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IS ANYTHING WRONG AFTER 800 YEARS?

We are living in an era of anniversary celebrations. After the jubilees of Redemption and the beginning of the second millennium, it is now the turn of the second millennium of the birth of St. Paul. In the Franciscan Order I remember the celebrations of the 750th anniversary of the death of St. Francis (1976), the 800th anniversary of his birth (1982), the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Clare (1993). And now it is the turn of the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the Order (2009).

Somebody has jokingly remarked that it is high time that we celebrate a good anniversary by not celebrating anything at all. Personally I doubt whether we can historically call 2009 the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the Order of Friars Minor, for the simple reason that the very name *fratres minores* does not seem to have been officially used to designate who we were at such an early stage of our history. However, it is not good to be spoilsports, and so we also join in the universal celebration of this event, hoping that it will pass without creating new tensions between the sons of the Seraphic Father.

What really preoccupies anyone who reflects upon what we are currently going through is the fact that, whereas in the period 1209-1221 the Order grew from a handful of brothers to some 3000 brothers (some Sources speak about 5000), since Vatican II the Franciscan families of the First Order have seen a sharp decline in numbers. This decline is even more evident in the case of the Friars Minor, and is a source of preoccupation if one realises that it is not just a question of not having vocations, but rather of losing many brothers who opt to leave Franciscan religious life.

So, while it is good to celebrate our roots and reflect upon the origins of our charism, it is also important to project our prophetic witness in the world today by reflecting about what is really going wrong in our Franciscan life. My remarks might sound pessimistic or even apocalyptic, but the figures speak for themselves. The Franciscan Order is faced with the dilemma of not being able to cope with the increasing demands of apostolate, to the point that it will be difficult to hold on to important and centuries-old presences in important missions. The Holy Land is one of the most eloquent examples. And yet, we are keen on implanting the Order in new areas. Does this mean that we have to abandon the priorities which the Order has cherished for these last 8 centuries?

Maybe it is high time that we celebrate our 800th birthday by reflecting sincerely upon what is going wrong in our own house.

Fr. Noel Muscat ofm

THE LORD'S SUPPER OF 1 CORINTHIANS 11 IN SAINT FRANCIS' LETTER TO THE ENTIRE ORDER

Noel Muscat OFM

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul presents the oldest account of the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist. Written in Ephesus in 57 AD, 1 Corinthians is older than the Synoptic Gospels, and therefore provides us with the first historical account of what Paul calls "the Lord's supper."

This Pauline text has been used many a time with reference to Christian morals and the celebration of the Eucharist. After the publication of session 13, chapter 7 of the Council of Trent (on the Eucharist), 1 Corinthians 11:28-29 has been quoted with reference to the need to approach sacramental Communion in a state of grace, and after having ordinarily received the sacrament of Penance when in a state of mortal sin:

"If it is unbeseeming for any one to approach to any of the sacred functions, unless he approach holily; assuredly, the more the holiness and divinity of this heavenly sacrament are understood by a Christian, the more diligently ought he to give heed that he approach not to receive it but with great reverence and holiness, especially as we read in the Apostle those words full of terror: 'He that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself.' Wherefore, he who would communicate, ought to recall to mind the precept of the Apostle: 'Let a man prove himself.' Now ecclesiastical usage declares that necessary proof to be, that no one, conscious to himself of mortal sin, how contrite soever he may seem to himself, ought to approach to the sacred Eucharist without previous sacramental confession. This the holy Synod hath decreed is to be invariably observed by all Christians, even by those priests on whom it may be incumbent by their office to celebrate, provided the opportunity of a confessor do not fail them; but if, in an urgent necessity, a priest should celebrate without previous confession, let him confess as soon as possible" (Council of Trent, Session 13, Chapter 7).

This sacramental practice of communion

following upon confession, however, is the fruit of an older tradition in the Church. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 had already enacted laws regarding the annual sacramental Confession and Communion. In the writings of Saint Francis we find references to the Church doctrine regarding the sacraments, as a result of the canons of the Lateran Council.

Canon 21 of the Fourth Lateran Council prescribed: "All the faithful of both sexes, after they have reached the age of discerning, shall faithfully confess all their sins to their own priest at least once a year and perform the penance imposed to the best of their abilities, receiving reverently at least at Easter the sacrament of the Eucharist" (text taken from FAED 1, 77).

The aim of our paper is that of looking at the use that Saint Francis makes of the text of 1 Corinthians 11: 17-34 in his Letter to the Entire Order. First, however, we must try to understand the biblical significance of the Pauline text. Our analysis will be purely descriptive and based on the English translation of the biblical text.

Brief analysis of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

The context and background of this reference to the Last Supper was the community celebration of the Eucharist in the church of Corinth. Paul was aware of serious abuses taking place in Corinth, to the point that the Christians were creating a situation of injustice even during the Eucharistic meal. Paul himself describes these abuses:

"I hear that when you all come together as a community, there are separate factions among you, and I half believe it – since there must no doubt be separate groups among you, to distinguish those who are to be trusted. The point is, when you hold these meetings, it is not the Lord's Supper that you are eating, since when the time comes to eat, everyone is in such a hurry to start his own supper that one person goes hungry while another is getting drunk. Surely you have homes for eating and drinking in? Surely you have enough respect for the community of God not to make poor people embarrassed?" (1Cor 11:18-22).

Paul is speaking about the "coming together" of the Christian community, and therefore about the weekly meeting of the Eucharistic banquet. Now the distinguishing feature of the Eucharistic meal in the early Christian Church was that of bringing together all believers into a concrete expression of unity and love (agape). It seems, from what Paul states, that the opposite was happening in Corinth. Instead of being a guarantee of Church unity, the Eucharistic banquet was an occasion for factions

and divisions within the same community. In fact, Paul uses the Greek term *schismata*, which literally means schisms, divisions. The apostle also uses the term *hairesis*, which has a similar connotation of division in doctrine and dissension. Already in 1 Corinthians 1:12 Paul had alluded to dissensions within the community regarding the authority of the evangelisers (Paul, Apollos, Peter, Christ). Now it seemed that the same divisions were being felt even with regards to the social status of the ones who participated in the Eucharistic banquet.

The context of these divisions, as we have said, is the Eucharistic banquet. In the primitive Church the Lord's Supper took place in the course of a communal meal. All brought what food they could, and it was shared together. Patterned after Christ's last meal with his disciples on the night before he died, the institution which Paul calls "the Lord's Supper" was originally a frequent fellowship meal shared among the brethren, followed by participation in the symbolic bread and wine. This fellowship meal was also known by the name of agape.

We have abundant New Testament evidence for the agape. In the opinion of the majority of scholars the agape was a meal at which various kinds of food were consumed and shared together, with the explicit intention of giving an expression of Christian brotherhood. At the end of the meal, bread and wine were taken according to the Lord's command, and after thanksgiving to God were consumed in remembrance of Christ as a special means of communion with the Lord and with the other members of the community.

The basic problem in Corinth appears to have arisen out of tensions in the Church between the poor and rich. Since there were no church buildings, the Lord's Supper was held in the houses of the Church members, particularly in those of the rich, where a maximum number of participants could be accommodated. These occasions were full meals with plenty of food and drink. The rich brought plentiful food for themselves, whereas the poor had to make do with what they could provide. Thus the scandal was that there was no brotherly sharing of food among the members. There was over-indulgence on the part of the rich and feelings of envy on the part of the poor, who were made to feel inferior to them. For Paul this attitude contradicted the explicit meaning of agape.

It seems that Paul is laying down that the rich should eat privately in their own homes and not scandalise the poorer members of the community, and thus avoid creating tensions in the Church. In a certain way, this praxis was to place the Eucharistic banquet at the level it assumed later on, namely that of a celebration of the community in which the

Lord's Supper was commemorated and bread and wine alone were consumed.

In verses 23-29 we find the oldest institution narrative of the Eucharist and the moral dispositions of the Church members who participate in the Eucharistic banquet:

"For this is what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you; that on the same night that he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and thanked God for it and broke it, and he said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me.' In the same way he took the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink of it, do this as a memorial of me.' Until the Lord comes, therefore, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death, and so anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be behaving unworthily towards the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone is to recollect himself before eating this bread and drinking this cup; because a person who eats and drinks without recognising the Body is eating and drinking his own condemnation" (1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

Paul uses the verb *parelambano*, which means "to receive from another". He is thus alluding to a genuine Christian tradition, which the Church has always cherished all along its long history, as having come directly from the Lord Jesus. Paul declares that Christ personally revealed to him the information he is about to explain. By stating that this event happened on the night the Lord was betrayed, he definitely identifies it with the Last Supper.

The breaking of the bread and the drinking of the chalice is described as an *anamnesis*, a remembrance, a commemoration, a memorial. The observance of this memorial was intended to constantly remind the disciples that Christ offered himself as a sacrifice and died for them on the cross. In fact, the Eucharist, according to Paul, becomes the proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes in glory.

The Greek term *anamnesis* implies "an action whereby the object is re-presented in memory." In 1 Corinthians 11:24, "Christians are to enact the whole action of the Lord's Supper in recollection of Jesus, and this not merely in such sort that they simply remember, but rather, in accordance with the active sense of *anamnesis* and the explanation in v. 26, in such a way that they actively fulfil the *anamnesis*. The making present by the later community of the Lord who instituted the Supper, and who put the new covenant (*diatheke*) into effect by His death, is the goal and content of their action in which they repeat what was done by Jesus and His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Edited by G. KITTEL, Translated

by G.W. Bromiley, Vol. I, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1991, 348-349).

Our attention is directed particularly on the adverb “unworthily”. Paul says that whoever partakes of the Lord’s Supper unworthily (*anaxios*) will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Now the term *anaxios* would refer to the fact that the Christians treated the Lord’s Supper as a common meal, and did not understand the intrinsic difference between a common supper and the supper which commemorated the paschal mystery of Christ. Therefore, the sin of the Corinthian community was that of a lack of respect to the Body and Blood of the Lord because of a mistaken idea of what the Eucharist is all about. Originally it does not seem to have had any moral connotations regarding ritual purity from individual sins, which it later assumed in the history of the Church. However, one cannot fail to notice the underlying notion of unworthiness to receive the Body and Blood of Christ whenever the disciple fails to believe in the true meaning of the Eucharistic sacrifice, and therefore to live a life which is in direct agreement with its intrinsic meaning. Hence, the moral disposition necessary to receive communion flows in a logical way from this initial notion of discerning, distinguishing, the Body and Blood of Christ from other common food.

This argument is further strengthened by what we read in Hebrews 10:29, which Saint Francis also quotes in the Letter to the Entire Order: “You may be sure that anyone who tramples on the Son of God, and who treats the blood of the covenant which sanctified him as if it were not holy, and who insults the Spirit of grace, will be condemned to a far severer punishment.”

The interpretation of 1Corinthians 11 in the Letter to the Entire Order

The *Letter to the Entire Order* (EpOrd) was written towards the end of Francis’ life, roughly in 1225. It is the direct response to the promulgation of the post Lateran IV document *Quia populares tumultus* (3rd December 1224), which gave the friars permission to celebrate the Eucharist on a portable altar in their own churches and oratories. The section we shall analyse and which regards the sacramental practice of the friars regarding the celebration and reception of the Eucharist is found in verses 14-25:

“I also beg in the Lord all my brothers who are priests, or who will be, or who wish to be priests of the Most High that whenever they wish to celebrate Mass, being pure, they offer the true Sacrifice of the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus

Christ with purity and reverence, with a holy and unblemished intention, not for any worldly reason or out of fear or love of anyone, as if they were pleasing people. But let all their will, as much as grace helps, be directed to God, desiring, thereby, to please only the Most High Lord Himself because He alone acts there as He pleases, for He Himself says: Do this in memory of me (Lk 22:19; 1Cor 11:24). If anyone acts differently, he becomes Judas the traitor and guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord (1Cor 11:27).

