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FRANCISCAN INSTITUTE ST. BONAVENTURE UNIVERSITY
SAINT BONAVENTURE, NEW YORK

OUR MONTHLY CONFERENCE

The month of January is dedicated to the Holy Name of Jesus. In Sacred Scripture names frequently foreshadow the divine calling or mission of the person who bears the name. The Gospel for the Feast of the Circumcision, the first day of the new year, is the shortest throughout the entire Ecclesiastical Year. But, its one brief sentence resembles a ball of golden thread which entwines the eternal decrees of God with a simple rite, performed in obedience. Divine Wisdom, says the Wise Man of old, "reacheth therefore from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly" (Wisd. 8, 1). In this instance the result of an act of obedience was the naming of the Child by the sweet Name of Jesus, "for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1, 21). In all likelihood Mary and Joseph were unaware that by humbly submitting to the Law of Moses (Gen. 17, 12) and heeding the word of the angel (Luke 1, 21) they were focusing the Omnipotence, the Wisdom, and the Mercy of the Triune God upon the destiny of the entire human race and that, by observing a simple rite of old, they were opening the way to the ineffable Mystery of the Redemption, and lifting up, as it were, "the ancient portals that the King of Glory may enter" (Ps. 23, 9).

Thus Obedience becomes known as the deeper meaning of the Holy Name of Jesus. Hence Obedience is the first lesson of the year; the fundamental law, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, of religious life. The word is derived from the Latin "obedire," originally "ob-audire," which means to listen attentively to the command of another. This etymology suggests three simple questions that may well serve as points for this conference: 1) Whom do we obey? 2) Why should we obey? 3) How should we obey?

In recent years, especially under the leadership of our gloriously reigning Pontiff Pius XII, a wealth of spiritual beauty, light, and power has been showered

¹ In his recent Encyclical, entitled "Centenaria Solemnis," the Most Reverend Father General of the Order of Friars Minor, Father Pacificus Perantoni, described Franciscan spirituality as Christocentric or Christ-centered. Needless to say, the spirituality of every religious Order, as well as that of the entire Catholic Church, may properly lay claim to this general characteristic, for to every devout Christian "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday and today, yes, and forever" (Heb. 13, 8). St. Francis never deviated from this royal highway of Christian Perfection. But he did choose a manner of life that came to be known as the Franciscan Way because of its direct, wholehearted and intimate approach to the Holy Gospel. To re-live the Holy Gospel and imitate Christ as the Gospel tells his story from the Cross to the Cross, that is the specific form of Franciscan Spirituality, and should properly be considered as the source and pattern of all that this spirituality embraces.

We shall do well to make the aforesaid letter of the Most Reverend Father General as our guide for the year 1951, and to meditate upon its rich and varied contents as the various seasons and feasts of the Ecclesiastical Year may suggest.

upon the spiritual life of those who live in holy Obedience under a monastic rule. The doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, which was always believed but not always duly appreciated, has been set before us in all its pristine power and charm by the recent Encyclical "Mystici Corporis." It will amply repay us if we peruse this document and meditate upon the "mysterious law" (the Roman Pontiff calls it "lex mirabilis") by which all the members of this living organism are most intimately knit together with Christ the Head. From this mystical and invisible Head all life, strength, and order proceeds, for He said: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing" (John 15, 8). It is easily seen how the Vow and Virtue of Obedience to Christ the Head impart spirit and life to the entire organism and what an important part they play in the work of the Holy Spirit Who is the soul, the vitalizing, energizing, and ordering principle of this organism. It is the same Holy Spirit, we should not forget, Who directs the leaders of the Church and the superiors of our communities in their divine commission of teaching, sanctifying, and guarding their charges until, as St. Paul tells the Galatians, "Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4, 19).

With this picture before us we all understand better the meaning of the life of a Religious that is "hidden in Christ." We realize that Father Faber put his finger on the essence of spirituality when he published a beautiful work under the title *All for Jesus*. At the profession in some communities of Sisters the candidate pronounces the words of the Breviary: "Propter amorem Domini nostri Jesu Christi, quem vidi, quem amavi, cui credidi, quem dilexi." This is the road of Obedience, in its usual four stages. The first (quem vidi) is the call to this life. The second (quem amavi) tells of the happy days of the first fervor. The third (cui credidi) is the long, dreary and toilsome road where faith, and obedience through faith, must sustain us. The fourth (quem dilexi) is the perfect possession of the Master, not granted to all, where perfect love rules. The lesson is that Obedience must proceed from love.

Jesus Christ is the source and center of all revelation and salvation. "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me" (John 14, 6). He is the Alpha and Omega, the King of the Universe, of nations, of our hearts; the chief cornerstone, the head and heavenly Bridegroom of His spouse, the Church. Which means that all power in the Church, all superiorship in this vast spiritual organization, stems from Him and must again be placed before Him, for "at the name of Jesus every knee should bend" (Phil. 2, 10).

The Church of Jesus is a Church of order, and order is established by the law of Obedience. Religious are bound to aim at perfection, and perfect obedience is based on the vow; it is enhanced and fortified by the virtue. Yet this bulwark of obedience is flanked by two supports, the superiors on one side, the subjects on the other. Both must stand their ground if the system is to endure. In a sense the superiors have the greater responsibility. Since they receive their authority from Christ, they must exercise it in the spirit of Christ. Superiors should read and re-read and fully assimilate the wise counsels set forth by St. Bonaventure in his inimitable booklet "The Six Wings of the Seraphim" (*De Sex Alis Seraphim*) in which he enumerates the virtues that should adorn every superior. These are the headings of the six chapters: Zeal for Justice, Piety, Patience, Exemplary Conduct, Circumspect Discretion, and Devotion to God. They speak for themselves and their meaning is grasped by intuition. Superiors hold office not by their own right, but by divine commission, and some day they will face the inevitable demand: "Make an accounting of thy stewardship, for thou canst be steward no longer" (Luke 16, 2).

