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## Editorial

With this issue, THE CORD is at last up to date. It has been a rather hectic process, making up a year of magazines in a couple of months, and we don't mind admitting that we're glad it's over.

One thing remains to be done as we prepare to resume normal operation, and that is the expression of our deep gratitude to everyone involved.

We are grateful, first of all, to our subscribers for their faithful confidence in us. Only in the case of a Franciscan publication, as a publishing executive recently observed, could the circulation *increase* (by the hundreds) while the magazine was not being published.

Our thanks go, too, to the many competent authors and artists, who responded so generously to our request for relevant and significant material with which to grace the pages of this review. Deadlines were short, and requirements exacting. Yet the material came in, and past issues have been made up precisely on schedule.

A considerable debt of gratitude is owed, finally, to the printing and production staffs: particularly to Mrs. Joseph Cucchiari of the Franciscan Institute, and the Franciscan Fathers Press, Brooklyn, N. Y., for setting aside much of their normal work schedule to accommodate the needs of THE CORD.

With God's help, we shall continue, now, to bring you on time, each month, reading material designed to keep you informed about the latest developments in Franciscan living, as well as to inspire ever greater fidelity to the Franciscan ideal.

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## The Franciscan Spirit of Brotherhood

Cullen Schippe, O.F.M. Cap.

"If a mother loves and cares for her child in the flesh, a friar should certainly love and care for his spiritual brother all the more tenderly" (2 Rule 6).<sup>1</sup> This is one of the most haunting and beautiful exhortations in the Rule of Saint Francis. Some of the most lyrical passages in the history of literature have been devoted to the tenderness of mother-love, and yet Saint Francis of Assisi has asked his followers to be more tender and devoted to one another than a mother is to her own flesh and blood.

Twentieth-century man is very much concerned with interpersonal relationships. Existentialist philosophers furnish outstanding representatives of the contradictory and equally strange tendencies so prevalent today: the headlong race in which some are engaged, away from what little communication they still have with other people; and the brazen swagger which others have adopted in their quest for a deeper and more meaningful interpersonal communication.

Between these bizarre extremes we find the genuine interpersonal relationship of brotherhood in Christ under the fatherhood of God: a Christian reality which divine revelation and guidance have preserved from the defects and exaggerations that have vitiated virtually all purely human programs for fulfillment. Here we are interested specifically in the Franciscan form of such brotherhood. What is involved in it? What is excluded from it? These and other questions must be answered, and the answers must be applied to the contemporary effort to renew Franciscanism.

In this article I shall discuss two points of major importance in any consideration of our tradition of brotherhood in the Order: (1) Saint Francis' own view of *fraternitas*, and (2) the modern approach to the same subject. Basically the two views are the same, but changes that have taken place in the Order and in society as a whole have had a role in shaping our contemporary outlook on brotherliness; hence the need to reflect on the matter and its importance in the current renewal.

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## Saint Francis and Brotherhood

The best summary of our Seraphic Father's feelings for the brethren and how they should conduct themselves toward one another can perhaps be found in the eleventh chapter of his First Rule:

The friars are bound to love one another because our Lord says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12). And they must prove their love by deeds, as St. John says: "Let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn. 3:18).

They are to speak "evil of none" (Tit. 3:2); there must be no complaining, no slander; it is written, "Whisperers and detractors are people hateful to God."

Love one another ... brother making peace with brother. The members of older religious institutions were called monks; it was only among themselves and in contrast to their superiors that they called themselves brothers. But Francis shunned the terms *monk*, *monastic Order*, *monastic Rule*. He replaced them with the names, *brother*, *brotherhood*, *Order of Friars Minor*. And significantly, he forbade any other title.

Thomas of Celano in his *Vita Secunda* insists:

The Blessed Francis admonished all to charity, kindness, and brotherly affection. He said: "I desire that my brothers show themselves as sons of one mother, and if one ask the other for a habit, a cord, or anything else, it should be given him generously." ... The constant desire and unceasing endeavor of the saint was to preserve intact the bond of unity among the brothers, in order that those whom the same spirit had called and the same father had begotten, should be nurtured peaceably in the bosom of the same mother (2 Cel. 180, 191).

Saint Francis always considered the Brotherhood as a family first and an Order second. As Archbishop Felder expresses it, "In thoughts, words and actions, inwardly and outwardly, whether near and known intimately or absent and unknown, all were to show one another genuine brotherly love" (p. 245). The life of the first friars was a constant exercise in a brotherly, almost motherly affection. The brethren were always on the lookout for opportunities to show their genuine affection for a brother in need. Seldom did a friar have to express his need, so quick were the others to sense it.

There were, however, difficulties along this line, early in the history of the Order. It seems that a rash of detraction broke out among the friars. "The Order," said Francis, "is threatened by a crisis, if the detractors are not checked. Very soon the good name of many brothers will be sullied if the mouth of these slanderers is not stuffed. Rise, rise, examine carefully, and if you find an accused brother as innocent, then inflict on the accuser a hard and public punishment."

Hard words from the seraphic Saint! He could take many offenses and show great mercy, but for him the biggest offense against fraternal charity was the detraction and murmuring of the brethren. "Far from indulging in detraction or disputing in words (2 Tim. 2:14) the friars should do their best to avoid talking, according as God gives them the opportunity. There must be no quarrelling among themselves or with others, and they should be content to answer everyone humbly ..." (1 Rule 11).

One of the outstanding virtues of the friars under the inspiration of Saint Francis was a knightly courtesy. The background for such courtesy was twofold. First, Christ was seen to be the head of his Body, the Church. Every human being therefore became equal under God as at least a potential member of Christ. The care and solicitude of the friars for one another flowed from this "divine" egalitarianism. Secondly, there was the simplicity and humility of the friars. To be boorish, discourteous, harsh, was not consistent with a truly simple and humble demeanor. Such lack of social grace would be a gross insult to a fellow member of the Mystical Body or to a brother in religion.

The sense of equality which was inherent in the Franciscan social ideal, was sublimated to a sense of personal dignity as attaching to all men in virtue of their relationship with Jesus Christ. The majesty of the Christ-life lay, as we have seen, upon all creation; and that sense of majesty had its corresponding personal action in the courtesy which in the Franciscan legend is considered an outstanding virtue; so much so that the discourteous friar was held to be no true friar (Cuthbert, *Romanticism of Saint Francis*, p. 67).

Francis was, after Christ, the supreme exemplar and living model of fraternal charity in the Order. He first lived the injunction to love before he expected it of others. The *Fioretti* are filled with little instances of love, compassion, and sympathy on the part of our seraphic Father. Celano relates one touching story that could well serve as a typical example. Brother Rizerio was convinced that he stood in the good or ill favor of God

accordingly as he stood in the good or ill favor of the Saint. He considered himself unworthy of the seraphic Father's friendship, and was on one occasion dismayed by this fancied unworthiness. When Francis found out about the brother's plight, he said:

Let not this temptation trouble you, my son, nor this doubt embitter you; for you are very dear to me and can be assured that among all my beloved ones you are worthy of my particular esteem and friendship. Come to me whenever you wish, and avail yourself without fear of this friendship (2 Cel. 49).

The *Mirror of Perfection* recounts the simple yet powerful story of the friar who woke up in the middle of the night in the throes of a terrible hunger tantrum. "Immediately Blessed Francis had a meal prepared, and like a man full of love and discretion sat by his side to eat with him, that he should feel no shame at eating by himself. . . ." Many were the examples of Francis' outstanding brotherly love.

But what is the basis — the "philosophical foundation" — for such a respect (and this is a key word) and love for the brothers? The answer has already been hinted at in the foregoing paragraphs: Christocentrism and a realization of human dignity.

Christocentrism may be regarded as the unifying element in all Franciscan brotherly love. It is expressed in the theology of Saint Bonaventure as an outlook which sees all creation as produced in and through Christ, modelled on Christ, and destined for ultimate fulfillment under the headship of Christ, Christocentrism means, in short, an attitude which sees Christ first, last, and always as the center of God's plan and therefore of human life.

The second factor mentioned above is that realization of human dignity which characterized Francis' attitude toward every man he met. He viewed each human being through Christian eyes, particularly the members of the Brotherhood he founded. For Saint Francis, the brethren were much more than comrades in a new adventure, more than fellow Christians if by this we mean merely a fellowship in the same visible organization, more than friends if we take friendship in even its deepest philosophical sense. They were spiritual *brothers*, joined together in the communion of a life infinitely transcending every natural reality.

Francis, then, loved and cherished his brethren with a deep **PERSONAL** love. Down through the centuries this brotherhood and, shall we say, *esprit de corps* has been an integral part of

the Franciscan way of life. The reason for this can be seen in these words from Chesterton's *Saint Francis of Assisi*:

From the Pope to the beggar, from the Sultan of Syria to the ragged robbers, there never was a man who looked into the dark and burning eyes of Francis Bernadone without being certain that he was really interested in them. Francis was interested in everyone's own individual life from the cradle to the grave. Each human being was valued and taken seriously. He treated the whole mob of men as a mob of kings. He demanded a great deal of human nature, not because he despised it, but rather because he trusted it and realized its potential.

Francis showed men anew how to live the new commandment, and he manifested this warm love especially to his fellow friars. He saw his duty (as the Apostle Paul tells of it in the sixth chapter of his Letter to the Galatians) as being first to the "household of the faithful."

### *The Franciscans and Brotherhood*

Since the days of Saint Francis, and even during his lifetime, there have been failings, within the Franciscan family, with regard to fraternal charity. Yet despite these unfortunate lapses, the sons and daughters of the Seraph of Assisi have always been distinguished for what Felder calls their "most cordial and happy brotherliness" (p. 247).

Caring for and loving a brother, as evidenced in the life and words of Saint Francis, is simply being FOR that brother. Being FOR a brother involves gaining, in a limited way, an understanding of him. In this understanding is the germ of sympathy and compassion. The I-Thou relationship which is established as a result is by no means purely intellectual. Nor is it purely volitive. And by no means is it a mere overflowing of the emotions. The spirit of brotherhood which is so strong in our Order is eminently divine and wonderfully human. The spot in our hearts reserved for our brother is the stamp of God's approval on our way of life. Francis named us, and we are in reality, "friars" — brothers — who must daily bend and be FOR one another.

This being FOR another is not something frivolous or externally ostentatious. At times it is the drudgery of bearing a brother's cross. Then, too, it may be the nagging itch of putting up with annoying habits. Being FOR another takes humility and grace. But above all, as the whole tradition of the Order indicates, it springs from love.

Love as Christ himself defined it at the Last Supper is the wellspring from which flows any genuine affection a friar shows for his brother. Any other way would produce a distorted, perverted, twisted affection which would be more in line with what the world considers love.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). Such is Saint Paul's sound advice to the Christians at Rome. If a twentieth century friar is to be FOR his brother, if he is to love and care for him more than a mother loves and cares for her natural child, then he must share that brother's joys and sorrows. And this sharing must be a springboard to God.