My priest brothers, remember what is written in the law of Moses: whoever committed a transgression against even externals died without mercy by a decree of the Lord. How much greater and more severe will the punishment be of the one who tramples on the Son of God, and who treats the Blood of the Covenant in which he was sanctified as unclean and who insults the Spirit of grace? (Heb 10:29) For a person looks down upon, defiles and tramples upon the Lamb of God when, as the Apostle says, not distinguishing and discerning the holy bread of Christ from other foods or actions, he either unworthily or, even if he is worthy, eats It in vain and unworthily since the Lord says through the prophet: The person is cursed who does the work of the Lord deceitfully (Jer 48:10). He will, in truth, condemn priests who do not wish to take this to heart, saying: I will curse your blessings (Mal 2:2).

Listen, my brothers: if the Blessed Virgin is so honoured, as is becoming because she carried Him in her most holy womb; if the Baptist trembled and did not dare to touch the holy head of God; if the tomb in which He lay for some time is held in veneration, how holy, just and fitting must he be who touches with his hands, receives in his heart and mouth, and offers to others to be received the One Who is not about to die but Who is to conquer and be glorified, upon Whom the angels longed to gaze (1Pt 1:12).

See your dignity, my priest brothers (1Cor 1:26), and be holy because He is holy. As the Lord God has honoured you above all others because of this ministry, for your part love, revere and honour Him above all others. It is a great misery and a miserable weakness that when you have Him present in this way, you are concerned with anything else in the whole world!” (EpOrd 14-25, FAED 1, 117-118).

The context of the EpOrd was probably the occasion of a general chapter during which Francis addressed the brother priests of the Order. In 1225 the number of priests was still very limited, but at that time it was evident that many more priests would enter the Order in the future. Anthony of Padua, who was a priest, was by this time Custos at Limoges in France, and had lectured theology to the brothers in Bologna. The fact that Pope Honorius

III had addressed the *Quia populares* to the Order in 1224 shows that there was a discreet number of priest brothers, who ministered to the other brothers by celebrating the Eucharist in the oratories and chapels of the hermitages in which the brothers lived.

The text we have just quoted shows that Francis was preoccupied not with the external form of the celebration of the Eucharist, although he would certainly have insisted that it was to be similar to that of the Church of Rome, but rather with the inner disposition of the priest who celebrates the Eucharist. From the brother priests Francis requests purity of heart and intention as a prerequisite for celebrating the Eucharistic sacrifice. Any act of unfaithfulness to this moral precondition was considered by Francis an act of high treason against the Lord, comparable to the same act of Judas the traitor. It is interesting how Francis explains the words of 1 Corinthians 11:27 as a reference to the sin of Judas. Judas consigned the body of the Lord to the Jews who paid him thirty shekels of silver for the blood of the immaculate Lamb of God. In the same way the unfaithful priest would be a minister of iniquity if he were to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice unworthily.

To further strengthen his argument Francis refers to the text of Hebrews 10:29. If any transgression against the Law of Moses in the Old Testament was seen as an act of high treason, since it defiled the covenant sealed with the blood of lambs, how greater would be the sin of the priest who defiles the blood of the innocent Lamb of the New Testament, shed on the cross for our salvation, and perpetuated in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice!

Francis notes that the sin of unfaithfulness to the Lord consists in not distinguishing the Body and Blood of the Lord from ordinary food. In this Francis is totally in line with the teachings of Paul in 1 Corinthians. Francis speaks about discerning the Body of the Lord from other food or actions. In other words, he is insisting upon the absolute holiness of the Eucharistic sacrifice, celebrated by priests who alone administer the sacred mysteries.

The insistence upon the dignity of the priest as a celebrant of the divine liturgy was an important feature in the spirituality of Saint Francis. Indeed, in his Testament Francis explicitly notes this fact, even in the case of priests who are public sinners:

“Afterwards the Lord gave me, and gives me still, such faith in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them ... And I do not want to consider any sin in them because I discern the Son of God in them and they are my lords. And I

act in this way because, in this world, I seen nothing corporally of the most high Son of God except his most holy Body and Blood which they receive and they alone administer to others” (Test 6-9: FAED 1, 125).

In his Second Version of the *Letter to the Faithful*, Francis echoes the same teaching regarding the respect towards the Eucharist when receiving holy communion, this time by addressing the common faithful, maybe also as a result of the provisions of the Fourth Lateran Council outlined above:

“We must, of course, confess all our sins to a priest and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ from him. Whoever does not eat His flesh and drink His blood cannot enter the kingdom of God. But let him eat and drink worthily because anyone who receives unworthily, not distinguishing, that is, not discerning, the Body of the Lord, eats and drinks judgment on himself” (EpFid II,22-24: FAED 1, 47).

One notices that, for Francis, there is no distinction whatsoever between the moral integrity of the lay people and that of the priests. In both instances Francis makes use of the same text from 1 Corinthians to emphasize the need for a good and solid spiritual preparation before receiving communion, and is very exact in his interpretation of the genuine meaning of the Pauline expression.

Now if we consider that, in the 13th century, the Church had to invite Christians to go to communion at least once a year, we would understand why Francis is encouraging priests and lay people alike to approach the Eucharistic banquet with a clear conscience. Indeed, it was not common for Christians to receive communion frequently, and we are surprised that Saint Clare, in her Rule, mentions seven feasts on which the sisters were to receive communion, but also states that they were to approach the sacrament of Penance twelve times:

“Let them go to confession, with the permission of the abbess, at least twelve times a year ... Let them receive Communion seven times, namely, on the Nativity of the Lord, Thursday of Holy Week, the Resurrection of the Lord, Pentecost, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, the Feast of Saint Francis, and the Feast of All Saints” (RegCl 3,12-14: CAED 113).

Conclusion

The studies regarding Francis’ devotion towards the holy Eucharist all indicate his great respect to the Body and Blood of the Lord, in perfect agreement with his great love for the mystery of the Incarnation. Paul Sabatier writes: “For Francis the Church, the priests, the Eucharist, the Bible are various aspects

of the power of God. The Bible is the history of the Eucharist, and the Eucharist the symbol of the realisation of God's work in humanity" (*Etudes inédites sur saint François d'Assise*, Paris 1932, 49).

Francis insists that one should approach the sacrament of the Eucharist with good moral dispositions. In this he is echoing genuine Church teaching, which was already present in the Fourth Lateran Council and which became much more clear in the sacramental practice introduced by the Council of Trent, and still valid in the Church today.

Francis bases his arguments on the teaching of Paul in 1Corinthians 11:17-34, again in perfect agreement with the traditional teachings of the Church. Furthermore he shows a very clear understanding of the Pauline expression in 1Corinthians 11:28-29, namely that of discerning the Body of the Lord from common food. In practice this would amount to evaluating the Eucharistic banquet as a special moment of communion with the Lord, separating it from all other actions. Indeed, the original interpretation of Paul was limited to the rules governing the celebration of the Lord's Supper within the context of the agape meal. Later on, it came to be widened to the moral attitude of Christians when approaching holy communion. In Francis' case we could conclude that both elements are present. Francis is certainly more interested in the inner dispositions and spiritual preparation of the lay people who approach holy communion, as well as of the priest who celebrates the Eucharist.

Francis' respect towards the brother priests, expressed so clearly in the *Letter to the Entire Order*, has to be interpreted in the light of his interpretation of the narrative of the Eucharistic institution in 1Corinthians 11. During this Pauline year it would be interesting to delve much deeper into this aspect present in the Writings of the saint, from the scriptural, dogmatic and spiritual viewpoints.

THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF «THE CANTICLE OF EXHORTATION FOR THE LADIES OF SAN DAMIANO» FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

Daniel P. Horan OFM

"Listen, little poor ones called by the Lord, who have come together from many parts and provinces. Live always in truth, that you may die in obedience. Do not look at the life without, for that of the Spirit is better. I beg you out of great love, to use with discernment the alms the Lord gives you. Those weighed down by sickness and the others wearied because of them, all of you: bear it in peace. For you will sell this fatigue at a very high price and each one will be crowned queen in heaven with the Virgin Mary."¹

Introduction

This short passage from the writings of Francis of Assisi provides an array of instructions, emotions and edifying words upon which to reflect. The text's wealth surpasses its brevity and continues to be a living resource for the prayerful examination of our Christian lives. Such investigation also supplies the contemporary sisters and brothers of Francis with that spirit of hope that comes from the authentic embrace of the *vita evangelica*. The aim of this essay is to provide a brief introduction to and then prayerfully examine the *Canticle of Exhortation for the Ladies of San Damiano*.² It is my hope that this reflection on the *Canticle of Exhortation* might serve to renew interest in the text as a source for contemporary Franciscan spirituality and function as a wellspring of prayerful inspiration for all Christians.

Unlike most of Francis's work that has been passed down to us in Latin, the *Canticle of Exhortation* shares the special status with his *Canticle of the Creatures* by being written in the

Umbrian dialect of the time.³ While there continues to be some scholarly debate over the proper dating of the text, it is generally held that it was written in 1225 shortly after, or concurrently with, Francis's writing of the *Cantic of the Creatures*. In the *Assisi Compilation*, the early friars record that Francis composed this canticle while regaining his strength at San Damiano while ill.⁴ It appears that Clare and the early Franciscan sisters were distressed at the severity of Francis's illness and in response to their concern, Francis sent this canticle. Regis Armstrong suggests that part of the beauty of this text lies in the other-centeredness Francis demonstrated in his desire to console and inspire his sisters. Armstrong notes that usually when one is severely ill it is easy to become introspective and concerned about one's own needs and wishes. Francis, on the other hand, composes two canticles that express his outward gaze to find God in the whole of creation and to remind his sisters in religion to do the same.⁵

There are two ways we can look at this text. There is the historical-critical approach that allows us to recall the context of those last months of Francis's life when he composed this canticle and there is the contemporary retrieval of its significance for us today. Commentaries on the context and meaning of the text for Clare and her sisters have already been written.⁶ However, its contemporary relevance remains a depth unexplored. Francis continues to speak to us as he did to his sisters at San Damiano nearly eight centuries ago. Here we will examine the text by verse to illuminate its present-day application.

“Listen, little poor ones called by the Lord, who have come together from many parts and provinces” (CtExh 1)

This introduction, originally addressed to Clare and her sisters, is also addressed to us. The Franciscan family has grown from Francis and a few brothers to include women and men from every direction on earth. As contemporary *fratres minores* and *poverelle* we are the inheritors of the simplicity and humility of Francis and Clare, bearing the title “little poor ones.” In an age dominated by competitive capitalism and pervasive materialism, we are called to rise above the temptation to acquire earthly riches and power in order to walk in the footprints of Christ who, Himself, came as a poor and lowly human. It is this connection to Christ through the emulation of our Franciscan founders that we can read “called by the Lord” as the affirmation of our Christian vocation.

Like those early women who left their homes and families and came from all over Italy to live

the Franciscan life modelled by Clare, the Christian community is represented all over the world and continues to grow in number. While this portion of the address at first appears geographical, it also calls us to consider the states of life from which we emerge to follow Christ in the manner of Francis. It is from many locations, many social strata and many degrees of spiritual peace that the Franciscan family and the broader Christian community are composed. Our challenge is to recognize the varied backgrounds and statuses of our sisters and brothers and accept them as once Christ accepted those he encountered.