From this the subject learns that all vows, precepts, commands and directives, whether they emanate from the divine or human law, from the authority of the Church or the Order, from superiors who are kind, understanding and patient or from such as may despoil their commands of "the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour" (Tit. 3, 4), by harshness, unreasonableness, unwarranted partiality or unpredictable moodiness—that all these should be traced ultimately to the kindest heart that ever beat in human breast, the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Even as we render thanks to God for every drop of water that falls from heaven in its crystal purity and later mingles with dust or dirt, so should we gratefully receive every command or direction, because we know its source and author Who says: "My yoke is easy, and my burden light" (Matt. 11, 30). The yoke of Obedience was placed upon our shoulders when we placed our Vow in His Sacred Hands, pierced by cruel nails.

This brings us to the second question: Why should we obey? Here again the Vow is overshadowed by the amiable personality of the Lord and Master who both commands us and obeys for us. To Him we owe our life and being. He loved us "with an everlasting love" and in pity drew us to Himself (Jer. 31, 3); but most of all, He set a glorious example of Obedience which is the safest way to keep close to Him. "Learn of me," He begs, "for I am meek and humble of heart" (Matt. 11, 21). If the words and deeds of Jesus were studied in the searchlight of all virtues and perfections, arrayed in a spacious hall of mirrors, each reflecting its own charm and splendor, the Religious would probably halt, and meditate upon the simple sentence: "I do as the Father

commanded me" (John 8, 29). The command of His heavenly Father, who is wrapped in deep mystery even to theologians, evidently directed the course of His life among us. In obedience to His Father's Will He spent thirty years in a hidden life, subject to Mary and Joseph; three years of public life, announcing the Kingdom of God; three hours on Calvary, "becoming obedient to death even to the death on a cross" (Phil. 2, 8), and three days in the tomb.

Never has man lived whose life was planned and blueprinted so minutely on the pages of Holy Writ and executed so zealously, as was the life of our Lord and Saviour. The Evangelists had caught the secret. It almost sounds like a refrain to a wondrous hymn as they concluded each event with the simple words: "to fulfill that which was spoken by the prophets" (Matt. 27, 35). Such was His life from the Crib to the Cross.

Such should be our lives, especially when we remember that our Seraphic Father wanted to bequeath to us the Christ of the Gospel; that he wanted to renew and re-live in our lives the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Rule has been properly called the "Marrow of the Gospel" because originally it was set together from a few simple texts taken from the Missal in the Church of San Damiano. There have been changes, but the marrow remains and this is the groundwork of the Rules of all Franciscan congregations, the framework of every Franciscan community, the program of their daily routine and apostolic work.

The question: How should we obey? is answered by St. Alphonsus under four points, viz., with promptness, exactness, cheerfulness, and simplicity. The first pertains to the hands and feet; the second to the head; the third to the heart; the fourth to the spirit of faith. Promptness as to time, exactness as to the manner of execution, are requisites in any organization, but especially in a religious community where time not merely means money but grace, and where the material and purpose of the work usually tend directly to the glory of God and the spiritual wellbeing of the religious household, and immortal souls. Even the most menial tasks in convents and monasteries are conducive to sanctification. The proof is furnished by the catalog of saints which places farmers, tailors, cooks and working people next to the great Doctors of the Church.

Cheerfulness is a Franciscan characteristic and it ill behooves any child of St. Francis to approach a task with a growl, grumble, or a grudge. St. Francis found "perfect joy" even in contumely. "I labored with my hands," he writes in his Testament, "and I wish to labor and I wish firmly that all the other Friars labor in work that pertains to honesty." Meanwhile, he remained the

happy troubador of the Lord, and, walking through the valleys and over the mountains of Umbria, he invited all creation to sing the praises of the bountiful Father above.

Servants, exclaims St. Paul, obey "in the sincerity of your heart, as you would Christ: not serving to the eye as pleasers of men, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart" (Eph. 6, 5-6). St. Francis gloried in the distinction of being the servant of all. "Serve the Lord with gladness," says the Psalmist (Ps. 99, 2). If in our daily work we link cheerfulness with simplicity, that is the "single eye" of faith, our obedience will be seraphic in the true sense. We shall find ourselves with Jesus in the workshop in the temple among the doctors, in the hamlets and towns of Palestine, healing the sick, instructing young and old, and with St. Francis, we shall reach up, as Murillo visualizes him, to embrace Jesus on the Cross. Then, looking down we shall behold the soldiers casting lots over His seamless garment. That garment which was woven in one piece by His Blessed Mother, as the legend runs, is today committed to our religious Sisters who by their daily little duties continue weaving it, not for the Holy Infant, but for Christ's Mystical Body which is the Church.

Let us renew our Vow of Obedience every morning at Holy Mass, during the Minor Elevation when the priest takes the sacred host and three times makes the sign of the cross over the consecrated chalice and slowly pronounces the words: "Per Ipsum, Cum Ipso, In Ipso." "Through Him" we have received our call; "With Him" we shall toil and labor; "In Him" we shall live and hope to live for all eternity—a worthy reward for our filial and loyal obedience to our Divine Master.

