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# **COVER AND ILLUSTRATION CREDITS**

The cover and illustrations for our February issue were drawn by Sister Mary Regina, P.C.P.A., of the Monastery of Sancta Clara, Cantan, Ohio.

## A REVIEW EDITORIAL



# Of Essence, Process and the Religious Life

PADERS WHO have been with us for the past decade or so doubtless recall (perhaps vividly) the innumerable articles and series we have published on renewal, particularly in the mid-to-late sixties, in the aftermath of Vatican II. Our forthcoming Index lists a dozen entries from that period which dealt explicitly with "Aggiornamento" or "Renewal" of the Franciscan/religious life. We were challenged (usually in private) about the publication of some of the more radical, not to say revolutionary, of those articles; and yet even at this late date we tend to feel that their publication was justified, if only to help "clear the air."

Many of these same readers have perhaps noticed a parallel evolution in our editorial and book-review section—a development which might be characterized as your editor's odyssey through the straits of process thought. Here too, one (well, I) can only be grateful for the opportunity to learn through unrestrained opportunity to clear ideas publicly in these pages.

This editorial should not be construed as a retraction of the heart of most of what we have espoused and proposed over those years. But in a sense it is a "retractation," like those discussions Augustine used to write many years later about his earlier treatises.

Our specific subject is the Franciscan religious life, and the point we want to make is extremely simple and brief: viz., precisely as a growing organism—a living society if you will, it has an essence, a nature, a self-identical soul which must be allowed to direct its growth.

What occasions this (perhaps terribly obvious and almost trite) observation is the recent publication of Father Rene Voillaume's superb series of conferences on the religious life. The conferences were originally a retreat of shortly more than two weeks, given in March of 1971 to the novice Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Jesus.\*

The subjects covered in the course of this excellent retreat are the usual ones: the nature of a vocation and of religious life, living in brother-hood, the three vows (with particular emphasis on obedience), the

religious life as a sharing in the paschal mystery, religious dedication and its permanence (stability), silence and prayer, and the apostolate.

Father Voillaume mekes good use of the major conciliar documents (Perfectae caritatis, Gaudium et spes, and Lumen gentium), and in all that he has to say there rings clearly a Franciscan-like evangelical simplicity, as well as a refreshing Christocentrism and ecclesiocentrism. His style is direct (the second person of direct address has been retained) and at times aphoristic; and with only a couple of odd expressions by way of exception, it has been admirably retained by the translator.

Among the innumerable items of sage advice, are those on the absolute need for obedience if community is even to exist, on the religious life as a constant "coming to birth" requiring not only liturgical celebration but eucharistic adoration, on dedication as something God (not we) must effect, on religious silence as an "absolute," and on the apostolate as the "motor power by which the Kingdom grows." Would there were space here for a more detailed discussion of the author's fine elaboration of these and many other themes. But of greater importance for present purposes is the welcome balance between contemporary language and awareness, on the one hand, and, on the other, an undercurrent of salutary warning against many contemporary errors, designed to help the novices enter religion "with their eyes open."

I was personally delighted by the many references, all through the conferences, to the communion of saints and, in particular, the angels. But I was hardly prepared for the "Appendix," in which the author synthesized a reply to what had evidently been a number of questions raised in that connection by the novices. This short chapter is one of the best expositions and defenses of Catholic doctrine on the angels that it has ever been my pleasure to read.

In short, then, reality is not process; created reality is, surely, in process, but it is something that processes. The religious life is no exception to this general truth. Fortunately more and more of us are coming to realize that the "renewal" to which we have been summoned by Popes John and Paul and the Second Vatican Council is indeed a re-assertion of the "essence" of the religious life and of our particular (e.g., Franciscan) way of living it. For Franciscans as well as for Little Brothers and Sisters of Jesus, Spirituality from the Desert will be a powerful aid to just such a faithful and meaningful re-assertion.

Fr. Michael D. Mailad, of



<sup>\*</sup>Spirituality from the Desert. By René Voillaume. Trans. Alan Neame. Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1976. Pp. xi-145. Paper, \$2.95.