“Live always in truth, that you may die in obedience” (CtExh 2)

As noted earlier, when Francis could be reasonably expected to focus on his impending death, he instead offers a note of concern to the sisters and, by extension, to us. We know that earlier in his life Francis was deeply troubled by the thought of death. Even more than the simple fear of the mystery that lies before all living things, Francis was concerned about himself and others dying in sin.⁷ However, toward the end of his life Francis was able to make peace with his fears and welcome death as his sister.⁸ It is in this light that we interpret this verse.

Like Francis's message to his original audience, today we too hear a dispatch of eschatological hope in these words. Our world has witnessed much violence and many injustices, to the degree that our social environment has been called “a culture of death.”⁹ Working for justice and moving toward a culture of life, we are commissioned to dwell not on the violence of death around us, but redirect our gaze toward the life that is within and among us. As Francis was not afraid to face death at the end of his life, so too we are encouraged to see death as a natural part of God's creation and welcome Sister Bodily Death. We are empowered to do this through a life lived in truth and obedience to the Gospel. From the time we enter this world until the time we leave it our shared vocation is to follow in the footprints of Christ.

“Do not look at the life without, for that of the Spirit is better” (CtExh 3)

The meaning of this verse appears to be twofold. Francis is originally writing to cloistered women¹⁰ who lived an “interior life” of the monastery. In this way Francis might have been encouraging his sisters in their religious vocation, praising their particular state of life as superior to some alternate way of living. However, the theme of following the Spirit or

living the life of the Spirit emerges with force. This reading could be taken as general encouragement for all Christians to forego the distraction of the material and passing world for those things of God, in order not to accumulate earthly riches, but store up treasure in heaven.¹¹ If such an exhortation was pertinent to Clare and her sisters in 1225, how much more relevant are these words today?

Our age is marked by increased globalization and commercialization.¹² Today those things of the “life without,” money, power and status for example, are even more pervasive in all parts of our globe. Francis provides us with a succinct reminder of what should be our *forma vitae*: the life of the Spirit. Our task then is to constantly recall that our life should be the Gospel of Christ and not the propaganda of the world. When distracted by the trappings of the worldly life, we need to redirect our view to the Spirit.

“I beg you out of great love, to use with discernment the alms the Lord gives you” (CtExh 4)

In both talent and treasure, we are exhorted to be good stewards of all gifts. The sisters are told that these gifts are from the Lord and should be used with discernment, or prayerful reflection. At a time when the Franciscan Order was becoming more established and stable, the message to care for that with which the sisters and brothers had been entrusted was more necessary than in the early days of the Franciscan movement. The message pertains to Francis’s contemporary sisters and brothers all the more.

The notion of discerned use or good stewardship extends from that which constitutes monetary acquisition to all that we are entrusted with by God. In addition to our material assets we are challenged to exercise discernment and good stewardship with all creation. The earth is one such gift or form of alms from the Lord. The fraternal worldview of Francis so exhibited in *The Canticle of the Creatures* should call our attention to the ecological crises of our day. Invoking this powerful fraternal worldview, Keith Warner suggests that what is needed in our time of ecological turmoil is the move from a model of stewardship to a model of “nature as family.”¹³ This process of shifting our paradigm from caretaker to family member is the next step in our journey toward seeing the world around us with the eyes of Christ. When we view ourselves and the rest of creation as intimately linked to God our Creator, we move closer toward the Franciscan ideal of *fraternitas* that Francis strove to live.

“Those weighed down by sickness and others wearied because of them, all of you: bear it in peace” (CtExh 5)

Clare and the sisters were troubled by the illness and possibility of Francis’s impending death. Here he encourages them to carry the cross of concern with the same peace that he assures them he is facing his own illness with. The message is not one of surrender nor is the tone despairing, rather Francis hopes to remind his sisters (and perhaps himself) of that which he instructed in his *Earlier Rule*. Francis instructs those who come after him, whether sick or healthy, to thank God for everything and to pray for and desire to fulfil God’s will.¹⁴ His concern is that in the weakness of illness a brother or sister might be more preoccupied with his or her body than with his or her soul.

Our reflection has to do with the way we handle misfortune and illness in our lives and the lives of others. Do we over exaggerate the troubles we encounter in this life and slip into despair? Do we become preoccupied with our own physical, economic or social wellbeing to the point of neglecting those around us? Do we only trust in ourselves as the sole arbiter of our health and security? Or do we trust in the Lord and bear our infirmities with peace?

As Christian women and men, we recognize a future that is not limited to our present condition. While we should work to alleviate suffering in the world and in our own lives, its eradication is impossible. In light of the Gospel and Francis’s instruction, we recall that God remains with us and works through us in ways we do not completely understand. It is by trusting in the Lord that we are able to bear all in peace.¹⁵

“For you will sell this fatigue at a very high price and each one will be crowned queen in heaven with the Virgin Mary” (CtExh 6)

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews encourages us, that, “since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us” (Heb 12:1). As a runner I know first-hand that after a long race I am duly fatigued. In concluding his remarks to Clare and her sisters, Francis chose to describe the experience of Gospel living as a tiring venture, as something like a “Christian race” that results in “runners’ fatigue.” The message throughout this canticle remains consistently supportive of living the *vita evangelica* in truth, in the Spirit and in peace. Francis notes that in the end such a life is worth

“a very high price.” Written as he prepares for his own death, Francis anticipates joining the cloud of witnesses described by the author of Hebrews and encourages his sisters to look forward to their own arrival in heaven someday.

The language of this final verse might at first appear off-putting to a modern reader. Rarely today do we speak of being crowned queen (or king for that matter) in heaven. However, the choice of language and its implied imagery is consistent with Francis’s earlier work. First we have a clearly feminine expression of eschatological reward. Although it appears exclusive, barring male readers from appreciating or participating in the message, we must remember Francis’s previous use of traditionally feminine images in a broader context.¹⁶ Take his *A Rule for Hermitages*, where Francis instructs:

“Let those who wish to stay in hermitages in a religious way be three brothers or, at the most, four; let two of these be ‘the mother’ and have two ‘sons’ or at least one. Let the two who are ‘mothers’ keep the life of Martha and the two ‘sons’ the life of Mary.”¹⁷

Here he is speaking of the friars in feminine terms that convey another dimension of our shared humanity, one not encumbered by the politics of gendered expression.¹⁸ In this way we can understand this concluding passage to include, not only the Poor Clare sisters of the thirteenth century, but also all women and men.

The reward of sharing in the crown of Mary has a second implication of a more timely nature. We can understand this idea as made manifest through our bearing the Word in our lives and actions. Like Mary who became pregnant with the Word Incarnate, so too we are called to echo the *Magnificat* and answer yes to becoming “pregnant” with the word of God. While Francis understood this concept well, this perspective is perhaps best understood in the life and spirituality of Clare of Assisi. She believed that by living the Gospel we partly share in Mary’s title of *theotokos* (God-bearer) through, “enfleshing [Christ] in our lives and labouring to bring him to birth in the lives of others.”¹⁹ Like Mary, after bearing Christ in the world our reward is to be found in heaven.

Conclusion

Although the collection of letters, prayers and hagiographic material is nearly eight centuries old, the written corpus of Francis of Assisi continues to inspire people from all over the world. Through the retrieval of the texts’ fundamental significance, we uncover the Franciscan spirit that can serve as a foundational spirituality for contemporary

Christians.

The *Canticle of Exhortation* is one such text. While originally destined to comfort and exhort Clare of Assisi and her fellow Franciscan sisters, it contains wisdom relevant for our age too. As we go about our days in a modern world filled with competing distractions, we can benefit from six brief verses from this thirteenth-century Saint. Francis reminds our generation of the need to live the life of the Spirit, to endure suffering in peace and to face death with the hope of eternal life.

NOTES

¹ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, “The Canticle of Exhortation for the Ladies of San Damiano” 1-6, in R.J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and W. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1999-2001) 1, 115. Further citations of this source will be noted as *FAED* followed by the volume and page number with “The Canticle of Exhortation” noted as CtExh followed by verse number.

² *Cantico Audite Poverelle*. For the sake of consistency with the English critical translation (see note 1), I have chosen to adopt the title “The Canticle of Exhortation for the Ladies of San Damiano.”

³ See FRANCIS OF ASSISI, “The Canticle of the Creatures,” *FAED* I, 113-114.

⁴ See AC 85, in *FAED* 2, 188-189.

⁵ REGIS ARMSTRONG, ed., *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (New York: New City Press, 2006) 393.

⁶ See ARMSTRONG, *Clare of Assisi*, 393; ARMSTRONG et al., *FAED* I, 115; and REGIS ARMSTRONG and IGNATIUS BRADY, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986) 3-10, 40. For more on the relationship between Francis and Clare see INGRID PETERSON, “Francis’s Tenacious Lady,” *Church History* 13 (1994) 33-37.

⁷ Francis, on at least two occasions, writes polemical and sardonic reflections on death. See “Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance” (“The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful”) 2:14-18, in *FAED* 1, 43-44; and “Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance” (“Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful”) 72-85, in *FAED* 1, 50-51.

⁸ This of course is made manifest in “The Canticle of the Creatures: 12, in *FAED* 1, 114. We read, “Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape.”

⁹ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* 12 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995).

¹⁰ It is important to note here that recent scholarship suggests that the community of the Franciscans at San Damiano may not have been exclusively composed of cloistered women. Rather, it is posited that there was

something resembling a contemporary “intentional community” made up of both Franciscan women and men engaged in a joint apostolate, living a religious life in common. For more see MICHAEL ROBINSON, *St. Francis of Assisi: The Legend and the Life* (New York: Continuum, 1999) 199ff; MARIA PIA ALBERZONI, “Clare of Assisi and Women’s Franciscanism,” *Greyfriars Review* 17 (2004) 5-38; and LEZLIE KNOX, “Audacious Nuns: Institutionalizing the Franciscan Order of Saint Clare,” *Church History* 69 (March 2000) 41-63.

¹¹ Matt 6:19-20.

¹² For more on this theme see *Theological Studies* 69 (June 2008) [a special volume containing essays on theology, ethics and globalization]; MANFRED STEGER, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); JOSEPH RATZINGER and JURGEN HABERMAS, *Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006); GREG OTT and HAROLD NETLAND, eds., *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); and CHARLES TAYLOR, *A Secular Age* (Boston: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹³ KEITH WARNER, “Out of the Birdbath: Following the Patron Saint of Ecology,” *The Cord* 48 (March/April 1998) 80.

¹⁴ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, “*Regula non bullata*” 10:3, in *FAED* 1, 71.

¹⁵ For a good reflection on Franciscan spirituality and bearing infirmity with peace see ROBERT STEWART, *Making Peace with Cancer: A Franciscan Journey* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001).

¹⁶ For an overview of the subject see JACQUES DALARUN, *Francis of Assisi and the Feminine* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2006).

¹⁷ FRANCIS OF ASSISI, “A Rule for Hermitages” 1-2, in *FAED* 1, 61.

¹⁸ Again Francis makes an explicit reference to the brothers as “mothers” in the *Regula non bullata*. We read: “Let each one love and care for his brother as a mother loves and cares for her son” (RnB 9:10, in *FAED* 1, 71).

¹⁹ MARIE BEHA, “Clare’s Trinitarian Prayer,” *The Cord* 48 (1998) 177.

“LET THEM ALL BE CALLED FRIARS MINOR” (4)

(Earlier Rule 6,3)

MINORITY IN THE LIGHT OF THE WRITINGS OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Fernando Uribe OFM

Original paper in Italian: “*Minores et subditi omnibus*”. *Tratti caratterizzanti dell’identità francescana*. Atti del Convegno 26-27 novembre 2007, a cura di L. Padovese, Istituto Franciscano di Spiritualità, PUA, Edizioni Collegio S. Lorenzo da Brindisi – Laurentianum, Roma 2003, 149-190.

