and Baghdad, with two successive dynasties. The Umayyads reigned in Damascus from 661 to 750 CE, and the Abbasids founded Baghdad and governed from there until 1258. Descendants of the Umayyads, however, ruled Spain and eventually ceased to recognize the Abbasids. Egypt also broke away after 787 CE.<sup>12</sup>

The Abbasid community was highly diverse and its leaders sought to follow the Prophet's original model more closely than the Umayyads had. The Abbasids moved beyond the Arab nationalism and secularism of the Umayyads, and took direction from the original teachings of Islam and the conduct of the Prophet. In a plural world, they found, the source served them best. Under Abbasid rule, Christians enjoyed greater tolerance. Some converted to Islam, because Islamic ideals and attitudes had affinity with those of Judaism and Christianity.

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<sup>10</sup> David Levering Lewis, *God's Crucible* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 77-78.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, *God's Crucible*, 116-17.

<sup>12</sup> Eaton, *Islamic History as Global History*, 17-18; The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th ed., "Abbasid," in *Abbasid* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001-04).

There are many parallels. For example, Muslims institutionalized charity, as did Jews and Christians. (Indeed, it is reported that, on opening Saladin's treasury after his death, people found he had donated so much to charity that no funds remained to pay for his funeral.)<sup>13</sup> All three had a weekly day of rest, shared similar praying and fasting traditions, and displayed many other cognate features. These facts, too, help clarify and contradict earlier, cruder, Christian models developed out of ignorance of Muslims, which tended to bury the idea of interreligious dialogue beneath the notion of Islam as the religion of the sword.<sup>14</sup>

Using eloquent preaching and interreligious dialogue, Islam came to mediate a global civilization. Varied Muslim populations merged their own elements with diverse existing communities and traditions.<sup>15</sup> To take just one example, in northern India the Shi'as' great annual procession of Ashoura shows pronounced Hindu features, absent from Ashouras elsewhere in the world.<sup>16</sup> Similar instances of synthesis abound.

Devout adherents of Islam have been able to respect the other while conveying their religion and, as we've seen, this dual capacity increased its appeal and growth. The same was true of Christianity, despite cases cited above, and the two religions spread over three-fifths of the earth. Indeed they are similar on many levels. Both address all aspects of human life, from personal piety and worship to interpersonal relations with people outside of their tradition. In particular, both have featured the unceasing efforts of believers "daring to cross the threshold"<sup>17</sup> of darkness and ignorance into the light of an understanding that is inclusive of all. In Islam, dialogue is an imperative, and so it is in Christianity. It is a most important parallel between the two, and it helped enable the meeting between Sultan al-Kāmil and St. Francis.

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<sup>13</sup> Baha' al-Din Ibn Shaddad, *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin*, trans. D.S. Richards (London: Ashgate, 2002), 25 and 244.

<sup>14</sup> Eaton, *Islamic History as Global History*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Eaton, *Islamic History as Global History*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 47.

<sup>17</sup> Warren, *Daring to Cross the Threshold*, 18.

Nonetheless, the monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – have operated like a dysfunctional family throughout much of their history. Tales of conflict are legion – the Crusades are just one example – and it is clear that many adherents have misinterpreted religion.<sup>18</sup> But it is critical to highlight what can happen when there exists a greater resolve and rationale for them to enter into interreligious dialogue with each other. These religions have far more similarities than the differences that breed the polemics.

### **BACKDROP OF BLOOD: THE CRUSADES**

Sultan al-Kāmil ruled Egypt during the wars of the Fifth and Sixth Crusades. The Crusades take their name from crux of the “cross” in Latin, and they pitted Christians against Muslims in a series of eight military expeditions from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> It is not necessary to recapitulate the Crusades, but it is important to see the Islamic perspective on them in order to grasp the significance for both sultan and saint in crossing the threshold of ignorance.

Two myths pervade Western perceptions of the Crusades: one, that the Christian people were victorious, and two, that they fought the Crusades to liberate the Holy Lands, especially Jerusalem. The truth is that Crusader successes were spotty and transient – hence the need for repeated Crusades – and that the Crusaders themselves exhibited a full spectrum of human motives. Unfortunately, most people today know little about the Crusades. To some Christians they remain a splendid adventure, and most Western historians credit these wars with opening European eyes to Islamic civilization and spurring the Renaissance. On the other hand,

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<sup>18</sup> John Corrigan, Frederick M. Denny, Carlos M.N. Eire, Martin S. Jaffee, *Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Religions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), xi.

<sup>19</sup> John Esposito, *Islam Threat: Myth or Reality?* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 38.

Muslims recall the Crusades as the clearest example of militant Christianity in their history. Those Christians spread their religion by war and the Crusades are a reminder of their early hostility toward Islam.

Americans would see this negative legacy in 2001 when President George W. Bush announced he would wage a “crusade” against terrorism. Part of the Muslim world reacted with fear and part with anger, because of the malign connotations of “crusade.” President Bush later retracted the statement after he recognized the strong feelings about the word, calling it a “slip of the tongue” and stating that he meant to call it “a broad cause against terrorism.”

For most practical purposes today, the actual facts of the Crusades matter less than the Muslim and Christian recollections of them. According to Islamic scholar John L. Esposito:

Jerusalem was a city sacred to all three Abrahamic faiths.... Under Muslim rule, Christian churches and populations were left unmolested. Christian shrines and relics had become popular pilgrimage sites for Christendom. Jews, long banned from living there by Christian rulers, were permitted to return, live, and worship in the city of Solomon and David. Muslims built a shrine, the Dome of the Rock, and a mosque, the al-Aqsa, near the Wailing Wall, the last remnant of Solomon’s Temple, and thus a site especially significant to Judaism. Five centuries of peaceful coexistence were now shattered by a series of holy wars, which pitted Christianity against Islam and left an enduring legacy of distrust and misunderstanding.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the meaning of the Crusades ultimately depends on whether Muslims or Christians are telling the story.<sup>21</sup>

The theater of the Crusades was Syria and Palestine/Israel, where “most expeditions landed and nearly all of the

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<sup>20</sup> Esposito, *Islamic Threat*, 40-41.

<sup>21</sup> Esposito, *Islamic Threat*, 38-40.

stages of war took place.”<sup>22</sup> However, in 1219 the Crusaders had placed Damietta under siege, and hence the meeting between the sultan and saint was even more remarkable. There is no indication that St. Francis arrived as an official emissary, yet Sultan al-Kāmil let him through the battle lines to help strive for a solution to the question of organized violence.<sup>23</sup> For him, the problem required reflection on the Prophet Muḥammad. His approach obligated Sultan al-Kāmil to cross over the threshold of darkness – war – into the light of dialogue with the saint. The Prophet’s model would not allow him to destroy peoples’ lives arbitrarily. The Qur’an 8:61-62 states:

Do thou incline towards peace, and trust in God: for He is the One that heareth and knoweth (all things). Should they (your enemies) intend to deceive thee, – verily God suffices thee: He it is that hath strengthened thee with his aid and with (the company of) the believers.

He is exalted in might, Wise.

The Qur’an commands Muslims to accept peace over war.<sup>24</sup> It compels its adherents to seek peace even in the throes of war.

## **THE SULTAN OF PEACE**

Sultan al-Kāmil ruled Egypt from 1218 to 1238, and though he spent much of his life entangled in the Crusades, he possessed a strong belief in God and service. He was the

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<sup>22</sup> Emmanuel Sivan, *Interpretations of Islam: Past and Present* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1985), 23.

<sup>23</sup> Sivan, *Interpretations of Islam*, 24-26.

<sup>24</sup> Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Religion of Islam: A Comprehensive Discussion of the Sources, Principles and the Practices of Islam* (Lahore: Ripon Printing Press, 1971), 460-61.



nephew of the brilliant Kurdish general Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, known in the West as Saladin. He was a member of the Ayyubid dynasty, named after the general, which reigned in Egypt from 1193 to 1249.<sup>25</sup> As Sunnis, the Ayyubids believed in the religious line of the Caliphs and followed the Sunnah or guidance left by Prophet Muḥammad. In contrast, the Ismaʿīli Shiʿas of the prior Fatimid dynasty believed in the lineal descendants of Ali, like most Shiʿas, yet also favored mysticism and eventually drifted away from Islam on many counts. Sultan al-Kāmil and his family returned the basic Sunni faith to the masses in Egypt and Syria, and this act heightened their status and echoed the transformation wrought by the Abbasids. As a devout Sunni, the sultan made use of the Prophet's model in matters of the sacred and in his everyday affairs.

Though history depicts Sultan al-Kāmil favorably as a believer in God and a man of honor, he paid a price for his principles. For example, his brother al-Muʿazzam was at odds with him over interreligious dialogue with Christians. Al-Muʿazzam and others vehemently opposed Sultan al-Kāmil's many offers of peace, most rejected by the Christians. Al-Muʿazzam would go to his grave detesting the sultan's preference for peace over war. Sultan al-Kāmil would face similar problems with his other brother, al-Ashraf. To compensate for their differences over peace and war, the sultan made al-Ashraf leader of Syria. Later, in 1229, after the sultan adroitly negotiated a ten-year truce with Frederick II that halted the Sixth Crusade without a single battle and ceded defenseless Jerusalem to the Crusaders, Muslims reacted with fury. (Frederick also received Christian wrath for not fighting.)

Sultan al-Kāmil seems clearly to have sought to establish peace as the standard and overarching factor for coexistence between diverse people. He had always maintained fine relations with the 3,000-odd Italian traders in Cairo,<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Marshall G. D. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 267.

<sup>26</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Holy War* (New York: Anchor Books, 1984), 404.

for instance, and his multiple peace offers and his territorial concessions, despite the anger of many citizens, show his preferences.<sup>27</sup> His record has led some to interpret him as a weak ruler, though in addition to resilience, wisdom, and benevolence, he clearly possessed the courage to stand against the flow. Interestingly, some Christians opposed not only Frederick II but also the sultan with his passion for peace, believing he did not yield enough. Yet the sultan remained sensitive to the plight of Christians and genuinely cared about the lives of people.<sup>28</sup>

Historians have tended to overlook this side of the sultan because of their interest in St. Francis, who obviously deserves attention. However, we gain a truer idea of this event by bringing the sultan into the spotlight, and we better understand why he graciously gave St. Francis an audience. He probably sensed similar values in the European.

### **ST. FRANCIS'S MISSION TO THE MUSLIMS**

If one among the rejecters (of your religion) seek [dialogue] and aid, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of God; and then [whether he accepts the word or not] escort him where he can be secure (Qur'an 9:6).

St. Francis remains a famous, highly esteemed name in Christian history. He was a devout Catholic of the Latin Church, a committed believer in God and service for humanity. Pledged to poverty and renowned for gentleness, he roamed Italy preaching even to the birds and trees. The Catholic Church canonized him in 1228, soon after his death, and his Franciscan order remains the largest in Christendom.

He went to Damietta almost certainly to convert Muslims to Christianity, and probably the sultan as well, and he braved warfare and the epidemic then raging in the Nile Del-

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<sup>27</sup> Sivan, *Interpretations of Islam*, 27-28.

<sup>28</sup> Sivan, *Interpretations of Islam*, 28.

ta to do so. However, once he saw the Crusade up close, he seems to have turned against it. In his *Early Rule* – that is, The Rule of 1221 written two years after his return – Francis calls the Saracens (Muslims) unbelievers, but goes on to explain to the Friars that they should preach to Muslims respectfully and provide good examples in deed. He insisted that words and intelligent actions were more important than force. His approach stands in direct contrast to that of the Crusaders.

Within the Latin Church, historically, diverse views about interreligious dialogue with the Muslims raise two important questions: 1) Was its overall mission far-reaching enough to include Muslims or was it more restricted, particularly during the period of St. Francis?<sup>29</sup> 2) Why did St. Francis's outlook toward Muslims and his praxis of interreligious dialogue within the context of spreading the gospel appear out of touch with the Crusader absolutism of his time?

Regarding the first question, Christian sources indicate that church leaders harbored extreme views about Muslims and could not cross the threshold of belief in God and service. Most could not brave the challenge of moving beyond ignorance about Muslims. Crusader ideology shrouded the facts and heightened the emotions, and even led Pope Innocent III in 1207 to declare a crusade of annihilation against other Christians, the Catharists in southern France.<sup>30</sup> The ignorance about Muslims was far greater, and for the most part the rhetoric depicted Muslims as terrible enemies of Christians, not as people in need of Christian dialogue. Christians also maintained that Muslims were heretics, and thus closer than pagans to Christians. This idea had no foundation whatever.<sup>31</sup>

Second, why did St. Francis's outlook seem out of touch with the Crusader ideology? The answer probably lies in his

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<sup>29</sup> Arnold, *Preaching Islam*, 408; O.M.I. Richard G. Cote, *Re-visioning Mission: The Catholic Church and Culture in Postmodern America* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>30</sup> Armstrong, *Holy War*, 394.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches Toward the Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 6-12.

love for God and service. While the Church was going through an absolutist phase, St. Francis looked to himself and the origins of his religion. The early Church had offered an integrated, holistic notion of interreligious dialogue. *Propagatio fidei* (dialogue) was inclusive and all embracing rather than exclusive and restrictive. The Church understood itself as

a community of believers that articulates for itself, first, and then attempts to somehow disclose to the world the deep reasons for its profound and joyous hope.... [Interreligious dialogue] in this context is like one beggar telling another one where he or she has found food.<sup>32</sup>

In this spirit, St. Francis opened his heart, mind, and soul to interreligious dialogue with Muslims. He grasped the importance of dialogue with Sultan al-Kāmil and understood how to conduct it. And his approach paralleled Islam's concept of *dawa*.

### **THE MEETING AT DAMIETTA**

The actual conversations seem to have lasted for three days. As a sincere, devout Muslim and a practicing Sunni, the sultan would have relied on the Qur'an and Prophet Muḥammad's *Sunnah* in the events that led up to his meeting with St. Francis. Sultan al-Kāmil understood and believed deeply in God, prayer and charity, and he plainly listened to St. Francis with good will. He would have realized that they shared a commitment to peace and an acceptance of those who did not believe as they did. His religious and intellectual qualities likely bred a special relationship with St. Francis. Indeed, a relationship would have formed between the sultan, saint, and Prophet, even though the Prophet was not a contemporary.

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<sup>32</sup> Cote, *Mission: Catholic Church and Culture*, 7-8.

The pacific sultan was clearly not just a figure in the story of St. Francis, not just a political leader influenced by the saint. He enabled the dialogue and was a partner in it. He actively opposed dominant political views that advocated the rejection of all infidels, including St. Francis and Christians.<sup>33</sup> In the larger context of the Qur'an and Sunnah, Sultan al-Kāmil's openness and willingness to share concerns become a model for people interested in continuing the conversation that started with him and St. Francis.

As for St. Francis, once contact occurred, he opened himself unconditionally to the positive values of Islam, unfettered by qualms that Muslims might somehow be outside humanity, God's highest form of creation. In his time among them, he heard the Adhān (call to prayer) and witnessed Ṣalāt (prostration before God) five times daily. The Adhān has the spiritual force of the Christian bell, ringing throughout the land, and the Ṣalat is powerful and moving. St. Francis always sought to become one with the power of goodness, and he acknowledged and accepted it wherever he found it. He found it among Muslims.