# The Synthesis of Masculine and Feminine Elements in the Personality of Francis of Assisi

SISTER MAGDALEN DANIELS, C.S.S.F.

M EDIEVAL SOCIETY is a tapestry of religious paradoxes. There exist side by side, perhaps in response to each other, the most scandalous moral laxity and the most exalted ascetic mysticism. In the name of God, the poor are extorted, unbelievers executed, and indulgences sold. Also in the name of God, thousands enter new forms of religious life, minister to lepers, and seek martyrdom as though it were a duchy. Feudalism creates a social class system while chivalry disregards it to protect the poorest widow. Womanhood is debased as the spoil of battle, subjected to the right of the feudal lord, and married off as a political pawn by her father at the same time as it is exalted in the "lady" of chivalric ideal. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin concretizes in the magnificent cathedrals in front of which half-naked women are sold to the highest bidder during holiday celebrations. It is a maledominated society, conquestoriented, and hotly defensive of its "honor"—which both demeans and longs for the gentler virtues usually associated with the feminine.

Yet there arises in this age a man who, while remaining undeniably the product of his milieu, succeeds in uniting many of its paradoxical elements, not the least of which are the masculine and feminine roles, in the unique synthesis of his personality. His is a personality that in turn gives rise to mystical paradoxes of perception that reach far beyond the thirteenth century in their potential for achieving inner and outer unity. The man is Francis of Assisi.

To understand more clearly this paradoxical and powerful union of male and female characteristics in Francis, let us turn to the medieval encyclopedian Bartholomaeus Anglicus, who gives us a vivid picture of the male/female role and personality

Arnaldo Fortini, "La giovinezza del Santo," Nova Vita di san Francesco (Edizioni Assisi, n.d.), I, 121-25.

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differences as they existed in the medieval mind.

A man is called vir in Latin. and hath that name of might and strength. For in might and strength a man passeth a woman. A man is the head of a woman, as the Apostle saith. And therefore a man is bound to rule his wife ... he adviseth her if she do amiss . . . . A man loveth his child ... and setteth it at his own board when it is weaned. And teacheth him in his youth with speech and words, and chasteneth him with beating...and putteth him to learn . . . And the father sheweth him no glad cheer, lest he wax proud, and he loveth most the son that is like to him ... and purchaseth lands and heritage for his children, and ceaseth not to make it more and more.... The more the father loveth his child, the more busily he teacheth and chastiseth him . . . lest he draw to evil manners.2

The name lord is a name of sovereignty, of power, and of might.... A rightful lord, by way of rightful law, heareth and determineth causes ... that be between his subjects... and draweth his sword against malice, and putteth forth his shield of righteousness, to defend innocents against evil doers.... And so under a good, a strong, and a peaceable lord, men of the

country can be secure and safe. For there dare no man assail his lordship, nor in any manner break his peace.<sup>3</sup>

Bartholomaeus' description of the woman can be drawn from his description of the wife and the nurse. There is omitted here his description of the serving woman, who is portrayed as chattel, base, mean, and having no rights at all.

In a good spouse and wife behoveth these conditions, that she be busy and devout in God's service, meek and serviceable to her husband, and fair-speaking and goodly to her meinie, merciful and good to wretches that be needy, easy and peaceable to her neighbors, ready, wary, and wise in things that should be avoided. mightiful and patient in suffering. busy and diligent in her doing, mannerly in clothing, sober in moving, wary in speaking, chaste in looking, honest in bearing, sad in going, shamefast among the people, merry and glad with her husband, and chaste in privity . . . and useth the goodness of matrimony more because of children than of fleshly liking, and hath more liking to have children of grace than of kind.4

A nurse hath that name of nourishing, for she is ordained to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Robert Steele, Mediaeval Lore from Bartholomaeus Anglicus (Boston: John W. Luce & Co., 1907), 55-59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-59.

nourish and to feed the child, and therefore like as the mother... taketh the child up if it fall, and giveth it suck: if it weep, she kisseth and lulleth it still... and doth cleanse and wash it.... And she useth medicines... if it be sick... And cheweth meat in her mouth, and maketh it ready to the toothless child... and pleaseth the child with whispering and songs when it shall sleep.... She batheth and anointeth it with good anointments.<sup>5</sup>

And for a women is more meeker than a man, she weepth sooner.