Minority in relation to God

In order to make a good study of this dimension of minority, it seems to us to be necessary to ask ourselves first and foremost regarding the concept of God that Francis had, and how he related to God. Secondly it seems indispensable that, even in this case, we depart from his lived experience of poverty understood as a total expropriation. From here emerges a permanent sense of gratitude for the greatness and bounty of God and, at the same time, of unlimited trust in His mercy.

a) It is not easy to express in a few lines who God was for Francis. In order to succeed it is necessary to start off with Francis’ faith in the paternity of God. This faith found an eloquent expression in one of the significant moments of Francis’ initial conversion, a moment which the first biographers narrate in a dramatic way. We are referring to the episode in which Francis renounced for all his possessions in front of the bishop of Assisi, stating: “from now on I can say: *Our Father, who art in heaven*.”¹ Above all the picturesque elements of this narration, this episode did determine the experience of faith of the Poverello.

Neither the biographical documents nor the writings of the Saint can offer us a complete view of who God was for Francis. Both can help us only to catch a glimpse of that great light which the grace of

the Most High sent to enlighten him. Since we are aware of this limit, he shall try in all ways to make an attempt to start off from Francis' writings, among which his prayers merit a special attention, since in this way we can perceive his way of being in front of God and of relating to Him.

First of all it is clear that Francis refers with a certain frequency to God in His Trinitarian mystery, as we find in Francis' references to the Three Persons, to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Francis attributes to each Person a very defined role, even though the Person who dominates is that of the Father, whom Francis many a time calls *Dominus*.² The Father is called *sanctus*,³ and for this reason he is Father par excellence. The Poverello regards himself as a son who receives everything from the Father, and thus from here we can start to understand his sense of minority. In his littleness, in his interior poverty, Francis enters into a relationship of freedom with his God, towards whom he refers many a time with a confidential "you", that is, with an attitude of one who does not feel himself to be a slave but a son.

Departing from this belief, Francis regards God as his creator, redeemer, consoler, saviour, salvation, giver, king, liberator, light, love, eternal goodness, guardian, defender, refuge, protector, defender.⁴ This abundance of adjectives attributed to God and their variety offer us an idea of the ineffable nature of God for Francis, and of the way Francis feels himself engulfed in this great mystery, in such a way that human language for him becomes insufficient to express God in an adequate way. On the other hand, the words he uses evoke a specific action of the same God, who is conceived as someone much greater than the human person according to the meaning of the terms which the Saint uses in addressing Him, for example, most high, great, almighty, merciful.⁵

That God who dwells in the highest heavens, who is richness and sufficiency, who is worthy of honour, glory and blessing, is also meekness.⁶ This last adjective is maybe the one which, more than all the others, is used by the Poverello to address God, since it finds its point of departure in the total self-emptying of Christ, who in his humiliation is seen as being similar to a worm and not to a man, who becomes the gossip of men and is refused by them.⁷ Francis' mind and heart are struck by the idea that Christ "though he was rich, wished, together with the most Blessed Virgin, His mother, to choose poverty in the world beyond all else (cfr. 2Cor 8,9)."⁸ The same humility is expressed with enthusiasm when Francis considers the mystery of the Eucharist: "O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity! 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! Brothers, look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before Him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him!"⁹ God who dwells in an inaccessible light, leaves His royal throne and takes upon Himself a body like ours; He humbles himself and every day comes to us under the humble appearance of bread and wine.¹⁰ This "humility of God" is a clear point of reference in order to understand how Francis is fascinated by God. In many of his *Admonitions*, the Saint emphasizes the consequences of the fact that Christ did not cling on jealously to his divine condition, but became like us.¹¹ This thought is so persistent in Francis that we get the impression that Christ is the secret protagonist of Francis' prayers to the Father. Minority is a prerogative of the Son; God is great because He becomes a minor in Jesus Christ. For the Poverello, to follow Christ means to make with Him a journey in minority.

b) What we have just said regarding the way Francis conceives God and relates with Him, places us necessarily in the same situation we have studied, when we dealt with Francis' way of looking at himself and with his relationship with the universe and with the other human beings. For this reason the theme of expropriation necessarily returns in a very explicit way in Francis' relationship with God, as we shall now be seeing.

An important premise has been Francis' insistence upon God as Father, from whom the human person receives the dignity of a son. Francis was also aware that God is the great king, in front of whom the human person has to assume the attitude of a servant, the same attitude assumed by the Virgin Mary in the episode of the Annunciation. This double dimension appears very clearly in the *Form of Life* which Francis sent to the Poor Ladies of San Damiano: "Because by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and handmaids of the most High, most Exalted King, the heavenly Father..."¹² In agreement with such a concept, the life of penance presupposes a triple relationship with God in which, we are called to "know", "adore" and "serve" Him.¹³

Another indispensable element of the relationship with God is the recognition of His acts of mercy towards the human person. Francis expresses this dimension in the *Office of the Passion*, when he associates himself with the prayer of Christ, and says: "For it was you who took me out of the womb, you, my hope from my mother's breasts. I have been cast upon you from the womb. From my mother's womb you have been my God; do not depart from me."¹⁴ Such recognition inevitably produces a profound sense of humility.

When a man is convinced of his own littleness,

he begins to have faith in the merciful action of God. From this faith is born a fundamental attitude which embraces all his being and which has specific reflexes when man places himself in front of God, since he begins to experiment a total dependence upon Him, although he recognizes his proper freedom. The reason is that he is totally aware that all good things, discovered in his own self, are the fruit of divine mercy. Therefore man commits himself to serve, love, adore and honour the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind,¹⁵ in penance and great humility.¹⁶

According to Francis, humility is born from the intimate conviction that the human person is aware of who he really is when he places himself in front of God: "what a person is before God, that he is and no more."¹⁷ For the same reason, who is truly a minor "does not exalt himself over the good the Lord says or does through him more than over what He says and does through another."¹⁸ It is here that man experiments in a full way his sense of expropriation in his relationship with God. In front of this expropriation the writings of the Saint present a double reaction: on the one hand praise and thanksgiving when one discovers what God is in Himself, on the other hand, the profound conviction that we should render back to Him all the good things He gives us. The Poverello normally expresses the first reaction through the remembrance of divine attributes, always presented in a tone of praise, with an invitation to honour, to bless, to glorify. These are expressions of a heart which knows how to recognise the greatness of God and knows how to thank him for his numerous benefices.¹⁹ The second reaction is manifested in the preoccupation to render back to God all the good things and to thank Him because of them, since "whoever holds onto something for himself hides the money of his Lord God within himself, and what he thinks he has will be taken away from him."²⁰ This is the authentic attitude of the one who is poor in heart, who regards everything as a grace, and does not appropriate the gifts he receives, since they are none other than the manifestation of the greatness and goodness of the Creator: "Let us refer all good to the Lord, God Almighty and Most High, acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him, from Whom all good comes, for everything. May He, the Almighty and Most High, the only true God, have, be given, and receive all honour and respect, all praise and blessing, all thanks and glory, to Whom all good belongs, He Who alone is good."²¹

Concluding remarks

After having approached the origins of the word

"minor" beginning from its literary significance (semantic meaning), from its use in the origins of the Franciscan movement (historical meaning), and from the probable social motivations which induced Francis to make use of it (etiological meaning), we proceeded to make a first "incursion" into the Writings of Saint Francis, with the intention of discovering his concept of "minority." The result is that the simple use of the term *minor* does not offer a clear notion of minority, because, among other things, the Saint never wrote anything systematic regarding minority, and does not even use the term *minoritas*. In fact, instead of the abstract term, he prefers the word *minor*, always with a very concrete meaning. The use of the word, in spite of its rare use in his writings, is very unitary, and this indicates a coherence of thought. On the other hand the term appears to be used with a very wide significance, in the sense that it points towards a form of being and, for the same reason, to a mental (spiritual?) condition of those who are called to embrace minority. Another important conclusion is that the adoption of the term *minor* obeys an evident Christological inspiration.

As a result of initial analyses, we have been courageous enough to propose a hypothesis according to which the concept of "minority" clothes entirely the friar minor. In other words, the term has to do with his entire being, it is a true philosophy of life. For this reason we have decided to take as reference the four dimensions of the human person and to make on each one a short analysis into the writings of the Saint of Assisi, with the aim of obtaining the data which can best characterise Franciscan minority. A first conclusion is that minority can be identified as the fundamental attitude of the mind and the heart of the disciple of Jesus Christ according to the form of Francis of Assisi, which implies a dynamic tension in all dimensions of his own existence, regarding the concept he had about himself, about his interaction with the world which surrounded him and with the universe, about his relationship with other human persons, and about his behaviour in front of the Absolute.

From the point of view of the vision that each and every one has of his own self, minority departs from the value which gives to the human person its condition as son and daughter of God and a mission in history. This vision presupposes that, from the most profound roots of its own existence and following the example of Jesus Christ, the human person accepts expropriation, thus leading him or her to a true *kenosis*. For this reason minority excludes the spirit of the flesh, which in modern terms can be referred to the myths surrounding the human person, such as obsession with psychology, the cult of the body, the false sense of freedom, the

importance given to outward appearance, etc. On the other hand minority does not deny the values which build man and society, such as the progress of his own qualities, work, study, health. According to these parameters minority cannot be considered at the same level as ascetic attitudes, nor as being similar to other inferior attitudes, like that of being servile, or like frustrating fear, ignorance or inability. Minority calls for a profound sense of interior harmony, which is not to be confused with a resigned mediocrity. It is a conviction which is acquired with an intimate joy, with a serenity of spirit, without ostentations but also without a sense of defeatism or inferiority complexes. It is rooted in the simplicity of truth. In the light of what we have just shown, minority is a way of being and of looking at ourselves which asks for a *forma mentis*.

From the point of view of the relationship with the material world and, in general, with the universe, the teachings of Francis regarding minority presuppose his doctrine regarding the purity of heart, which in turn leads to an orderly scale of values in a theological hierarchy, at the top of which we find the adoration and contemplation of the “living and true God.” According to this way of considering minority, “the things of this world” should exist in function of the celestial realities, and, for the same reason, they should be looked at with a profound sense of expropriation, which in its turn is one of the fundamental conditions in the following of Christ. This new ordering is the *kosmos* of Francis, in which he established a relationship of dependence and fraternity with all creatures, always in function of the “Most High, omnipotent and good Lord.” It is a *kosmos* which is not tainted with the ever growing phenomena of our contemporary culture, such as the lack of reverence towards creation, or the uncontrolled desire to possess, or the tyranny of consumerism. It is a *kosmos* which implies, at the same time, taking one’s distance from the *kaos* understood as the abuse of things and economy, the downgrading of the value of beauty, the bad aesthetic taste, carelessness and disorder. Minority is not an absence of values but a new value which leads us to a new, free and radical way of being in the world, which implies the moderate use of things and the commitment to share them with others, especially with those who are most in need.

It is in relation to other human beings that the relational dimension of minority is most evident. In this case we leave from the intimate conviction that the others, according to their own condition, are major to themselves. Even in this case the motivation is eminently Christological, not sociological. From this fact we conclude that we should have a generous sense of love and service to the others in the various

spheres of life, in our relationships within the Fraternity, as well as outside it. It implies a set of relationships guided by a new style or, at least, by a diverse style, which departs from the respect of the person of the other, and for the same reason excludes all kinds of dominion, manipulation and violence.