This sounds idealistic? How can a Christian, much less a religious, live without an ideal? If every Franciscan, religious and lay, were fully aware of the dynamism inherent in fraternal love and affection, how close we would be to fulfilling the hopes placed in us by Pius XI, Pius XII, and John XXIII! The crest of our Order would be emblazoned, and the atmosphere of our convents, monasteries, and homes permeated, with the truth to which so much theoretical homage is paid and which is so succinctly expressed in Psalm 132: "Behold how good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one!"

There is a need, not only in modern society as a whole, but especially in contemporary religious life, for brothers who are FOR one another. As Friars Minor and as followers of Saint Francis, our affinity transcends the bonds of flesh. It has its source in supernature. I am no longer I; I am WE and WE are CHRIST. With Saint Paul, the Franciscan who is immersed in this ideal can say, "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

This aspect of Franciscan brotherhood can and must be viewed under the aspect of poverty. As the well known Benedictine writer Hubert van Zeller points out in *The Choice of God*,

the man who is poor in spirit is not bound to people or bored by people. He loves people in Charity. ... How can a man be bored by people when he cannot imagine anyone to be more boring than himself? Such a man is on the contrary delighted by the presence of people; they remind him of the Charity he owes God (pp. 103ff).

This close relationship between brotherliness and poverty shows how thoroughly evangelical the Franciscan ideal is. It is because Christ, being rich, became poor for the sake of us, his brothers (2 Cor. 8:9), that the Franciscan seeks to be poor, the better to love his brothers and all men in Christ.

That poverty of spirit, then, which would seek to exclude tender affection for one's brother, would be self-defeating. It would show up under trial for what it is, a false poverty not sufficiently detached from its own poverty and from its own solitude.

### Conclusion

We Franciscans are neither monks nor hermits. Most of our time is spent rubbing elbows with others — our brothers in religion. At prayer, in work, and during his hours of relaxation, the Franciscan is surrounded by brothers or sisters who are dedicated by a common love to the Franciscan ideal. The intangible spirit that accompanies such a life is the essence of Franciscan brotherhood.

"If a mother loves and cares for her child in the flesh. ..." We are back again to that haunting phrase that began this article. Perhaps we can see more clearly now, as a result of recalling some basic truths once relished and then allowed to lapse into the nirvana of presupposition, what Francis meant when he said that the love between brothers in the Order must be greater than mother-love.

This exhortation, enigmatic perhaps to the casual observer, must at all times be a throbbing reality for us who are immersed in the Franciscan lifestream. The bonds of spiritual relationship — brother for brother — are stronger than family ties. Franciscan profession does give us birth into a new family. We are, by that profession, more members of the Franciscan family than our natural families. And our patrimony is Francis' desire that the brothers should love and support one another.

Every Franciscan is a brother, and we have much more in common than the initials we add to our names. May what was said of the first friars be said of our "new" generation:

Although the members of this immense fraternity were gathered from all parts of the globe, yet they were raised up to one temple of the Holy Spirit by the cementing bond of love. Indescribable was their mutual love and cordiality. When living together, they vied with one another in loving friendship and friendliness, each one seeking only how he might gladden the heart of the other (Felder, 247).

Saint Francis' spirit of brotherly love is contagious. It must be studied, and re-studied, meditated and contemplated. Modern

"isms" have cast a cloud over brotherly love and have labelled it, branded it, formalized it, fossilized it. But the example of our seraphic Father can cut through centuries and errors to re-establish and revitalize his own divinely inspired spirit of fraternal love.

His perfect love for the little flock which he had drawn after himself never left him without fear that they might lose heaven, after having renounced the world. He feared that he should not attain to glory himself, if he should not lead those to glory who were entrusted to him, those whom his spirit had brought forth with greater travail than the maternal womb (2 Cel. 181).

Saint Francis had an ideal. His ideal was translated into the poetry of the brotherhood. The Capuchin Constitutions tell how that ideal must live on: If the friars "would be true disciples of Christ, let them heartily love and bear with one another, exercising themselves in divine love and fraternal charity; studying how best to give good example to one another and to all" (n. 113).

Perhaps the Franciscan ideal of brotherhood has suffered through the ages. Perhaps, because of human frailty, the love — brother for brother — that is to be characteristic of Christians, much more of Friars Minor, has declined. Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., introducing the English version of the *Speculum*, says that

there are those who are scandalized when they discover imperfections in a religious body of men. But healthy minds see only the inevitable conflict which must arise when a spiritual ideal comes into close contact with the earth; and they are edified even if humbled.

Deficiencies in its practice should never corrode the ideal. Failure to foster the spirit of brotherhood may exist. Friars may become capricious, slanderous, or simply inconsiderate; but never must the ideal of true, Franciscan brotherly love be allowed to tarnish. Francis' exhortation to love and care for our brothers more than a mother loves her child according to the flesh, must burn on. The mutual help and encouragement of brothers is absolutely necessary for the perdurance of the Franciscan ideal, and for the very life of the Franciscan Order.

1. Translation of the writings of Saint Francis used in this article is that of Benen Fahy, O.F.M., *The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1964), used with the permission of the publisher.

## Christocentrism and Love:

### Two Basic Forces in Franciscan Formation

Sister Mary Mildred, C.S.S.F.

#### I. CHRISTOCENTRISM

After a preliminary explanation of the Rule, the novice strives to overtake the poor, chaste, and obedient Christ by adding to his knowledge the essence of the three vows, through which the Sister is to make a contract of love with her divine Spouse; the cleric or Brother, a pact of the most intimate friendship with his Master.

##### *Franciscan Poverty with the Poor Christ*

In considering poverty, the first and foremost of the vows from the Franciscan standpoint, the novice sees the compelling example of poverty left by Jesus for every Franciscan. With St. Bonaventure, he realizes that

Christ was poor at the beginning of his life, throughout the course of his life, and at the end of his life ... He who is rich in all things and in need of nothing, became so poor, as he himself testified, that he was poorer than the foxes of the earth and the birds of the air. 'The foxes have dens, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Mt. 8:20). For he was poor at birth, poorer in life, and poorest on the Cross. His covering at birth consisted of swaddling clothes. In life, although he had clothing, he often lacked proper nourishment. At death you will find him naked and thirsting.<sup>1</sup>

This poverty of Christ is the chief characteristic of the spirituality of every Franciscan, for Franciscan poverty implies

1. D. Faccin, *Spiritual Exercises according to St. Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, N. Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1955), p. 145.

detachment from all the goods of this world that are a hindrance to the love of Jesus Christ. It also implies a detachment from oneself, a dying to oneself. Despoiled thus of everything, the Religious can attach himself perfectly to Christ. The novice sees, in Franciscan poverty, the poverty of Christ on the Cross to the extent that, to him as to St. Francis, the love of poverty and love of Christ become one and the same thing. He realizes that detachment from everything on earth, which is nothingness, turns into the possession of the All-Good, who is everything. Thus the Poverello, and every Franciscan with him, may always repeat with a unique emphasis the profound yet simple words, "My God and my all."

At the very outset of the religious life, then, the novice apprehends and takes intimate possession of the perfect reliance on God's providence which our Lord taught in the Sermon on the Mount:

Do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. ... Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you of much more value than they...? And as for clothing, why are you anxious? See how the lilies of the field grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field ... how much more you. ... Therefore do not be anxious, saying: 'What are we to put on?' For your Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his justice and all these things shall be given you besides (Mt. 6:25-33).

To become a true follower of St. Francis, the novice has to love and understand poverty as St. Francis loved it and understood it. If he is a true imitator of Christ and of St. Francis, then Lady Poverty must occupy a central part in his life. The common denominator to which he will reduce his daily living in poverty is expressed in the first of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3). Although the sacred words apply in some measure to every truly Christian life, they apply especially to those who have

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chosen to give up all things to follow Christ. To a Franciscan, poverty means far more than the mere relinquishment of goods. It means "detachment" (though not in the sense that he must deny himself every human satisfaction or foster a dull indifference to life) — independence, lack of need for much that ordinary people regard as essential to contentment and happiness. It means a paring down of desires and taking the "ache" out of them. It means that the Franciscan sees everything in his life in terms of poverty of spirit and feels a kind of joy and pride in being poor out of love for Jesus Christ who, though rich, "became poor for (our) sakes, that by his poverty (we) might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

Without poverty, there is no genuine Franciscanism. Other virtues are Franciscan only in combination with poverty. But poverty itself is only a means to an end. Poverty, the hidden treasure of the Gospel, is the great liberator which transforms a man into Christ. Poverty removes every obstacle to perfect union with God. With St. Francis, the novice, and the mature Franciscan as well, must never tire of repeating, "I, a little brother (or sister), wish to follow the life and poverty of Jesus Christ, our Most High Lord, and of his holy Mother, and to persevere in it to the end."<sup>2</sup>

The novice should be informed, then, that this entire abdication, this full renunciation, will not be unrewarded. He will give up the false liberty and glory of the world only to find true joy, lasting peace, and liberty of spirit in the company of a tender Friend or Spouse. He will strip himself of earthly riches, and be clothed with the wedding-garment of divine Love. He will leave his home and be admitted to the royal palace of Christ. He will relinquish his worldly name and receive instead the royal title of a member of the King's court. Instead of an earthly, perishable reward, he will reap the imperishable crown of union with Christ his Lord. God is not outdone in generosity; but religious abandonment must be sincere, for neither is God mocked.

#### *Franciscan Chastity with the Chaste Christ*

After poverty, the young novice is instructed about the significance and beauty of chastity for the man or woman who has

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2. T. Foley, *Spiritual Conferences for Religious* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1948, p. 188.

chosen a total consecration to Jesus Christ as his or her way of life:

He, the Savior of the human race, was pleased to be born of the most pure Virgin, he himself remained a virgin, and before all the others he loved the virgin disciple whom he kept from carnal nuptials. Virginity was so pleasing to him that he chose the virginal womb for his spiritual abode, wherein he celebrated the nuptials of his assuming of human nature.<sup>3</sup>

Because the novice loves Christ above everything else and wants to imitate him in everything, he chooses to vow chastity out of love for Jesus. To him, Jesus will always be, not merely in theory, but in the deepest and most hidden recesses of his life, the Alpha and the Omega; the beginning, and the end.

Perfect chastity, it goes without saying, is not only a bodily and spiritual integrity; it is, much more importantly, a gift made to Christ, a voluntary renunciation *for his sake*, of what gives human existence its most perfect, intimate, and noble human happiness — conjugal love. It has rightly been called a holocaust offered to Christ as a testimony of Love. As St. Methodius of Olympus says, "Virgins are the unbloody altar from which ascends the incense of love."<sup>4</sup>

Love of God will not be only the motivating cause of perfect chastity, but the novice's goal as well. He will vow chastity, that is, not only once and for all as a single act of love, but continually, as a prolonged expression of his fundamental desire to grow in love for, and likeness to, Jesus. The Sister will see in Jesus her perfect Model and Spouse; the priest and Brother, his perfect Model and Friend. All through his public life, our Lord revealed to man the singular value that purity had in his eyes. If the Franciscan has learned to live with Christ, he cannot fail to learn that lesson.