St. Francis grew beyond bias, the idea that one's own religion is the only way, the tunnel vision that breeds isolation and a feeling of superiority over others. We see such behavior in an extremist minority of Muslims in the world today. They exalt an Islamist ideology, concoct enemies, and despise others, even their own kind, in the name of God. St. Francis, however, taught his companions that they were obliged to converse with all people. Just as the Abbasids had to reject the Umayyads and return to the original teachings of Prophet Muḥammad, St. Francis had to reject Crusader ideology for a truer, more basic, more universal message of the Church.

At the end of the meeting, the sultan sent the saint back to the Christian encampment "with every mark of respect and in complete safety," according to Bishop James of Vitry, a contemporary.<sup>34</sup> In fact, he apparently offered St. Francis

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<sup>33</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 268.

<sup>34</sup> Armstrong, *Holy War*, 407.

precious gifts, and the saint, with his vow of poverty, refused them. As Francis left, Sultan al-Kamil reputedly said, "Pray for me, that God may deign to show me the law and the faith that are most pleasing to him."<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, Muslims made a profound impression on St. Francis's heart. As a Christian living among Muslims, he had positive experiences of praying, almsgiving, and fasting, while Christians who did not know Islam at first hand continued to see it as the religion of the sword. He never forgot the experience. In "A Letter to a General Chapter," he later wrote, "At the sound of God's name you should fall to the ground and adore him with fear and reverence," a line that immediately suggests the Salat. Christianity sends Friars all over the world, he adds, to "bear witness ... that there is no other Almighty God besides him," an expression amazingly close to the Muslim's central formula of faith: "There is no god but God!" [*La illaha illa lah*].<sup>36</sup>

In his *Early Rule* of 1221, St. Francis sought to call all people and all nations to the way of God. He clearly included the Muslims in this worldview, just as Muslims included Christians in their worldview on *da'wa*. St. Francis's encounter with Muslims, two years before he composed his *Early Rule* shows how much he had learned from and been influenced by non-Christians. It also affirms his belief, courage, and service for humanity. His Rule would go against the religious orthodoxy of his day: the idea that Muslims were served best with war and violence rather than the love of God.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Armstrong, *Holy War*, 407.

<sup>36</sup> Jack Wintz, O.F.M., "Quest for Peace," in *St. Francis, the Sultan and the Quest for Peace* (American Catholic.Org/Father Jack's E-spiration, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> Jan Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam* (Quincy: Franciscan Press, 1997), 21.

## **THE SULTAN AND SAINT AS MUSLIMS OF PEACE**

And nearest among them in love to the believers (Muslims) wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians": Because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.

And when they listen to the revelation ... thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: They pray: "Our Lord! We believe; write us down among the witnesses" (Qur'an 5:85-86).

St. Francis was a Muslim at heart. His visit to the Muslims of Egypt demonstrates his sincerity, tolerance, and appreciation of Islamic beliefs and virtues, though public opinion of his day declared Islam detestable in every respect. Like Prophet Muḥammad, St. Francis believed that it was his duty to deliver God's message to all people. According to the Qur'an 10:15:

Say: It is not for me, of my own accord, to change it [the message of God], I follow naught but what is revealed unto me; if I were to disobey my Lord, I should myself fear the Penalty of a Great Day (to come).

Moreover, his duty was to follow God's signs whether it pleased or displeased authorities who possessed crude notions of the other.

Sultan al-Kāmil, a devout follower of Prophet Muḥammad, almost certainly recognized the Muslim-like character of St. Francis when they met. The noble qualities in St. Francis made it easy for Sultan al-Kāmil to accept him on terms based on their similar belief in God and desire to help people, rather than on the enmity that would have been socially justifiable during this period.

A devout Christian, St. Francis could still appreciate the Muslim point of view. For this reason, he possessed the spirit

of Islam, just as ‘Abd al-Muttalib, grandfather of the Prophet, and Abū Ṭālib, uncle of the Prophet – neither of them Muslims – are interpreted in Islamic history as men incarnated with that spirit.

A Muslim is one who submits to the will of God. St. Francis was sincere, honest, devoted to learning, and he had truly renounced the fleeting, selfish ways of the world antagonistic to God’s way.<sup>38</sup> He and Sultan al-Kāmil possess kindred commitments to belief and service that bonded them with the spirit of the Prophet Muḥammad. Despite their disparate cultures and religions, they have more similarities than differences.

In sum, Sultan al-Mālik Muḥammad al-Kāmil and Saint Francis were Muslims of peace. They show that personal salvation rests with every individual. They are models for men and women who want a contemplative character. Every Muslim and Christian is challenged when they examine these people and their efforts to cross the threshold of ignorance and darkness.

The world is indebted to both of these great Muslims of peace. They set the benchmark of interreligious dialogue high enough that, regardless of how far people slip into gross darkness and ignorance through denial of the light and unity of God, they can always find their way back with these models and cross over new thresholds in life. They are exemplars and, to whatever extent others emulate them, conflicts will grow milder and less common, and the earth will be a more harmonious place.

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<sup>38</sup> Warren, *Daring to Cross the Threshold*, 38-39.



## **WHAT DOES ROME HAVE TO DO WITH ASSISI? BENEDICT XVI'S RECENT ADDRESSES ON THE FRANCISCAN TRADITION**

**DANIEL P. HORAN, O.F.M.**

### **THE OPENING OF NEW WORLDS**

In the Fall of 1953 a young German priest, the very recent recipient of a doctorate in theology, set out to work on his *Habilitationsschrift* – a book-length thesis completed *after* successfully defending one's doctoral dissertation and the academic qualification that grants eligibility to hold a professorship at a German university. Without a topic at hand, he sought the counsel of Professor Gottlieb Söhngen, who advised the young scholar to consider working in the area of medieval theology, a logical choice given the recently completed doctoral research in Patristics. Söhngen, after some additional thought and in light of his advisee's previous work on the thought of Augustine, suggested Bonaventure might be a good option. More than forty years later, the now not-so-young theologian would recall, "Although I had some rudimentary knowledge of Bonaventure and had read some of his shorter writings, new worlds opened up as I made progress with my work."<sup>1</sup> That young priest whose research into the theological insight of the Franciscan Saint and Doctor of the Church, Bonaventure, was Joseph Ratzinger.<sup>2</sup> Today he is known by another name, Pope Benedict XVI.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 104.

<sup>2</sup> The resulting text was *Die Geschichtestheologie des heiligen Bonaventura* (München: Schnell and Steiner, 1959) and recently republished in the

Those unfamiliar with the scholarly work of Pope Benedict XVI, particularly his early work as a young academic, might find it surprising that the pontiff would dedicate several weeks worth of his Wednesday public audiences (designed to provide general catechesis for the universal church) this year to discussing several key figures of the Franciscan Order. However, even the briefest glimpse of the young Ratzinger's homilies, articles and books betray a profound respect for the saint from Assisi and those men and women who would follow in his way of life. It is safe to say that Francis of Assisi is likely the most popular saint in the Church (and even beyond the Church), but what is it about the beloved *Poverello* that first captured the imagination and interest of Joseph Ratzinger and continues to captivate him as Bishop of Rome? A close look at Benedict's recent addresses on themes related to Franciscan saints can help us unpack the Pope's own appreciation for and interpretation of the Franciscan tradition.

### **JOSEPH RATZINGER: A FRANCISCAN THEOLOGIAN?**

In early summer 2005, just a few months after the election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to succeed the late Pope John Paul II as Bishop of Rome, I began to study the writings and interviews with the German theologian-made-pope. His elevation to the pontificate coincided with my completion of undergraduate theological studies, which is why I was already familiar with the name "Cardinal Ratzinger," or so I thought. In truth, what I – and I suspect most students and professors of theology at the time – was familiar with was the reputation of the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine

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ongoing series of the collected works of Ratzinger, fully expanded with a previously unpublished section in *Gesammelte Schriften: Offenbarungsverständnis und Geschichtstheologie Bonaventuras: Habilitationsschrift und Bonaventura-Studien*, vol. 2, (München: Herder and Herder, 2009). The English translation is *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971).

of the Faith (CDF). Frequently portrayed as the “theology” or “orthodoxy police,” Joseph Ratzinger was cast in my mind as someone to be feared and whose interest was less in the development of the Roman Catholic theological tradition and more in “reigning in” scholars who did not adhere to curial standards of Catholic orthodoxy. Like most reputations, there was some truth in that characterization. However, I quickly realized that I knew little about what this *person* actually thought. I committed myself to spend the summer delving into the personal theological writings (as opposed to the curial promulgations and notes of the CDF) in order to find out for myself what this theologian was all about.

To my surprise, the German thinker’s work was less polemic and apologetic than I had anticipated. While there have certainly been personal texts by Ratzinger that are more explicitly responsive, if not reactionary, his corpus was, by and large, not representative of a man seeking to establish narrowly conceived and hegemonic theological treatises. Instead, what I found was an intelligent theologian interested in elucidating the faith in ways that made theology more accessible. Like all scholars, he did this to a lesser and greater degree over the course of his career, but he struck me as one committed to unpacking the content of faith in timely and relevant ways.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true of his earliest works, among them his most famous pre-pontifical work, *Introduction to Christianity*.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, I was surprised to find that there were strong “Franciscan currents” in his writing. Upon discovering his *Habilitationsschrift* in translation (*The Theol-*

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<sup>3</sup> For a recent article on the thought of the young Ratzinger, see John Wilkins, “Ratzinger at Vatican II: A Pope Who Can and Cannot Change,” *Commonweal* CXXXVII (June 4, 2010): 12-17. It should be noted that Wilkins’s assessment of the shifts in thought over the course of Ratzinger’s career are without any consideration of the independent theological scholarship of the mature Ratzinger (Benedict XVI). Instead, Wilkins compares the young Ratzinger’s book on the *Highlights of Vatican II* against dicastery documents during his tenure as prefect of the CDF – no small oversight. Nevertheless, Wilkins attempts to return to the early work of Ratzinger, an admirable task.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J.R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004).

ogy of History in St. Bonaventure), it became clear to me that Bonaventure's contribution to theologies of prophecy, revelation and eschatology strongly influenced the future pope in his own explorations in theology.

Though Joseph Ratzinger remained for me a controversial figure, even into his years as pope, I began to reconsider what type of theologian he might be, going so far as to posit a radical interpretation and asking whether or not he might fit more comfortably into the category "Franciscan theologian" than anyone would have previously considered. I found that raising such a possibility proved to be unpopular, nevertheless I was not alone in considering this connection between Ratzinger and the Franciscan tradition.

On the Feast of Saint Bonaventure, July 15, 2007, the Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University bestowed on Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., the prestigious Franciscan Institute Medal, making him the Twentieth recipient of that award. As is customary at such an event, Armstrong delivered an academic address as part of the festivities. The title of his talk was "Hermes and the 'Co-Incidence' of San Damiano,"<sup>5</sup> and soon into the address Armstrong made an observation that confirmed what I had already begun to suspect. Citing an essay on Christian spirituality and pneumatology written by Ratzinger, Armstrong remarked, "This theological insight of now Pope Benedict XVI rightfully resonates with theologians of the Augustinian and Franciscan schools. In many ways, it echoes with what both Francis and Clare would have us desire above all things: 'the Spirit of the Lord and His holy activity.'"<sup>6</sup> Later in his address, Armstrong again visits the work of Joseph Ratzinger to illuminate the complementary relationship of Gospel living found in the life and tradition

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<sup>5</sup> This was later published as Regis Armstrong, "Hermes and the 'Co-Incidence' of San Damiano," *Franciscan Studies* 66 (2008): 413-59.

<sup>6</sup> Armstrong, "Hermes and the 'Co-Incidence' of San Damiano," 420. The passage from Ratzinger was taken from the essay "The Holy Spirit as Communion," in *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, ed. Stephan Otto Horn and Vinzenz Pfnür, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

of Francis and Clare of Assisi.<sup>7</sup> Since delivering that address three years ago, Armstrong has returned to the thought of Benedict XVI in its more recent forms as well as in his early writings. Armstrong continues to identify parallels and Franciscan influences in the work of Benedict, drawing on these insights for contemporary engagement with the Franciscan theological tradition.<sup>8</sup>

The concurrent recognition by Regis Armstrong of the Franciscan influence on the thought of Benedict XVI and the contribution the pontiff's work could make to contemporary Franciscan scholarship further petitions us to consider the status of the current pope vis-à-vis the Franciscan intellectual tradition. It seems at least plausible to ascribe the moniker "Franciscan theologian" to Benedict XVI, but the true test depends on the definition of the term. Because there is no clear understanding of what makes someone a "Franciscan theologian," it is difficult to demarcate an appropriate set of characteristics by which to determine whether Benedict XVI may legitimately be included. Zachary Hayes notes that, "If we simply look for a common set of themes shared by the great theologians of the past, we will probably have to conclude that there is no such thing as a Franciscan school."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, to what extent must a "Franciscan theologian" be a professed member of one of the three Franciscan Orders? It is becoming increasingly more common that women

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<sup>7</sup> See Armstrong, "Hermes and the 'Co-Incidence' of San Damiano," 440-43. Later in the address, p. 452 n. 119, Armstrong writes: "I am once again most indebted to the insights of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's article, 'The Holy Spirit as Communion,' for what follows in these next paragraphs. They have enabled me to bring into focus many distinctions between *communitas* and *fraternitas* with which I have wrestled in the fog of my understanding of the spirituality of Francis and Clare."

<sup>8</sup> See most recently, Regis Armstrong, "*Novellus Pazzus in Mundo*: The Call To Foolishness," *Collectanea Franciscana* 79 (2009): 469-86; and Regis Armstrong and Ingrid Peterson, *The Franciscan Tradition*, Spirituality in History Series (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Zachary Hayes, "Bonaventure of Bagnoregio: A Paradigm For Franciscan Theologians?" in *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition*, Washington Theological Union Symposium Papers 2001 (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2002), 43.

and men who are not professed members of religious communities (or Secular Franciscans, for that matter) make up the academic guild that studies the Franciscan intellectual tradition. Surely religious profession cannot be such a determining mark.

Like most scholars who engage the thought of the major medieval contributors to the Franciscan intellectual tradition, Benedict XVI has a particular take on the Saint from Assisi and the movement that emerged in the wake of the *Poverello's* religious conversion in the early thirteenth century. This perspective emerges from the Pope's reading of the texts and literature related to the Franciscan sources and should be considered on their own merit. While any reference to Benedict XVI as a Franciscan theologian is sure to remain contentious, study of his perspective on the Franciscan tradition – particularly in the explicit references made during his universal catechetical audiences this year – will surely contribute to contemporary Franciscan scholarship. The voice of the pope carries with it certain authority that naturally draws the attention of a broad audience. For this reason, the miniature series of addresses in 2010 relating to the Franciscan tradition need to be examined.

### **ADDRESS TO THE CHAPTER OF MATS (APRIL 20, 2009)**

Nearly a year before the more substantial series of Wednesday general audiences delivered by Pope Benedict XVI on Franciscan themes, the pontiff greeted representatives of the Franciscan family at his residence at Castel Gandolfo. The chapter was to celebrate the eighth centenary of the approval of the nascent Franciscan rule by Pope Innocent III in 1209. Benedict XVI took this occasion to commend the friars for what a gift they are to the world, especially in the ministry of spreading the Gospel. After acknowledging the “precious gift” that the Franciscan family is for the entire Christian people, Benedict XVI spoke about the founder of the movement the Franciscan family represents today.