When seen from the point of view of minority, the relationships with others imply a profound sense of “serving” (not a servile attitude) and concrete attitudes of hospitality, which lead to a constant revision of the sense of social condition. In other words, this kind of relationship helps us to place ourselves within society not as major ones, nor asking for privileges (including the *status* of “friars” or “clerics”), but truly being minors, in order to project from this position the redeeming message of freedom, love, mercy, justice and peace. This means that, with reference to his social role, the friar minor is not exclusive nor excluding, although he might show preference to the minors in society, to those who are most poor, who are not defended, who are refused.

Within the context of the structures of society, of the Church and of the same Order, minority does not mean conflict, nor an aggressive attitude, nor a systematic opposition to authority on the part of the one who obeys; nor is it a desire to be powerful or to gain a spirit of superiority on the part of those who have the service of authority. It means that all should place themselves in the human community with an attitude marked by love, by subsidiarity and by simplicity.

As a fundamental attitude in front of the Most High, minority is linked in an indissoluble way to the concept that, from a theological viewpoint, everyone should have of himself or herself, and which leads one to abandon oneself with trust into the hands of God our Father. Although in his writings Francis reflects an ineffable concept of God, particularly in his prayers, and this allows us to perceive the immense and robust experience of his faith, at the same time Francis’ writings give us the security of being able to conclude that minority brought him to enter into a relationship with God starting from his typical condition of an expropriated man. It was this attitude which helped Francis to understand much better the “humility” of God manifested in the self-emptying of His Son. The contemplation of such a great mystery was the driving force of Francis’ reaction of admiration, praise and thanksgiving. In the same way, whenever the Saint experienced his condition of interior poverty and the abundance of gifts which the Lord had endowed him with, he did not appropriate all this nor did he boast because of such gifts, but he rendered them back to God with gratitude.

The preceding verifications lead us to conclude that the name “Friars Minor” is not a simple empty title or a stereotype, but a programme of life which corresponds to a free option as an answer to one’s vocation. Since it is a programme of life, it asks for a constant presence of mind and a permanent commitment on the part of those who have received this vocation, which should be assumed as a vital process in a true dynamic tension that gradually leads those who embrace minority to a distinct *forma mentis*. But it is also necessary to recognise that the concept of minority, described in this way, aims at a form of “being” which will never be fully reached, since it enters into the ambit of the evangelical “utopias” and, last but not least, because it is a special grace of God.

NOTES

¹ L3C 20; FAED 2,80; 1C 15; 2C 12; LMj 2,4.

² This is the noun which is most widely used in the Writings, for a total of 410 times, even though we have to notice that sometimes it is also directed to the Son; cfr. *Corpus des Sources Franciscaines*, V, 118-122 and 98-102 respectively.

³ *ExpPat* 1.

⁴ *ExpPat* 1; *LaudDei* 7; *OffPass* 1,10; 2,1.12; 4,10; 5,16; 6,15; 7,3; 9,3; 12,2; 13,6; 14,2.3; *ExpPat* 3-4; *ExhLD* 8; *LaudDei* 2; *OffPass* 1,5; 2,11; 5,15; 7,2.3.9; *ExpPat* 10; *OffPass* 8,7; 12,1; *ExpPat* 2; *LaudDei* 4,7; *LaudDei* 3; *SalBVM* 3; *LaudDei* 6; *OffPass* 4,9.10; 11,2.7.9; 12,3.5-10.

⁵ *LaudDei* 2; *CantSol* 1,2.4.11; *OrCruc* 1; *OffPass* 13,6; *LaudDei* 2.6.7; *LaudHor* 1.7.11; *CantSol* 2; *LaudDei* 2; *OffPass* 6,14; 8,5; 9,12; 10,2; 12,6; *ExpPat* 7,8; *LaudDei* 7; *OffPass* 4,1; 9,4; 11,9; 12,7; 13,5.

⁶ *ExpPat* 2; *LaudDei* 4; *ExhLD* 1-16; *LaudHor* 1-10; *CantSol* 1.3.5-10.12.14; *LaudDei* 5.

⁷ *OffPass* 4,7; 6,1-16.

⁸ *2EpFid* 5; cfr. *RegB* 6,3.

⁹ *EpOrd* 27-28.

¹⁰ Cfr. *Adm* 1,16-19.

¹¹ Cfr. *Adm* 2,3; 7,4; 8,3; 12,2; 17,1; 18,2.

¹² *FormViv* 1, in *The Form of Life of Saint Clare*, 6,3: CAED 118.

¹³ *RegNB* 23,4: “and to say to all those who have known You, adored You and served You in penance: *Come, you blessed of my Father...*”

¹⁴ *OffPass* 2,4-5.

¹⁵ *RegNB* 22,26: “But, in the holy love which is God, I beg all my brothers [...] after overcoming every impediment and putting aside every care and anxiety, to serve, love, honour and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind in whatever way they are best able to do so, for that is what He wants above all else.”

¹⁶ Cfr. *RegNB* 23,4; *CantSol* 14.

¹⁷ *Adm* 19,2.

¹⁸ *Adm* 17,1.

¹⁹ *RegNB* 23,9: “Therefore, let us desire nothing else, let us want nothing else, let nothing else please us and cause us delight except our Creator, Redeemer and Saviour, the only true God, Who is the fullness of good, all good, every good, the true and supreme good, Who alone is good, merciful, gentle, delightful, and sweet, Who alone is holy, just, true, holy, and upright, Who alone is kind, innocent, clean, from Whom, through Whom and in Whom is all pardon, all grace, all glory of all penitents and just ones, of all the blessed rejoicing together in heaven.” *RegNB* 23,11: “...let all of us truly and humbly believe, hold in our heart and love, honour, adore, serve, praise and bless, glorify and exalt, magnify and give thanks to the Most High and Supreme Eternal God...” Cfr. *Ib.*, 21,2; 23,1; *CantSol* 1-2.

²⁰ *Adm* 18,2; Cfr. *RegNB* 17,17; *Adm* 7; 8; 17; 18.

²¹ *RegNB* 17,17-18.

PAUL SABATIER

«LIFE OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI»

Translated into English by Louise Seymour Houghton, (Hodder and Stoughton), London 1908.

Chapter IV – STRUGGLES AND TRIUMPH (Spring 1206 – February 24, 1209)

[53] The biographies of St. Francis have preserved to us an incident which shows how great was the religious ferment even in the little city of Assisi. A stranger was seen to go up and down the streets saying to every one he met, "Peace and welfare!" (Pax et bonum.) He thus expressed in his own way the disquietude of those hearts which could neither resign themselves to perpetual warfare nor to the disappearance of faith and love; artless echo, vibrating in response to the hopes and fears that were shaking all Europe!

"Vox clamantis in deserto!" it will be said. No, for every heart-cry leaves its trace even when it seems to be uttered in empty air, and that of the Unknown of Assisi may have contributed in some measure to Francis's definitive call.

Since his abrupt return from Spoleto, life in his father's house had become daily more difficult. Bernardone's self-love had received from his son's discomfiture such a wound as with commonplace men is never healed. He might provide, without counting it, money to be swallowed up in dissipation, that so his son might stand on an equal footing with the young nobles; he could never resign himself to see him giving with lavish hands to every beggar in the streets.

[54] Francis, continually plunged in reverie and spending his days in lonely wanderings in the fields, was no longer of the least use to his father. Months passed, and the distance between the two men grew even wider; and the gentle and loving Pica could do nothing to prevent a rupture which from this time appeared to be inevitable. Francis soon came to feel only one desire, to flee from the abode where, in the place of love, he found only reproaches, upbraidings, anguish.

The faithful confidant of his earlier struggles had been obliged to leave him, and this absolute

solitude weighed heavily upon his warm and loving heart. He did what he could to escape from it, but no one understood him. The ideas which he was beginning timidly to express evoked from those to whom he spoke only mocking smiles or the head-shakings which men sure that they are right bestow upon him who is marching straight into madness. He even went to open his mind to the bishop, but the latter understood no more than others his vague, incoherent plans, filled with ideas impossible to realize and possibly subversive. It was thus that in spite of himself Francis was led to ask nothing of men, but to raise himself by prayer to intuitive knowledge of the divine will. The doors of houses and of hearts were alike closing upon him, but the interior voice was about to speak out with irresistible force and make itself forever obeyed.

Among the numerous chapels in the suburbs of Assisi there was one which he particularly loved, that of St. Damian. It was reached by a few minutes' walk over a stony path, almost trackless, under olive trees, amid odors of lavender and rosemary. Standing on the top of a hillock, the entire plain is visible from it, through a curtain of cypresses and pines which seem to be trying [55] to hide the humble hermitage and set up an ideal barrier between it and the world.

Served by a poor priest who had scarcely the wherewithal for necessary food, the sanctuary was falling into ruin. There was nothing in the interior but a simple altar of masonry, and by way of reredos one of those byzantine crucifixes still so numerous in Italy, where through the work of the artists of the time has come down to us something of the terrors which agitated the twelfth century. In general the Crucified One, frightfully lacerated, with bleeding wounds, appears to seek to inspire only grief and compunction; that of St. Damian, on the contrary, has an expression of inexpressible calm and gentleness; instead of closing the eyelids in eternal surrender to the weight of suffering, it looks down in self-forgetfulness, and its pure, clear gaze says, not "I suffer," but, "Come unto me."

One day Francis was praying before the poor altar: "Great and glorious God, and thou, Lord Jesus, I pray ye, shed abroad your light in the darkness of my mind. ... Be found of me, Lord, so that in all things I may act only in accordance with thy holy will."

Thus he prayed in his heart, and behold, little by little it seemed to him that his gaze could not detach itself from that of Jesus; he felt something marvellous taking place in and around him. The sacred victim took on life, and in the outward silence he was aware of a voice which softly stole into the very depths of his heart, speaking to him an ineffable language. Jesus accepted his oblation.

Jesus desired his labor, his life, all his being, and the heart of the poor solitary was already bathed in light and strength.

[56] This vision marks the final triumph of Francis. His union with Christ is consummated; from this time he can exclaim with the mystics of every age, "My beloved is mine, and I am his."

But instead of giving himself up to transports of contemplation he at once asks himself how he may repay to Jesus love for love, in what action he shall employ this life which he has just offered to him. He had not long to seek. We have seen that the chapel where his spiritual espousals had just been celebrated was threatened with ruin. He believed that to repair it was the work assigned to him.

From that day the remembrance of the Crucified One, the thought of the love which had triumphed in immolating itself, became the very centre of his religious life and as it were the soul of his soul. For the first time, no doubt, Francis had been brought into direct, personal, intimate contact with Jesus Christ; from belief he had passed to faith, to that living faith which a distinguished thinker has so well defined: "To believe is to look; it is a serious, attentive, and prolonged look; a look more simple than that of observation, a look which looks, and nothing more; artless, infantine, it has all the soul in it, it is a look of the soul and not the mind, a look which does not seek to analyze its object, but which receives it as a whole into the soul through the eyes." In these words Vinet unconsciously has marvellously characterized the religious temperament of St. Francis.

This look of love cast upon the crucifix, this mysterious colloquy with the compassionate victim, was never more to cease. At St. Damian, St. Francis's piety took on its outward appearance and its originality. From this time his soul bears the stigmata, and as his biographers have said in words untranslatable, *Ab illa hora vulnera-[57]tum et liquefactum est cor ejus ed memoriam Dominicae passionis.*

From that time his way was plain before him. Coming out from the sanctuary, he gave the priest all the money he had about him to keep a lamp always burning, and with ravished heart he returned to Assisi. He had decided to quit his father's house and undertake the restoration of the chapel, after having broken the last ties that bound him to the past. A horse and a few pieces of gayly colored stuffs were all that he possessed. Arrived at home he made a packet of the stuffs, and mounting his horse he set out for Foligno. This city was then as now the most important commercial town of all the region. Its fairs attracted the whole population of Umbria and the Sabines. Bernardone had often taken his son there, and Francis speedily succeeded in selling

all he had brought. He even parted with his horse, and full of joy set out upon the road to Assisi.