We see in these descriptions the clear distinction of masculine and feminine qualities and roles within medieval society. Briefly, the man is ruler, father, judge, defender, acquirer, and teacher.

He is stern, dominant, and aggressive—a peacemaker through force, fear, and justice. The woman is subject, mother, nurse, nourisher, comforter. She is religious, modest, meek—a peacemaker through patience, self-control, and mercy. The man likes the son that is most like himself. The woman prefers children "of grace [rather] than of kind." The first quality mentioned for the ideal woman is that she be "busy and devout in

God's service." God is not mentioned directly in the description of the man, who is strongly associated with law and justice. The woman is conscious to bear herself with modesty, to be careful in speaking, humble in public, and mighty in suffering. None of these are mentioned in connection with the man, whose might is described in terms of aggressive external actions, who inflicts suffering on his enemies rather than endures it patiently himself.

Bartholomaeus Anglicus was himself a Franciscan writing twenty-five years after the death of Francis of Assisi, and it is to be wondered whether he ever noticed the correspondences between his own description of proper conduct for a noble woman, wife, and mother, and the directives of Francis in regard to the conduct of the Friars Minor given in the Rule of 1223 and in his Admonitions.7 Whether Bartholomaeus did or not, the modern reader cannot but note them. A reading of Francis' other writings, and the impression we gain from the two biographies of Celano and the Legend of the Three Companions only confirms this blending of the roles in the person and spiritual-

ity of Francis. This blend enriches and makes more whole the concept of manhood, rather than diminishes it. Francis, while remaining in many ways the daring. adventurous, paternal medieval man and son of his merchant father Peter Bernardone, upon whom Bartholomaeus' description could almost have been modelled, still included in his self-concept and behavior many of the very qualities which in that era were considered more expressly feminine and maternal. such as tenderness, meekness. and personal ministry. Without any self-consciousness or any knowledge of modern genetics or psychology, Francis balanced the masculine paternal tendencies in himself with others that were more feminine and maternal. The balance of these aspects within his personality gave him a charism and an attractiveness that continue to inspire after 700 years. He simply was truly himself before God and men, and in being that, allowed all that God had given him to find outlet and praise Him in return. Let us explore this balance further.

The specific association of



devotion to God with the "feminine" that we find in Bartholomaeus' description is not an isolated instance. A brief dictionary study reveals that the linguistic origins for the word "soul" are consistently feminine in gender in Greek, Latin, Italian, French, German, and Gothic. The same is true for the words for "prayer" and "spirituality." This perception finds dramatic personification in the Franciscan legend.

If we are to follow Brother Pacificus' interpretation of a dream that Francis had (recorded by Celano), it would seem that Jesus revealed Francis' soul to the Poverello in a definitely feminine form. According to the dream, Francis was shown "a certain woman that looked like

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Placid Hermann, O.F.M., tr., XIIIth Century Chronicles (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1961), p. 62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>Any appropriate dictionary may be used, but the results are as follows: In Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, German, and Ancient Gothic the word for soul is feminine; in all but one of the languages (i.e., except where there was no word given in the dictionary checked), the words for prayer and spirituality are likewise feminine. (In the Latin, "animus" is used to refer to the principle of intellection; the feminine, "anima" for the life-giving principle.)

this: her head seemed to be of gold, her bosom and arms of silver, her abdomen of crystal. and the rest from there on down of iron. She was tall of stature. delicately and symmetrically framed. But this woman of such beautiful form was covered over with a soiled mantle."9 Francis refused to interpret the dream for Pacificus, but Pacificus had received an inner interpretation as he was listening to Francis' account. "This beautiful woman," he said. "is the beautiful soul of Saint Francis." The golden head, of alchemists' reminiscent symbolism, signified contemplation; the silver bosom and arms represented the Word of God carried into action, the crystal abdomen symbolized sobriety and chastity; the sturdy iron spoke of perseverance; and the soiled garment was "the despised little body" of Francis that covered his soul (2 Cel. 82, p. 431). Others who heard of the dream said the woman was Lady Poverty or the Franciscan Order, but Celano wisely concludes that it was indeed Francis' soul because "avoiding any arrogance, he refused absolutely to interpret it. Indeed, if it had pertained to the order, he would not have passed over it with complete silence."