Perhaps the most striking set of comments offered by the Holy Father consisted of what we can call the “apostolic identification” of Francis. In a unique way, Benedict XVI associated Francis with St. Paul. He said, “To the *Poverello*, one can apply literally some expressions that the apostle Paul uses to refer to himself and which I like to remember in this Pauline year.”<sup>10</sup> What follows is a veritable litany of quotations from the Pauline corpus that speak of one’s kenotic embrace of poverty to live totally in Christ. Another way to describe Francis, Benedict XVI continues, is that he fully embodied the Gospel. His identity *was* the Word of God and therefore, like Paul, Francis’s life says: “For me, to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21). Benedict XVI summarized this well when he said:

[Francis] defined himself entirely in the light of the Gospel. This is his charm. This is his enduring relevance.... So the *Poverello* has become a living gospel, able to attract to Christ men and women of all ages, especially young people, who prefer radical idealism to half-measures. The Bishop of Assisi, Guido, and then Pope Innocent III recognized in the proposal of Francis and his companions the authenticity of the Gospel, and knew how to encourage their commitment for the good of the Church.<sup>11</sup>

At this point in his address, Benedict XVI begins to offer his interpretation of the contemporary value of Franciscan religious life. He identifies the occasion of this meeting of the Franciscan family, the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the approval of Francis’s way of life by Innocent III, as a constitutive element of the Franciscan charism. In doing so, Benedict XVI made

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<sup>10</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Attract to Christ Men and Women of All Ages,” Benedict XVI’s Address to the Franciscan Family (April 20, 2009). All translations of addresses by Pope Benedict XVI cited in this article have been provided by the Zenit news service and are accessible at [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org). These texts are also available in translation in archived issues of the Vatican newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*. Additionally, the texts are available in the original Italian on the Vatican’s website.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Attract to Christ Men and Women of All Ages.”



an explicitly ecclesiological<sup>12</sup> statement that indeed emphasizes that aspect of Francis's *Regula* promising obedience to the Holy See and maintaining the Catholicity of the Order, while de-emphasizing (by way of omission) those more overt challenges Francis raised to the leadership of the Church in his day – most notably in his “ecclesiastical disobedience” with regard to the Fifth Crusade.<sup>13</sup>

Benedict XVI mentions the other religious movements of the age that sprang up without papal approval. He notes that Francis was not like these other groups that held a “polemical attitude towards the hierarchy.” Rather, Francis

immediately thought to put his journey and that of his companions into the hands of the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter. This fact reveals his true ecclesial spirit. The little ‘we’ that had started with his first friars he conceived from the outset inside the context of the great ‘we’ of the one and universal Church. And the Pope recognized and appreciated this.<sup>14</sup>

Benedict XVI did not hesitate to remind the Franciscans of their founder's proximity to Rome. This statement, something between an admonition and exhortation, was likely formed against the backdrop of Joseph Ratzinger's personal experience. One cannot help but recall the famous and painful exchange between the former Franciscan friar and theologian Leonardo Boff and Ratzinger in his official capacity as

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<sup>12</sup> There are several studies available on the ecclesiology of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), perhaps the most substantial is: Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology, Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium*, trans. Michael Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> For a new overview of Francis's encounter, see Paul Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan: The Crusades, Islam, and Francis of Assisi's Mission of Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 2009). For a study of the contemporary relevance of this stance, see Daniel Horan, “Those Going Among the Saracens and Other Nonbelievers”: Thomas Merton and Franciscan Interreligious Dialogue,” *The Merton Annual* 21 (2008): 44-66.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Attract to Christ Men and Women of All Ages.”



prefect of the CDF.<sup>15</sup> It seems likely that beyond the vested interest any sitting pontiff would have in reminding the largest religious order in the world to stay “close to home,” the Boff experience must have served as additional motivation.

Beyond the reminder to maintain ecclesiastical communion, Benedict XVI offered little by way of critique or concern. Instead, the Holy Father closed his address with words of edification that were, and indeed remain, inspirational. He said:

As Francis and Clare of Assisi, you also commit yourselves to follow the same logic: to lose your lives for Jesus and the Gospel, to save them and make them abundantly fruitful. While you praise and thank the Lord who has called you to be part of such a great and beautiful family, stay attentive to what the Spirit says to it today, in each of its components, to continue to proclaim with passion the Kingdom of God, the footsteps of your seraphic father. Every brother and every sister should keep always a contemplative mood, happy and simple; always begin from Christ, as Francis set out from the gaze of the Crucifix of San Damiano and from the meeting with the leper, to see the face of Christ in our brothers and sisters who suffer and bring to all his peace. Be witnesses to the ‘beauty’ of God, which Francis was able to sing contemplating the wonders of creation, and that made him exclaim to the Most High: ‘You are beauty!’<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps surprising given the speaker’s personal history of engaging liberation theology, this encomium aimed at the Franciscan vocation and way of Christian living bears a certain sense of social justice that explicitly names those men and women who suffer in our world. Drawing on the tra-

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<sup>15</sup> For one account of the exchange, see Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone and Company, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Attract to Christ Men and Women of All Ages.”

dition of Francis's own ministry to and solidarity with the poor, marginalized and disaffected, Benedict XVI encourages Francis's sons and daughters of today to do the same.

### **ON FRANCIS OF ASSISI (JANUARY 27, 2010)**

Continuing the theme of renewal in the Church, something Benedict XVI illustrated in referencing the formation of the Order of Friars Minor and the Order of Preachers by Francis and Dominic respectively, the Pope highlighted the Saint from Assisi. Beginning with a short biographical outline of the *Poverello's* starting point and conversion, Benedict XVI focuses on the dual symbolic foci of Francis's conversion: the call to "repair my Church in ruins" heard at San Damiano and the encounter with the leper. The Holy Father recalled that it was ultimately not a repair of manual labor that Christ was calling the Saint to, but instead the renewal of the Church of Christ itself "with his radical faith and his enthusiastic love for Christ."<sup>17</sup> Benedict XVI chose to focus on the renewal of the Church in an effort to highlight two features of Francis's vocational activity. The first is that this renewal did not come by way of the powerful, learned or mighty, but rather through the "small and insignificant religious," Francis, called by God. The second is, picking up again on the ecclesiological theme emphasized in his address a year earlier, that Francis renews the church *in communion with the Pope*. Benedict XVI said:

It is important to note that St. Francis does not renew the Church without or against the Pope, but only in communion with him. The two realities go together: the Successor of Peter, the bishops, the Church founded on the succession of the Apostles and the new charism

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<sup>17</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "The Secret of True Happiness: To Become Saints," On Francis of Assisi (January 27, 2010).

that the Holy Spirit created at this moment to renew the Church. True renewal grows together.<sup>18</sup>

Benedict XVI treats this portion of his address almost as if it were a digression, following it immediately with, “Let us return to St. Francis’s life.” However, in the continued recounting of Francis’s experience of conversion, the current pontiff seeks yet another opportunity to connect the *vita evangelica* of Francis with ecclesiastical order:

The *Poverello* of Assisi had understood that every charism given by the Holy Spirit is placed at the service of the Body of Christ, which is the Church; hence, he always acted in full communion with the ecclesiastical authority.<sup>19</sup>

The identification of the Church as the Body of Christ is indeed a rather unexpected surprise given the propensity Benedict XVI has for focusing his reflections on the authoritative structures of ecclesiastical governance and Church renewal. Nevertheless, in this instance the Holy Father demonstrates some interest in striking an ecclesiological balance between seemingly oppositional ecclesial emphases.

Following his explicit and frequent identification of Francis with the Church and its leadership, Benedict XVI addressed concerns he has with certain modern scholarly efforts to recover the “historical Francis,” an endeavor not unlike the quest for the historical Jesus of recent decades. The caution issued by the Pope is one aimed at those who would like to reconstruct the person Francis of Assisi for particular political or social gains. In other words, you cannot separate Francis from the Pope and bishops, the Eucharist and full communion with the whole Church – at least that is the message that is rearticulated.

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<sup>18</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “The Secret of True Happiness: To Become Saints.”

<sup>19</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “The Secret of True Happiness: To Become Saints.”

One area where Benedict XVI does not include a reference to communion with the Church can be found in his praise of Francis's interreligious efforts exemplified most strikingly in the encounter with the Muslim Sultan Malek-al-Kamel in Egypt. The Pope said:

I want to underline this episode of the life of Francis, which is very timely. At a time in which there was under way a clash between Christianity and Islam, Francis, armed deliberately only with his faith and his personal meekness, pursued with efficacy the way of dialogue. The chronicles tell us of a benevolent and cordial reception by the Muslim Sultan. It is a model that also today should inspire relations between Christians and Muslims: to promote a dialogue in truth, in reciprocal respect and in mutual understanding.<sup>20</sup>

This episodic recounting of Francis's experience of peace-making and dialogue is something to be especially treasured. Benedict XVI, aware of the urgent need for tolerance, trust, peace and dialogue in today's world, realizes the powerful example of Gospel living embodied in that heroic act of the thirteenth-century saint. What is not acknowledged in the pontiff's recollection, however, is that this paragon of inter-religious dialogue and peacemaking was an action that stood in stark contrast to the official policy of both the Church and State of the day. We should not forget, nor omit, that this encounter took place during the height of the Fifth Crusade. How one reconciles the unwavering commitment of the son of the Church *par excellence* as portrayed in Benedict XVI's image of Francis and the concrete and powerfully prophetic action of the same man over and against the putative will of the Pope is left unsolved.

After completing the brief chronology of the *Poverello's* life, Benedict XVI offers a unique reflection on Francis's evangelical life vis-à-vis scripture. What is important to know about

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<sup>20</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "The Secret of True Happiness: To Become Saints." Also see footnote no. 11 above.

this particular aspect of his address is that it is strongly reminiscent of Benedict XVI's early work on Bonaventure and the Seraphic Doctor's theology of prophecy and revelation. The Pope continued:

Truly, dear friends, the saints are the best interpreters of the Bible; they, incarnating in their lives the Word of God, render it more than attractive, so that it really speaks to us. Francis's witness, who loved poverty to follow Christ with dedication and total liberty, continues to be also for us an invitation to cultivate interior poverty to grow in trust of God, uniting also a sober lifestyle and detachment from material goods.<sup>21</sup>

For Bonaventure, and for Benedict XVI so influenced by the Seraphic Doctor, a prophet (or in this case, the saint) is one who has been imbued with the Word of God. The result of such a life, one rooted and oriented by scripture, is that such people can see the world as it really is and understand how God continues to reveal God's self to us in ever new ways. This is the freedom that comes with evangelical poverty, the surrender of one's own will for God's will, the emptying of one's self so as to be filled by the Word of God. For Benedict XVI Francis is indeed a prophet, as he was for Bonaventure as depicted in his *Legenda Major*.<sup>22</sup>

Benedict XVI concludes this address with two particularly relevant reflections. The first is a mention of Francis's expressed admiration for priests. No one familiar with the writings of Francis of Assisi could deny that the Saint had a particular respect for and deference toward ordained ministers, regardless of their individual sanctity or sinfulness. Benedict XVI ties this aspect of Francis's own spirituality and disposition to the Year for Priests (2009-2010) and directs Francis's own respect for priests toward priests themselves,

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<sup>21</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "The Secret of True Happiness: To Become Saints."

<sup>22</sup> See Bonaventure's *Legenda Major*, Prologue, *FA:ED* 2, 525-29.

admonishing those ordained to “live in a consistent way with the mystery we celebrate.”<sup>23</sup>

The final reflection is also one of timely import. Here Benedict XVI recalls Francis’s love of all people and creation that is rooted in the Saint’s love of Christ. The Pope ties this recollection not only to the ecological crises of our present day, but also to his latest encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*. This section is worth quoting at length.

Here is another characteristic trait of Francis’s spirituality: the sense of universal fraternity and love for creation, which inspired his famous Canticum of Creatures. It is a very timely message. As I reminded in my recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, the only sustainable development is one that respects creation and does not damage the environment, and in the Message for the World Day of Peace this year I underlined that also the building of a solid peace is linked to respect for creation. Francis reminds us that in creation is displayed the wisdom and benevolence of the Creator. In fact, nature is understood by him as a language in which God speaks with us, in which reality becomes transparent and we can speak of God and with God.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to being a renewed call for ecological awareness and restoration of the integrity of creation, these comments are a powerful reflection of the Pope’s own understanding of the Franciscan theological tradition. The latter part of the quote above, where Benedict XVI speaks of Francis’s recognition of creation as the space within which and a medium for communication with the Divine, is a summary of Bonaventure’s theology of creation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “The Secret of True Happiness: To Become Saints.”

<sup>24</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “The Secret of True Happiness: To Become Saints.”

<sup>25</sup> For an overview see Christopher Cullen, *Bonaventure* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128-33; Ilia Delio, *Simply Bonaventure: An*

**ON SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA (FEBRUARY 10, 2010)**

After speaking on Francis of Assisi, Benedict XVI dedicated the following week to catechetical instruction on St. Dominic, Francis's contemporary and fellow founder of a mendicant order. In that address, Benedict XVI refers to Francis as "the luminous figure" of church renewal. The Dominican sojourn was short indeed, for the following week again saw the Pope's interest in the Franciscan tradition return, this time in the figure of St. Anthony of Padua, who Benedict XVI refers to as "one of the most popular saints in the whole Catholic Church."<sup>26</sup> Before regaling his audience with the biographical highlights of this first-generation Friar Minor's life, the Pope said, "Anthony contributed in a significant way to the development of Franciscan spirituality, with his outstanding gifts of intelligence, balance, apostolic zeal and, mainly, mystical fervor."<sup>27</sup>

Recalling Anthony's almost accidental, yet providential, foray into the ministry of preaching on the occasion of an ordination Mass, Benedict XVI also recounted the lasting significance of Anthony's personal approval by Francis to teach theology.

He was also among the first teachers of theology of the Friars minor, if not even the first. He began his teaching in Bologna, with Francis's blessing who, recognizing Anthony's virtues, sent him a brief letter with these words: 'I would like you to teach theology to the friars.' Anthony set the foundations of Franciscan

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*Introduction to His Life, Thought and Writings* (New York: New City Press, 2001), 54-66; and J.A. Wayne Hellmann, *Divine and Created Order in Bonaventure's Theology*, trans. J.M. Hammond (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2001).

Also see Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* II.1.1-II.12.5, trans. Dominic Monti, WSB IX (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2005), 59-98.

<sup>26</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "One of the Most Popular Saints in the Whole Catholic Church," On St. Anthony of Padua (February 10, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "One of the Most Popular Saints in the Whole Catholic Church."

theology that, cultivated by other famous figures and thinkers, came to its zenith with St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and Blessed Duns Scotus.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike his two earlier addresses that dealt with the person and legacy of Francis of Assisi directly, Benedict XVI does not tie Anthony in any explicit way to ecclesiastical authority. Instead, his admiration for the famous preacher, theologian and saint comes through his reflections on the more overtly spiritual and mystical nature of Anthony's legacy. Highlighting an often overlooked dimension of Franciscan spirituality, that of eremiticism and solitude, Benedict XVI said, "Anthony reminds us that prayer needs an atmosphere of silence, which is not the same as withdrawal from external noise, but is an interior experience, which seeks to remove the distractions caused by the soul's preoccupations."<sup>29</sup> This reference to the place of solitude in the spiritual life evokes the recent work of Benedict XVI in his Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate* and the pontiff's concern that modern men and women learn to "disconnect" from technology in order to remember what is real and what is most profoundly human.<sup>30</sup>

Returning to a theme that is clearly an important one for the Holy Father, he focuses on Anthony's appropriation of

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<sup>28</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "One of the Most Popular Saints in the Whole Catholic Church." Benedict XVI's paraphrase of Francis's letter to Anthony is a little off, for the original text see Francis of Assisi, "A Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua," in Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1999-2001), 1:107. Further citations of this source will be noted as *FA:ED* followed by the volume and page number. For a contemporary study of Franciscan engagement in theology, see Michael Blastic, "It Pleases Me That You Should Teach Sacred Theology": Franciscans Doing Theology," *Franciscan Studies* 55 (1998): 1-25.