More concretely, however, the novice will find in the rule he has chosen to follow, specific counsels and admonitions designed to safeguard his purity. He will do well to take to heart those counsels, those admonitions. He will resolve with the utmost determination to practice a moderate, healthy degree of control — of mortification — in training his body, his emotions, and his rational faculties to respond readily to the demands of the state he has chosen. Assent to this as a theoretical principle

3. D. Faccin, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

4. Dom Massabki, "The Vow of Chastity," *Religious Sisters* (Westminster: Newman, 1952), p. 44.

is only too easy for the novice; it is only afterwards, after the fervor of the novitiate has cooled, that he comes to realize the importance of this sort of moderate and purposeful, positively motivated mortification.

At recreation, to take an example that is by no means minor or trivial, the novice must learn to avoid all that is worldly, offensive, or unbecoming to religious dignity — all this without sacrificing that spirit of joyful affability, charity, and humility without which his "religiosity" is only too suspect. He will be cautious and circumspect in his correspondence and reading, because he realizes that these activities contain real dangers for the life he is to lead.

He will, further, avoid those friendships which become too particular, too natural; for they can only weaken the love he has reserved for Christ — they can only divide his heart, and no man can serve two masters. This is not only a matter of chastity; it involves much more. It entails a modesty and a reserve that flow from the constant awareness of Christ's presence in one who has given him everything. The Franciscan has to be, in a very real sense, a tabernacle sacred to the mystical Christ within him. His virginal heart must center on Christ alone, and his esteem for Christ has to drive him to imitate his Master, to strain toward likeness and unity of will and purpose in all that he undertakes.

It is, after all, the highest form of created love, that of the seraphim, that tradition has used to symbolize the spirit of St. Francis and of his Order. Every novice, and every professed Franciscan as well, is obliged to a life of love; and the fulfillment of his vow of chastity lies, not in drawing careful distinctions as close as possible to the danger point, but in the perfection of an undivided love.

#### *Franciscan Obedience with the Obedient Christ*

As his love for Christ matures, the novice becomes ready to surrender by the vow of obedience all he possesses to the Person around whom his life has become centered. Ultimately, this has to include that which he, as a human being, most intimately and jealously treasures: his personal liberty.

This submission is, admittedly, no easy task. Intellect and will are man's two highest faculties — that which make him most God-like. With the exception of life itself, he cannot make a greater sacrifice than that of his intellect and will. And this is exactly what he does when he vows to obey another human



being out of love for Jesus Christ. With this ultimate submission, the sacrifice of the Religious is complete; it is no longer he that lives, when he practices a truly Christ-like obedience; but Christ lives in him (cf. Gal. 2:20). As obedience was Christ's road to victory, so obedience must, in the long run, be his disciple's way to victory.

The stable of Bethlehem was the first convent; religious obedience was practiced first there, by the Son of God himself. He was the first Religious, the model of total consecration to God our Father. He was omnipotent; yet he bowed in humble submission to Mary and Joseph: "he was subject to them" (Lk. 2:51). He came down from heaven, "not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (Jn. 6:38). He never wavered from his Father's will, whether it was insults he faced, mockery, scourging, or crucifixion. "The chalice which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn. 18:11). His life culminated in a supreme act of obedience when he, the infinite God, humbled himself to the form of a slave and became obedient even to the death of the cross.

This example of Christ teaches us that there can be no dishonor in full obedience for his sake — that there can be no more noble disposition of this most excellent gift of our free will and independence, than to return it to the hands of the God who bestowed it, in a spirit of Christ-like obedience.

St. Francis, that most Christ-like of saints and our model of obedience, longed for nothing more than that his followers remain true to this submissive spirit of Jesus Christ.

The Franciscan Religious makes this heroic act for the love of Christ. His love, founded not upon feelings but upon reason, urges him to immolate his self-will and to fulfill to the best of his ability the will of God, by submitting his will to divinely constituted authority. Duly observed, the vow of obedience will transform his many actions, in themselves routine and inglorious, into a clean and sweet-smelling holocaust in the sight of God. This is so, particularly, because his sole motive in making this surrender (and persevering faithfully in it) is his love for Christ and Christ's mission. He must be impelled, as Paul was, (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14), by the love of Jesus Christ. And this necessarily implies that he will use the most effective means, approved by Christ, to become as far as possible a fit and acceptable instrument for the glorification of God and the redemption of men.

Such considerations as these place the third of the evangelical counsels high in the novice's esteem. Poverty remains the center of the Franciscan ideal, true, but obedience becomes poverty's most perfect expression. Fostering a spirit of true Christian

obedience, our own will is sacrificed, and the will excels the body and external possessions, which are the objects of the vows of poverty and chastity; (2) in the vow of obedience the other two vows are contained, whereas this cannot be said, conversely, of the vow of poverty or of chastity; (3) the vow of obedience comes closer than either of the other two to the end of the religious state itself: the subordination of the whole man to God. (S. T. 2, 186, 8).

Obedience unites the Franciscan to God in a perpetual spiritual communion, causing God to abide in him; in the words of Fr. Eugene Boylan, O.C.R.,

Perfect union with Christ is to do the will of God for the love of God ... Therein lies all holiness and all happiness ... for it renews us in Christ and unites us to him who is our God and our All.<sup>5</sup>

Faith and love change obedience from the galling yoke it would be, to the pleasant service of a loving Master or Bridegroom. Through faith, the novice who perseveres will learn to see Jesus Christ hidden behind the human personality of his superior. Through obedience, all his actions will become meritorious — from washing dishes to attendance at Mass. Whatever the form assumed for the manifestation of God's will, love will spur the Religious on to eager, Christlike action, stamped with the seal of eternal life. He will soon realize that

if love is giving, then in the perfect and unreserved giving of the vow of obedience ... love is perfect and unreserved. This, the greatest of all vows, is the greatest love, the most generous gift of oneself. It is the most ardent union of heart with ... God, not only of what (one) has and does, but also of all details and circumstances — in fine, of all (one) is.<sup>6</sup>

Through his religious life, the Franciscan will ever be ready to repeat the one continual "fiat" initiated at the Incarnation and prolonged in the Body of Christ throughout time and eternity. He will repeat it with confidence on his deathbed, and with the words of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, who well understood the value of hidden obedience when she said: "I am sure that God will do my will in heaven because on earth I have always done his will. I have never refused the good God anything."<sup>7</sup>

5. *This Tremendous Lover* (Westminster: Newman, 1948), pp. 175-76.

6. F. J. McGarrigle, *My Father's Will* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1944), p. 168.

7. St. Therese of Lisieux, *the Little Flower of Jesus* (tr. T. N. Talor) New York: Kenedy, 1926), p. 329.

Obedience is love's consummation, the test of loyal love for the Christian community, the proof of filial love for Mary, and the crown of eternal love for Christ.

## II. LOVE

When the foundation of religious life, which is embodied in the three evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, has been laid, the master or mistress of novices should begin to instruct and guide the novices in the practice of the outstanding virtues of Franciscan asceticism — particularly in what all theologians, spiritual writers, and masters of the religious life call "the soul of all virtues and the bond of perfection": love.

There is no doubt that the novice who enters the Franciscan life seeks perfection. The intention may be, indeed usually is, somewhat vague at the beginning; but it must be made more explicit; and the earlier, the better. The novice must learn, as soon as possible, that as St. Thomas puts it, "The perfection of the Christian life is none other than the perfection of love, for the Christian life consists specifically in love."<sup>8</sup>

Perfection, then, consists in love — in union with God. The possession of God is perfection, and love alone unites a person to God. The young novice is, then, to be taught how to love God with his whole heart, and how to try to exclude from his life whatever would hinder the total submission of his heart to God. It is because of love that he has set out to become a Religious and renounced the goods of this world, conjugal love, and personal independence.

St. Francis' understanding of this cardinal truth is most evident, perhaps, in the following passage from Chapter Three of his Third Order Rule:

The obstacles to sanctity being removed by the three holy vows, the Brothers and Sisters should strive to fulfill the divine law, which depends wholly on the love of God and neighbor. Charity is the soul of all virtues and the bond of perfection. Nothing is better, nothing more effective than charity to mortify the vices, to advance in grace and to attain to the height of all virtues. ... But the test of the love of God is the practice of charity towards our neighbor. Wherefore charity towards others should appear above all in the true follower of Christ. All his conversation should be guarded, useful, and proper; that charity may abound in deed, it must first abound in the heart.<sup>9</sup>

8. S. T. 2-2, 184, 1.

9. A. B. Wolter, *The Book of Life* (St. Bonaventure, N. Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1954), xiii-xiv.

More basic (and therefore more impelling still), however, even than the prescriptions of our Father Francis, is the divine commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind: and thy neighbor as thyself" (Lk. 10: 27). The Franciscan novice must be brought to the point where he will respond, with St. Ignatius: "Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my whole will." Out of love for you, Lord, I vow to you a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

In view of the divine Love expressed in the institution of the Eucharist, it would seem unnecessary to supply the young Franciscan with other motives and incentives for loving Christ. Impelled by the Christ-love developing within him, and led on by the inspirations of his grace, every Franciscan novice should dedicate himself to a life of love in the service of Christ and his Blessed Mother, if he aspires to be a true follower of St. Francis. The very essence of Franciscanism is seraphic love of God and of one's neighbor. St. Francis is considered to be the greatest lover the world has ever seen — that is, as we have said earlier, why he is called the Seraph of Assisi; and his Order, the Seraphic Order. Since *seraphic* implies the highest form and degree of created love, the Franciscan novice is rightly expected to excel all other Religious in love, if he is to prove true to his name and profession.

He should be encouraged often to go to his Seraphic Father, to learn from his life and writings how to love God. All of St. Francis' love for God was centered in the sacred humanity of the God-man, Jesus Christ. In his beloved Christ he saw concretely all the appealing beauty, perfection, and goodness of God united with perfect human nature. From the God-man he learned how to raise himself from the human to the divine and, ultimately, transfigure himself in Christ. With St. Francis, the young novice should be determined to "look and make it according to the pattern, that was shown thee in the mount" (Ex. 25:40).

If the Franciscan would follow Christ closely in intimate and genuine love, he must pass the test that marks a close friend of Christ. If he truly loves God, he will naturally love his neighbor, for love of neighbor is inseparable from love of God. As love for God increases, so must love of neighbor. Our Lord himself points out the way: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love, one for another" (Jn. 13:15).

The novice must, then, learn to love all men in Christ, especially his fellow-Religious. As Christ died for love of him,

so he must die to self for love of them. He should never harbor an unkind thought, never utter an unkind word, or perform a deed that might cause pain to another. Like his Master, he should "go about doing good" and always look for opportunities of bringing joy and gladness into the lives of his brothers in Christ.