It can be noted that Francis' own writing and Celano's writing about him bear out this feminine way of regarding the soul in several other instances. In his "Letter to All the Faithful," addressed to both men and women, Francis definitely speaks of the soul in a predominantly feminine way:

A person is his [Christ's] bride when his faithful soul is united with Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, we are his brethren when we do the will of his Father who is in heaven (Mt. 12:50), and we are mothers to him when we enthrone him in our hearts and souls by love with a pure and sincere conscience, and give him birth by doing good.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of the soul, either of an individual or of a nation, as "spouse" of the divine is an ancient Judeo-Christian tradition and can be found throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Canticle of Canticles and Hosea. Therefore Francis, who loved and read Scripture, is not

unique in this perception, but he expresses it with an ease and unselfconsciousness that are somewhat unique to his era. It is Celano again who tells us that Francis sought privacy, or at least tried to shield his face when his soul was in prayer, "lest bystanders should become aware of the bridegroom's touch" (2 Cel. 94, p. 440).

Above all else, Francis is an imitator of the gospel Christ, and is it not lesus who says, addressing a mixed crowd, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act upon it" (Lk. 8:21)? It might also be noted that Iesus, too, perceives and gives expression to a certain maternal dimension of his role. He often addresses the disciples as "little children"; he insists on their allowing children to come to him to be blessed and fondled; and his sorrow over Ierusalem is that of a mother over stubborn, wayward children: "How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a mother bird collects her young under her wings, and you refused me" (Lk. 13:34). Thus we are not surprised when Celano tells us that as his order grew, Francis dreamed of himself as a little

black hen with innumerable chicks and then went to the Pope to seek a Cardinal Protector for his order (2 Cel. 24, pp. 382-83). Even in this aspect of his life and personality, Francis has a precedent in Christ, whether he was specifically conscious of it or not.

Francis' way of being at ease with the masculine and feminine in his own nature finds reflection in his regard for women. In spite of his cautioning the brothers about too familiar associations with women (Rule of 1221, ch. 12, p. 42), unlike many of his medieval male contemporaries, Francis did not doubt the ability of the feminine soul to match that of the male in spiritual stamina and integrity. perhaps because of his subconscious perception of the soul's role as feminine. He believes that eighteen-year-old Clare is as capable as himself of leading the austere and demanding life of strict poverty and literal observance of the gospel and encourages her to leave her family in spite of the total insecurity she will face. 11 A short time later, he also accepts her even younger sister Agnes. 12 He so admires the courage. stamina, and spiritual gallantry of the widowed Lady Jacopa that he

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>Marion A. Habig, O.F.M., ed., St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), p. 430. The reference here is to a passage in the second life of Francis by Thomas of Celano. All subsequent references to that work and others in the Omnibus will be given in text using abbreviated forms of the titles.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>Thomas of Celano, "The Legend of Saint Clare of Assisi," The Legend and Writings of Saint Clare of Assisi (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1953), p. 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 36-37.

affectionately calls her Brother Jacopa and sends for her on his deathbed (2 Cel. 37, pp. 549-50). This belief that women could be the spiritual equals of men also finds expression in the fact that Francis' Rule for the Third Order Secular was addressed to men and women alike (Omnibus, pp. 168-75), as was his "Letter to All the Faithful" which called both sexes to sanctity (Omnibus, p. 93; L3C 34, p. 922).