This act was to him most important; it marked his final rupture with the past; from this day on his life was to be in all points the opposite of what it had been; the Crucified had given himself to him; he on his side had given himself to the Crucified without reserve or return. To uncertainty, disquietude of soul, anguish, longing for an unknown good, bitter regrets, had succeeded a delicious calm, the ecstasy of the lost child who finds his mother, and forgets in a moment the torture of his heart.

From Foligno he returned direct to St. Damian; it was not necessary to pass through the city, and he was in haste to put his projects into execution.

[58] The poor priest was surprised enough when Francis handed over to him the whole product of his sale. He doubtless thought that a passing quarrel had occurred between Bernardone and his son, and for greater prudence refused the gift; but Francis so insisted upon remaining with him that he finally gave him leave to do so. As to the money, now become useless, Francis cast it as a worthless object upon a window-seat in the chapel.

Meanwhile, Bernardone, disturbed by his son's failure to return, sought for him in all quarters, and was not long in learning of his presence at St. Damian. In a moment he perceived that Francis was lost to him. Resolved to try every means, he collected a few neighbours and furious with rage hastened to the hermitage to snatch him away, if need be, by main force.

But Francis knew his father's violence. When he heard the shouts of those who were in pursuit of him he felt his courage fail and hurried to a hiding-place which he had prepared for himself for precisely such an emergency. Bernardone, no doubt ill seconded in the search, ransacked every corner, but was obliged at last to return to Assisi without his son. Francis remained hidden for long days, weeping and groaning, imploring God to show him the path he ought to follow. Notwithstanding his fears he had an infinite joy at heart, and at no price would he have turned back.

This seclusion could not last long. Francis perceived this, and told himself that for a newly made knight of the Christ he was cutting a very pitiful figure. Arming himself, therefore, with courage, he went one day to the city to present himself before his father and made known to him his resolution.

It is easy to imagine the changes wrought in his appearance by these few weeks of seclusion, passed much of them in mental anguish. When he appeared, pale, cadaverous, his clothes in tatters, upon what is now the Piazza Nuova, where hundreds of children play all day long, he was greeted with

a great shout, "Pazzo, Pazzo!" (A madman! a madman!). "Un pazzo ne fa cento" (One madman makes a hundred more), says the proverb, but one must have seen the delirious excitement of the street children in Italy at the sight of a madman to gain an idea how true it is. The moment the magic cry resounds they rush into the street with frightful din, and while their parents look on from the windows, they surround the unhappy sufferer with wild dances mingled with songs, shouts, and savage howls. They throw stones at him, fling mud upon him, blindfold him; if he flies into a rage, they double their insults; if he weeps or begs for pity, they repeat his cries and mimic his sobs and supplications without respite and without mercy.

Bernardone soon heard the clamor which filled the narrow streets, and went out to enjoy the show; suddenly he thought he heard his own name and that of his son, and bursting with shame and rage he perceived Francis. Throwing himself upon him, as if to throttle him, he dragged him into the house and cast him, half dead, into a dark closet. Threats, bad usage, everything was brought to bear to change the prisoner's resolves, but all in vain. At last, wearied out and desperate, he left him in peace, though not without having firmly bound him.

A few days after he was obliged to be absent for a short time. Pica, his wife, understood only too well his grievances against Francis, but feeling that violence would be of no avail she resolved to try gentleness. It was all in vain. Then, not being able longer to see him thus tortured, she set him at liberty.

[60] He returned straight to St. Damian.

Bernardone, on his return, went so far as to strike Pica in punishment for her weakness. Then, unable to tolerate the thought of seeing his son the jest of the whole city, he tried to procure his expulsion from the territory of Assisi. Going to St. Damian he summoned him to leave the country. This time Francis did not try to hide. Boldly presenting himself before his father, he declared to him that not only would nothing induce him to abandon his resolutions, but that, moreover, having become the servant of Christ, he had no longer to receive orders from him. As Bernardone launched out into invective, reproaching him with the enormous sums which he had cost him, Francis showed him by a gesture the money which he had brought back from the sale at Foligno lying on the window-ledge. The father greedily seized it and went away, resolving to appeal before the magistrates.

The consuls summoned Francis to appear before them, but he replied simply that as a servant of the Church he did not come under their jurisdiction. Glad of this response, which relieved them of a

delicate dilemma, they referred the complainant to the diocesan authorities.

The matter took on another aspect before the ecclesiastical tribunal; it was idle to dream of asking the bishop to pronounce a sentence of banishment, since it was his part to preserve the liberty of the clerics. Bernardone could do no more than disinherit his son, or at least induce him of his own accord to renounce all claim upon his inheritance. This was not difficult.

When called upon to appear before the episcopal tri-[61]bunal Francis experienced a lively joy; his mystical espousals to the Crucified One were now to receive a sort of official consecration. To this Jesus, whom he had so often blasphemed and betrayed by word and conduct, he would now be able with equal publicity to promise obedience and fidelity.

It is easy to imagine the sensation which all this caused in a small town like Assisi, and the crowd that on the appointed day pressed toward the Piazza of Santa Maria Maggiore, where the bishop pronounced sentence. Every one held Francis to be assuredly mad, but they anticipated with relish the shame and rage of Bernardone, whom every one detested, and whose pride was so well punished by all this.

The bishop first set forth the case, and advised Francis to simply give up all his property. To the great surprise of the crowd the latter, instead of replying, retired to a room in the bishop's palace, and immediately reappeared absolutely naked, holding in his hand the packet into which he had rolled his clothes; these he laid down before the bishop with the little money that he still had kept, saying: "Listen, all of you, and understand it well; until this time I have called Pietro Bernardone my father, but now I desire to serve God. This is why I return to him this money, for which he has given himself so much trouble, as well as my clothing, and all that I have had from him, for from henceforth I desire to say nothing else than 'Our Father, who art in heaven'."

A long murmur arose from the crowd when Bernardone was seen to gather up and carry off the clothing without the least evidence of compassion, while the bishop was [62] fain to take under his mantle the poor Francis, who was trembling with emotion and cold.

The scene of the judgment hall made an immense impression; the ardor, simplicity, and indignation of Francis had been so profound and sincere that scoffers were disconcerted. On that day he won for himself a secret sympathy in many souls. The populace loves such abrupt conversions, or those which it considers such. Francis once again forced himself upon the attention of his fellow-citizens

with a power all the greater for the contrast between his former and his new life.

There are pious folk whose modesty is shocked by the nudity of Francis; but Italy is not Germany nor England, and the thirteenth century would have been astonished indeed at the prudery of the Bollandists. The incident is simply a new manifestation of Francis's character, with its ingenuousness, its exaggerations, its longing to establish a complete harmony, a literal correspondence, between words and actions.

After emotions such as he had just experienced he felt the need of being alone, of realizing his joy, of singing the liberty he had finally achieved along all the lines where once he had so deeply suffered, so ardently struggled. He would not, therefore, return immediately to St. Damian. Leaving the city by the nearest gate, he plunged into the deserted paths which climb the sides of Mount Subasio.

It was the early spring. Here and there were still great drifts of snow, but under the ardor of the March sun winter seemed to own itself vanquished. In the midst of this mysterious and bewildering harmony the heart of Francis felt a delicious thrill, all his being was calmed and uplifted, the soul of things caressed him gently and shed upon him peace. An unwonted happiness swept over him; he made the forest to resound with his hymns of praise.

Men utter in song emotions too sweet or too deep to be expressed in ordinary language, but unworded music is in this respect superior to song, it is above all things the language of the ineffable. Song gains almost the same value when the words are only there as a support for the voice. The great beauty of the psalms and hymns of the Church lies in the fact that being sung in an unknown tongue they make no appeal to the intelligence; they say nothing, but they express everything with marvellous modulations like a celestial accompaniment, which follows the believer's emotions from the most agonizing struggles to the most unspeakable ecstasies.

So Francis went on his way, deeply inhaling the odors of spring, singing at the top of his voice one of those songs of French chivalry which he had learned in days gone by.

The forest in which he was walking was the usual retreat of such people of Assisi and its environs as had any reason for hiding. Some ruffians, aroused by his voice, suddenly fell upon him. "Who are you?" they asked. "I am the herald of the great King," he answered; "but what is that to you?"

His only garment was an old mantle which the bishop's gardener had lent him at his master's request. They stripped it from him, and throwing him into a ditch full of snow, "There is your place, poor herald of God," they said.

The robbers gone, he shook off the snow which covered him, and after many efforts succeeded in extricating himself from the ditch. Stiff with cold, with no other covering than a worn-out shirt, he none the less resumed his singing, happy to suffer and thus to accustom himself the better to understand the words of the Crucified One.

[64] Not far away was a monastery. He entered and offered his services. In those solitudes, peopled often by such undesirable neighbors, people were suspicious. The monks permitted him to make himself useful in the kitchen, but they gave him nothing to cover himself with and hardly anything to eat. There was nothing for it but to go away; he directed his steps toward Gubbio, where he knew that he should find a friend. Perhaps this was he who had been his confidant on his return from Spoleto. However this may be, he received from him a tunic, and a few days after set out to return to his dear St. Damian.

He did not, however, go directly thither; before beginning to restore the little sanctuary, he desired to see again his friends, the lepers, to promise them that he would love them even better than in the past.

Since his first visit to the leper-house the brilliant cavalier had become a poor beggar; he came with empty hands but with heart overflowing with tenderness and compassion. Taking up his abode in the midst of these afflicted ones he lavished upon them the most touching care, washing and wiping their sores, all the more gentle and radiant as their sores were more repulsive. The neglected sufferer is as much blinded by love of him who comes to visit him as the child by its love for its mother. He believes him to be all powerful; at his approach the most painful sufferings are erased or disappear.

[65] This love inspired by the sympathy of an affectionate heart may become so deep as to appear at times supernatural; the dying have been known to recover consciousness in order to look for the last time into the face, not of some member of the family, but of the friend who has tried to be the sunshine of their last days. The ties of pure love are stronger than the bonds of flesh and blood. Francis had many a time sweet experience of this; from the time of his arrival at the leper-house he felt that if he had lost his life he was about to find it again.

Encouraged by his sojourn among the lepers, he returned to St. Damian and went to work, filled with joy and ardor, his heart so much in the sunshine as the Umbrian plain in this beautiful month of May. After having fashioned for himself a hermit's dress, he began to go into the squares and open places of the city. There having sung a few hymns, he would announce to those who gathered around him his

project of restoring the chapel. "Those who will give me one stone," he would add with a smile, "shall have a reward; those who give me two shall have two rewards, and those who give me three shall have three."

Many deemed him mad, but others were deeply moved by the remembrance of the past. As for Francis, deaf to mockery, he spared himself no labor, carrying upon his shoulders, so ill-fitted for sever toil, the stones which were given him.

During this time the poor priest of St. Damian felt his heart swelling with love for this companion who had at first caused him such embarrassment, and he strove to prepare for him his favorite dishes. Francis soon perceived it. His delicacy took alarm at the expense which he caused his friend, and, thanking him, he resolved to beg his food from door to door.

[66] It was not an easy task. The first time, when at the end of his round he glanced at the broken food in his wallet, he felt his courage fail him. But the thought of being so soon unfaithful to the spouse to whom he had plighted his faith made his blood run cold with shame and gave him strength to eat ravenously.