<sup>29</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "One of the Most Popular Saints in the Whole Catholic Church." For more on solitude in the Franciscan spiritual tradition, see Daniel Horan, "Dating God: A Young Friar's Experience of Solitude," *America* 196 (June 18, 2007): 25-27; and Thomas Merton, "Franciscan Eremiticism," *The Cord* 16 (1966): 356-64.

<sup>30</sup> For more on this insight of Benedict XVI, see Daniel Horan, "Digital Natives and Franciscan Spirituality," *Spiritual Life* 56 (Summer 2010): 73-84, esp. 78-79.



“one of the specific features of Franciscan theology” that is the primacy of divine love.<sup>31</sup> The association that is made between Anthony and Franciscan spirituality in general really finds a forthright articulation in the theology of Bonaventure. It is remarkable to note the resemblance, at least in part, between the construction of the Pope’s first Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est* and the notion of Bonaventure’s cosmic theology. This particular focus on the divine love present in the writings of Anthony only reemphasizes Benedict XVI’s affinity for the larger Franciscan tradition.

Continuing with the theme of spirituality in the example of Anthony, Benedict XVI recalled that the Franciscan preacher always encouraged his hearers to return to prayer. Through that communication with the Creator, one is able to redirect one’s focus from pride, impurity, injustice and other forms of sinfulness to focus on “true wealth, that of the heart.”<sup>32</sup> It is this aspect of Anthony’s legacy that the Pope sees as particularly relevant given the recent economic crisis. Again drawing connections to his own work, Benedict XVI said,

Is not this perhaps, dear friends, a very important teaching also today, when the financial crisis and the serious economic imbalances impoverish not a few persons and create conditions of misery? In my encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, I remind that: ‘The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly – not any ethics whatsoever, but an ethics which is people-centered.’<sup>33</sup>

This ethic Benedict XVI speaks of might indeed benefit from retrieval of the wisdom of the Franciscan tradition, not just in the writings of Anthony (although that may be a good

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<sup>31</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “One of the Most Popular Saints in the Whole Catholic Church.”

<sup>32</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “One of the Most Popular Saints in the Whole Catholic Church.”

<sup>33</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “One of the Most Popular Saints in the Whole Catholic Church.” Also see *Caritas in Veritate* no. 45.

place to start), but also in the more developed ethical system of John Duns Scotus.<sup>34</sup>

### **ON SAINT BONAVENTURE (MARCH 3, 2010)**

Benedict XVI begins his reflection on Bonaventure with the admission that doing so evokes for him a “certain nostalgia” because of his particular fondness for the Seraphic Doctor, whom, the Pope shares, “I particularly esteem.”<sup>35</sup> It is immediately after this segue that he then said, “[Bonaventure’s] knowledge has been of no small influence in my formation.”<sup>36</sup> Benedict XVI goes on to describe Bonaventure as a “man of action and of contemplation, of profound piety and of prudence in governing.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed Bonaventure was a man of many talents and skilled in many areas. One cannot help but see yet another reason the Pope might find Bonaventure’s ability to excel as a scholar and then an ecclesiastical leader, first as General Minister of the Order and later a Cardinal Bishop of the Church. Perhaps Benedict XVI sees in Bonaventure a model for his own life, one marked early on by theological excellence and later shaped by ecclesiastical leadership positions.

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, John Duns Scotus, *Political and Economic Philosophy*, ed. Allan Wolter (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2001); and Thomas Shannon, *The Ethical Theory of John Duns Scotus* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1995), esp. 71-128.

<sup>35</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Proposing This Theme I Feel a Certain Nostalgia,” On St. Bonaventure (March 3, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Proposing This Theme I Feel a Certain Nostalgia.” For more on the role of Bonaventure’s thought in the theological formation of Joseph Ratzinger, see Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Continuum, 2007), 34-44; D. Vincent Twomey, *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of Our Age, A Theological Portrait* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 50-53; and, for his own reflection, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium, an Interview with Peter Seewald*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 61-63.

<sup>37</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Proposing This Theme I Feel a Certain Nostalgia.”

Benedict XVI keenly notes that Bonaventure's theology is richly Christocentric, and the Pope posits that it is no coincidence that the first major project of Bonaventure's, completed in order to teach theology and obtain the *licentia ubique docendi*, was the treatise *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*.<sup>38</sup> This Christocentric emphatic thrust to the wide-ranging corpus of the Seraphic Doctor contributed significantly to the development of the Franciscan intellectual tradition.

The Holy Father then recounts the internal political struggle that plagued the nascent University of Paris between the mendicant faculty (Franciscans and Dominicans) and the so-called secular masters. In doing so, he praises Bonaventure for his skillful response to the charges leveled against the mendicants by the seculars and for the ardent defense the Seraphic Doctor gives for the evangelical counsels in light of the Gospel.

Beyond these historical circumstances, the teaching offered by Bonaventure in this work of his and in his life is always timely: The Church becomes luminous and beautiful by fidelity to the vocation of those sons and daughters of hers who not only put into practice the evangelical precepts, but who, by the grace of God, are called to observe their advice and thus give witness, with their poor, chaste and obedient lifestyle, that the Gospel is source of joy and perfection.<sup>39</sup>

At a time when the number of religious vocations is noticeably declining in Europe and the Americas, a message from the Pope highlighting the evangelical contribution of those professed religious in our world is well received. That

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<sup>38</sup> See Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*, ed. Zachary Hayes, WSB IV (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Press, 2005); and Joshua Benson, "Structure and Meaning in St. Bonaventure's *Quaestiones Disputatae de Scientia Christi*," *Franciscan Studies* 62 (2004): 67-90.

<sup>39</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Proposing This Theme I Feel a Certain Nostalgia."

Benedict XVI ties such a contribution to Bonaventure's particular articulation of the *vita evangelica* of the mendicant orders is also edifying.

Bonaventure is then praised for his handling of the responsibility entrusted to him as the Minister General of Francis's Order. He notes that under Bonaventure's leadership, the Franciscan missionary zeal to spread the Gospel promoted mission journeys all over the world. Furthermore, during his tenure as General Minister Bonaventure wrote the masterpiece the *Legenda Major*, which was to become the official and authoritative biography of the founding saint. Here Benedict XVI offers his interpretation of Bonaventure's portrayal of Saint Francis in the *Legenda Major*:

What is the image of St. Francis that arises from the heart and pen of his devoted son and successor, St. Bonaventure? The essential point: Francis is an *alter Christus*, a man who passionately sought Christ. In the love that drives to imitation, he was entirely conformed to Him. Bonaventure pointed out this living ideal to all of Francis's followers. This ideal, valid for every Christian yesterday, today and always, was indicated as a program also for the Church of the Third Millennium by my predecessor, the Venerable John Paul II. This program, he wrote in the letter *Tertio Millennio Ineunte* is centered 'on Christ himself, who must be known, loved and imitated to live in Him the Trinitarian life, and, with Him, to transform history to its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem.'<sup>40</sup>

Bonaventure, for Benedict XVI, continues to offer the world wisdom that is ever timely and ever new. This wisdom, centered on Christ, looks to the paragon of Christian living – Francis of Assisi – as the model for how all Christians should strive to live their baptismal call.

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<sup>40</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Proposing This Theme I Feel a Certain Nostalgia." Benedict XVI cites paragraph number 29 of *Tertio Millennio Ineunte*.

**ON SAINT BONAVENTURE'S CONCEPT OF HISTORY  
(MARCH 10, 2010)**

Beginning this address in St. Peter's Basilica and then continuing it in the Paul VI general audience hall, Benedict XVI continued his reflection on the significance and influence of Bonaventure. The pontiff starts his catechetical reflection with the assertion that among the many merits of Bonaventure's thought, the Seraphic Doctor was primarily and authentically the interpreter of the figure St. Francis of Assisi. He understood the *Poverello* in a faithful and insightful manner and it was by this grace that Bonaventure was able to put forth an image of Francis that was at once legitimate and prophetic.

The context for Benedict XVI's address on Bonaventure's concept of history centers on the problematic movement of a small group of Franciscans in Bonaventure's day that sought to interpret the founding of the Order and the emergence of Francis of Assisi as prophetic figure in a way that aligned snugly with Joachim of Fiore's view of history. Bonaventure, familiar with the Calabrian Abbot's work and an appreciator of at least certain features of Joachim's thought, developed a theological response in the form of both his *Legenda Major* as well as his *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*. It is in these two texts, but especially the *Hexaëmeron*, that Bonaventure outlines his theology of history.<sup>41</sup> The *Hexaëmeron* is the text that captured the lifelong interest of Joseph Ratzinger, beginning during his research for the *Habilitationsschrift* and continuing even through his pontificate. In his address, Benedict XVI summarized the setting and structure of Bonaventure's *Hexaëmeron*:

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<sup>41</sup> The *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* are found in volume V of *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, eds. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 10 vols. (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1891). The English translation of the *Hexaëmeron* is Bonaventure, *Collations on the Six Days*, trans. José de Vinck, Works of Bonaventure vol. V (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1970).

St. Bonaventure addressed the problem [of errant theologies of history] in fact in his last work, a collection of conferences to [friars]<sup>42</sup> of the Paris *studium*, which remained unfinished and which was completed with the transcriptions of the hearers. It was titled “*Hexaëmeron*,” that is, an allegorical explanation of the six days of creation. The Fathers of the Church considered the six or seven days of the account of creation as a prophecy of the history of the world, of humanity. The seven days represented for them seven periods of history, later interpreted also as seven millennia. With Christ we would have entered the last, namely, the sixth period of history, which would then be followed by the great Sabbath of God. St. Bonaventure accounts for this historical interpretation of the relation of the days of creation, but in a very free and innovative way.<sup>43</sup>

What follows is a very brief recapitulation of the pontiff’s *Habilitationsschrift* given in the form of a commentary on Bonaventure’s development of a theology of history in light of the twofold challenge that faced the Seraphic Doctor in his time; namely, (a) dealing with the unique figure of Francis and his Order as a liminal experience of ecclesiastical history and (b) safely navigating the complicated insights of Joachim of Fiore that were gaining particular attention at that time. Bonaventure’s response was to illustrate how Francis’s Order was not something apart from the hierarchic Church community. Instead, Francis – while remaining a unique figure of historical and spiritual significance – always remained in communion with the rest of the Church. This was a direct response to some Joachite factions of the day that were leaning toward more anarchic manifestations of Franciscan life.

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<sup>42</sup> The Pope mistakenly uses the term “monks” in reference to the Friars minor that gathered to hear the *collationes* of Bonaventure.

<sup>43</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Proposing This Theme I Feel a Certain Nostalgia.”

In four points, Benedict XVI traces the development of Bonaventure's theology of history (and, therefore, restates his own scholarly work). The first two points are refutations of errant, or at least unorthodox, Joachite positions. Bonaventure rejects the Joachite Trinitarian view of history, insisting that God is one and therefore history is one – not divided into three divinities associated with a threefold rhythm of history. Additionally, Bonaventure insists that Jesus Christ is the “last word of God” and that “there is not another higher Gospel, there is not another Church to await.”<sup>44</sup>

The third point occupies the largest portion of Benedict XVI's address on the subject. This feature of Bonaventure's theology of history is that of its progressive nature. According to the Pope, this is a novel introduction to the concept of history original to Bonaventure. This view rests on the Christocentric foundations for Bonaventure's theology. Unlike the view of many in the Patristic era, Bonaventure does not see Christ as the end of history, but Christ is instead the center of history. With Christ a new period in history begins. In other words, Bonaventure allows for the possibility of *the new*. This is how he connects the emergence of the person Francis of Assisi and his *new* movement. Francis confirms that the richness of the word of Christ “is inexhaustible and that also new lights can appear in the new generations. The Uniqueness of Christ also guarantees novelties and renewal in all the periods of history.”<sup>45</sup>

This third point, concerning the progressive quality of history, is especially important to the Pope who draws on this insight to speak about the Second Vatican Council. Benedict XVI has occasionally discussed the concept of both novelty and continuity in the promulgations of the Council Fathers. The Second Vatican Council did not do something entirely “different,” but instead features into the ongoing progress of history in revelation.

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<sup>44</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Proposing This Theme I Feel a Certain Nostalgia.”

<sup>45</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Proposing This Theme I Feel a Certain Nostalgia.”

The final point has to do with the way in which Benedict XVI sees Bonaventure's theology of history play a significant role in the pastoral and praxiological dimensions of the Seraphic Doctor's governance of the Order and leadership roles in the broader Christian community. Benedict XVI explained:

Thus we see that for St. Bonaventure, to govern was not simply a task but was above all to think and to pray. At the base of his government we always find prayer and thought; all his decisions resulted from reflection, from thought illumined by prayer. His profound contact with Christ always accompanied his work as minister-general and that is why he composed a series of theological-mystical writings, which express the spirit of his government and manifest the intention of guiding the order interiorly, of governing, that is, not only through commands and structures, but through guiding and enlightening souls, orienting them to Christ.<sup>46</sup>

This reflection offers powerful insights upon which the Holy Father would do well to reflect, as would any person in pastoral leadership – lay, religious or ordained – today. In the wake of ongoing discovery of misjudgment, abuse and negligence on the part of some entrusted with Church governance, this model of ecclesiastical leadership – one absolutely rooted in reflective thought and prayer – is a welcome reminder of what the vocation to servant leadership in the Church is truly about. It is only through one's own "profound contact with Christ" that Church leaders of our day might serve the Lord and the Church effectively by orienting the faithful to Christ. There is perhaps no more timely a reflection that the Pope could have offered.

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<sup>46</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Proposing This Theme I Feel a Certain Nostalgia."



**ON THEOLOGY ACCORDING TO THOMAS AND BONAVENTURE  
(MARCH 17, 2010)**

This address marks the third and final reflection on St. Bonaventure and the last of Benedict XVI's 2009-2010 Franciscan series. The Pope begins his catechesis with a summary of the manifold ways Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas are alike. Such similarities include their membership in newly established mendicant orders, their respective academic work in Paris and the fact that they both died in the year 1274, among other things. However, it is not the likeness that Benedict XVI desired to illustrate, but the differences.