He should realize, moreover, that love as a means of perfection does not lose its validity at the monastery door. It must reach much further; it must permeate all the activities of the Franciscan priest in the apostolate of the word and the Sacraments; it must pervade the Brother's life in the classroom and among the people; it must penetrate every aspect of the Sister's hospital and social work. If love ever fails to be the moving force of the apostolate, all the external efforts of the Religious lose their significance and value as a means of perfection.

More still: the novice in an Order devoted to the mixed or active life must be brought to realize that the active element is not the most basic in his life; it is, in the view of St. Thomas, an "overflow" of the deeper life of contemplation which must continue to nourish it and to which its fruits must be returned. The nursing Sister does not nurse the sick *simply* for the sake of serving suffering mankind, but for the sake of loving God more intensely by serving the friends for whom he laid down his life. The teaching Brother studies not *primarily* for the sake of learning or educating; but to know God better and bring others to a loving knowledge of him who is Truth.

### *Love of Christ Crucified*

In acquiring perfect love, the novice may be helped by three basic devotions: complete surrender to Christ crucified, the Holy Eucharist, and the love of Mary Immaculate.

Christ crucified is the source, ideal, support, and *raison d'être* of every Franciscan's life. It is in terms of the suffering Christ that the Franciscan Religious must really understand the Franciscan spirit. The crucifix must be the center of all his devotion, as Christ is the center of all creation. "He who does not carry his cross and follow me, cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:27).

Francis grasped this point thoroughly. He became the follower and disciple par excellence of Jesus Crucified — so much so that, because of his love for the suffering Savior and because of his heroic imitation of him in bearing the cross of his Franciscan way of life, he merited to bear on his mortal body the marks of the crucifixion.

St. Francis was so deeply in love with the Cross, that his love for it diffused itself throughout his entire Order. Anyone who aspires to follow Francis must take up in his own turn the cry of St. Paul: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

The sight of Christ's Cross should penetrate the very depths of the heart of his young follower. His Friend, her Beloved, is the Son of God — the Perfect Man, nailed to the Cross. In the anguished mind, the tortured soul, the broken heart, the disfigured body of Christ, the Franciscan should read what sin did and is still doing — ravaging the mystical body of Christ.

He should come to see that Christ's death has not been brought about by sin alone, but also by the love of God. The smallest act of the Son of Man had a morally infinite value in his Father's eyes. One tear, one drop of perspiration, a single sigh, a whispered prayer, a plea for forgiveness could have bought every grace humanity needed — would have sufficed to redeem a thousand worlds. But it would hardly have proved Christ's love; for love is attested by sacrifice:

That men might know something of the mystery of the tremendous love of their God, Christ chose the supreme test — the awful agony in the garden, the cruel crown of thorns, the flaying at the pillar, the nightmare way of the cross, the choking pain as he hung suspended for three hours between heaven and earth. And because he knew we might wonder if in the grip of pain he ever regretted his action, he deliberately pushed aside the wine mixed with myrrh that could have anesthetized his senses and robbed his sacrifice of some of its perfection. Sin indeed might nail Christ to the cross but only love could keep him there.<sup>10</sup>

It was this aspect of Christ's love, his sufferings, that caused the Poverello to seek God, the ideal of all perfection. To return God's love, man must crucify himself for God's sake. That is what Francis wished to do. And that is what the Franciscan novice must also do: he must begin right away, at the beginning of his religious life, to consecrate himself to the love of Christ on the cross. He must continue to specialize for the rest of his life in the practice of this crucified and crucifying love. Christ crucified will then become for him the one way leading to perfection. In imitation of Paul of Tarsus, he will exclaim, "With Christ I am nailed to the cross. It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:19-20).

10. *ibid.*, p. 72.

When his heart and mind are filled with our Lord's sufferings, he will find it easy to meditate on the Passion. He will burn to suffer with Christ, to embrace the Crucified through tears of contrition and gratitude.

### *The Holy Eucharist*

Contemplating the love of Christ who died for him, the Franciscan realizes that his Master was not satisfied simply to become one of us by adopting a human nature like our own. It was not enough that he should share the hardships of a life like our own, and that he should suffer and die and atone for our sins. He loves us, and he would not rest until he could be completely united to us. And in that immeasurable love, he devised a most extraordinary method of union in which he himself became our food. That is, he instituted the Blessed Sacrament.

There may be several answers, from the theological viewpoint, to the question of why Jesus is in the Eucharist; but to the Franciscan novice, only one answer, really, should matter: Love. Love, as Bishop Sheen so eloquently explains, is the reason for the institution of the Eucharist.

Without the Eucharist, the love of Jesus Christ would be for us a dead love, a past love, which we should soon forget, and which we should be almost pardonable in forgetting. Love has its laws, its demands. The Eucharist alone fully satisfies them. By it, Jesus Christ has every right to be loved, because he testifies in it infinite love for us.<sup>11</sup>

It would be, so to speak, the cardinal sin against everything that Franciscanism stands for, to reject this love. Following in the footsteps of St. Francis, the novice will want to foster the greatest possible devotion to his Friend — her Bridegroom — in the Blessed Sacrament.

St. Francis once invited all his followers to "fall in love with the God-man, whom love had made man" (Matins for Oct. 4, 2nd antiphon). St. Clare, his partner in sowing the seeds of renewal in a world grown cold, shows her perfect grasp of his spirit in her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Her frequent visits to her Eucharistic Lord, and the many favors they brought her, are common knowledge.

11. F. J. Sheen, "The Eucharist, the Need of Our Heart," *The Holy Hour* (Washington: NCCM), p. 51.

Now, this devotion to the Eucharist that Francis and Clare cherished are particularly called for in our day, as the cult of the Blessed Sacrament continues to spread despite the manifold forces opposing it. The novice ought to call upon Francis and Clare, to enkindle within his heart the same sort of love for the Eucharistic Christ that they had. Then he will learn from experience the power of the Blessed Sacrament to renew one's dedication to the deepest and most difficult ideals of the religious life.

Contemporary theology has yet another lesson to teach the Franciscan neophyte: Christ as he is present in the Eucharist is, precisely, "our Pasch." Now risen, he dies no more; yet it is in an eternalized moment of glorified sacrifice that he is present on the altar and in our hearts. No "prisoner of the Tabernacle," he deliberately remains there, glorified precisely in this expression of his timeless sacrifice and ever active in joining to himself the body he came to earth to assume.

Contemplating this sort of unique love, the Franciscan can only conclude that his life too must be one of self-immolation. For the sake of Christ, he too must sacrifice himself completely in obedience to the precept to "love ... as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12).

### *Love of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

The wise master or mistress of novices will waste no time in inculcating that most Franciscan of traits: devotion and dedication to the Mother of God. This is but a natural result of the Franciscan form of life, which is rooted in Christ and his gospel. The Franciscans inherited this loyalty to their heavenly Queen from Francis himself, whose devotion to her was outstanding. Jesus, after all, had loved Mary; and Francis, the perfect imitator of Jesus,

becoming one with Jesus ... felt in himself all the love of the Child Jesus for his Mother; he loved her with the very heart of Jesus. And since his heart had identified itself with the heart of Jesus, the love of Jesus for Mary was his love, and his love for Mary was the very love of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

The arms of Mary were the cradle of the Franciscan Order. Celano tells us (1, 21) that Francis renovated a tiny wayside

12. L. Veuthey, *Union with Christ* (tr. J. Meyer; Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1954), p. 13.

chapel, a half-ruined church "because he burned with great devotion for the Mother of all Goodness."

Francis felt for Mary all a true son feels for the best, most tender, most sublime of mothers. And what Mary was to Francis, she must be to every Franciscan. It was Francis himself who bequeathed to his followers that legacy of devotion to Mary which has ever been a beacon for the entire Franciscan family.

To love Jesus, the novice must realize that he must love Mary. Love for Mary cannot be separated from love for Jesus. St. Bonaventure says, in this connection, that we should

hold ever in highest and most affectionate veneration the glorious Queen, Mother of our Lord. In your every need turn to her as the most assured refuge, and beg her protection. Choose her for your advocate, and recommend to her your cause whole-heartedly and without misgiving, for she is the Mother of Mercy. Seek to offer her day by day special marks of reverence. But, in order that your prayer may be heard, and your homage be pleasing to her, strive with all your might to preserve in your own body and soul the immaculate purity of your Mother, and to follow her in the path of humility and meekness.<sup>13</sup>

The entire Franciscan school, which has inherited the love of Francis for our Lady, Mother, and Queen, has always consecrated the best of its powers to the defense and propagation of her privileges. The Franciscan novice, too, must arrive early at the full consciousness of the basic reason for all his devotion to Mary and filial love for her: namely, the divine maternity. It was not absolutely necessary that the Word be born of a woman to become man. Being God, he could have assumed a full-grown, perfect human nature. If he chose to be born of Mary, that choice bears its lesson for us. It means, first and most importantly, that he has set up a special relationship between her and redeemed mankind: he has made her our Mother because she is his Mother, and we are his brothers.

He gave us that Mother at the most tragic, yet triumphant, moment in history, as he was about to bow his head in freely chosen sacrifice. "Behold thy mother," he said to his beloved disciple, and through him to every man who would follow his royal road of the cross (Jn. 19:7).

13. W. Meyer, *Conferences for Religious* (New York: Sisters of St. Francis, 1932), I, 167.

## A PRAYER FROM A HEBREW

We pray, O Lord, for the Catholic Church to say: "Come into our realm, O brothers of the Hebrew faith, that we may truly learn of the One divine Source and purpose through each other, and so may true conversion follow even as day follows night. Amen."

HENRY C. SAMUEL  
Seattle, Washington

Mary is, then, our Mother; she is to form Jesus in us as she once did in her own body. Hence the singular importance of filial devotion to her as one of our chief means of perfection and holiness. "If we wish to have God dwell in us as in his tabernacle, it is necessary for us to give ourselves devotedly to Mary."<sup>14</sup>

The Franciscan must give himself to Mary in that simplicity and abandonment which have become traditional in his Order. He will want to manifest such practical indications of his devotion to her as regular recitation of the rosary and the *angelus*, wearing a scapular or medal in her honor, etc. But he must never mistake these means for the end, which is imitation of Mary in her total consecration to God.

He will imitate Mary, then, in her purity, in her humility, in her meekness; like her, he will spread light and peace wherever he goes. He will keep his Mother for his constant companion, along with her divine Son, realizing that this will prove his surest guarantee of advancing toward that perfection of love in which he finds his whole reason for being.

14. St. Bonaventure, *Sermo 26* in *Nat. Dni.*, IX, 125; cited in Veuthey, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

# St. Francis and the Fatherhood of God

Sister M. Rose Cecilia, O.S.F.

## I. FRANCIS' CONCEPT OF GOD'S FATHERHOOD

Down through the centuries the message of Christ, that God is loving Father, had resounded with varying results. It was in the thirteenth century, however, that it was reiterated in accord with the divine plan, with emphatic dignity, simplicity, zeal, and love, in the person of St. Francis of Assisi, the little Poor Man of God.