But Francis' perception of the particular strength and valor of the feminine is directed not only to those virtues as seen in women. but, as was mentioned earlier. also to the fostering of certain of these qualities within himself and his brothers. And in this he is somewhat startling in his simplicity and candor. Whether it is his remembrance of his own mother who respected his radical vocation enough to free him from his father's imprisonment and risk the paternal anger (1 Cel. 13, pp. 239-40), or his meditation on the love for the Blessed Virgin as the chosen mother of the Incarnate Word, or his intuitive appreciation of the maternal role in all forms of life that was an overflow of his nature

mysticism—Francis awareness of and identification with the maternal role that is almost unique among male religious founders of his time. In fact, it exists simultaneously and in direct opposition to the Albigensian estimation of maternity which subtly influenced so much of the society of Francis' time and viewed women as evil and carnal, seeing maternity as the perpetuation of the soul's imprisonment in flesh.13

To be a "mother," if we are to gather the meaning of the expression from Francis' own writings, is to care for the needs of others, to provide them with nourishment of soul and body, to care for them when sick, to protect their spiritual peace from the prying and intrusion of others, to comfort with a gentle affection and spiritual support those who are weary or distressed. These are concepts that can be easily related to those found in the passage quoted earlier from Bartholomaeus Anglicus.

Francis therefore directs, in his "Rule for Hermitages," that "Two of these should act as mothers, with the other two...as their children. The mothers are to lead especially those regarding how brothers should love one another. even when Francis doesn't use the word "maternal," he describes the unreserved love that we associate with a mother. A beautiful example of this occurs in his "Letter to a Minister." He is dealing with the superiorsubject relationship in a matter requiring correction, but the picture he paints is anything but the stern medieval father who chastizes and beats his sons. On the contrary, he says,

the life of Martha; the other two,

There should be no friar in the whole world who has fallen into sin, no matter how far he has fallen, who will ever fail to find your forgiveness for the asking, if he will only look into your eyes. And if he does not ask forgiveness, you should ask him if he wants it. And should he appear before you again a thousand times. vou should love him more than you love me, so that you may draw him to God ... [Omnibus, p. 110].

That the friars themselves perceived this "maternal" dimension of their love for each other is reflected in the Legend of the Three Companions' description of the mutual charity of the first friars (ch. 41, p. 929):

... each deeply loved the other and cared for him as a mother cares for a cherished only child. Charity burned so ardently in their hearts that it was easy to risk life itself, not only for love of Jesus Christ, but also for the soul and body of any one of the brothers.

In his 25th "Admonition" (on True Love). Francis again refers to this unqualified love when he says, "Blessed that friar who loves his brother as much when he is sick and can be of no use to him as when he is well and can be of use to him" (Omnibus, p. 86). Although the term "mother" isn't specifically used here, it is present implicitly in the idea of acting as "nurse" to one who is sick. Celano tells us that "on his own sick bed, [Francis] commissioned Elias to take the place of a mother in his own regard and to take the place of a father for the rest of the brothers" (1 Cel. 98, p. 313). The dual roles were evidently present in Francis' mind at times, and he consciously synthesized their attributes, at least in this instance toward the end of his life, realizing that an order of men devoid of the gentling and compassionate qualities provided by family life had to integrate these within

the life of Mary Magdalen . . . . The friars who are mothers must be careful to stay away from outsiders and in obedience to their custos keep their sons away from them, so that no one can speak to them . . . . Now and then the sons should exchange places with the mothers" (Omnibus, pp. 72-73). In many of his words of advice,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup>A significant example is Chapter 8 of the Book of Wisdom in any edition of the Bible. The chapter begins: "Her I loved and sought after from my youth; I sought to take her for my bride and was enamored of her beauty. She adds to nobility and splendor and companionship with God; even the Lord of all loved her. For she is instructress in the understanding of God" (vv. 1-4).

their own personalities and community life for both to be whole and healthy.

Again, this same tone is in evidence when Francis deals with spiritual suffering or illness. He says to Leo, for example, "As a mother to her child, I speak to you, my son.... And if you find it necessary for your peace of soul or your own consolation and you want to come to me, Leo, then come" (Omnibus, pp. 118-19).