New York

Fr. Thomas Plassmann, O. F. M.



How much our perfection depends on our adherence to the smallest point of our holy Rule, with courage and fervor, with constancy and fidelity.

Mother Frances Schervier



Submit blindly to Divine Providence and allow yourself to be sanctified by those means which God Himself has selected and ordained for that end.

Mother Frances Schervier

THE COMMUNITY AT MARBURG

In the spring of 1228 Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia left the castle of Marburg for the last time and followed her spiritual director, the monk Conrad, to his native city, Marburg in Hesse. There she discovered that she would have to have a domicile built for herself and her little family before they could live in the city. After arranging for the construction of a simple house they retired to a small place called Wehrda. Not wanting to be a burden to any of the country folk, they took up their abode in the ruins of an old dilapidated home where they had to patch up a shelter for themselves with the boughs of trees. Here they lived and cooked their meals, deprived of every normal convenience of life. With the heat and smoke they had little comfort, but they made the best of it until their new home at Marburg was finished; then they moved into their new home and began their life with God in all holiness.

As soon as they were settled Elizabeth started the construction of a hospital, since they had determined to take care of the sick poor as they had done at Eisenach during the famine. At the suggestion of Pope Gregory IX she dedicated this hospital to St. Francis, who had just been canonized. The Holy Spirit also placed her and her little community under the protection of the Holy Spirit and sent her as a relic some of the blood that had flowed from the side of Christ on his side.

Either shortly before they left Eisenach, or just after they were settled in Marburg, Elizabeth and her maids were received into the Third Order of Saint Francis. There are several accounts of this event, the most reliable being that of the anonymous author who testifies that he has recorded only what he has seen or has received from credible witnesses. He writes, "After the death of her husband the saint made a complete renunciation of the world, and she caused herself to be tonsured and the cord tied about her waist in the convent of the Friars Minor. She directed that her habitation be built in the church of the Friars, to whose teaching and discipline she was devoted as subject. With them she walked with God until the end. It was said that she had done near Wartburg, but many have testified that Friar Burghard of the Order of Friars Minor, Custos of Hesse, in the presence of Friar Henry of the same Order, gave the tonsure to Blessed Elizabeth as his most precious gift. Her friend and clothed her in the habit, the while Marburg was being built. Her sacrifice she and three or four maids were clothed in a simple, patched habit of the religious and embraced perfect continence and voluntary poverty."

COMMUNITY AT MARBURG

The course of this community's life followed the age-old evolutionary process of any manner of life based upon Charity in the true sense: a love-bond between a soul with its God. This true Charity can no more be contained than a flood. Originating in a single heart, it must burst forth and overwhelm a world. Originating in the heart of a religious superior, it must include the whole community, then the poor and unfortunate, then every soul capable of glory. The hurdling love of God, that conquered the heart of Elizabeth, engulfed her community, the poor, the sick, and the world.

The community life at Marburgh was lived in great humility and poverty. The usual food was the vegetables from their garden. These were often cooked in plain water and served without any seasoning. And when Elizabeth herself did the cooking they were sometimes burned, for which the others did not hesitate to scold her—presumably all in good part.

She showed the utmost benevolence and courtesy in dealing with her companions. Although they had been her maid-servants, she would have them think of her as one of themselves. She told them to stop calling her Lady; she wanted to be known by her own name, as were other women. She not only shared the cooking with them but ate from the same dishes, slept in the same kind of bed, made herself equal to them in all things. All her words and actions were graced with courtesy and she tried to cultivate this virtue in the others. If anything was said in her presence that savored of vanity or showed anger or indignation, she would quickly but kindly correct it: "Where now is the Lord, who has promised to be with those who speak of Him?"

In her spare time Elizabeth worked at spinning and weaving wool to earn the food and other necessities. Even when she was sick in bed she kept busy with a distaff. If the others felt that this was too much for her strength and took away from her, she would comb out wool in preparation for work later on. If she gave her more than she thought her work was worth, she gave it back. She would not want anything that she had not justly earned.

Elizabeth and her companions made frequent visits to the hovels of the poor, carrying baskets of food which was distributed to those who needed it. On these visits she would inspect the clothes, the beds, and their coverings. Wherever she went she would see that they were provided as far as her means permitted.

would permit. Her great concern seemed to be to obtain for the poor the food they wanted; and it is said that the Lord sometimes helped her in this.

When at length Elizabeth received the value of her dowry in money she sent messengers far and wide to call the poor who could come to Marburg. When they were assembled she distributed in the course of a few hours an equivalent of about 10,000 dollars. Her companions, seeing that she was giving to the poor what was left of her dowry and everything else they asked for, took to task for it quite severely, but she paid no attention to them. It was brought to the attention of Master Conrad and he tried to put a stop to it, lest she leave herself and her little community destitute. At first he ordered her to give only one coin to each of those who came begging. She followed his instructions literally but succeeded in giving as much to the many as she had previously given to the few. He forbade her to give any money, permitting her to give only bread to the hungry. She gave whole loaves of bread, and that with great prodigality. Finally he limited the amount of bread she might give at any one time. Thus, she said, was she torn between obedience and her many provocations to men.