Francis, it is true, was not a learned man; his "learning" was in its totality a reflection of the "Light of the world," and for that reason it gave him an insight into the truths of the Gospel which few men have ever attained. After reading the Scriptures, he would meditate on their message and write it indelibly upon his heart, so that nothing he read would be in vain (2 Cel. 240). This is the way he discovered the fundamental truth of the "Good News": God's Name is Father! He realized that rebirth in Christ through the Holy Spirit made God his Father and made him a son of the Father. This realization so permeated his life from the first moment of his conversion in 1206 until his death in 1226, that for him the fact that God was his real and ever-present Father became identical with his very existence.

Francis was the essence of simplicity, for he had no other intention in his life than to be conformed to Christ. Through the Gospel he had learned that Christ is the Way to the Father, and he had seen the Father through Christ. The Gospel revealed to him also the love, goodness, and mercy of God; for Jesus had manifested these attributes during his life. Francis knew well that he who sees Christ sees the Father; he made explicit use of our Lord's conversation with Philip (Jn. 14:8-9) in his admonition on the Eucharist (Meyer, *Words of St. Francis*, 128).

*In this article, SISTER M. ROSE CECILIA shows how St. Francis imitated Christ in his filial piety toward the Father. Sister has discussed our Lord's relationship to his Father in a previous article for THE CORD. Citations for this article from the writings of St. Francis are taken from James Meyer's Words of St. Francis, referred to in the text simply as "Meyer," and used with the permission of the Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, Ill.*

Naturally, then, since Francis considered Christ "the center of all things, the focus of all thought, the object of all striving, and the inspiration of all action" (A. Wyse, *Rev. for Religious*, 10, 129), one would expect to find in Francis a life similar to that of Christ. Here we are interested specifically in the Fatherhood of God as it influenced Francis; we shall see that, in his case as in that of his Master, God's Fatherhood was an all-pervading force. It is evident in his life, in his prayers, in his teaching, and in his counsels. Let us consider each of these in turn.

### *The Life of St. Francis*

After his conversion, Francis became the troubadour-herald of divine love. Through his fidelity to grace he was ready to make any sacrifice to become more closely united to his heavenly Father. The way was not easy: for he met opposition where once he had incurred favor; ridicule where there had been approval; rejection by his father for his whole-hearted adherence to his Father. In the first great crisis in his life, Francis found strength in the doctrine of the divine Fatherhood and pronounced that doctrine publicly: "Hear, all of you, and understand: until now I have called Pietro Bernardone my father; but because I propose to serve the Lord I return him his money, concerning which he was troubled, and all the clothes I had of him: for now I wish to say: Our Father who art in heaven, and not, father Pietro Bernardone" (Cuthbert, *Life*, 221). These words are, directly, a well merited rebuke for Pietro; but they are also the beginning of a twenty-year litany of "Our Father." For it was here that Francis suddenly realized the absolute character of God's providence — the wealth implicit in being able to call God, *Father*.

Now that Francis was stripped of all worldly ties, he was better able to penetrate into the depths of the Gospel message. In it he rediscovered that the Gospel is a personal message from God to man, and the fact that God is our Father struck him so forcibly that his heart was filled to overflowing. Christ had continually addressed God as his Father; Francis too, then, had the right *in and through Christ* to call God *Father*.

The strength of Francis' faith and of his dependence on divine Providence is apparent throughout his life. He was content to beg, knowing that his Father would provide for his needs. (Had Christ not told his followers to avoid solicitude for this world's goods?) Absolute trust in God's providence was, it seems, the very substance of Francis' rule of life. So pronounced was

this abandonment to God's loving care that it even caused dissension among the Cardinals when he sought approval for the Rule in Rome.

Was his trust vain — presumptuous? We know the answer: his Father in heaven knew his needs and provided for them. Conspicuous among the many occasions exemplifying this point is his journey from Rome to Spoleto. Francis was engrossed in conversation with his followers, telling them how to observe the Rule and manner of life they had chosen. As had been the case with Christ himself, the discussion lasted long and extended beyond the normal time for their meal. Tired and hungry, the band of friars had nothing with which to satisfy their needs. Then a man came up and offered them a loaf of bread; he disappeared immediately without anyone's knowing where he had come from or where he had gone. But the disciples realized that it was because of their master that heaven had granted them this signal favor. The Father is never outdone in generosity.

Something similar happened when Francis had invited a physician to stay for dinner, knowing quite well that all they had was a little bread and wine. No sooner had the doctor accepted the invitation, than a woman presented herself at the door and gave Francis a basket of fine bread, fish, pastries, honey, and grapes. There was much joy and thanksgiving, Celano tells us, and there was enough food not only for that meal, but for the entire following day (2 Cel. 188).

#### *The Prayer of St. Francis*

These two examples suffice to show that Francis believed in and knew God as a Father. Now let us look at his prayer life to see how the doctrine of God's Fatherhood permeated it.

Celano tells us that Francis was not so much praying as a living prayer (2 Cel. 234). The Poverello so well understood God's love that his prayers constantly proclaimed the goodness of his heavenly Father; his life was a continual bursting-forth in ardent praise of the Most High:

Our Father most holy: our Creator, our Redeemer and Savior, our Comforter.

Who are in Heaven: in the angels and the saints, giving them light to know you, since you, O Lord, are Light; setting them afire to love you, since you, O Lord, are Love; abiding in them and filling them for their bliss, since you, O Lord, are the sovereign

good, the eternal good, from which everything good has its being and without which there is nothing good.

Hallowed be your name: may we grow in our knowledge of you, that we may appreciate the width of your favors and the length of your promises to us as well as the utter height of your majesty and depth of your judgments.

Your kingdom come: so that you may rule in us through grace and have us get to your kingdom, where the sight of you is clear, love of you is perfect, association with you is full of bliss, and enjoyment of you is eternal.

Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven: so that we may love you with all our heart by always keeping you in mind: with all our soul by always longing for you; with all our mind by directing all our intentions to you and seeking your glory in everything; and with all our strength by exerting all the forces and faculties of soul and body in your loving service and in nothing else. So may we love our neighbors as ourselves, by getting them all so far as we can to love you, by being as glad at the good fortune of others as at our own, while feeling for their misfortune, and giving no offense to anybody (Meyer, 25f).

Francis is pre-eminently the Saint of the Pater Noster. Christ taught his disciples this prayer, and so Francis adopted it as his own. He not only cherished it and said it at all the Hours of the day and night, but he longed for others to understand and appreciate its value too. It is not surprising, then, that he should exhort the friars in his First Rule: "And when you are about to pray, say, 'Our Father, who are in Heaven'" (Meyer, 277). The lay Brothers were also to repeat the "Our Father" seventy-six times daily. This prayer was substituted for the Divine Office and was recited also for the dead and for the negligences of the brothers. Francis likewise exhorted the whole world to offer "praise and pray to him day and night, with the words, Our Father, who are in Heaven, for we should pray always and never lose heart" (Meyer, 187).

In the Office of the Passion, which is made up of appropriate verses from the Psalms arranged by Francis to recall and praise the passion of Christ, we find the words of the verses changed. Many times "God" and "Lord" become "Holy Father," or the word "Father" is simply added to the text of the Psalm (see Meyer, 31ff.). These changes are, evidently, introduced to stress God's love; the whole of the Office is a song of loving thankfulness for the Redemption willed by God our Father, and accomplished by the death of the Son sent by the Father out of love for his children. All Francis' prayers and writings are saturated with



the same gratitude for God's goodness, and all use, to some extent, the words of the Gospel.

Francis' filial love for God found expression, for example, in his immortal "Hymn of the Praises of Creatures" or "Canticle of the Sun." This Canticle is a song of the kinship of all God's creatures, of God's Fatherhood, and of the liberty which man's heart finds in the vision of this truth.

Lying ill in a small hut at San Damiano after the stigmatization, Francis poured out his heart in gratitude for all the gifts of the all-good and all-loving God. "In every piece of workmanship he praised the Craftsman; whatever he found done he referred to the Doer of it. In beautiful things he recognized him who is supremely beautiful; all good things cried out to him 'He who made us is the Best'" (2 Cel. 296f.). The sun, thus, not only stood for the Sun of Righteousness but also expressed the might, majesty, and daily care of God. All creatures in turn: the moon, stars, wind, air, clouds, water, fire, mother earth, fruits, and flowers — all spoke to him of the goodness and Fatherhood of God. This was the source of his love of nature.

This penetrating insight was not due to the exquisite beauties of nature itself, nor to his own sensitive temperament. Francis, we are told by Bishop Felder, "looked upon nature with the eyes of a poet deeply imbued with faith, of having loved it with the heart of a child of God, and of giving to it a soul and a voice with which to praise the Lord in a thousand tongues" (*The Knight-Errant of Assisi*, 136).

### *The Teaching of St. Francis*

It was from Jesus that Francis had learned to pray. Jesus was everything to him, for in Jesus he saw revealed the goodness of God. Our Lord also manifested the Father's goodness in his teaching, however; and Francis did likewise. As a matter of fact, the whole body of St. Francis' teaching is but a paraphrase of the Sermon on the Mount; its *imprimatur* was granted on the heights of La Verna two years before his death.

The teachings of Francis appealed to the heart of man and impressed him with the thought that God loves him. If some of his hearers were faithless and asked for proofs, Francis would turn to nature and life. Following the method of Christ, he would teach them to read the word *goodness* in nature — the goodness of a heavenly Father. Then he would turn to the book of life and have them reflect on the past benefits of God, who is

more merciful than severe and has aided us all beyond our deserts:

With all our heart and soul and mind and strength and fortitude and understanding and all our faculties: with all our endeavor, affection, and yearning; with all we desire and will, let us all love God the Lord, who has given and still gives us all our whole body, soul and life; who has created and redeemed us and only in his mercy will save us; who has done and keeps doing everything good to us, miserable and wretched, corrupt and foul, ungrateful and wicked as we are (1 Rule; Meyer, 282).

Thus Francis strove in his teaching to make God better known and loved. His own heart was aflame with this love, and he longed to rekindle it in the hearts of others. He had come close to the fire Christ had cast upon the world and was consumed in seraphic love.

### *The Counsels of St. Francis*

We have seen how Francis' life, prayers, and teachings emphasized the Fatherhood of God. Quite naturally, then, this same doctrine will be found in the counsels he left to his followers.

The advice of Christ to his disciples re-echoed in the words of Francis when he sent his friars on their mission. He admonished them "to be gentle, and patient, putting their trust in their heavenly Father, and not to be afraid because they were simple and lowly and despised by men; for the Spirit of God would speak in them" (Cuthbert, 67f.). He also exhorted them to live in the spirit of their Rule: their conversation while out among the people was to be such that anyone who saw or heard them would glorify and praise the Father in heaven (J. O. Dobson, *St. Francis*, 55). After these loving exhortations, each friar joyously knelt before Francis, who addressed them singly with the words of the Psalmist: "Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will support you" (54:23). He was accustomed to use these words often when he imposed a task under obedience.