Each hour, so to speak, brought to him a new struggle. One day he was going through the town begging for oil for the lamps of St. Damian, when he arrived at a house where a banquet was going on; the greater number of his former companions were there, singing and dancing. At the sound of those well-known voices he felt as if he could not enter; he even turned away, but very soon, filled with confusion by his own cowardice, he returned quickly upon his steps, made his way into the banquet-hall, and after confessing his shame, put so much earnestness and fire into his request that every one desired to co-operate in this pious work.

His bitterest trial however was his father's anger, which remained as violent as ever. Although he had renounced Francis, Bernardone's pride suffered none the less at seeing his mode of life, and whenever he met his son he overwhelmed him with reproaches and maledictions. The tender heart of Francis was so wrung with sorrow that he resorted to a sort of stratagem for charming away the spell of the paternal imprecations. "Come with me," he said to a beggar; "be to me as a father, and I will give you a part of the alms which I receive. When you see Bernardone curse me, if I say, 'Bless me, my father,' you must sign me with the cross and bless me in his stead." His brother was prominent in the front rank of those who harassed him with their mockeries. One winter morning they met in a church; [67] Angelo leaned over to a friend who was with him, saying: "Go, ask Francis to sell you a farthing's worth of his sweat." "No," replied the

latter, who overheard. "I shall sell it much dearer to my God."

In the spring of 1208 he finished the restoration of St. Damian; he had been aided by all people of good will, setting the example of work and above all of joy, cheering everybody by his songs and his projects for the future. He spoke with such enthusiasm and contagious warmth of the transformation of his dear chapel, of the grace which God would accord to those who should come there to pray, that later on it was believed that he had spoken of Clara and her holy maidens who were to retire to this place four years later.

This success soon inspired him with the idea of repairing the other sanctuaries in the suburbs of Assisi. Those which had struck him by their state of decay were St. Peter and Santa Maria of the Portiuncula, called also Santa Maria degli Angeli. The former is not otherwise mentioned in his biographies. As to the second, it was to become the true cradle of the Franciscan movement.

This chapel, still standing at the present day after escaping revolutions and earthquakes, is a true Bethel, one of those rare spots in the world on which rests the mystic ladder which joins heaven to earth; there were dreamed some of the noblest dreams which have soothed the pains of humanity. It is not to Assisi in its marvellous basilica that one must go to divine and comprehend St. Francis; he must turn his steps to Santa Maria degli Angeli at the hours when the stated prayers cease, at the moment when the evening shadows lengthen, when all the fripperies of worship disappear in the obscurity, [68] when all the nation seems to collect itself to listen to the chime of the distant church bells. Doubtless it was Francis's plan to settle there as a hermit. He dreamed of passing his life there in meditation and silence, keeping up the little church and from time to time inviting a priest there to say mass. Nothing as yet suggested to him that he was in the end to become a religious founder. One of the most interesting aspects of his life is in fact the continual development revealing itself in him; he is of the small number to whom to live is to be active, and to be active to make progress. There is hardly anyone, except St. Paul, in whom is found to the same degree the devouring need of being always something more, always something better, and it is so beautiful in both of them only because it is absolutely instinctive.

When he began to restore the Portiuncula his projects hardly went beyond a very narrow horizon; he was preparing himself for a life of penitence rather than a life of activity. But these works once finished it was impossible that this somewhat selfish and passive manner of achieving his own salvation

should satisfy him long. At the memory of the appearance of the Crucified One his heart would swell with overpowering emotions, and he would melt into tears without knowing whether they were of admiration, pity, or desire.

When the repairs were finished meditation occupied the greater part of his days. A Benedictine of the Abbey of Mount Subasio came from time to time to say mass at Santa Maria; these were the bright hours of St. Francis's life. One can imagine with what pious care he prepared himself and with what faith he listened to the divine teachings.

One day, it was probably February 24, 1209, the fes-[69]tival of St. Matthias, mass was being celebrated at the Portiuncula. When the priest turned toward him to read the words of Jesus, Francis felt himself overpowered with a profound agitation. He no longer saw the priest; it was Jesus, the Crucified One of St. Damian, who was speaking: "Wherever ye go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither silver nor gold nor brass in your purses, neither scrip nor two coats, nor shoes nor staff, for the laborer is worthy of his meat."

These words burst upon him like a revelation, like the answer of Heaven to his sighs and anxieties.

"This is what I want," he cried, "this is what I was seeking; from this day forth I shall set myself with all my strength to put it in practice." Immediately throwing aside his stick, his scrip, his purse, his shoes, he determined immediately to obey, observing to the letter the precepts of the apostolic life.

It is quite possible that some allegorizing tendencies have had some influence upon this narrative. The long struggle through which Francis passed before becoming the apostle of the new times assuredly came to a crisis in the scene at Portiuncula; but we have already seen how slow was the interior travail which prepared for it.

The revelation of Francis was in his heart; the sacred fire which he was to communicate to the souls of others came from within his own, but the best causes need a [70] standard. Before the shabby altar of the Portiuncula he had perceived the banner of poverty, sacrifice, and love, he would carry it to the assault of every fortress of sin; under its shadow, a true knight of Christ, he would marshal all the valiant warriors of a spiritual strife.



«LE IMMAGINI DEL FRANCESCANESIMO»

36th International Study Congress SISF

The “Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani”, founded by Paul Sabatier, organised the 36th International Study Congress in Assisi on 9th – 11th October 2008. This annual event draws to Assisi the most prestigious scholars of Franciscan history, many of whom are lay professors in various universities all over Europe.

The theme chosen for this year's Congress is “Le Immagini del Francescanesimo” (The Images of Franciscanism). As the title states, this year's Congress dealt with the artistic representations in early Franciscan history.

The programme of the Congress was the following. On 9th October there were talks by U. Vignuzzi (Università “La Sapienza”, Roma): “Ricordo di Ignazio Baldelli”; R. Rusconi (Università Roma Tre): “Francesco d'Assisi, i frati Minori e le immagini”; K. Tachau (Iowa University): “L'elaborazione di una teoria dello sguardo nei teologi francescani”. On 10th October it was the turn of M. Bacci (Università di Siena): “Immagini miracolose, promozione dei culti e nuovi santi presso i Minori”; R. Argenziano (Università di Siena): “Il Breviarium Fratrum Minorum miniato da Santo di Pietro per il convento di Santa Chiara di Siena”; D. Donadieu-Rigaux (Univ. de Marne La Vallée): “Penser en image l'ordre franciscain”; C. Frugoni – N. D'Acunto (Università Cattolica “Sacro Cuore”, Milano): “Testo e immagine del ciclo francescano della Basilica superiore di Assisi”; L. Bourdua (University of Warwick, Coventry): “Ordini religiosi e grandi cicli di affreschi”; R. Cobianchi (Villa I Tatti, Firenze): “La canonizzazione di Francesco d'Assisi tra testo e immagini”. On 11th October the Congress concluded with the talks of C. Aglietti (Università Tor Vergata, Roma): “Storie francescane per immagini dopo Bonaventura e Giotto: il ciclo pittorico di San Francesco a Castelvecchio Subequo”; M. Bollati (Università Cattolica “Sacro Cuore”, Milano): “Gloria e trionfo: un'immagine di Francesco nel tardo Medioevo da Taddeo di Bartolo a Sassetta e oltre”.

This year's theme is highly specialised, when compared with preceding themes, which dwelt more on the historical aspect of the Franciscan movement in the Middle Ages. It is the first time that a specifically artistic theme is being considered in a

Congress of the International Society of Franciscan Studies. However, it is still perfectly in line with many themes already developed in preceding meetings, which dealt with the theme of sanctity and cult. One should remember that the artistic representations of images of Saint Francis during the Middle Ages were aimed at promoting the cult of the Saint. The best example of such artistic cycles is the basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi, but in Umbria there are other famous cycles of paintings and frescoes regarding Saint Francis and the Franciscan saints of the 13th and 14th centuries, including Saint Clare of Assisi, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Louis of Anjou, bishop of Toulouse, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, Saint Louis IX, King of France.



Books



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• *Franciscans and Liturgical Life: Let Us Praise, Adore and Give Thanks*, Washington Theological Union Symposium Papers 2006, Commission on the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition / English Speaking Conference of the Order of Friars Minor (CFIT/OFM Series, 6), Editor Elise Saggau OSF, ISBN 978-157659-142-0.

• *Franciscan Evangelization. Striving to Preach the Gospel*, Washington Theological Union Symposium Papers 2007, Commission on the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition / English Speaking Conference of the Order of Friars Minor (CFIT/OFM Series, 7), Editor Elise Saggau OSF, ISBN 978-157659-148-4.

These two volumes are the most recent in the Franciscan Heritage Series. The other volumes were entitled: *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: Tracing Its Origins and Identifying Its Central Components*, by Kenan Osborne (2003); *A Franciscan View of Creation: Learning to Live in a Sacramental World*, by Ilia Delio (2003); *The Franciscan View of the Human Person: Some Central Elements*, by Dawn M. Nothwehr (2005);

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This series was initiated by the Commission on the Retrieval of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition (CFIT). The series is intended to include various topics linked with the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition, including Christian Anthropology, Ecclesiology, Scripture, Evangelization, History, Natural Sciences, the Arts. The publication of this series is sponsored by the English Speaking Conference of the Order of Friars Minor.

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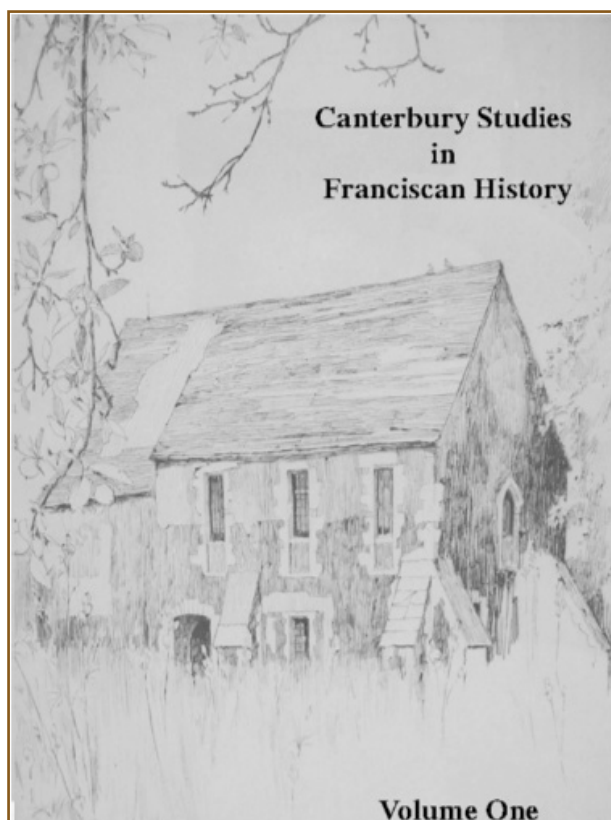
• SAINT BONAVENTURE, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, Introduction and Translation by Zachary Hayes. Notes by Robert J. Karris, (Works of St. Bonaventure, Vol. XIV, ISBN 1-57659-147-8.

The volumes regarding the Works of St. Bonaventure are a precious contribution to understanding the theology of the Seraphic Doctor, now that readers can consult the English translations of the *Opera Omnia* published by the Quaracchi Editors a century ago. The translation regarding the *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit* continues the series of translations of other *Collations* of the Seraphic Doctor, particularly the *Collations on the Ten Commandments* and the *Collations on the Six Days of Creation*. These last series of conferences, delivered by Bonaventure at the very end of his long career as a doctor of theology in the Paris University, are still awaiting publication in the Works of Bonaventure series.