Although the little group distributed alms and helped all the poor as far as their time and means would permit, they were especially diligent in caring for those to whom the hospital gave refuge. Even among these there were two classes they favored, those who seemed more sincere in the practice of the religion and the crippled and sick who were the more helpless. Elizabeth often invited the most abject cases of infirmity to share her meals with her. Her patience with them was remarkable. One day there came to the hospital a pauper who was both blind and sick. He asked if he might be taken in and treated. It happened that Elizabeth herself was in the entrance talking with Master Conrad and she said to the man, "We shall be glad to admit you, and freely. But first of all you must look into the ailing condition of your soul. Prepare yourself and make an honest confession of all your sins." Impatient, as the poor blind and infirm sometimes are, he began to curse and swear and berate such superstitious conditions of reception till presently he broke out into blasphemy. Master Conrad reprehended him. But Elizabeth gradually calmed him down so that he implored their pardon for what he had said and went to confession. After he had eaten and had been put to bed, Father Conrad and Elizabeth went to see him. At the bedside of the poor man the priest said to her, "Now that you have given food to the hungry, give sight to the blind." The full import of his words made her tremble. She asked in all humility, "Who am I that can do such a thing?" He insisted that she try it, and she pleaded with him not to command her. But finally acquiescing to his instructions, she said that she would pray to the Lord and

would not doubt that He would hear her prayers, on condition that the priest would add his more powerful prayers to her own. They both knelt down to pray fervently and presently their prayers were answered; light began to return to the eyes of the blind man. Master Conrad always attributed this miracle to the great virtue of Elizabeth but she in her humility claimed that it was due to his command.

As time went on Elizabeth's laborious and frugal life weakened her, but she would not neglect her duties of charity nor give up the most menial services for the poor sick. God rewarded her by enabling her to give effective remedies to the sick and infirm, no matter what their condition might be. Nor was she less diligent in healing souls than in healing bodies. When a child was born in the hospital she exhorted the mother not to neglect nor even delay the baptism of her new-born babe. "To neglect Baptism," she would say, "is stupid; to delay it is very imprudent. In either case the child's soul is placed in jeopardy." If any of the sick were in danger of death, she was very solicitous in persuading them to cleanse their conscience by a good confession and to receive Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction in time. In spite of the urging of the Saint, one young woman kept putting off her confession, until at last Elizabeth aroused her with the rod from the sleep of negligence to listen to her counsels.

Her death was beautiful. As she lay waiting for it, one of the sisters who was watching nearby heard her singing. As the final hour approached she said to her little community, now gathered about her, "This is the hour of the immaculate Virgin Birth. We ought to think about the beautiful little Jesus, how He was born in winter, at night, among strangers; how He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger; how He was found by the shepherds, revealed by the star, adored by the Magi; these the hallowed mysteries, the enriching favors, the glowing jewels of our salvation. In them all our hope finds life, our faith grows, our love takes fire. Let us probe these truths and make our converse sweet." And with these words she fell asleep in the Lord she had served well.

Washington, D. C.

Fr. Denis Gallagher, O. F. M. Conv. ✓

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Whenever I gave food and drink to our Lord in His poor, I always felt an increase of sensible love for our Divine Savior; this compensated me abundantly for the little sacrifices which this exercise of charity imposed on me. Oh, how pure and sweet to me was this love.

Mother Frances Schervier

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

According To Saint Bonaventure

The examination of conscience reveals, as it were, the reverse of our spiritual life; for it is a sound philosophical maxim that defects, and, in general, "privations" (*privaciones*) are known by that which ought to be there. Hence, if we are to go about probing the wounds and diagnosing the maladies of our soul, we must, like a competent physician, be aware of what the normal condition of spiritual health would be. For us, this means a thorough knowledge of the Franciscan ideal, and this ideal is always to be the norm of perfection against which we examine the state of our supernatural health. Profiled against the background of perfect Franciscan spirituality, our sins and imperfections and unlovely traits of character will appear in sharp, clear contours.

The most common defects in the spiritual life of religious are rooted in negligence, and for this reason negligence, rather than concupiscence or malice, is the first point Saint Bonaventure proposes for analysis in his plan for examination of conscience. If one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Franciscan spirit is constant renovation in youthful restlessness, the gravest danger to the spirit lies in loss of energy, in loss of youthful dissatisfaction with one's present state of imperfection, and in yielding to lassitude and routine and distraction, and in the smug self-complacency that marks the advent of spiritual senility. Saint Bonaventure, then, would have us examine ourselves with all candor and penetration, on the first point:

WAS I NEGLIGENT IN GUARDING MY HEART?

Immediately the question arises: What does Saint Bonaventure mean by "heart?" Undoubtedly, the term "heart" is to be understood in the sense of spiritual life, or of religious personality, or in that which Our Seraphic Father Francis calls the spirit of prayer. To keep custody of the heart, then, is to nourish and guard the interior life, to protect it from harmful influences, to keep it in the warm, life-giving atmosphere of religion; for all this is included in what Saint Francis means by living in the spirit of prayer. The religious, therefore, who strives constantly and manfully to realize it at all times and as deeply as possible, his consecration to the Lord; who strives to become what Saint Bonaventure called Saint Francis—"A man of God"—may be said to be guarding his heart. With this large, general ideal in mind we may proceed to examine

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

ourselves in regard to some of its particular aspects. Let us, for example, ask ourselves:

Do I really make every effort to live a life of prayer in union with God? Am I conscious of the Divine Indwelling in the sanctuary of my heart? Do I endeavor to be alone with Our Lord for at least a short time every day? Do I feel the need of being with Him? Are my days filled with lifeless, mechanical carrying out of routine duties, or do I make an effort to work in the presence of God, even though I cannot think of Him directly? Do I make it a point to raise my heart to God at certain times or at certain places during the day? Do I make a sincere effort to see God everywhere, in all His creatures, even in those who repel me?