To us, as well as to St. Francis' contemporaries, it is impossible not to see the holy joy and cheerfulness he derived from his deep realization that God was his Father. Surely Francis practiced in his own life the exhortation he bequeathed to his followers: "When God's servant (as often happens) is troubled about anything, he ought forthwith to arise and pray, and remain persistently in his heavenly Father's presence until he restores to him the joy of his salvation..." (2 Cel. 262).



Physical suffering never lessened Francis' zeal in proclaiming to the world the central message of Christ: God is our Father. Stricken by an attack of fever in 1215, which kept him, for the time, from preaching, Francis put his joyful message in writing. This was his first and longest letter; it was addressed to all the faithful. Humbly Francis strove to present the words of Jesus Christ, who is the Word of the Father, and the words of the Holy Spirit, which are "spirit and life" (Meyer, 190). Lovingly, gratefully, and joyfully, Francis proclaimed to all mankind: "Oh, what a glorious, holy, and great thing it is to have a Father in Heaven!" (Meyer, 104).

## II. FRANCIS GLORIFYING THE FATHER

Francis' belief in God's Fatherhood had an extraordinary and vivifying effect on him. He walked about his Father's world as if it were his own, ever maintaining an attitude that was simple, natural and free of any care except that of loving his Father and fulfilling the divine will with all the ardor of his heart. True child of God that he was, he sought to please his heavenly Father in all things. Inevitably he found the Father wherever he turned, and his whole life was an effort to please the Father through Christ, our only way to him.

### *The Example of Christ*

Our Lord has declared that he came down from heaven to do his Father's will, and his entire life was the fulfillment of that singleness of purpose. Ample proof of this is found in the Gospel. But the Gospel was Francis' manual of life; he soon caught the spirit of Christ embodied in it, and he set about in earnest to imitate his Model. As a result, his life was in accord with the will of God from the moment of his conversion to the utterance of his *consummatum est*; he knew no other desire than to mirror the life of his divine Savior.

Imitation of Christ, then, was the key to Francis' whole existence — imitation of the true Son of God, who knew how to fulfill perfectly the will of his heavenly Father. But the word *imitation* is, to tell the truth, inadequate in this case. *Identification* would convey the meaning better: the marks he received on La Verna were but the outward manifestation of an inward conformity that had been reached long before that time.

Francis' biographer, Thomas of Celano, sums up the saint's ideal when he says:

His chief intention, his principal desire and supreme purpose was in and through all things to observe the holy Gospel, and with all watchfulness, all zeal, all the longing of his mind and all the fervor of his heart perfectly to follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and tread in his footsteps (1 Cel. 82).

St. Bonaventure tells us that "Christ Jesus crucified was laid, as a bundle of myrrh, in his heart's bosom, and he yearned to be utterly transformed into him by the fire of his exceeding love" (*Life of St. Francis*, 358). This supreme purpose of St. Francis was so successfully carried out in all the details of his life that he was called, in all due reverence, the Christ of Umbria.

What was the motivating force that caused Francis to become identified with Christ? It was the note Christ sent ringing through the world, which finally sounded in the heart of Francis and prompted him to action: love of God. This produced two effects in Francis. First, he was convinced of what God wanted him to be; and second, he was determined to fulfill God's expectations. His whole being responded to this desire. The final result was an intense longing to accomplish the will of his heavenly Father. This was no mere wish, but a leading star in the life of Francis. God had sent his Son to show the way, and Francis followed that way faithfully. Consequently, the final word in his life was always: "Not my will, but thine be done" (Lk. 22:42). When Francis believed in the love of God as a Father, he had, from that time forth, to be a true son and return full and unfaltering love. The Father, through the Son, had said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). Francis' response was wholehearted; he accepted the word of God contained in the Gospel as if it had been written for him alone.

### *Determining God's Will*

The desire to do the will of the Father overpowered Francis, and he was never content until he knew the designs of God. An insight into certain incidents and writings of St. Francis will prove his fidelity to the Father in imitation of Christ his model.

From the very first moment of his conversion, Francis felt the need to know God's will. He knew, too, that it would be in silence and solitude that he would hear the voice of God. He sought a cave and entered into a secret retreat to pray to his heavenly Father. With the humility and simplicity of a child, Francis earnestly begged the Father to lead him to the path he was to follow and help him recognize and accomplish the divine

will. The Psalmist's words were continually on his lips: "Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths" (Ps. 24:4).

Confident in his Father's Providence, Francis patiently prayed and waited for the manifestation of the divine will. Its first expression, through Christ, occurred in the Church of St. Damian. Christ manifested himself and his will to Francis in a tangible way, for the painted image of the Crucified moved its lips and addressed him, calling him by name: "Francis, go repair my house, which as you see is wholly falling into ruin" (2 Cel. 154). Francis was shocked and amazed by the words, but he set out eagerly to obey the command. He fulfilled Christ's words literally, for it was only later that their fuller, deeper meaning was revealed to him. But the literal understanding of Christ's words is, here, beside the point. The lesson that should not be lost to us is the striking example of loving obedience to God's will.

When the time came for Francis to choose a rule of life for himself and his followers, he sought through prolonged and intense prayer to determine the divine plan for himself. Constantly reviewing thoughts and experiences, he arrived at length at a fixed ideal which remained unshaken by any influence other than divine or ecclesiastical. His rule was to be according to the Gospel, in which he found the expressed will of God. In this First Rule, which was verbally approved by Innocent III, can be found admonitions that all should be careful to fulfil the will of God:

The rule and life of these brothers is this, that they live in obedience, in chastity, and without property, and follow the teaching and the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. ... And I ask the sick brother to thank the Creator for it all, and well or sick he should want to be just as our Lord wants him to be. ... Now, however, after we have left the world, there is nothing else for us to do but be concerned about following the will of our Lord and pleasing him (Meyer, 250, 263, 275).

#### *Implementing God's Will*

Francis was a man of action. His love of the Father and obedience to the Father's will, therefore, found expression in his actions. All Francis had to know was that it was God's will, and nothing stood in his way. This was the driving force behind his every act. His resolve to preach to the infidels in Syria, even at the risk of his life, when his Order was yet scarcely weaned,

becomes understandable when seen from this vantage point. How well Francis grasped that he was not necessary to the future of the Order! That belonged to the care of God. His duty was to be obedient and docile to the Father in order to set an example and practice the doctrine he taught.

Since Francis was obedient to God's will, all things were referred to his Father's honor and glory. In touching, simple, and humble words, Francis would reply, when praised:

For as in the picture of the Lord and the Blessed Virgin painted on wood, the Lord and the Blessed Virgin are honored, and yet the wood and the picture take nothing of it to themselves, so the servant of God is in a manner a picture of God, wherein God is honored on account of his goodness (Leo of Assisi, *The Mirror of Perfection*, 220).

The obedience of Francis was total, and it remained so until his death. He took measures, in fact, designed to help him persevere in this ideal. A few years before his death, for example, he humbly petitioned the Minister General to place over him one of the brothers, as a warden, to whom he could give his obedience. This is compatible with the words he had spoken previously to his followers: "For a subject ought to look upon his superior, not as a man, but as that God for whose love he is subject to him" (*Ibid.*, 221).

Many incidents in Francis' life could be cited to show his esteem for unstinting obedience to God's will. An outstanding instance is one that took place within two years of his death. At the time, Francis was disposed to suffer the most extreme torments of mind or body, if only his wish could be granted. What was that wish? The accomplishment of his heavenly Father's will. To discover it he came to the altar in the hermitage where he lived and placed on it the book of Gospels. He prostrated himself and humbly prayed that "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" would manifest his will. Humble and contrite of heart, Francis made the sign of the Cross and opened the Gospels with simple faith. The Passion of Christ first met his glance. To remove any suspicion that it was by chance, Francis repeated the action a second time; and again, a third time. On each opening it was either the same or a similar passage, Francis was content. His Father had made known his will; with songs of gladness in his heart, Francis continued to follow the Way, who had ever said: "Not my will, but thine be done" (Lk. 22:42).

A paraphrase of this is found in the beautiful prayer Francis wrote at the end of his letter to the Minister General and all the Friars. After exhorting all to practice reverence toward the Blessed Sacrament, to observe the Rule, and to recite the Divine Office, Francis ardently prays: "Almighty, eternal, just, and merciful God, have us poor wretches for your sake do what we know you want, and have us always want whatever is pleasing to you ..." (Meyer, 150).

### *Even to Death*

This prayer echoes throughout the sufferings of Francis. It is as though one were present again at the Agony of Christ in the Garden. If Francis was identified with Christ during his life, he was equally united to him in his sufferings and death. If Christ gave supreme adoration to God during his agony Francis did likewise. This is tangibly evident in his Canticle of the Creatures, in which he calls upon all the elements to join in the praise of God. The final verse was added by Francis with great joy of mind and body when he was informed by the physician that he would die around the beginning of October. It was only one who had been obedient to the will of God during life who could joyously utter at the time of his death:

Be praised, my Lord, through our Brother Death of Body,  
From whom no man among the living can escape.  
Woe to those who in mortal sins will die;  
Blessed those whom he will find in your most holy graces,  
For the second death will do no harm to them (Meyer, 239-40).

Francis' agony was severe. Once, as he suffered more acutely than usual, a simple brother asked him to pray for relief since the hand of God seemed to be very heavy on him in this trial. Francis was distressed that anyone would censure the divine will but understood the simplicity of the brother. Nevertheless, in agony of body, Francis prostrated himself on the ground, kissed it, and cried:

I give you thanks, O Lord God, for all these my pains, and I beseech you, my Lord, that if it pleases you, you will add to them a hundredfold; for this will be most acceptable to me if, laying sorrow on me, you do not spare — since the fulfilling of your holy will is an overflowing solace to me (St. Bonaventure, *Life*, p. 391).

Jesus had prayed three times, in the garden, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mt. 26:39). A third prayer of St. Francis

can be said to express the same sentiments. One of the friars asked which he would rather bear, this sickness that was so long, or a horrible but instantaneous martyrdom. Francis, now hardly able to move at all, replied:

That, my son, ever has been and is dearest, sweetest, and most acceptable to me, which it most pleases the Lord my God to do in me and with me, to whose will I ever desire to be found conformable and obedient in all things (1 Cel. 106).

During life Francis had glorified the Father and he had finished the work God gave him to do. There was now a place prepared for him that Christ promised once when he told his apostles, "I go to prepare a place for you" (Jn. 14:2). Like Christ, Francis uttered his *consummatus est* in the words: "I have done my duty, may Christ teach you yours" (2 Cel. 343); and his soul made its way to the Father.

Thus we have seen that the entire guiding spirit of Francis' life was that through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, there be to God the Father almighty, in unity with the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory. This liturgical doxology finds its exact parallel in our Father's own words:

Almighty, most holy, most high, and sovereign God, the sovereign good, everything that is good, wholly good, who alone are good: to you let us render all praise, all glory, all thanks, all honor, all blessings, and to you let us refer always whatever is good. Amen. (Meyer, 28).