The set of *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity, on the Knowledge of Christ*, and on *Evangelical Perfection* have now been published.

Other new publications by the Franciscan Institute

• *Daring to Embrace the Other: Franciscans and Muslims in Dialogue*, (Spirit and Life Series, 12), by Michael F. Cusato, Michael D. Calabria, Robert Lentz, Irfan A. Omar and Madge Karecki, ISBN 1-57659-151-4.



• JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *The Examined Report on the Paris Lecture, Volume 2*, by Allan B. Wolter and Oleg V. Bychkov, ISBN 1-57659-150-6. The volume completes the entire translation into English of the Latin original of Scotus' *Reportatio I-A*.

• *The Third Order Regular Rule: A Source Book*, Edited by Margaret Carney, Jean François Godet-Calogeras, and Suzanne M. Kush, ISBN 1-57659-149-2. The study is a historical and spiritual commentary on the text of the Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, approved in 1982.

• ROBERTO RUSCONI, *Francis of Assisi in the Sources and Writings*, Translated from the original Italian version by Nancy Celaschi.

• GRADO MERLO, *In the Name of Francis*, Translated from the Italian by Raphael Bonanno. Edited by Robert J. Karris.

• ELISABETH LOPEZ, *Learning and Holiness: Colette of Corbie (11381-1447)*, Translated by Joanna Waller.

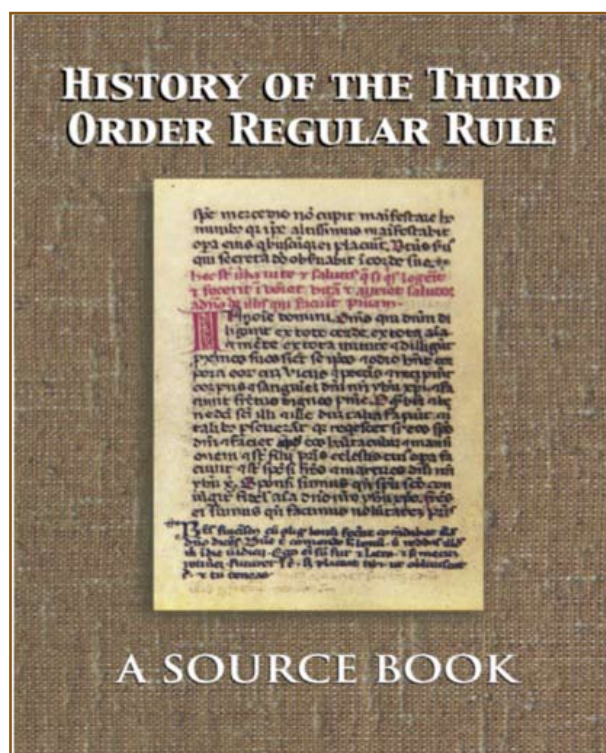
Publications by the Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury

• *Canterbury Studies in Franciscan History*,

Edited by Dr. Jens Röhrkasten (University of Birmingham) and Dr. Michael Robson (St. Edmund's College, Cambridge), Volume 1. In 2006 the Franciscan International Study Centre in Canterbury established the Franciscan History Conference that meets in September each year. The papers from this conference are published in a series entitled *Canterbury Studies in Franciscan History*. This volume published papers by scholars of Franciscan history on the York and Cambridge medieval Franciscan custodies, the Franciscan philosophy of money, Roger Bacon, Franciscan Libraries and the Observant movement.

• *A Pilgrimage through the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition*, Forward by Joe Chinnicci. To be published in January 2009. Contains input from scholars Nicole Bériou, Andre Cirino, Johannes Freyer, Seamus Mulholland, Amanda Power, Michael Robson, Hermann Schalück, and Philippe Yates. In 2006 the Franciscan International Study Centre participated in a joint programme of two pilgrimages in conjunction with Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs. These two pilgrimages visited sites connected with the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition in England, France and Germany, hearing eminent scholars at each place. The talks given at these pilgrimage sites will now be collected in this volume.

Further information and ordering of these volumes: publications@franciscans.ac.uk



Grace of our origins... grace of our future...

José Rodríguez Carballo OFM, Minister
General and General Definitory:

Letter "Solemnitas Sancti Francisci" 2008

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«The celebration of the VIII Centenary of the simple gesture of Francis presenting himself before the Lord Pope and asking for the approval of his form of life is already upon us. Many Friars have recognised themselves and have found a way to live as disciples of Jesus in different periods in it since then. The memory of that day and of the many stories of discipleship is now being lived by us and is contributing to shaping the features of the very countenance of our fraternity at this time, which is so particular and provocative for us all. Our formative journeys find life in this living memory so that the evangelical vocation of the Friars Minor may become possible today in a change of epoch, which requires us to live in an ever-changing reality. The Gospel does not change, but it is also true that the times, the places and the cultures are not absolutely indifferent to its reception in life. The task of formation, therefore, seems to be complex and, at the same time, a source of enthusiasm today. The celebration of the grace of our origins could unlock a grace of the future in us if we do not flee from the call to make restitution of the gift of our vocation, not in the closed space of our cloisters which are often empty, but in the greater cloister of the world, the only one which really belongs to us and in which we should feel at ease.»

”

Abbreviations

Writings of St. Francis

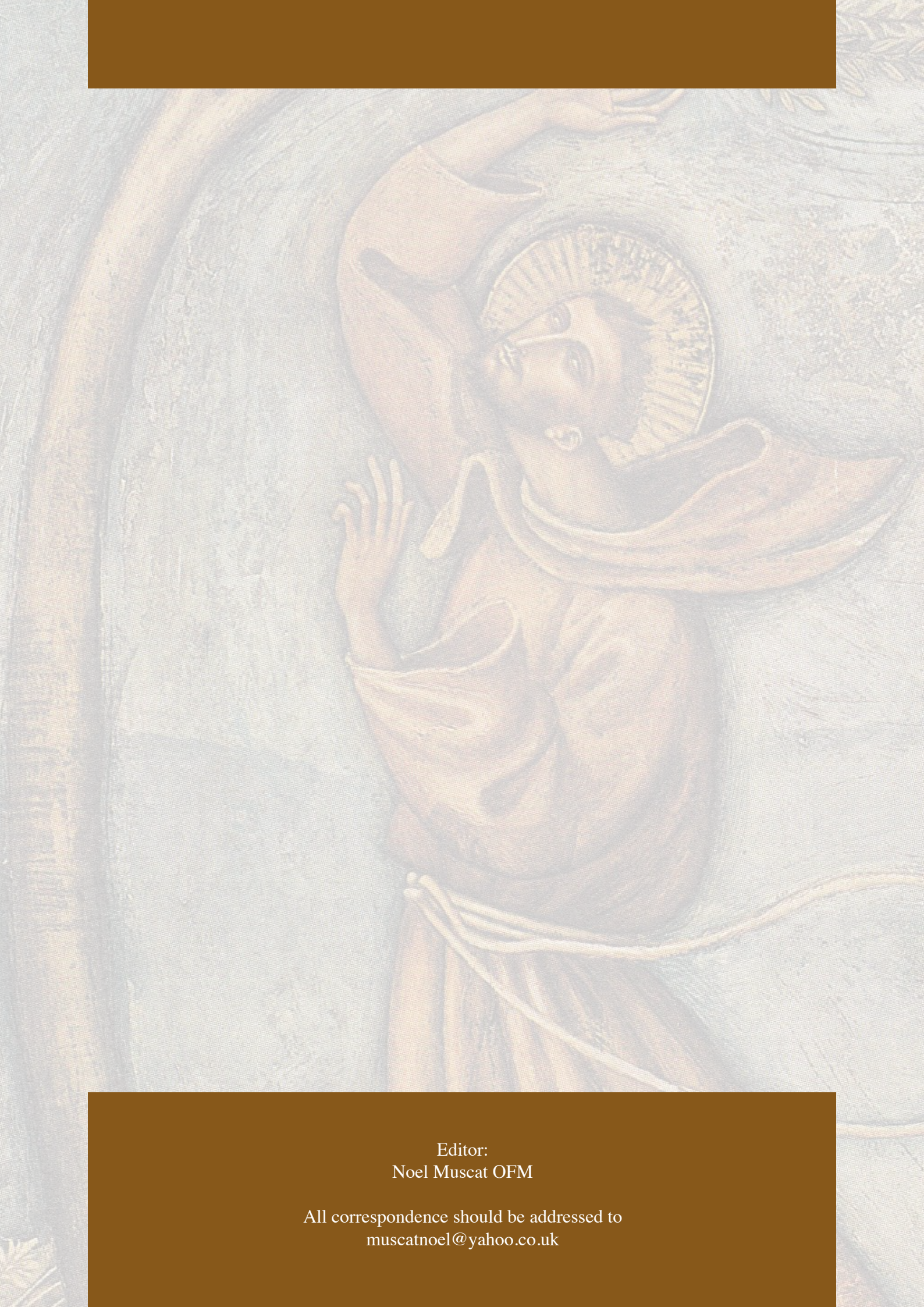
Adm	Admonitiones.
CantAudPov	Cantico Audite Poverelle.
CantSol	Canticum fratris Solis.
LaudDei	Laudes Dei Altissimi.
BenLeo	Benedictio fratri Leoni data.
EpAnt	Epistola ad sanctum Antonium.
EpCler I	Epistola ad Clericos (Redactio prior).
EpCler II	Epistola ad Clericos (Red. posterior).
EpCust I	Epistola ad Custodes I.
EpCust II	Epistola ad Custodes II.
EpFid I	Epistola ad Fideles I.
EpFid II	Epistola ad Fideles II.
EpLeo	Epostola ad fratrem Leonem.
EpMin	Epistola ad Ministrum.
EpOrd	Epistola toti Ordini missa.
EpRect	Epistola ad populorum rectores.
ExhLD	Exhortatio ad Laudem Dei.
ExpPat	Expositio in Pater noster.
FormViv	Forma vivendi sanctae Clarae data.
Fragm	Fragmenta alterius RegulaeNB.
LaudHor	Laudes ad omnes horas dicendae.
OffPass	Officium Passionis Domini.
OrCruc	Oratio ante crucifixum.
RegB	Regula bullata.
RegNB	Regula non bullata.
RegEr	Regula pro eremitoriis data.
SalBMV	Salutatio beatae Mariae Virginis.
SalVirt	Salutatio virtutum.
Test	Testamentum.
UltVol	Ultima voluntas S. Clarae scripta.

Sources for the Life of St. Francis

1C	Tommaso da Celano, Vita Sancti Francisci.
LCh	Celano, Legenda ad usum chori.
2C	Celano, Memoriale in Desiderio Animae.
3C	Celano, Tractatus de Miraculis S. Francisci.
LJS	Julian of Speyer, Vita Sancti Francisci.
OR	Officium Rhythmicum S. Francisci.
AP	Anonimo Perugino.
L3C	Leggenda dei Tre Compagni.
CA	Compilatio Assisiensis.
LMj	S. Bonaventura, Legenda Maior S. Francisci.
LMn	S. Bonaventura, Legenda minor S. Francisci.
SP	Speculum Perfectionis.
SC	Sacrum commercium S. Francisci.
ABF	Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Eius.
Fior	Fioretti di San Francesco.

Sources for the Life of St. Clare

BC	Bull of Canonization of St. Clare.
BICl	Blessing of St. Clare.
1-4LAg	Letters to St. Agnes of Prague..
LCI	Legend of St. Clare.
PC	Acts of the Process of Canonization.
PrPov	Privilege of Poverty.
RegCl	Rule of St. Clare.
TestCl	Testament of St. Clare.



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