Do I live in the atmosphere of religion, mindful that by my religious profession I am in the world but no longer a part of it; that I belong wholly to God and to the works of God? And is it, consequently, my deep conviction—not merely a casual assent of the intellect but a principle by which I live—that everything I do is, in virtue of my consecration, a work of religion? Or, on the contrary, is my life split into two spheres of activity, religious and secular? In other words, do I conduct myself in chapel and during the spiritual exercises of the community in a manner becoming a religious, but during the rest of the day, at work or a recreation, is my behavior hardly, if at all, distinguishable from that of a secular person?

There is one sure test for discovering whether our religious personality is well guarded: the consolation we seek in time of trial. Every human being needs consolation and comfort. It is simply impossible for a man to stand absolutely alone when afflictions and sufferings weigh him down. But let us ask ourselves specifically: Where do I seek consolation? Do I have recourse first to creatures, or to the Creator? When I have been severely rebuked, when I am suffering an injustice or tormented by physical or mental pain, do I try to find consolation from God, or do I first go to my friends and take comfort in purely human understanding—perhaps even going so far as to unburden my soul to persons outside the community, revealing the private affairs of the community in the process?

Religious silence is one of the most important means of guarding the heart. Without silence the religious personality is bound to disintegrate. Saint Bonaventure says: "I dare say with certainty, that in vain does a religious boast the possession of virtue in his heart when he breaks down the discipline of silence

through the inquietude of loquacity."¹ Of course, silence as such, with further qualification, is not always a virtue. It is good to remind ourselves sometimes that Christ drove out a mute devil. Religious silence, however, is always a virtue, and it is absolutely necessary for progress in perfection since it is governed by love of God, by obedience, and by charity. Let us, therefore, examine ourselves: Do I appreciate religious silence as a means of guarding my heart and of keeping the presence of God? Or is silence for me only an irksome restriction of self-control imposed by the Rule I have bound myself to keep? Do I respect the religious silence of others, or do I begin and prolong useless conversations? Unless sound reasons and genuine charity demand it, do I avoid speaking during the time of silence? Do I refrain from making unnecessary noise and from disturbing the holy atmosphere of monastic tranquility?

Just as our churches and chapels and sacred vessels are, by their consecration and blessing, withdrawn from profane use and reserved for the service of God, so a religious by his profession is withdrawn from the world and consecrated to the Lord. Now the world, as created by God, is good; even the pleasures and entertainments sought by people in the world are not bad, so long as they remain within the limits of decency and moderation. But, what is allowed and perhaps even recommended for people in the world is not necessarily good and expedient for religious. Of course, no religious, not even our cloistered nuns, can live absolutely apart from the world. But contact with mundane affairs must always remain a potential danger to the interior life and to the religious personality. It is therefore well for us to ask: Do I avoid contact with the world in so far as sound reason, charity, and the regulations of my Institute permit? Do I allow myself to fall victim to that deplorable illusion that confuses worldliness with sound progress? Do I even go so far as to try to keep pace with the "progressiveness" of my secular friends in practically everything? A point that might well be considered here is whether, in the words of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, the world has an uncensored access to me through radio, cinema, and the like. When taking part in purely secular recreations, pleasures, and social affairs, do I always keep in mind what my state as a person consecrated to God requires of me? Do I always seek to draw spiritual values from such circumstances rather than worldly distractions or pleasures?

In similar fashion we must question ourselves concerning the more delicate relations with secular persons. True, it would not be even Christian to disregard the piety and gratitude we owe our parents and benefactors. On the other hand, our heart belongs to God. Hence we must ask ourselves: Do I guard my heart against inordinate attachment to any creature—to parents, relatives, friends,

¹ *De Perfectione Vitae c. IV, 1*

"inordinate" is meant such attachments as impair my religious life. Do I always give my heart first to God, to Whom I belong body and soul, and only secondly to Him and With Him to other persons?

These are a few thoughts about custody of the heart. To be practical, the examination should be expanded into more specific detail by the individual religious according to his own personal needs. For this was Saint Bonaventure's intention, that his plan for examination of conscience should be so fitted to the individual that it would help him to follow the exhortation of our Seraphic Father Francis to "Keep the spirit of prayer to which all other things must be subservient."

Bonaventure University

Fr. Philotheus Boehner, O. F. M. ✓



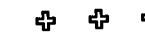
WORDS OF MOTHER FRANCES SCHERVIER



The practice of conformity to the Divine Will was of great profit to my soul.



I found myself constantly in better dispositions; I was cheerful and happy and intent on keeping myself in the presence of God. Unpleasant happenings, such as occur at times in every household, disturbed me but little, or not at all; with a glance upward to God I was able to bear all in peace and joy.



Let us love our Divine Savior with our whole heart, and be ready for every sacrifice. Let us never permit ourselves to become discouraged, or be held back by trifles.



How sublime, how sacred, must be to us the smallest and most insignificant act done in the service of God our Creator!

FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

AN OUTLINE AND SUMMARY OF THE ENCYCLICAL LETTER ON FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY BY THE MOST REVEREND FATHER PACIFICO M. PERANTONI, O. F. M., MINISTER GENERAL, MAY 21 - JUNE 4, 1950 (*Acta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, SEPT.-OCT., 1950, pp. 214-243).

Introduction: The *occasion* is the fifth centenary of the canonization of Bernardine of Siena, 1450, who is a model for us; likewise Holy Year of 1950, which should be for us a time of spiritual renovation.

- I. The fundamental *principles* of Franciscan spirituality.
 1. The *existence* of Franciscan spirituality. Franciscan spirituality is distinct from Christian spirituality but rather is a specification of Christian spirituality or a particular interpretation of the message of Jesus as expressed in the lives of St. Francis and his faithful followers as well as in the writings of the great Franciscan theologians especially St. Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus.
 2. The *sources* of Franciscan spirituality. They are three in number:
 - a. The *life* of our holy Father St. Francis, who reached the height of perfection and sanctity by seeking to imitate Christ as perfectly as possible and thus became a model for all his spiritual children.
 - b. The Franciscan *Rule*, which is "the book of life." By their profession Franciscans have bound themselves to observe the Rule and to live the kind of life it prescribes.
 - c. The Franciscan *tradition* for over seven hundred years, consisting of the example of numerous faithful followers of St. Francis who have been raised to the honors of the altar, and in the many spiritual works written by learned and saintly members of the Order.
 3. A *compendium* of Franciscan spirituality.
 - a. *Theory and practice.* St. Francis did not concern himself much with theory; he devoted himself directly to practice. This practice, however, has been analyzed by such holy doctors as St. Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, who formulated the theory or principle and found the essence of Franciscan spirituality to consist in Christocentrism.
 - b. *Doctrinal Christocentrism.* This is set forth in the encyclical letter on the Primacy and Kingship of Christ, issued by the Most Reverend Fr. Leonard M. Bello, O. F. M. Beginning, as did St. Francis,

with the realization of the infinite goodness of God, who has made us His adopted children, the Franciscan theologians recognized Christ as the First-born of creatures, as our Universal King and necessary Mediator; and they pointed out that this consideration should fill our souls with confidence in God, love of God, fidelity in the service of Christ the King, and the effective desire of modelling our lives on that of Christ. Devotion to Our Lady and to the Angels follows naturally.

- c. *Practical Christocentrism.* Union of the soul with God, which is the aim of all spirituality, is attained in the Franciscan way by:
 - (1) the *evangelical life* or the observance of the Gospel;
 - (2) the unquestioning and literal carrying out of the *words of Christ*;
 - (3) the *imitation of Christ*, resulting from meditation particularly on the poverty and sufferings of Our Savior;
 - (4) *conformity with Christ*—becoming, as far as possible, "other Christs", as did St. Francis.
4. The *steps of advancement* in Franciscan spirituality. Christocentrism, in practice is the love of Christ, strong enough to effect a transformation of ourselves into Christ. In every spirituality, this transformation is accomplished negatively and positively. According to the Franciscan way, these two steps are principally the virtues of poverty and charity.
 - a. *Poverty*, meaning not merely the renunciation of temporal goods but detachment from creatures. Associated with this kind of poverty are the other so-called negative virtues; penance, chastity, obedience, diligence in work, recollection and love of solitude.
 - b. *Charity*, of love of God and conformity with Christ, including special devotion to the Humanity of Christ, the Sacred Heart, the Holy Eucharist, the Nativity and Passion of Christ, also to the Blessed Virgin, and reverence for the priesthood; likewise love of neighbor, especially the poor and oppressed, and apostolic zeal for the conversion of those outside the fold of Christ and for the salvation of all souls.
 - c. *Mysticism* is the third step. Franciscan spirituality naturally tends towards contemplation.
5. Special *characteristics* of Franciscan spirituality. These are: awareness of the Presence of God, spiritual joy and optimism, supremacy of the will over the intellect and of action over contemplation, prompt-

ness in carrying out what is recognized as good and useful, and spirit of liberty which leaves the individual's personality intact admits all kinds of characters and every field of activity.

II. The *practice* of Franciscan spirituality in religious life.

Franciscan spirituality is intended not only for those who live in convents but for all walks and conditions of life; and even in the religious life spiritual progress is an eminently personal matter. However, in the external organization of the Franciscan Order, we have certain means and habits which foster the Franciscan spirit. The Franciscan leads a mixed life, alternating both at the attainment of personal sanctification by contemplation and at the good of our neighbor by apostolic activity.

A. The spirituality of the contemplative phase of the religious life. The religious life is a state of perfection, and requires that we strive for perfection. Each religious Order has its own regulations for that purpose, and these impart to it its peculiar character. We shall consider the nature and spiritual value of the following:

1. The Franciscan *vocation*. The vocation to the religious life is a gift of God. Vocation is what we are by nature and by grace. A good example of this is St. Francis himself. The increase of Franciscan vocations should be the concern of all. In the first place we must pray for vocations, and then put forth earnest efforts to foster vocations. Even lay brothers who have contact with the outside world by reason of their work can do this. It is the special task of preachers and those to whom the work of promoting vocations has been assigned. Everyone who applies should not be admitted blindly, but on the other hand we should not demand too much of applicants. Defections from the Order are not the result so much of improper selection of candidates as of lack of training in the religious life.