### *Conclusion*

Francis followed closely in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, who was ever his Way, Truth, and Life. Francis knew only too well that without Jesus there was without going; without him, no knowing, and without him, no living. Thus it was that the Poorerello proclaimed this during life with the words "Deus meus et omnia" which were ever on his lips and ever in his heart.

Christ is the light of the world, and this Light reflected in St. Francis, who "shone in his days as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full. And as the sun when it shines, so did he shine in the temple of God" (Gradual of the Mass, Oct. 4).

It was by means of this Light that Francis discovered the Father, for "no one knows the Father except the Son, and him to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt. 11:27).

# Franciscan Pioneers in Mexico

*Benedict Leutenegger, O.F.M.*

## IV. WORDS OF SADNESS, AND A PRAYER FOR HELP

In the last chapter of Book IV of his History Mendieta writes: "If the conversion of the Indians of New Spain had progressed toward the goal expressed in the title of the fourth Book, it would be fitting now to conclude with a canticle of praise, blessing God . . . as did Father Toribio Motolinia. At the end of his History he rejoiced over the abundant fruit which he saw with his own eyes and concluded with a spiritual song in which he invites even the conquerors of Mexico, who committed murder and theft, to praise our Lord and God for the abundant harvest of souls."

Motolinia finished his History in 1541 and at the end of Part II he writes: "Who will not be astonished when he sees the new wonders and mercies that God has done with these people? Why do men here on earth not rejoice before whose eyes God has worked these things, especially those men who came with a good intention and conquered great provinces, such as these are, in order that God might be known in them and adored? Although they are sometimes eager to acquire riches, one is inclined to believe that they regard this as incidental and secondary. Who will not believe that men, whom God endowed with reason and who found themselves so frequently in great need and in danger of death, would regulate their conscience and reform their intentions, and that they would be ready to die for the Faith and its establishment among the infidels, and that they would consider this their singular and chief purpose? These conquerors and all Christian friends of God should rejoice greatly to see a Christian community so well established in so short a time and so disposed to lead a virtuous and godly life. For this reason I beg everyone who reads this to praise and glorify God from the bottom of his heart. Let him recite the following words of thanksgiving, wherein, according to Saint Bonaventure, are contained all the ways of praising God that are found in Holy Scripture: "Praise and benediction, exaltation and recog-

nition, thanksgiving and glorification, adoration and satisfaction be to Thee, highest Lord our God, for the mercies Thou hast shown these Indians newly converted to Thy holy Faith. Amen. Amen. Amen."

On another page of his History Motolinia, deeply stirred, apostrophizes Mexico thus: "O Mexico, that such mountains should encircle and crown thee! With reason will thy fame now spread because in thee shines forth the Faith and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thou, previously the mistress of sin, art now the teacher of truth. Thou, formerly in darkness and obscurity, now givest forth the splendor of Christian doctrine and civilization. Thy submission to the most unconquered Caesar, Don Carlos, doth thee greater honor and glory than the tyrannical sway that in other times thou didst seek to impose upon all. Then thou wast a Babylon, full of confusion and wickedness; now thou art another Jerusalem, the mother of provinces and kingdoms. Then thou didst go whither it pleased thee, led by the will of a smooth idiot who through thee executed barbarous laws; now many are watching over thee, taking care that thou live according to divine and human laws. At one time, on the authority of the Prince of Darkness, thou wast eager to challenge, capture and sacrifice men and women and to offer blood to the demon on cards and on bits of paper; today, with pious prayers and holy sacrifices, thou dost adore and profess the Lord of lords. O Mexico! If thou wouldst raise thy eyes to the mountains that encircle thee, thou wouldst see more good angels aiding and defending thee than formerly demons stood against thee in order to plunge thee into sins and errors."

Mendieta finished his History in 1596 and in that last chapter of Book IV he continues: "But I, having rejoiced (by divine grace) over the good beginnings, have seen things end calamitously, for all the former good has ceased, because men have hindered the work of God by their opposition, as was mentioned in previous chapters; not only am I not able to sing a song of praise at the end of my History but rather (had I the gift of composing dirges) I would sit down with Jeremias and with tears, sighs and groans, which would reach heaven (as happened over the destruction of the city of Jerusalem), I would lament and grieve over the unhappy fall and great calamity that befell our Church in the Indies; even the words of the prophet would be of little help. But I consider it better (as something more profitable) to do that only in private before the divine Reverence; in public I will turn to God (in whose almighty Hands the remedy lies) and invite those who love and fear to read with me Psalm 79, in which almighty God is asked to help the people

*FATHER BENEDICT'S series, of which this is the fourth and final number, has appeared in the three preceding issues of THE CORD.*

of Israel in their sufferings of oppression and vexation from their neighbors."

Mendieta applies Psalm 79 to the Indians of New Spain. In the beginning of the Psalm the power and help of God are invoked and then we read of the calamity, persecution and rejection of his people, and at the end there is a petition for divine help. "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel . . . O God of Hosts, how long wilt thou be angry when thy people pray? Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears and hast given them tears to drink in great measure. Thou hast made us the cause of contention amongst our neighbors, and our enemies deride us. O God of Hosts, bring us back again, show forth thy shining face, that we may be saved. Thou hast brought forth a vine out of Egypt, thou hast cast out the nations and planted it. Thou has prepared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow, the cedars of God, with its branches. It stretched forth its branches unto the sea, and its boughs unto the river. Why hast thou broken down its hedges, so that all who pass by the way do pluck it, and the wild boar lays it waste and the beasts of the field devour it? O God of Hosts, return, look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine. And protect what thy right hand has planted, and the young shoot which thou hast made strong for thyself. Let them who consumed it with fire and cut it down, perish at the threat of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, and upon the son of man whom thou hast made strong for thyself. Then we will never depart from thee; thou wilt preserve us in life, and we will declare thy name. O Lord, God of Hosts, restore us, show forth thy shining face, that we may be saved."

Mendieta comments: "In the beginning it was gracious of the Lord to provide chosen leaders in the ecclesiastical and secular worlds who governed well. In the ecclesiastical realm there were the saintly bishops ... and in the secular domain there were many devout and Christian governors who were true fathers of the Indians ... At the death of Don Luis de Velasco, the elder, the golden age began to decline. The crumbling of the wall was near. The Emperor, Charles VI, worked for the defense and spread and protection of this vineyard of the Lord by his laws and decrees and commands, for he knew that this vineyard was surrounded by wild animals of prey who eagerly sought their own profit, and they would destroy this vineyard as they had done the others some time before. An opening in the wall was made when an official arrived who increased the taxes and called for money and more money. Suddenly there came into the vineyard the wild hog and the ferocious beast of unbridled greed ... Who

has seen (as I have seen) in New Spain the roads crowded with people like ants, and on the streets of Mexico City there was such a crowd that one could not pass without nudging another; all the cities and towns were distinguished by a group of venerable old chiefs, who looked like Roman senators; the patios of the churches were filled with people before dawn (especially on feast days); the music of Christian doctrine is sung in devout chant at the dawn of day and at nightfall melts the hardened hearts of men and rejoices the angels; we see the frequent reception of the Sacraments by the Indians and their regular attendance at divine worship, the processions and the scourgings; the complaint of the Indians when there is no sermon; the search for confessors; the whole land filled with people going to divine services; the secure possession of poverty by every Indian; the peace, brotherliness and charity among them; the vigilance to restrain the wicked, the wayward and the mischievous; the zeal to defend and help the poor; the denial of permission to people of bad character to go to these lands, and if they should come, their short stay, so that they do not scandalize these new converts. And what do we see at present (because of our sins): an Indian chief is seldom seen in any of the famous towns of New Spain, nothing remains of his former glory; the palaces of the old lords have fallen apart throughout the land; the homes of the natives are for the most part without occupants or in ruins; the roads and streets are deserted; the churches are empty, even on feast days, for the few Indians who work the farms of the Spaniards excuse themselves, for their homes are robbed while they attend Mass, since some live a life of vice with the protection of the Spaniards whom they serve, and the ministers of the Church are helpless to induce them to live the Christian life, to learn the catechism and attend Mass, because these Indians would rather fail God the whole year through than fail one day in the service of their Spanish masters. There is no other law or right but what the Spaniard wants and does. The Indian must suffer it all, even when the Spaniard takes away his wife and daughter; he is subject to all kinds of people, to Spaniards, mestizos, mulattos and negroes, and even to other Indians, when they are the servants of those who are called Christians, without finding any relief from their injuries according to the standards of justice, which for the most part serve only the freedom and authority of those who take more and more from the Indians. Of all the heavy burdens which these miserable Indians carry on their backs, the one that weighs most heavy is the drudgery of forced labor, as if the Indians were slaves and captives. Though they collapse and die, as in fact they die and are buried

Tight is the band binding God and my heart.

Tighter the tension that pulls us apart.

Only in death will those fingers release

My soul that is stretching for heaven and peace.

— Anthony Myers, O.F.M. Conv.

in great number each day, one is not to speak out and say that this inhuman cruelty must stop. The ministers of the Church, who had the courage to speak up for the Indians, are now afraid and discouraged, for no one is more odious to the world than the missionary, and pray God, that some of them are not with the wolves in order to do away with the sheep who were entrusted to their care. The servants of God, if they perform their duties, do so more because they have to and because the ministry of the Church is not to cease than because of the merits they are to gain for heaven. It is an evil and the greatest of all evils, which are so many that they cannot be enumerated. All of them give way to the fierce beast of greed which has ruined the vineyard . . . Since this wicked beast is the one which has destroyed and brought to the final stages this Church of the Indians, only God is strong enough to banish the beast, giving life to the neophytes; and so we direct and raise up to Him our prayer in imitation of the one the afflicted Israelites prayed: "Our highest and most powerful Lord God, who rules and governs the city of thy faithful ones, listen to our groans and prayers and tears which we pour out before thy divine presence. Exercise, O Lord, your great power and come to save us. Turn us, O Lord, to you and show us your face and we shall be saved. Lord God of Hosts, how long will you be angry and refuse to hear the prayers of thy servants? Behold, when you abandon us, you make us eat our bread in sorrow and you mix our drink with abundant tears. You have set us against our neighbors, and they mock at us and make fun of us. God of Hosts, direct us to you and show us your face and we shall be saved. Recall

that you have brought us as a chosen vineyard out of the power of the demon (as from Egypt), and transplanted us in the fertile land of your Church. You have planted this vineyard with your own hands, banishing the infernal idols who possessed the land before. You have planted the roots and given them such vigor and strength that in a few days the vineyard filled the whole country and no corner remained that did not receive and profess your Catholic Faith. You provided chosen workers, a most zealous leader, and faithful husbandmen. Why Lord, did you permit the vineyard to be destroyed by the enemy which surrounded it, so that all those who passed by could rob it of its fruit. The wild boar and fierce beast of greed gained entrance and all but consumed the vineyard. By your secret judgments, O Lord, you also plucked the fruit and took away the people, but you are powerful to increase the numbers at once. We humbly beseech Thee to turn toward us and look down from heaven and see and visit your vineyard, and may you finish the work which you began to plant, bringing it to perfection for thy honor and glory, and that of the Son of the Virgin, your most holy Son, whom you decreed, determined and confirmed as Savior of mankind. If this vineyard is burned up, there will be complete ruin, but if you turn your face to us and against the fierce beast who caused so much damage, his strength will vanish and we shall grow strong. Place, O Lord, your hand on the man whom you chose to take care of this humble nation (the king of Castile) and give him your help and most ardent spirit to banish the wild beast of greed, which infects your kingdom and puts them in great danger; may he desire, endeavor and seek (especially in this new nation) only that which redounds to your honor and glory and the salvation of souls, granting them the freedom you have willed for rational creatures, because with this your anger will cease and those afflicted may gain a respite, and singular graces may come to all of us. This we hope, O Lord, from thy hand, with complete confidence, and we shall not depart from you, nor seek any other help; and until this is won, we shall not cease to invoke thy most holy Name. Therefore, Lord God of Hosts, restore us and show us your shining face and we shall be saved. Amen."