The heading under which the two Church Doctors' differences are presented is the nature of theology. For Thomas, Benedict XVI notes, theology serves a twofold function that allows us to know God better (the theoretical quality of theology) and to live in a right and just way (the practical quality of theology). Both of these dimensions contribute to the interpretation of Thomas's approach as being rooted in the primacy of knowledge. Bonaventure, on the other hand, moves beyond the twofold function of theology (theoretical and practical) offered by Thomas to include a third (sapiential) feature that serves as the launching point for his own articulation of the ultimate destiny of men and women, which, of course, is the subject matter of theology.<sup>47</sup> Bonaventure maintains a primacy of love. Benedict XVI explained: "For St. Bonaventure, [humanity's] ultimate destiny is instead to love God, the encounter and the union of his love and our own. This is for him the most adequate definition of our happiness."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For more on this theme see Gregory LaNave, "God, Creation, and the Possibility of Philosophical Wisdom: Perspective of Bonaventure and Aquinas," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 812-33; Gregory LaNave, *Through Holiness to Wisdom: The Nature of Theology According to St. Bonaventure* (Rome: Istituto Storico Dei Cappuccini, 2005); and Charles Carpenter, *Theology as the Road to Holiness in St. Bonaventure* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Different Accents in an Essentially Shared Vision," *On Theology According to Thomas and Bonaventure* (March 17, 2010).

Taking this distinction between the primacy of knowledge and the primacy of love for Thomas and Bonaventure respectively, Benedict XVI then explains that each medieval thinker posits a different highest category: For Thomas it is truth, while for Bonaventure it is the good. The Pope sees a reciprocal and complementary relationship between these two categories, for in God the good is true and truth is the good. In this way Benedict XVI asserts that the Franciscan and Dominican actually hold a shared vision, if each accents that vision differently.

At this point in his address, Benedict XVI abandons any further reflection on St. Thomas to instead focus again on Bonaventure in an exclusive way. The Holy Father is particularly interested in exploring the sources for Bonaventure's primacy of love. It might be safe to presume that the nearly hegemonic presence of Thomas's theology since Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter *Aeternis Patris*, which established Thomas Aquinas as the paradigmatic theologian for the Roman Catholic Church, inspired Benedict XVI to emphasize the less-known work of Bonaventure. It is also certainly true that Bonaventure's primacy of love has and continues to shape Benedict XVI's own theological and spiritual outlook (recall again his first encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est*).

Benedict XVI identifies the source of this primacy of love in two places: the very foundational charism of Francis of Assisi and the theological treatises of the so-called Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>49</sup> The Pope sees in the example of Francis's whole life a *vita evangelica* consumed with love. It was the very model of Francis's life that naturally compelled Bonaventure to, at least in part, preference love over knowledge as the highest category. Additionally, the sixth-century thinker, Pseudo-Dionysius, provided much of the language and theological organization that contributed to Bonaventure's articulation of the primacy of love. When Bonaventure syn-

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<sup>49</sup> While these two sources are incontestably antecedent influences for the development of Bonaventure's primacy of love, I would also include both the Augustinian corpus and the Victorine school, most especially Richard of St. Victor.

thesizes Francis's charism and Pseudo-Dionysius's theological insight the result is a profound theological system rooted in love. Benedict XVI, drawing again from his own scholarly work and preempting criticism of Bonaventure's primacy of love when compared to Thomas's approach, emphatically rejects the notion that Bonaventure is "anti-intellectual" or "anti-rational." Benedict XVI suggested that Bonaventure's approach "implies the way of reason, but transcends it in the love of the crucified Christ."<sup>50</sup> It is the Cross that serves as the centerpiece of Bonaventure's marriage of Francis and Pseudo-Dionysius.

Concluding his address with a short reflection on the connection between the Cross and the primacy of love in Bonaventure's theology, Benedict XVI briefly remarked on the Christocentric cosmology in the Seraphic Doctor's work that additionally links him with Francis:

This theology of the cross, born of the encounter between the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius and Franciscan spirituality, must not make us forget that St. Bonaventure also shares with St. Francis of Assisi's love of creation, the joy of the beauty of God's creation. I quote on this point a phrase of the first chapter of the *Itinerarium*: 'He who does not see the innumerable splendors of creatures, is blind; he who is not awakened by so many voices, is deaf; he who for all these wonders does not praise God, is dumb; he who from so many signs does not rise to the first principle, is foolish.' The whole of creation speaks in a loud voice of God, of the good and beautiful God; of his love.<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps more than in the previous addresses, we see in these concluding remarks Benedict XVI's admiration for the

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<sup>50</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Different Accents in an Essentially Shared Vision."

<sup>51</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Different Accents in an Essentially Shared Vision."

Seraphic Doctor and the Franciscan tradition that he was so much a part of and contributor to. In an age marked by global ecological crises and concerns for the health and safety of our planet, the focus on the Christocentric cosmological view of Bonaventure provides a refreshing endorsement of the possibility of a Franciscan contribution to ecotheological efforts that are so significant today.

### **BETWEEN ROME AND ASSISI: INTERPRETATION AND ECCLESIOLOGY**

The title of this article, “What Does Rome have to do with Assisi?” is a play on the famous Tertullian quote from around 197 C.E. that was aimed at critiquing the increasing appropriation of Hellenistic philosophy by the early Church. Following Tertullian, I pose a similar question that is aimed at highlighting the relationship between Pope Benedict XVI and the Franciscan intellectual tradition, geographically identified as Rome and Assisi respectively. There is no question that the theologian-turned-pope has a certain affinity for Francis of Assisi and the subsequent intellectual and spiritual tradition that counts among its contributors luminaries the likes of Anthony of Padua and Bonaventure. The question that can, and should, be raised has to do with the type of interpretation resulting from Benedict XVI’s engagement with the Franciscan tradition or what sort of “Franciscan hermeneutic” informs the pontiff’s reading of the sources. A complete account of Benedict XVI’s “Franciscanism” is beyond the scope of this current article, but some observations can be made in light of the Pope’s recent addresses on Franciscan themes. Perhaps the most noticeable theme that emerges from these addresses is Benedict XVI’s view of the relationship between the Franciscan Order(s) and the Church, the relationship between Assisi and Rome.

In the two earliest addresses, those offering reflections on the foundation of the nascent Franciscan Order and on the figure of Francis himself, Benedict XVI dedicates a significant

portion of his talks to highlighting what he perceived as Francis's loyalty to those in positions of ecclesiastical authority. Noting that Francis, unlike several of his fellow charismatic contemporaries, sought official recognition from Rome for his newly established religious movement early on, Benedict XVI offers obedience to the same ecclesiastical authorities as a constitutive element of the Franciscan charism. This is something that was articulated with particular emphasis in his address to the Franciscan family at the 2009 Chapter of Mats. While, indeed, obedience to Honourious III and his legitimate successors is in fact an early component of the Francis's way of life, it should not be overemphasized to a point that elevates perceptible allegiance (which, in Robert Bellarmine-like terms, is really what is being advocated here) at the expense of what is outlined in the preceding chapters of the *Regula*. The way of living in the world, the particularly prophetic stance demanded by authentic embrace of Francis's *vita evangelica*, will inevitably at times speak a challenging word to the same ecclesiastical authorities, albeit in a respectful manner. To strongly identify Franciscan living with Roman governance is to impose strictures that are in fact artificial and circumscriptive. While already evoked above, the action of peace offered by Francis during the Fifth Crusade is perhaps the most powerful and perennial example to consider. It would seem that Benedict XVI's emphasis on a particular and identifiable communion with Rome reveals, more than anything, his interpretation of what constitutes "Franciscan ecclesiology."<sup>52</sup> In response to the Tertullian-like question, for Benedict XVI, Rome has *a lot* to do with Assisi.

With the remaining addresses, but particularly with the three on Bonaventure, we see something of a different engagement with the Franciscan tradition. Moving from what Benedict XVI seems to consider a structural or corporate contribution to the Church (the Orders of Francis), and concerning which the pontiff is primarily addresses continued com-

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<sup>52</sup> For an alternative view of a constructive and contemporary "Franciscan ecclesiology," see Kenan Osborne, *A Theology of the Church for the Third Millennium: A Franciscan Approach* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

munion, the Pope reveals more of a pastoral reflection that is significantly rooted in the theology of those sons of Francis that so shaped the theological milieu of the thirteenth century. If Benedict XVI's initial addresses were focused on what Rome has to do with Assisi, then his latter reflections had more to do with what Assisi has to do with Rome. This is perhaps most acutely perceptible in his reflection on Bonaventure's view of history at which point the Pope discusses the insights of Bonaventure's theologically grounded approach for governance. Rooted in prayer and reflective thought, Bonaventure lays before ecclesiastical authorities a *modus operandi* that prioritizes discernment of the Spirit and openness to God's will over other priorities of leadership. Buttressed by a theological foundation rooted in the primacy of love, Bonaventure's example is one of timely application and worthy of serious examination today. Furthermore, Assisi presents to Rome a rich tradition of spirituality exemplified in the writings of Francis, Anthony and Bonaventure. Benedict XVI sees the Franciscan spiritual tradition as contributing to the ongoing renewal of the Church, while at one-and-the-same time not breaking the continuity of apostolic tradition.

Pope Benedict XVI offers us a unique interpretation on the relationship between the Franciscan tradition and the wider Christian community. Shaded by his own scholarly engagement with and admiration for figures like Francis, Anthony and Bonaventure, Benedict XVI sees the continued value of the Franciscan tradition for contemporary appropriation by the whole Church. These wisdom figures provide insight that has not been emphasized to the degree that they could be and therefore often remain largely unexamined beyond superficial portrayal in birdbaths and among lilies. Although the conversation remains ongoing concerning Benedict XVI's status as a "Franciscan theologian," it is fair to say that the current pontiff has a deep appreciation for the broad Franciscan tradition that transcends that of many other Church leaders. What sort of "Franciscan theologian" Benedict XVI might be also remains to be seen. For now, at least we can say that he sees an important relationship between Rome and

Daniel Horan

Assisi. Time will tell whether those that constitute "Rome" and "Assisi" will each see that relationship as he does.





## **CHRIST OUR MODEL, JESUS OUR FRIEND**

**GIRARD ETZKORN**

This essay pretends to counteract a mind-set. It makes no pretensions at academic profundity, but rather is an attempt to return to our Christian roots. It is an appeal to reflect on how the Gospel message is doing today. The message of Vatican II reminded us that we are “the people of God,” that there is a “priesthood of the faithful.” To the casual observer it is apparent that there has been serious backsliding since Pope John XXIII tried to open the windows for a breath of ecclesiastical fresh air. We “the people of God” are a community of believers. Even dyspeptic Ockham reminded his leaders that the indefectibility of the faith/church resides in the community of believers and not exclusively in the popes, hierarchy or clergy.

In this little essay I am beholden to the wonderful insights of John Duns Scotus and Teilhard de Chardin who, in a major reversal of a long lasting mind-set, have reminded us that Christ, the firstborn of all creation, is the center of our universe. The incarnation of the Son of God is not primarily “motivated” as redeeming us from sin but primarily as embodying a life according to which we can model our behavior. In short, Christ’s life is one which we can imitate, not slavishly (times and cultures change), but each of us according to our talents and abilities. Jesus is rightly characterized as “going about doing good.” While we are not generally capable of effecting miracles, we do have the potential for doing good. As Christians, our first allegiance and communion is with Jesus our guide, model and friend.



In my 82 plus years, I have never heard a sermon on “Jesus our friend” and yet it was he who told us “you are my friends”; I submit that it would be a pernicious exegesis to view this as restricted to the apostles and disciples. Friendship is possible only between equals as Aristotle reminded us long ago and in this respect Jesus has “consented” to be our friend. Friendship is a relationship of love, of communion, of community, of promoting the common good. The enemies of friendship are exclusivity and a “holier than thou” attitude. The relationship embedded in friendship and communality affects both the secular and religious realms and, needless to say, it is presently far from perfect.

In the middle ages, due in part to Aristotle’s commentator, Ibn Roschd (Averroes), relations came to be considered as having “diminished being/ontology” compared to Aristotle’s categories of substance, quantity and quality. Prior to this, some theologians regarded grace as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but this was not in vogue for long, and grace, resorting to Aristotle’s category, came to be quantified with the consequent of “demeaning” relationship/friendship. In general, the application of Aristotle’s categories to Christian sacramentology had disastrous effects, but that is another story.

There are many obstacles to communion with our fellow humans. Perhaps the most powerful obstacle is power addiction (a.k.a. in the secular realm “control freaks”) which sets up barriers to our communality as human beings in our cosmos. A power addict is incapable of love, a power addict does not want to be loved but only to be obeyed or submitted to. In recent years power addiction of those who are prone to manipulating others, often in the pursuit of wealth, has caused widespread devastation in the lives of those who were initially responsible for helping the addicts accumulate their wealth. This has been obvious in the major corporations of Enron, Worldcom and Adelphia. Power and greed thus stand as primary obstacles to the commonweal.

Power addicts invariably erect barriers to protect what they regard as their privileged domain. They are intolerant of dissent or alternate proposals. Whether consciously or not,

they regard themselves at the top of a hierarchy of power. This has repercussions in both the secular and religious realms. As the existentialist philosophers have noted: dialogue, true love and sharing can exist only between equals. To put it in another way: a stratified society, where certain classes are deemed to house superior persons, is not conducive to friendship and communality. Presidents, governors, popes and bishops might more correctly speak of their former friends.

Likewise, we are presently witnesses to an on-going failure of democracy whereby our elected officials are beholden to lobbyists and propose earmarked/pork barrel legislation designed primarily for getting them re-elected. The majority of these representatives voted in favor of an immoral and unjust war causing a terrible loss of lives and limbs at a cost of trillions of dollars and then we were told that we can't afford health care for all Americans. Ignorance of the criteria for a just war should be an impeachable offense!

Another obstacle to our common humanity is nationalism or xenophobia. Anyone who believes that the overflowing goodness of God is responsible for our universe and all of its peoples cannot hold that God favors one race or nation over another. It is inconceivable that God loves America more than France or Japan or Indonesia or China or Brazil. Those addicted to xenophobia would banish all others from the all-embracing goodness of God's love. We Americans are presently witnesses to a xenophobia regarding immigrants based apparently on an unwillingness to share our affluence. Even the most die-hard proponent of established Christianity would have a hard time condemning pre-Christian Japanese, Chinese, Indonesians or Australian aborigines to hell because Christ had not yet come. The followers of Jesus may be privileged to be guided by the Jewish and Christian scriptures but this must be viewed with gratitude and not self-righteousness. Shintoists, Confusionists, Buddhists and Hindus also have traditions by which they can be guided, hopefully without any accompanying xenophobia.

Within the Christian community, our communality, our communion and the possibility of friendship and mutual love

is also often impeded. Again the primary obstacle is the abuse of power. Each of us has power, on loan as it were from our Creator. We have the power of physical movement, of sight, of hearing, of thinking and reflecting, of making free decisions. However, when we use our powers by resorting to violence of any kind, whether physical or psychological, we are abusing our powers and it is this abuse which does harm to the common good. A cursory reading of the Gospels shows that Jesus never abused his powers. He invited, he cajoled, he shamed, but he never resorted to violence against his fellow humans. He embodied the precept of Socrates: it is better to suffer injustice than to cause it. Jesus was a fundamental pacifist. This model has not transferred felicitously and consistently into the Roman Catholic tradition. The mind-set of control still prevails. This has been dramatically demonstrated in what I would call (without remorse) the unchristlike tradition of the inquisition. Joan of Arc was burned at the stake, presumably for hearing voices, wearing men's clothing and leading an army and she was subsequently canonized! Galileo was condemned to house arrest for the heresy of claiming that the sun and not the earth was the center of our planetary system. It doesn't seem to occur to inquisitors that they might be more ignorant or less orthodox than those under suspicion. Is not faith by force an oxymoron? I think it was John Chrysostom who once said that one shouldn't bother spending time refuting falsehood, it will die a natural death ... a nice tribute to the human spirit.