2. The Franciscan *training*. At the beginning the Franciscan vocation is immature; it must be developed by proper training.

a. *The Seraphic College*. In the Franciscan preparatory schools those who have not a true vocation should be eliminated. The teachers in these schools must take seriously their task of training the students along Franciscan lines, and prepare themselves daily for their work.

b. *The Novitiate*. The training of the novices should be accomplished by presenting the Franciscan ideal to them; it should

not be achieved by force. Reverence for the individual's personality should be a dominant note. St. Francis set the example by the manner in which he trained his early disciples. The novitiate is a time of preparation for the religious life that lies ahead. Seraphic perfection is not attained in its fullness during the novitiate; that is the work of a lifetime.

c. *The Clericate*. This is a period of preparation for solemn profession and for ordination to the priesthood. Care should be taken that the clerics do not merely observe the external obligations which are imposed on them, but that their souls and characters are trained with the Franciscan ideal in mind. During the study of philosophy, special instructions on Franciscan spirituality should be given with emphasis on the practical side, namely on the life of St. Francis, on the Franciscan Rule, and on Franciscan virtues. During the years of theology, the instructions should expound the theory and doctrine of Franciscan spirituality as set forth in the Franciscan school of theology.

d. *The Lay Brothers*. During all the years before their solemn profession, the Brothers should receive similar and suitable training. This can hardly be done unless special Brothers' schools are established. During this period, therefore, they should remain in special friaries, and their religious as well as manual training should be kept up.

3. *The Community Life*. In the quest of the Franciscan ideal, living in a community with others who have the same objective in view is a great help.

a. *Laws*. To those who have made the profession of the Franciscan Rule the juridical expression of the highest perfection, this Rule is not only a safe guide but also a necessary means in Franciscan spirituality. However, it is not sufficient to know and observe the letter of the Rule; we must also imbibe its spirit. Hence the explanation of the Rule should stress its character as a true aid for spiritual progress. The Constitutions and various special statutes are likewise of great importance and should be regarded in the same light. We should observe them faithfully, not because we must, but because we wish to do so.

- b. *Fraternal Relations.* We are all brothers in the world-wide Order of St. Francis, and should cherish a great love for the Order. In the particular community, where we happen to be stationed, each one must contribute his share to cheerfulness, brotherliness and mutual helpfulness. The spirit that prevailed in the early communities at the time of St. Francis offers an example. These virtues should prevail; genuine love towards all confrères, obedience to the wishes of superiors and on the part of superiors the spirit of service and understanding efforts to bring back wayward friars; likewise mutual reverence between priests and brothers, young and old, the healthy and the sick.
- c. *The Common Life.* All must cooperate to make the liturgical functions as exact as possible; and the other communal exercises should be carried out with orderliness and serenity and happiness. The more holy each friar is, the more productive of spiritual profit will the community exercises be.
- d. *Retiros.* The retiro was dear to the heart of St. Francis and his most saintly sons. If the friars can retire occasionally to such places of silence and solitude, at least for a short time, these will be the source of fruitful external activity. Most Rev. Fr. Leonard M. Bello, O. F. M., has written a letter on this subject.

B. The spirituality of the *active phase* of the religious life.

1. *The Need.* External activity is required by the Franciscan vocation, as was pointed out in the previous letter of the Most Rev. General published under the title, "Our Vocation." Ours is the task of defending and extending the Church. Still, the interior must come first. Without it, our activity will be like sounding brass; with it, our labors will be really fruitful.
2. *Ways and Means.* For the Franciscans, they are:
 - a. *Good example.* St. Francis preferred good example to every other kind of apostolic activity.
 - b. *The sacred ministry.* Every kind of priestly activity belongs to the Franciscan program.
 - c. *Charitable work,* including social work which aims at improving the living conditions of the down-trodden, the Franciscan in a special manner.

- d. *Studying and writing* is by no means foreign to the Franciscan tradition. The ministers provincial are urged to send suitable friars for higher studies.
- e. *Manual work.* Recall the example and exhortations of St. Francis. Performed in the right manner, manual work is something noble. It is the particular sphere of activity of the brothers; but priests too, including professors and preachers, can profitably engage in this kind of work at times.

The *teaching* of Franciscan spirituality. The teacher of Franciscan spirituality has the task of not only imparting the correct knowledge of what it is but also guiding souls in practicing it.

1. *Imparting* the Franciscan spirit. St. Francis educated his first disciples, and they in turn trained others. Now that we are so far removed from the age of St. Francis, those who have the Franciscan spirit have all the more reason to impart it to others.
2. *The obligation* of training the young. The Franciscan spirit can not be communicated to them by force; but teaching methods must be such that they show how attractive and desirable Franciscan spirituality is. This is the special task of those who have been appointed to train the young; but the others are not exempt from this task, for they must teach by example. The latter method will naturally win vocations for the Order.
3. *The teacher.* Not everyone who is engaged in teaching is a teacher of Franciscan spirituality. He must have a more thorough acquaintance with the principles, and should have a special or technical training in this subject.
4. *International college* for training teachers of Franciscan spirituality (including writers on the subject). Such a college has been established in the Friary of St. Anthony at Grottoferrata, also for the benefit of those who do not belong to the Order. It aims at giving special training to teachers, writers, spiritual directors, preachers in Franciscan spirituality. The publication, *Vita Minorum*, is the official organ of the college. Similar publications, both popular and learned, issued in other parts of the world, will achieve much in diffusing the Franciscan spirit.