And today we can pray in the same spirit: "O God almighty, turn your face to us today, that the powers of evil may be vanished and that we may be found worthy to enjoy that peace of which your Son is Prince."

# The Twentieth-Century Franciscan Apostolic Life

Hilary Scully, O.F.M. Cap.

Francis of Assisi was a man who lived in the present, developed the past, and looked to the future. And, realizing that, we can take to heart the statement he made to his followers of the thirteenth century. "You have not been called for yourselves alone," he said, "but for the salvation of others." Francis was quite clear: the apostolate was part of his vocation; it must be carried out by his followers. Consequently, whoever wishes to follow in the footsteps of Francis must give himself to the service of other men.

That is exactly what the world expects of us and what the Church requests of us. In a letter to the Ministers General in April, 1959, Pope John XXIII urged Franciscans "to offer some hope of a brighter future (to our secularist world) by the return to earth of St. Francis through the ministry and good works of his followers."

Pope John expressed our purpose clearly. Our purpose is that God may reign — that God may reign in us, and through us, in others. St. Francis had his own way of achieving that end for the people of the thirteenth century. We have St. Francis' way of achieving that end for the people of the twentieth century because Francis' spirit, resting as it does upon God, will never change. Time does, and with it circumstances of time. It is up to us to bring Francis back and put his spirit to work.

This article will attempt to show what the spirit of the apostolic life is, and what makes that apostolic life Franciscan, twentieth-century Franciscan.

Every form of apostolic life — or the mixed life, as it is often called — combines a contemplative end and an active end. Francis, I think it is fair to say, was the first to embody such an ideal and all the other Orders of the Mixed Life took that ideal from him. We wish, in the words of St. Thomas, "to con-

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*FRATER HILARY, a student of theology at Capuchin College, Washington, D.C., provides, in this article, a penetrating analysis of poverty of spirit in the light of the demands of the contemporary apostolate.*

template and to give to others what has been gained through contemplation." We want to fill ourselves with God and let that spirit spread to mankind as a vessel that first fills up, and then runs over.

Such an apostolic life contains four elements: (1) regular observance: those traditional significant norms which each one of the old Orders carries with it down through the ages without interruption as a paternal inheritance, such as austerity in clothing, fasting and abstinence, choral office, silence at certain times and places. (2) Knowledge of the sacred sciences: the knowledge which postulates keenness of mind, ever ready for all the questions of practical life, and which makes contemplation easier and fosters regular observance. (3) Spirit of prayer: the most important of all, including especially liturgical prayer, daily meditation, and a fervent offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass. And lastly, (4) apostolic work: all the work contained in saving souls.

One can see that by far the most important end of the mixed life is that of contemplation. As a matter of fact, the most important part of any apostolate is not that which is seen — that is, the labor itself — it is that which urges that labor, the *caritas Christi* of St. Paul, our prayer life. Fr. Chautard, a Cistercian, has emphatically developed this in his book *The Soul of the Apostolate*. He urges that this all-important truth be printed in indelible characters on the minds of apostolic priests: our apostolate will be successful only in the measure that we ourselves love that supernatural inner life of which God Himself is the Sovereign Principle and Jesus Christ the source.

Was there anyone who realized this more than our Founder St. Francis? Certainly we Franciscans know that Francis understood that truth perfectly and certainly we Franciscans, his followers, ought to understand it just as perfectly.

This is where the whole panoply of Franciscanism envelops the basic principles of the apostolic life and makes that apostolic life a peculiar type — makes it Franciscan. It gives a distinctive character to the four elements: making the regular observance Franciscan, making the study of the sciences Franciscan, making the spirit of prayer Franciscan, and thus making the apostolate Franciscan. What is that distinctive character and can we have it today?

The doctrine of Francis and consequently of the Franciscan is the doctrine of the Gospel. Fr. Pacific Perantoni, O.F.M., states: "Imitating their Seraphic Father, the Friars Minor must always and everywhere give tongue to the Gospel with their



"Everything Franciscan must have the ideal of Christ on the cross behind it . . ."

conduct and their activity. They must bear witness that Christ is alive and active in their heart; that His doctrine alone is the true and the best doctrine, the doctrine serviceable, yes, absolutely necessary, for everybody." Christ-centered must be our life, Christ-centered must be our thought, Christ-centered must be our spirit, and in the center of Christ's doctrine is the doctrine of the cross.

Everything Franciscan must have the ideal of Christ on the cross behind it, Christ stripped of all on the cross; here is the essence of Franciscanism.

And surely Cardinal John of St. Paul's defense of the Franciscan rule still stands. Replying to the objectors that the Rule was impossible, beyond human endurance, he spoke up, in words which could just as well be spoken today: "If we reject the petition of this poor man as something novel and too hard to follow when all he asks is that the law of the life of the Gospel be confirmed unto him, let us beware lest we offend against the Gospel of Christ. For if anyone shall say that in the observance of evangelical perfection and the vow to observe it, there is contained something new or irrational or impossible of observance, such a one is convicted of a blasphemy against Christ the Author of the Gospel." These are eternal words. Christ-crucified must not be a figure of history! And if there is one person who must stop the tendency, it is the Franciscan.

It is this spirit then, the spirit of Christ-crucified as found in the Gospel, which must enshrine our apostolic life.

That spirit was one of poverty and charity. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Christ said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Poor in spirit" — renunciation, a magic word to Francis because it meant more than external poverty. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" was the first beatitude of Christ, and all the others can be traced back to that. Poverty is the Franciscan's starting point for all the virtues; charity is the spirit in which the Franciscan studies those virtues.

Poverty did mean renunciation of temporal goods. Thrown as we are into the midst of the atomic society we must remember that such a renunciation is not impossible. That spirit must invade and pervade everything we do as Franciscans. A Franciscan hospital chaplain, or prison chaplain, a Franciscan

director of an information center, a Franciscan pastor can handle money all day, count it, invest it, buy with it, almost live in it, and if he not only *remembers* that not a penny of it is his, but also acts in the conviction that not a penny of it is his, he is poor in spirit, detached from the world. He is an image of Christ-crucified.

Poverty also includes the other two monastic vows: renunciation of the desire of the flesh and renunciation of one's own will. It is belaboring the obvious to say that the modern Franciscan friar has the same vows with which Francis bound himself.

Christocentric poverty is also a renunciation of self-pampering: it means austerity: a rigorous training of life. A Franciscan who spends his whole apostolate in writing books or in teaching modern technology must be just as austere as a Franciscan missionary in the Philippines or New Guinea.

Poverty is a renunciation of pride; it is humility — the vivid and vital recognition of one's personal relationship to God. If a student graduates *summa cum laude*, if a confessor always has the longest line of penitents, if a lay brother is known as the best cook in the province, the adjective *Franciscan* can only be added when that particular person realizes that his gifts are not his at all. When he can admit that he is exactly the same before God as the graduate who had to try four times before he received his degree, exactly the same before God as the confessor whom penitents avoid, exactly the same before God as the lay brother who can't even boil water, he is a Franciscan. Fr. Pacific stresses the humility of the modern Franciscan in a unique way. "Whoever there may be among us, no matter what degree of holiness or learning or special gifts of nature and grace he may be adorned, let him not regard himself as any more than a plain helpmate, subject to associating his services with the secular clergy in the duties of the apostolate. The Franciscan Apostle could never be proud if he remembered that!

That renunciation of pride also carries with it the virtue of meekness, that moral virtue which moderates anger according to right reason. The Franciscan apostle of the confessional, the Franciscan spiritual director of nuns is a patient man, for the Franciscan has grown to be *patient* through his mortification and self-control, and the Franciscan is a *man*, for he exhibits a solid spirituality with a foundation in Christ.

Poverty is furthermore a renunciation of worldly ideas. It is a spirit of sacrifice that can accept suffering with the sim-



plicity of Christ. The Franciscan attitude on life must remain the same as Christ's attitude, and that is one of acceptance. If the Franciscan is true to his name, sickness, loss, even death are actual graces which he uses just as he accepts and uses the actual grace of joy and happiness. For one to whom the poor and sick have been especially entrusted, as it is with us Franciscans, should not, must not my face, your face reflect the joy of the acceptance of Christ? The poor and sick may not be able to define Franciscanism, but they can tell if we are true Franciscans.

Poverty is a renunciation of hostility, it is mercy, it is peace. The man who is truly merciful, one whose very disposition is that of forgiveness, is a man who is truly peaceful. The very outlook of the Franciscan requires of him the qualities of a lookout, a guard who recognizes danger, and replaces it with kindness to bring about peace. Such must be the attitude of the Franciscan Third Order director or guidance counselor. Like many Franciscans, he is to be a duplicate of the truly peaceful men of history: a duplicate of Christ, the man whose couriers heralded "peace to men"; of Francis of Assisi, a man who established a special Order to bring about peace; of John XXIII, a man who as head of the Church established the principles of peace by example; of John Kennedy, a man who as head of a state brought the ideal of peace to nations. The Franciscan is a man of mercy, a man of peace.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit": that first beatitude contained the substratum of the rest and the whole of the evangelical life, the life of Christ. The spirit which spreads itself over every single aspect of these virtues, is the spirit of charity. Love is the Lord's one great Commandment and Francis made it the means of accomplishing his likeness with the poor Christ on the cross.

Charity is basic to Franciscanism. The Franciscan preacher, the Franciscan educator, the Franciscan home missionary cannot merely be in love with God; he must be on fire with love of God and Christ-crucified. This is the *ille amor seraphicus* of Francis of Assisi, a love which consumes, actually consumes every single action of the Franciscan — every sermon we preach, every poor person we minister to, every act of our ministry, every liturgical prayer. Love must be the spirit in which we practice poverty, a love of God and love of neighbor for God. If we understand this basic element of evangelical life, we have found that to make our little world a little better, it does not take much time — it takes much love.

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