More recently, Roman Catholicism (not exclusively mind you) has experienced a terrible abuse of power whereby pedophilia in some of the clergy was covered up and even allowed to continue. Often when the families of the victims objected and sought closure, they were treated as troublemakers and unloyal Catholics! In dealing with the pedophilia crisis, the Vatican and hierarchy would have us believe that all manifestations of power abuse have been corrected. They would have us believe that cover-up is justified to protect the institution. What is needed is a frank admission of guilt followed by compassion and redress for the abused. Then there can be forgiveness and healing for the victims and their

families. If the Gospel is to be our rule of life, and not tradition tout court which is both good and bad (witness the aforementioned inquisitional and cover-up mistakes!), then the abuse of power cannot be reasonably countenanced in a Christlike mind-set.

If Vatican II called for a more meaningful participation of the laity in the governance of the church, they did not provide effective means for implementing this participation. There is still no effective medium for evaluating the performances of the clergy and hierarchy. The laity have nothing to say about the qualifications of candidates for priestly ordination. The laity still have nothing to say regarding the election of bishops, a process still conducted in secrecy. The parish councils are a rather feeble attempt at lay participation since the pastor has the ultimate veto power. Hence effective participation of the laity for the most part is monetary and the right to protest resides in boycotting the collection basket.

One of the titles the popes have accumulated over the ages is *servus servorum Dei*. To the disinterested non-Catholic observer, this must be regarded as rather odd since servants don't get their hands kissed, much less their feet. There is another title, *pontifex maximus*, which seems better to accord with current practices and circumstances and is more in the tradition of Constantine rather than the mandate of Christ who required his apostles to be servants and not lords. After the washing of the apostles' feet, Jesus remarked "Do you know what I have done?" One could say that they didn't get it then and, too often, they haven't gotten it since. Leadership as service is beautifully exemplified by Jesus and mandated for his followers. The best leader should say to himself or herself many times a day: How can I help? Our hope as Christians regarding the coming of the kingdom is found in our pastors and priests who exemplify leadership as service.

The prevailing mind-set in the hierarchy and clergy (not all, thank goodness!) has not adapted well to the present time when the majority of the faithful are well-educated, some with doctorates in philosophy and theology. The time for patronizing the laity should be long over! Currently there is cause for

worry in that, given the desperate need for male priests, candidates could be ordained with minimal education in logic (truth is not guaranteed by being able to emit verbal sounds!), philosophy and even theology which lack of training can at times lead to an emotionalism bordering on fundamentalism. Gregory the Great once said that if a preacher cannot beget spiritual children, he should be deprived of his office. I take begetting spiritual children to mean the providing of spiritual nourishment which priests and bishops should regard as their primary responsibility. The administration of the sacraments does not require a great deal of preparation or effort. Providing spiritual nourishment requires a lot of reading and reflecting ... no one has an inexhaustible store of solid spiritual food. In my forty years of retrieving the works of medieval philosopher-theologians from the manuscripts, I have found a rich storehouse of thought-provoking material in the sermons of medieval authors, some of which are available in English translations. Current preachers would likewise do well to draw from the wells of living water in contemporary authors, such as Richard Rohr, Donald Cozzens, Henry Nouwen and Wm. Paul Young, who are alerting the crew that the ship is leaking.

Today, I submit, it is unconscionable for the laity, men and women, to be regarded as a lower caste. Here the divine Trinity can be our model where there is no hierarchy but mutual love, harmony and esteem. Jesus, the Word Incarnate, consented to be our friend and was like all of us "in everything but sin." Jesus' life and words are a call for communion with all humankind and also with our cosmos, with our (only?) habitable planet and all that this involves. As the saying goes "talk is cheap," but Jesus' talk and behavior led to his death, making his words and deeds precious indeed.

**ALL ARE WELCOME**

**KAREN ZIELINSKI, O.S.F.**

I need to widen my tent.

These words, during one of our monthly “Third Tuesday for Peace” prayer gatherings in our chapel, kept cropping up. Our prayer leader led us through a rich variety of readings and thoughts for the evening prayer.

The service opened with some introductory words, noting that,

At their November 2007 General Assembly, the 192 member States of the United Nations unanimously adopted February 20th as The World Day of Social Justice.

So 2009 marked the first year that The World Day of Social Justice was observed internationally – an important day for all persons in our global village but especially for those of us committed to living the Good News of peace and justice. The Sisters of St. Francis of Sylvania, Ohio have been praying for peace on the third Tuesday of every month ever since.

Our prayer started with an antiphonal praying of *A Psalm To Widen Our Tents*:

*Our world is too small.*

*Our lives are too small. Our vision is too restricted.*

*Help us to widen our tents, Loving Creator God, so that all are welcome among us.*

*Our attitudes are too parochial, our assumptions too simplistic, our behavior too predictable.*

*May special people, may the differently-abled, may minorities of any kind – of race, class or gender – find room in our world and in our hearts.<sup>1</sup>*

The words of Pope Paul VI, a mantra from novitiate days, came flooding into my heart, “If you want peace, work for justice.”

We all exclude people who are different than us from our tents. We might exclude those who have different interests, or even those who cheer for different sports teams! Sometimes we exclude people because of their cultural or political affiliations, or for their work ethic. We might exclude persons with disability, not intentionally, but because we might not have thought large enough; we think too exclusively, staying in our usual circles. The result is that we are then omitting a rich group of people who could come into our tent, enriching our lives.

For the most part, we exclude people unintentionally. Sometimes, though, we might choose to exclude others, and that is not right. It is a matter of justice that all should be welcome. A good practice for me is to ask myself, “How would I feel if I would not be invited into the tent?”

The biggest evil is not war or hatred, but rather a person’s tendency to exclude others. It seems to be a universal human condition, of wanting to belong to a group, of not being excluded. When I taught high school the students in the classroom became anxious before heading to the cafeteria for lunch. They were worried they would not get a seat at a friendly lunch table, a table where there were popular students or their friends. This condition sometimes extends to our adult lives. We might not enter a room where people are having a cup of coffee, or a meeting place where people are

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<sup>1</sup> Miriam Therese Winter, “A Psalm To Widen Our Tents,” in *Woman Wisdom* (NY: Crossroad Publications, 1991), 105.

gathered because we feel we are not quite welcome. We might not attend an event or social gathering because we feel there is no room in that tent for us. This is the time when we can open up and widen our tents with a simple, "Glad to see you! Please join us."

We might exclude others by our attitudes. I went to a Detroit Red Wings hockey game this past winter and walked down the cement steps in Joe Louis arena to great seats which were eight rows from the ice. Because I walk with a cane and use an electric cart at work, people are surprised that I can stand, walk up steps or drive. My balance is not good, but I manage steps if there is a handrail, or if someone lends me his or her arm as I go up or down the steps.

I continually hear from people that they "would invite me to their house, a meeting, etc., but there are steps involved to get into the room. I know you cannot do stairs." This reminds me of the saying in the disability world that our greatest disability is the attitude of people toward those with disability. Sometimes people limit what I can do based on what they think I can do. I can walk up and down steps, and the only thing that keeps me from walking steps is when people don't invite me to walk them because they think I can't.

Often, we do not let people who have ideas different than ours into our tent. An idea that we hold passionately might close a tent flap to others who believe just as firmly in the opposing view. What a lost opportunity when we exclude the gift of differently-thinking people from our lives just because they hold an opposing insight!

We humans have countless ways of narrowing our tent to others who may be minorities of class, race or gender. Our lives are indeed too small and our vision too restricted when we alone decide who is worthy to come into our tents. A tent is a flexible and large space. It seems we need to find room for a number of wonderful, new people to enter this space. We must find room in our hearts and our world for the exciting group of different-than-we-are tent dwellers!



## THE EARLY WRITINGS

DAVID FLOOD, O.F.M.

One day I set out to trace the genealogy of the Rule. To do the genealogy of the Rule (published by Pope Honorius III in 1223), a laudable undertaking, an historian has to be clear about the *Early Rule* (ER) from which it comes. Alas, historians today still pretend Francis of Assisi wrote it. Andre Vauchez says without bothering to tarry at the assertion that Francis produced it when he came back from the Orient and did his best to put order back into the brotherhood. Luigi Pellegrini and P. Maranese propose likewise: there seems to be some consensus on the point. Such easy attribution of the text to Francis is preposterous on the face of it. The ER bears the marks of its development. In his Recall and Exhortation (as Francis characterizes his last words<sup>1</sup>), Francis refers to an original piece of writing. He refers to it as he sees it in 1226. It is not the text he has in mind, but the history it got going, his role in it, and the usefulness of the reference to what he is saying. Others had their own memories, about which we know only the fact that they were there and said yes to the common text. I say (and have often argued) that that original written accord among the brothers contained Chapters I, VII, and XIV of the *Early Rule*, VII certainly in an early state. The *Early Rule* shows signs of development. Certainly ER IX was

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<sup>1</sup> The lessons learned by the brothers came from the bustle of their laboring lives and not from Francis's mountain time. The *recordatio* refers to a common experience. What he leaves them (*testamentum*) is what they learned together (*recordatio*).

not written down at the start nor in 1221, for it answered problems that arose at the start and had been transcended by 1221. Chapters IV and V about reorganization in smaller groups were written and expanded in 1217-1219. James of Vitry knew about the work the brothers did on their written accord in 1216. In his *Letter to a Minister*, Francis offered lines that belonged to the discussion at a later chapter. And so on. Francis did not write the *Early Rule*.

Writers about Francis of Assisi tend to suppose that Francis of Assisi wrote the ER, for the ER belongs to “the writings of Saint Francis.” I can understand that, after his death, towards 1250 – to take the Assisi manuscript (Assisi, Bibl. Com., codex 338) as an example – a collection of writings from the early years, some of which were dictated by Francis (the *Commonitorium*, for example, where he had stood forth as the spokesperson of the brotherhood), brought together, had to be ascribed to someone, and it was easy to say Francis wrote them. The *Early Rule* was not among the writings in Assisi 338. In saying that, we must face the role played by the *Early Rule* in the turbulence of 1239. Brother Elias said at one moment that he had never sworn to the Rule of 1223. Thereupon he was obliged to do so; everyone did so at that moment, by an amazing feat of imposition, and the *Early Rule* was forcefully laid to rest. Then, with Assisi 338, Francis stepped into the role of author to the material from the early years and the practice held. As for the *Admonitions*, they arose alongside the ER, as help in holding fast to its understandings and intentions. For example, given their closeness to ER XVII, *Admonitions* VII-XII cannot be dated to the years after 1223 (although it has been so proposed). They bear a Franciscan stamp but not necessarily the personal stamp of Francis himself. Call them “precious pearls of [Francis’s] spiritual wisdom” if you like. Read that way they are often as dull as the so wise advice of Polonius. The early writings arose within the brotherhood, over the years. Their story is interesting, not some abstract formulation of a saint.

In this matter of the origin of the early writings, it is important to nail down the point that Francis of Assisi certainly

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did not write the *Early Rule*. I say that because the ER is the primary source of all the other texts: of all the texts, including those Francis did write. It carves out the space and tries out the words of brotherly exchange, selecting and developing the terminology of what gets said. It shows us how key Franciscan terms, such as minor, poverty, work, true-peace, arrived on the scene. Blasphemy was used in ER XVII, then explained in *Admonition* VIII, and so became a word in the Franciscan dictionary. Francis did that? All by himself? He invented a language: now that's a real saint! I hesitate to do so, but I think we need some close analysis of early Franciscan discourse, for I have not had any success by merely pointing to what I think evident.

We have to give close attention to *Early Rule* VII and to the opening lines in particular. From the first days on, the brothers had to see to their material needs. I say that they had cleared that up as they began tracing the initial lines of their common life. They certainly needed an answer to the question in the very first days, if not prior to their common commitment. If they had not resolved the question by working and by not taking money, if they relied on another economics, of which begging was the sole alternative, then they would have turned into another brotherhood. And they not only worked to cover their needs; they elaborated their own notion of work. I take that to mean that they made work central to their life when they began, for they soon saw to it that they determined what their working meant. They would not have done that if work had been a side issue in their initial public foray, a necessity they fell back on when they got hungry.

Then, if we look at the opening lines of the chapter, we see that the brothers quickly eliminated some tasks as they set up their relation to working colleagues. The elimination was backgrounded by a variety of experiences. In such wise did they arrive at their definition of work as service, in a consciously relational and not merely practical sense. That relation to others at the work site developed into their basic approach to people. We see in *Early Rule* XVI that they used it when they went among non-christians. We see it in the

proclamation that has come down to us as *Early Rule XXIII*. In his final words, the *Recordatio et Exhortatio*, Francis gave his brothers one strong practical instruction: Go work; learn if you have to. Work had gotten the movement going. The brothers had given it a particular dynamic. Then, circa 1240, work was the first major victim of the clerical *coup d'ordre*. Work as a particular mode of Franciscan behavior belonged to the origins of the *vita*. When it was dropped, the movement was over, its thrust a stump.

The opening lines of *Early Rule VII* are a tortured text, in the sense that the lines packed in a lot. Translations do not make that evident, for a translation wants a readable and not necessarily a belabored text. And the belabored text the brothers got was a text they understood very well, for they had to, whereas one who did not belong to its formulation had a great deal to figure out. Even a translation can attempt to show the ins and outs of a carefully worded text, without, however, giving it its original resonance. I tried to get closer to its meaning in translating *Early Rule VII* 1-2 in "Franciscans at Work" ten years ago.<sup>2</sup> I proposed taking *officium* as a feudal term and *minores* as a political one. The brothers knew what the two terms meant. They would not have been sure if they had not reached the wording by an open process. Had one man dictated the text, it would not have come out this way. He would have had to offer some explanation. Here we find ourselves at a defining moment in the *vita* and the brothers make the point as a group, drawing on their experience. They are authoring the *Early Rule*, not Francis.

In *Early Rule X* the brothers put their policy on sick brothers into writing. Writing it down was a security measure. Once done, Francis spoke up and offered a sick brother counsel on dealing with sickness. He concluded the counsel by saying that a sick brother who fights against his sickness and wants special care "does not seem to belong among the brothers," in the sense that there were basics he had not understood. Francis invited the brothers to think about dealing

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<sup>2</sup> *Franciscan Studies* 2001, 25.

with sickness in their own new way. The wording indicates that he was broaching an opinion. He was emerging as a brother who had a sure grasp of the brotherhood's need for clarity.

We have a difficult challenge to common understanding when the bothers confront the exercise of organizational power in *Early Rule* IV-V. The two chapters came about in 1217 and after: after I say because V deals with problems that arose around the service of ministers. We are then far along in the history of the brothers. Francis does not speak up in the first person plural, whereas the text gets to a very fine and important resolution in V 9-15. They are all basically *minores* to one another, they say as they establish a very delicate balance; and they all belong to the obedience of the Lord to the Father, which is one clear way of defining their common life. They are *minores* to one another, *fratres minores*. The qualification has to do with an inner-community question and not with the relations of the brothers to people outside the brotherhood. That question they had resolved earlier. Here they mean something wholly different from what *minores* and *subditi* mean in the opening lines of *Early Rule* VII. As is appropriate, they reach the definition of their relations to one another themselves, together, and not under the determination of Brother Francis. The whole question of organizational authority within the brotherhood was something that the brothers had to learn together and not a lesson that could be taught.