Louis

Fr. Marion Habig, O. F. M. ✓

FRANCISCAN REVIEWS

IN THE SPIRIT OF SAINT FRANCIS

Paterson, N. J., St. Anthony Guild Press. 172 p. \$1.75

By Theodosius Foley, O. F. M.

Add interest to the classical verities of unity, coherence and emphasis, have the writing done by an experienced retreat master, and then turn the author loose on the topic nearest to his heart. Unusual success is evident in these fourteen conferences on the characteristics of Franciscan life. Father Theodosius' earlier book, "Spiritual Conferences" was directed to his own confreres of the Capuchin branch. Word of their excellence got out, and now he favors the Franciscan family by issuing this book on the Rule common to all of us. Whether you are of the First Order, the Second, or one of the many communities of Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order, these are the things you should be thinking and saying in your own spiritual conversations.

The words of the Rule, the words and thinking actions of St. Francis, are our charter of life. As the life of our holy founder is a mirror of Christ, so the Mirror of Perfection is peculiarly our device for achieving at once the following of Francis and the following of Christ. In the first conference, Fr. Theodosius emphasizes our need to apply the methods of Franciscan spirituality if we are to approach perfection within our chosen state of life: religious in the Franciscan life. With this we agree, and for this purpose does "The Cord" exist to fulfill a long-felt need.

"Growing up with Christ" is what the author calls the process of spiritual assimilation during which the act of spiritual union with Christ first takes place, then is intensified. Although none of us presumes that he possesses the sanctity of Francis, yet each of us has chosen to mould his spiritual life in the same way. We are convinced that God wants us to be His servants in this Order. A necessary corollary is that we live up to our and His expectations. The things which tend to divert us from our vocation kill or weaken that determination of purpose. Then it is that the renewal of our act of love for Christ brings us back to the Franciscan pattern.

Conferences are these, but in such a handy form. For we can take them up at any time for meditation, finding on these pages a mood for the moment. That is because the Rule goes back to the Gospel, the Friar Minor always being a disciple of the Master. As the Lord was the Exemplar

of how to act in each situation that the heart of men, so He also has a soul in a way of grace for each of the problems of religious life. "This is the Rule and of the Friars Minor namely to observe the holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This observance of the Gospel is the essence of Franciscan perfection. What is added to the Rule pertains to those facets of religious life which tend to bring perfection in its fulness, such as "living in obedience, without property, and in chastity." The three vows form the means by which we live the Gospel. Kept in the spirit of St. Francis and according to example, they are the manifestations of Franciscan perfection as projected by the Holy founder.

Poverty, chastity and obedience are the sole content of our life. Neither are the remaining chapters. Charity and hospitality united are the heart of the Franciscan life, at home, or in the world, whether he is at work or at prayer. Guidance in prayer is always needed, for how many of us wander through wasted periods of meditation? In every century our Order produced its Saints and Blessed, people of splendid prayer and fruitful activity; alongside them has produced Franciscans who mix up activity and prayer in such a way that prayer loses. Work we must do—the mixed life is part of the Franciscan tradition—but to divorce prayer from work and think that we can choose one or the other well but certainly not both, is foreign to the reality as well as the ideal. Father Theodosius shows us how to avoid "extinguishing the holy spirit of prayer and devotion."

Not at the beginning, nor at the end but in the middle, the heart of the book is an essay on the Franciscan standard of living. In spite of modern conditions of poverty and simplicity of life are dictated for us. There is nothing elaborate about our manner of living. As nearly as possible we children of the Poverello try to live as he and the first brethren lived. In plain surrounding, with little ado about material matters, we try to emulate that "spirit of holy prayer and devotion" to which St. Francis says "all temporal things should be subservient." So it has been, and so always will be.

Callicoon, N. Y. Fr. Anselm Hardy, O.F.M.

LETTER OF THE VERY REVEREND FATHER PACIFICUS
PERANTONI, O. F. M., MINISTER GENERAL OF
THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR, TO THE
EDITOR OF THE CORD

IL MINISTRO GENERALE DEI FRATI MINORI

N. 129/51

Roma, Via Aurelia 139
January 5, 1951

Fr. Philotheus Boehner, O. F. M.
Editor, THE CORD
Franciscan Institute
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St. Bonaventure, N. Y.

Reverend and dear Father,

The publication of the first issue of THE CORD, under the auspices of the Franciscan Institute, demands that we give expression to our gratification and complete satisfaction with its truly seraphic apostolate of promoting the knowledge of ascetical and mystical ideals and practise of Franciscanism. We cannot but bestow our wholehearted approbation upon that which, in every respect, fulfills the long felt need as indicated by you, and so adequately evidences a model instrument for Franciscan indoctrination.

Throughout the centuries the motto of the entire Franciscan Order has ever been *In Sanctitate et Doctrina*. The relation between sanctity and doctrine is more than a mere formality. One can say that here is an interdependence. Every soul sanctifying itself acquires some kind of knowledge, whether it be by way of infusion or that of experience. The more grace in the soul, so much the more intense is that knowledge and the fullness thereof. It is in this sense that we claim a doctrine as underlying the fine simplicity of our holy Father Saint Francis. The very numbers of saints, canonized and uncanonized, who are followers of the Seraphic Patriarch, indicate how vast and profound the Franciscan doctrine has become. This is not to say that the doctrine of the Poverello has changed or is changing with the times, but rather that his sanctity has been so dynamic that the force thereof is ever operative in the minds and hearts of those who pledge themselves to follow the spirit and letter of his holy Rules.

Vol. 129/51