We can draw a similar argument out of *Early Rule* XVII. In Chapter XVII 10-16, the brothers distinguish clearly between the spirit of the world and the spirit of their association. They are telling themselves who they are, over against the effort of society to coopt them as holy men, as exemplary Christians, as one further glory of Assisi or Bettona or Sonstwo. Forced to do so, they have to confess their strong belief that the Spirit of the Lord has brought them this far along and they have no intention of doing anything else than continuing their journey to "true peace." The text that defines this clear border between them and their surroundings speaks in the first person plural. It continues as group speech in settling

the goal that they are pursuing, which is eminently political. *Bona Deo reddere* (XVII 17) envisages including everyone of central Italy's human agglomerations in the organization of life. Francis is not urging his brothers to think that way. They are thinking that way. Some have a better grasp on what is transpiring than others, but the lines exist between them, outside the mind of one man, as a common confession.

We can push examination of this part of the ER further. In ER XVII 12 we have two expressions, inner spirit (*in interiori spiritu*) and social geneality (*foris apparens hominibus*). The two catch the distinction the brothers are making. They make it in part thanks to the way some brothers do not socialize as easily as others do; they pick up clearly what is going on and, once pointed out, readily confirm it in the brotherhood's consciousness. In the coming and going of life among a varied population, outgoing brothers advance further into the suppositions of other people, offering them more trust than perhaps people deserve. Francis could risk advancing further into the lives of other people, for the distinction was sharply present in his heart and etched in his mind. He certainly needed the support of his socially suspicious brothers to share the distinction within the brotherhood and arrive at *Early Rule* XVII 10-16, with XVII 12 as a necessary stepping-stone to the confession of the Spirit of the Lord's presence in the brotherhood. Once made, of course, the movement of mind obliged them to answer the question that arose: Well, what are we about then, when moving among people and especially the working population?

We construct the coherence of an individual's story through his actions among others. In his life an individual is not grasped and wrought as was Francis in the later narratives. We know little about the individual's subjective life unless he speaks to and with others. His subjective life will always have its setting among the people in whose midst fate has cast him. We rob him of his historical dimension if we pretend to tell his story as a man, a holy man, a great and of course misunderstood man, with others the mere backdrop or scenery, the grateful or unconscious beneficiaries of his special grace. We grow as we reach out to our like and

deal with the troubles, personal and relational, of life, and that was Francis's story. We put his story together out of the ER, the *Admonitions*, the Message, and a few other pieces, read in context. His written prayers are prayers to which he would tempt us. He did not write them for God. All this is the archive that holds his secrets. With this material we can begin his story with the *Early Rule* and finish it with his parting words. What happens after that is the story of people's memory of Francis. It loses critical value the less that memory encompasses Francis's involvement with others.

If we do not deal critically and thoroughly with the early writings, beginning with the ER, we will not be able to deal with his various canonizations, the one celebrated by Pope Gregory IX, the one carefully constructed, and constructed joachimitically, by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, the wilfully individual story of Sabatier, which I, who have professed the Rule, find particularly offensive, and first of all the one in the minds of those who knew Francis and looked on him as a saint. If we neglect the early writings (the Early Writings), we lose track of the story that began in 1209. We fail to read well the Rule, by which Francis managed to salvage the *vita*. Then, inevitably, we fail to grasp the meaning of his parting words. We will not grasp the tragedy slowly taking shape among the brothers that culminates when, seizing a moment of confusion, an ambitious clerical clique seizes power and tries to erase the *vita* from history.

The recent publications of the narratives about Francis of Assisi, in New York (1999-2001) and Paris (2010), with the early writings as some sort of prehistory to his imaginary life after death, saunter voluminously down the sideroad onto which Paul Sabatier urged his colleagues and enticed his opponents. Sabatier and his critic Goetz agreed that the early writings should serve as criterion for assessing any historical contribution of the later narratives. Unfortunately, Sabatier did not have the interest to pry those sources open. He had his own firm understanding of Francis of Assisi. Moreover the narratives, he insisted, showed that he was right. Others took the approach as the task that lay ahead. It was open season; the hunt for new stories about Francis of As-



sisi had begun. Eventually the materials that resulted were brought together and published, first in Spain (1945), then in France (1968), and then in Chicago (1973). And, recently, once again.

In the meantime, beginning with courses on the early Franciscan writings in Moenchengladbach, Germany, in the 1930s, a new approach to early Franciscan history took shape and first appeared demonstratively in print with Kajetan Esser's study on the Testament of Francis of Assisi (1949). Esser proposed going into the detail of the early sources, called *The Writings of Saint Francis*, and scrutinizing the texts carefully for historical information.

Esser's attention to the early Franciscan writings initiated a new line of research and publication. Esser and others hoped their work would encourage and sustain a renewal of Franciscan life. This became very evident with the 1955 publication *Werkbuch zur Regel*, a substantial book on which OFMs, Coenuals, and Capuchins collaborated. Together they hoped this line of study and publication would renew and strengthen the Franciscan quality of the many communities that called themselves Franciscan. When *le livre bleu* came out, they decided with Coelde Verlag to hold to the approach of publishing sources apart, as a series and not as one thick collection.

I tied into this line of scholarship by studying under Esser in the early 1960s. However, whereas Esser turned his close reading of the writings into lessons of life left us by Francis (*The Writings of Saint Francis*, the *Admonitions* "precious pearls of spiritual wisdom"), I drew out of the *Early Rule* the basic elements of the early Franciscan story, to which Francis belonged. The *Early Rule* came about, not as a composition of Francis, but as the objectivation of the brotherhood's common consciousness. Francis and his brothers set out together, as agreed in a first written account of their intention and purpose, and gradually, through experience and reflection, arrived at the text we know as the Rule of 1221 (which I call the *Early Rule*). Factually, the early Franciscans produced an



emergent manifesto.<sup>3</sup> The result necessarily supplies us with a first dictionary of the movement's language. In particular, it allows us to do the genealogy of the Rule (of 1223). With this early material, we can elaborate with detail and clarity the first fifteen years of Franciscan history. It is the history Francis helped get on its feet, the journey he traveled with his brothers, and the context of his own story; it is the *vita* he kept alive, as well as he could, in the Rule. The people of the early Franciscan years knew who they were, admonished by Francis himself in *Early Rule* XXIV and his *Recordatio et Exhortatio* to recall and renew their trajectory, as they dealt with the Rule and then with the challenge of learned clerics determined to seize control of the brotherhood and steer it into new historical waters.

After Francis's death, the brotherhood passed into a troubled decade and a half. At the end of it, in 1239, the clerical clique had Brother Elias removed from office as general minister. That, in itself, was a good thing. Then they took charge of the organization, changed it from a working brotherhood into a pastoral organization by excluding work and promoting university learning. One new constitution closed the friary's front door to laborers and opened the back door wide to students and their masters. That was a very bad thing. This rejection of one mode of life and the institutionalization of a different mode of life did not settle well with all the brothers, of course. A new history had begun, and, as the prologue to the constitutions of 1260 gives us to understand, the good brothers of the earlier history had become the pariahs of the new history. It was a new and distinct history and not only a practical digression from what had been. Working for a just world is something wholly distinct from studying to improve and consolidate the unjust world – while fighting great intellectual battles, something well educated men enjoy doing.

We cannot see what happened in 1239 unless we first do the history of the original social entity and read well its *vita*. The ER gave rise to other texts. The Rule retains the

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<sup>3</sup> Those who love Francis of Assisi know quite well that their Francis would produce a manifesto rather than a rule.

line of action which Francis and his brothers developed. I say so, for Rule VI unambiguously places the brothers in that relation to Christian society with which they began in 1209. Of course they have no other economics than what they elaborated at work. The line is still there, consequently, in spite of the heavy controls and legal interpretations that soon overlaid it, not to mention the base infidelity of learned friars who distorted it. We have in the Early Writings, not only a way of assessing the narrative literature as Sabatier and Goetz agreed, but the means of reading the Franciscan narrative to which they belong. And that is neither the history of Franciscan scholasticism and its pastoral extensions nor some truth buried deep in the narrative literature about Brother Francis.



## BOOK REVIEW

***The Cross Was Their Book: Meditations on St. Francis's Prayer Before the Cross*** by André Cirino, O.F.M. Phoenix, AZ: Tau-Publishing, 2010. 80 pages, \$8.95.

André Cirino's many years as a pilgrim guide for the Franciscan Pilgrimage Program informs and illuminates his latest work, *The Cross Was Their Book: Meditations on St. Francis's Prayer before the Cross*. It is, in essence, a guide to Franciscan prayer life. The heart of the Franciscan tradition lies with the early companions of Francis whose prayer was based on their daily meditation before the cross. At that time, there were no books, breviaries, or bibles to share, only time, in solitude, with God. Cirino's invitation and challenge for us today is to find that same solitude and interiority with God that Francis shared with his first companions before the cross.

This meditative reflection corresponds closely to another book by André Cirino and Josef Raischl, *The Journey into God: A Forty-Day Retreat with Bonaventure, Francis and Clare*. The themes of light, faith, hope, love and the will of God, themes that animated Francis's prayer before the crucifix, are prevalent in both works. In *The Cross Was Their Book*, Cirino introduces each theme with a selection from one of the Franciscan sources and then brings the reflection to the present with stories from his life as a Franciscan. At the conclusion of each chapter, in continuation of the practice of the first Franciscans, he suggests relevant Scripture meditations and questions to guide the reader's own reflection.

Before delving into the book's content, Cirino offers some thoughts on meditation in the life of Francis, drawing on the work of Octavian Schmucki, a Capuchin friar. In his *Meditation in the Spirit of St. Francis of Assisi*, Schmucki comments that for Francis meditation was "the blissful savoring of the divine presence within," in which Scripture was pivotal. Further, he suggests a method of meditation that seemed to be Francis's pattern of prayer: withdrawal from the present external and internal clatter to a place of solitude with God; repentance for sins and failings; and reflection on a Biblical text, a divine mystery, or an experience from the day. Lastly, Schmucki comments on the effects of Francis's prayer in his life and preaching.

Each chapter of Cirino's work takes up one of the five themes, and prefaces each with a particular cross or crucifix. In the chapter on Light, we first notice the stark picture of a very simple cross placed against a projecting rock, *sasso spico*, at Mount LaVerna. It is believed that it was here that Francis would go for solitude and prayer before the cross. It was this style of cross within this place of solitude that became Francis's and his companions' book and light. Today it is a place of solitude and enlightenment for many pilgrims.

The author shares a story from *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* in which Francis seeks the guidance — the light — of Clare to help him discern whether to devote himself to prayer and solitude or to preaching. Cirino comments on how Clare's name, Chiara, "light," truly reflected who she was for Francis, her sisters, and others. This section ends with a commentary on Bonaventure's use of light in the *Soul's Journey into God*, the light of dawn symbolizing the search for the Holy One. When we come to the illuminating experience of finding God, it is like the blinding light at high noon.

The symbol of the San Damiano Crucifix introduces us to the reflection on Faith, and the search for "right faith" in the life of Francis and Clare. Cirino uses a story of Brother Bernard, moved to conversion one night as he watched Francis pray with fervent faith, "My God and My All," as example of what faith, what "right faith" is. We see that it is a willingness to take a risk and let God be God in our lives. It is also

a readiness to “walk the talk,” to live out the Gospel, and to love our neighbor in action and word. The author brings in Peter and his walk toward Christ on the water, to highlight other aspects of the theme. Faith involves an element of the unknown. It includes both choice and risk. We are gifted with faith in baptism; we are inspired in our life’s journey by other people of faith, and we return to the cross, our symbol of faith, in times of crises and discernment.

The crucifix depicting the suffering Christ hangs above the main altar in the Basilica of St. Clare and symbolizes Francis’s prayer for “firm hope” in this third part of the book. The chapter on Hope opens with a story from *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* of a young man, doubting his vocation as a friar because of the hard life, who receives a wondrous vision of future bliss that encourages and confirms him in his chosen way of life. Hope can be defined as a willingness to wait with patience and endurance. Cirino explains how waiting, with patience in our society can play out in different scenarios, such as waiting in traffic on a bridge to New York City. But patience also refers to suffering. He tells the story of Eddie who, homebound and physically impaired, knew the meaning of suffering. This man never complained about his situation. Rather, he looked at how he had been blessed. It became a humbling experience for the author to bring communion to Eddie. There are other stories, however, stories of individuals who turned to alternative means, such as drugs, to find hope, and experienced a different kind of suffering.

Francis embraced that hope and the element of joy in suffering through his conversion with lepers. Likewise the famous story of “perfect joy” is Francis’s way of witnessing the patience and true test of the virtue. In Admonition 5 Francis highlights the glory in our infirmities that we bear daily before the cross. Henri Nouwen likens prayer to a hopeful waiting on God, which we do not need to do alone, but in community or with family. We are called by our baptism to a Christian community to be a support for each other in our watchful waiting, to grow in our love for God and to experience that love. In addition, Cirino shares an experience in Rome of a musical *Forza Venite Gente* on the life of Francis

and especially the scene of Francis's dance with Sister Death. This was truly Francis's witness of "firm hope," waiting to be united in the arms of Jesus the Christ.

The chapter entitled Love opens with Francis praying, *et da me caritadea perfecta*, and give me perfect charity. A picture of the Tau cross on the parchment given to Leo on Mt. La Verna opens the chapter. The Tau itself has been a symbol of solidarity for all Franciscans and Franciscans at heart. In the *Legend of the Three Companions*, people took note of the solidarity within the brotherhood: "And each deeply loved the other and cared for him as a mother.... Charity burned in their hearts.... Love is that willingness and commitment leading to the love of God, the good to oneself and others."

Cirino expands on the explanation of this "perfect charity" by considering three dimensions of the human person. First, the body, in its needs, its limitations, and as the temple of the Holy Spirit is good. The second dimension is the soul. Reflecting on Chapter Three of Bonaventure's *The Journey of the Human Person into God*, Cirino notes that it is the human soul — memory, intellect, and will — that seeks the Highest Good, which is love. The last dimension of the human person is the spirit. In the depth of being, one's spirit meets God's, and the fruit of that intimacy is love.

So Francis prayed for "perfect love," and loved by example and word, caring for the brothers and providing spiritual guidance. The early brothers and sisters learned the Franciscan primer: to love tenderly, walk humbly, and act justly, from the affection, gentleness and compassion of Francis and Clare. The author interjects his own experience of conversion through the power of love as he tells of caring for his father who suffered from dementia.

The concluding chapter, discernment of The Will of God, brings Meditations on St. Francis's *Prayer Before the Cross* full circle. As with the other chapters, a crucifix precedes the text. It is the crucifix hanging in the Cathedral of Spoleto that clearly depicts Mary's *ecce* and *fiat*, her "yes" to God's will. Again, stories from *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* are illustrated, stories of Francis and Clare as the humble servants of Christ seeking to know and do the will of God. We,

too, struggle to discern the will of God as we endeavor to reach decisions for our lives and the lives of others. The spirit and intent of the meaning of the will of God, *che faça lo tuo santo et verace commandamento*, rests with God's greatest request of us: to commit ourselves to loving God above all and our neighbors as ourselves. We are challenged to accept God's continuous invitation to conversion.

In closing, André Cirino provides us with a three-step Franciscan process of discernment of the Will of God that he has used in spiritual direction. It is based on the work of Anthony Carrozzo, O.F.M. In the first step, one considers what it means to be a "humble servant"; in the second, one experiences an "agony of doubt," about possible choices. Finally, one needs to trust in oneself, in one's own prayer and the counsel of others to discern the will of God in your life.

André Cirino shares these reflections, so much the fruit of his journey, in the hope that the readers may discover their meditative prayer before the Cross to be their personal book. He leaves us with the words of Bonaventure:

*I ask, therefore,  
that you give more attention  
to the intent of the writer  
than to the work itself,  
more to the things said than to the uncultivated lan-  
guage,  
more to the truth than to attractiveness,  
more to the stimulation of affect than to intellectual en-  
richment.  
So that this might happen, it is important  
that you not run through these reflections in a hurry,  
but that you take your time and ruminate over them  
slowly (Itinerarium Prologue 4).*

Paula J. Scraba, Ph.D.  
St. Bonaventure University

## **Clare's Magnificat**

*I, Sister Clare, with grateful heart, proclaim God's  
saving grace,  
My Spirit hails the glory of his Incarnate Son.  
For upon me, the first-born of the Poorest Ladies  
Who spurned the flesh and worldly powers to put  
myself in Mary's care.  
Through my humble supplication, God the Almighty  
confronted the attacking Saracens,  
Blessed be the Eucharist I held!  
Through the power and strength of Christ's Eucha-  
ristic body  
All western Christendom and Assisi were saved.  
A child of the Offreduccio knights, I armed myself  
with the strongest defense,  
God's voice said "I will always defend you!"  
So now in abject poverty and love, I follow Christ,  
So poor beyond compare,  
Yet I now protect and lead my group of saintly maid-  
ens  
To Christ, Our spouse, in bridal array.  
Portraying Christ, our gentle master,  
Who calms this world then and now of greed and  
strife.  
Do grant that we who strive to follow  
May on your guidance e'er rely;  
To God the Father endless glory,  
And praise to his Incarnate Son,  
And homage to the Holy Spirit,  
Through whom this Virgin heaven won.*

Benedicta Dega, F.S.S.J.  
Cheektowaga, NY



## Lady Clare

Lady Clare, You brought a whole rebirth to the Church.  
Your desire for a radical form of poverty  
Brought new light and life to an age  
That was darkened with papal discord, church abuses,  
and constant warfare.  
You, Lady Clare, were that glimmer of hope, that spark  
of life,  
To a world changing from the feudal system  
To one where nations were beginning to emerge.  
Your spirituality from your convent cloister  
Gleamed with the freshness of God's grace and love.  
Though you never left your cloister, you and your Poor  
Ladies  
Were that furnace of hope and healing.  
You brought a new fiery vision to the meaning of serving  
the Lord.  
You gazed on your Lord and Savior  
And with words and actions of love  
A new spirituality was born.  
Coupled with the vision of Francis,  
Who imitated Christ to a new degree,  
Your words and letters introduced a love relationship  
With the freshness of Spring  
And the completeness of a Fall Harvest.  
Lady Clare – birth giver to a renaissance of new insight-  
ful dimensions,  
Where love of God and neighbor are wed,  
Where contemplation in the silence of God's Heart  
Is achieved by gazing,  
Where poverty is key to freedom,  
Where silence shouts of God's love for all,  
Where community becomes truly Trinitarian,  
And where a bit of heaven comes to earth.

Benedicta Dega, F.S.S.J.  
Cheektowarga, NY

## **To Mary**

***Ecce, Fiat, Magnificat  
Are your words, O Mother.***

***Ecce, Fiat, Magnificat  
Are words by which you broke your alabaster jar of love  
across God's Heart!***

***These precious words are no less powerful  
Spoken today, O Mary, full of grace,  
Than when they fell from your lips long ago.***

***And God, as Artist, left his trace on your heart  
O Mother- so gifted in beauty and full of grace.  
Both within and without-you radiate God's image.***

***Teach me to make a home for God in my heart-  
Consecrate me through these sacred words:  
Ecce-Fiat-Magnificat....so be it, so be it.-Amen!***

Mary Cecilia Keyser, O.S.C.  
Wappingers Falls, NY

## ***Praises of God***

***You are encircling love  
You are abiding strength  
You are the constant "Hound Of Heaven"  
You are my Spouse, my love  
You are my all-in-all***

***You are my surrounding presence  
You are the joy of my life  
You are my dearest friend  
You are my "nudger" when I am weak  
You are my encouraging companion***

***You fill my life with purpose and meaning  
You are gentle, caring, and compassionate  
You are beauty, sweet unction for my soul  
You are pregnating presence filling all life  
You are my precious guide and protector***

***You are my counselor, my friend  
You are wisdom, truth and peace  
You are mystery, urging us on  
You draw us to your Father and give us your life-giv-  
ing Spirit  
You keep showing us your Mother to also honor and  
love***

***You are filled with amazing surprises  
You mend our broken hearts, mind and body  
You are water for the thirsty  
You are bread for the hungry  
You are Creator, Redeemer, Risen Lord***

***You enfold us with your image and likeness, your  
very life-giving breath  
You are healing when we humbly acknowledge our  
brokenness  
You are forgiving when we fail  
You sense our needs before we know them  
You are the hand that holds us close to your heart***

***You are the indwelling Presence that makes us spe-  
cial  
You are the light that illumines our darkness  
You are peace for longing, agonizing hearts***

***You are the flower that perfumes our life  
You are the smile that brings acceptance  
You are the most precious friend that we cannot do  
without. Amen! Amen!***

LaDonna Pinkelman, O.S.F.  
Sylvania, OH

## ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

**BENEDICTA DEGA, F.S.S.J.** is a Franciscan Sister of St. Joseph. Since her profession, Sister has ministered as a high school teacher, principal, DRE, Bible study teacher, and most recently as a surgical chaplain at Sisters of Charity Hospital in Buffalo. She currently serves on the Hilbert College Board of Trustees.

**GIRARD ETZKORN, PhD** is Professor Emeritus of St. Bonaventure University. He lives with his wife in Tennessee and shares his developing insights with us on a semi-regular basis.

**DAVID FLOOD, O.F.M.** is a well-known scholar, respected for his work on Peter of John Olivi and the early Franciscan movement. Following his retirement from the Research Faculty at the Franciscan Institute, David returned to his home province of Montreal, Canada. His most recent book *The Daily Labor of the Early Franciscans* (2010) has been published by Franciscan Institute Publications.

**DANIEL P. HORAN, O.F.M.** is a Franciscan friar of Holy Name Province (NY) and currently teaches at Siena College in Loudonville, NY. The author of more than twenty scholarly and popular articles on theology and spirituality, he has delivered academic papers and lectured in the United States and Europe. For more information, visit [www.danhoran.com](http://www.danhoran.com).

**MARY BETH INGHAM, C.S.J.** is Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles. Her research interests include Stoicism and its influence on Medieval Philosophy; Franciscan spiritual tradition and its influence on Scotus and others. She is the author of many monographs, among them *Scotus for Dunces An Introduction to the Subtle Doctor* available from Franciscan Institute Publications.

**MARY CECILIA KEYSER, O.S.C.**, is formation director at the Poor Clare Monastery, Wappingers Falls, NY. She previously published in *The Cord*.

**FAREED MUNIR, Ph.D.** is a member of the Religious Studies faculty at Siena College. His areas of expertise include Islamic and African-American religious history.

**LADONNA PINKELMAN, O.S.F.** is a Sister of St. Francis from Sylvania, OH. In her fifty-two years of religious life she has ministered as a teacher, a DRE, retreat work and in hospital chaplaincy.

**PAULA SCRABA, Ph.D.** is Associate Professor of Physical Education in the School of Education at St. Bonaventure University. A graduate of the Franciscan Institute, Dr. Scraba is a member of the national advisory Board for *Build with Living Stones*.

**KATHERINE WRISLEY** is a student of Dr. Timothy Johnson and recently graduated from Flagler College with a BA degree in Religion/Philosophy and English. She will be traveling to Dresden in July to attend the FOVOG 2010 summer school program on medieval religious life, hosted by Dr. Gert Melville, and will be beginning her Master's of Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School in August.

**KAREN ZIELINSKI, O.S.F.** is Director of Canticle Studio for the Sisters of St. Francis, Sylvania, OH. After serving her congregation in communications for sixteen years, Sister Karen is now freelancing and has been published in a number of journals.

## BEAUTY, WONDER & BELONGING

FR. JIM CONLON, renowned presenter of programs in theology, social justice and spirituality/culture, has written several books, his most recent of which is *Beauty, Wonder and Belonging*

FR. JIM CONLON helps us put together “humanity’s emerging vision of the world of beauty, wonder and belonging” with what happens in every day life. We will reflect on the surging energy of Vatican Council II, the emergence of creation spirituality, and the deep wisdom revealed in and through the unfolding universe.

SR. MARYA GRATHWOHL, OSF, presenter and facilitator for the weekend, has a background in Earth Literacy and Creation Spirituality. She is the founder of Earth Hope.

**Friday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 7 pm to  
Sunday, October 24<sup>th</sup> after noon meal**

**Program fee:** \$150 includes speaker, book,  
6 meals and materials

**Accommodations:** Private room \$45 per night  
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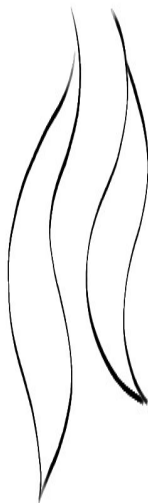
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- 
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  - Each of the 4 weeks will have a Franciscan theme, with module topics focused on or related to the theme for the week.
  - Details of the programme for 2011 are now being finalised and will be published shortly – so, please, watch out for more information.

Please visit our web site [www.franciscans.ac.uk](http://www.franciscans.ac.uk)  
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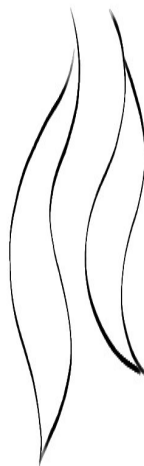
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Throughout the last months we have been talking with fellow Franciscans and members of other Christian communities and, as a result,

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- We are seeking to respond to the appeal for a more holistic approach to provision.
- We are seeking to meet the need for Christian spirituality in our world.
- While its activities will compliment the degrees and courses offered by the FISC, the nature and scope of its programmes will have a distinctive content and focus.
- We are planning that by October 2011 the **FCCS** will be open, to all.
- We will offer a broad range of retreats and programmes, sometimes in collaboration with other institutions and organisations.
- We will offer short focused programmes on specific themes throughout the year.
- Tutors and presenters will be drawn from the global Franciscan family, from renowned and recognised complimentary organisations and from members of the worldwide Christian community.



As you can imagine we have a lot of work to do. We hope you are interested in what we are planning. We would love to hear from you if you are keen to contribute to this exciting development.

We will, of course, let you know how we are progressing and look forward to welcoming you to the FCCS together with other members of your communities, parishes, organisations or groups.

**Interested ? Want to be involved? Please contact Philippe Yates OFM at**  
**[fccs@franciscans.ac.uk](mailto:fccs@franciscans.ac.uk)**

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## *FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY RETREAT*

Fr. Michael Crosby, OFM, Cap.  
SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 2, 2011

## Future Events. Mark Your Calendar

Sat. Sept. 11, 2010

Forgiveness: A day of Reflection

What does it mean to forgive and to truly believe you are forgiven? 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Sun.– Sat., Sept. 19-25, 2010

Franciscan Guided Retreat

Directors: Roberta Marie Doneth, OSF, Patricia Ann Froning, OSF, Ellen Lamberjack, OSF

Fri.– Sun., Oct. 22-24, 2010

Centering Prayer Retreat:

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Presenter: Fr. William Fickel, SSS

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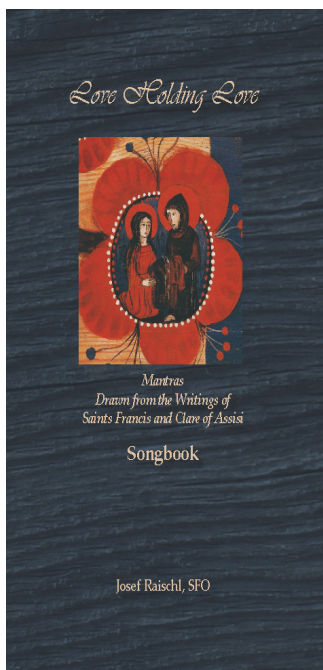
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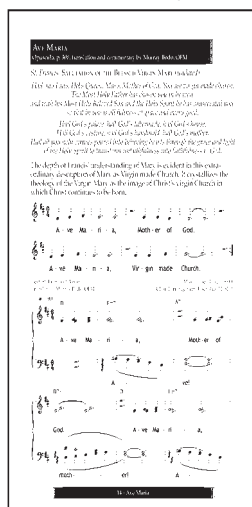
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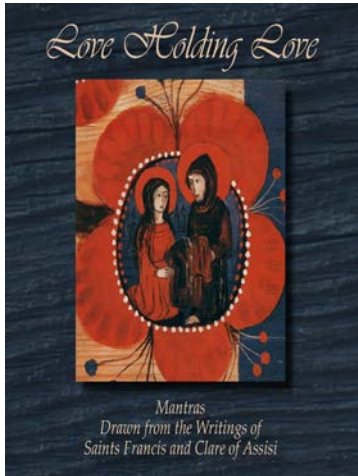
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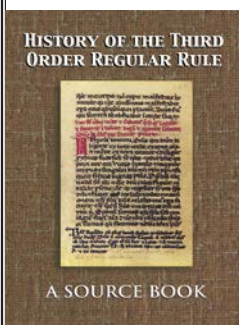
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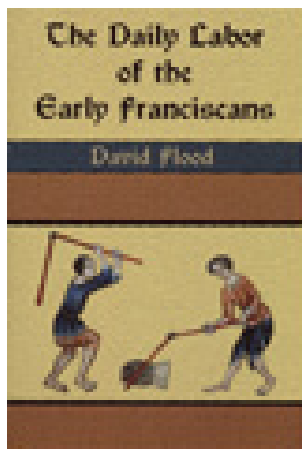
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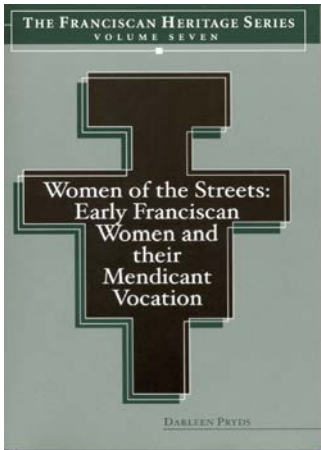
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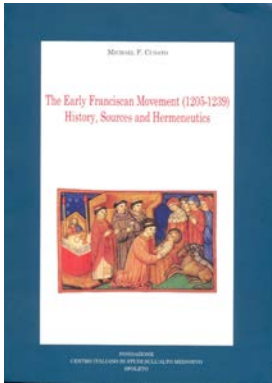
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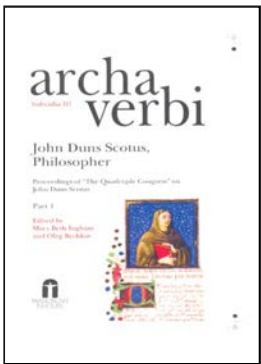
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