This "maternal" attitude of open affection is also expressly stated or described in scenes where brothers face separation from Francis and are taking leave of him before going on journeys. As the first eight friars set out on their initial missions, Celano tells us that Francis "embraced them and said to each one with sweetness and affection: 'Cast thy thought upon the Lord, and he will nourish you' " (1 Cel. 29, p. 252). Another instance from later in Francis' life, after he had already receive the stigmata, uses the actual term in direct address: "So prepared to leave, they both came to the saint, and kneeling down, Brother Pacificus said to Saint Francis: 'Bless us, dearest Mother, and give me your hand to kiss' " (2 Cel. 137, p. 473). The source here is later, and whether or not these exact words were used is debatable, but the fact that the term "mother" is used here and elsewhere in the Franciscan Legend indicates the presence of the concept and very likely the practice itself, or else it would be a most unusual choice of words for medieval male biographers.

In contrast to scenes of leavetaking, when the friars return from journeys, Francis consistently receives them as "father," welcomes them, hears their confession of faults, admonishes them, and teaches them.

They then gave an account of the good things the merciful Lord had done for them; and, if they had been negligent and ungrateful in any way, they humbly begged and willingly received correction and punishment from their holy father . . . . For the spirit of purity so filled that first school of the blessed Francis that ... the blessed father, embracing his sons with exceedingly great love, began to make known to them his purpose and to show them what the Lord had revealed to him [1 Cel. 30, p. 253].

In fact, true to Bartholomaeus' earlier description, whenever Celano portrays Francis teaching, he always describes him as "father." Yet an interesting sidelight is that in several passages what "father" Francis is teaching his sons are those qualities and modes of behavior that Bartholomaeus specifically categorized as feminine! Perhaps that was why it was necessary to "teach"

them to young men brought up on medieval standards who did not automatically associate them with the fullness of Christian behavior for a man.

Amid all these things they strove for peace and gentleness with all men, and always conducting themselves modestly and peaceably, they avoided all scandals with the greatest zeal. They hardly spoke even when necessary; neither did anything scurrilous or idle proceed from their mouths, in order that nothing immodest or unbecoming might be found in their life and conversation. Their every action was disciplined. their every movement modest: all their senses were so mortified that they could hardly permit themselves to hear or see anything except what their purpose demanded . . . No envy, no malice, no rancor, no abusive speech, no suspicion, no bitterness found any place in them; but great concord, continual quiet, thanksgiving, and the voice of praise were in them These were the teachings of their beloved father. by which he formed his new sons. not by words alone and tongue, but above all in deeds and in truth [1 Cel. 41, p. 263].

This maternal/paternal distinction can also be found in the descriptions of Francis' relationship with creatures. For the most part he is "brother" or "father" where he blesses, preaches, or admonishes the creatures of nature; but in several instances,

especially where the emotion is pity or tenderness, the maternal references appear. Speaking of the little rabbit that had been freed from a snare, Celano says, "after he [the rabbit] had rested there a little while, the holy father, caressing it with motherly affection, released it so it could return free to the woods" (1 Cel.

60, p. 279). Or again, when Francis encounters two lambs being taken to market and bleating plaintively, "he was filled with pity; and coming close, he touched them and showed his compassion for them like a mother over her weeping child" (1 Cel. 79, p. 295).

Even Francis' temptations against chastity reveal the balancing effect of this maternal dimension within him. While they are definitely the temptations of a man, and he deals with them in the direct, immediate, and aggressive style of a man, despite the severity of what he does physically, there is still a certain tenderness psychologically: he builds for himself a snow-wife and four snow-children-two boys and two girls (2 Cel. 117, p. 459). It is somewhat interesting that his imagination conceives two daughters instead of four sons in a society that priced male children. This same thought is reinforced when Celano tells us that one of his favorite retorts to those who would praise him



was, "I can still have sons and daughters; do not praise me as being secure" (2 Cel. 133, p. 471). It would seem that the having of children was as much a temptation as the pleasure and comfort of the love of a woman, which again reminds us of the distinction Bartholomaeus made in regard to that matter.

The positive spiritual imension of this particular attitude is found in Francis' concept of praying as the source of spiritual motherhood:

Why do you glory over men who have been converted when it was my simple brothers who converted them by their prayers?... 'The barren,' he said, 'is my poor little brother who does not have the duty of bringing forth children for the Church. This one will bring forth many at the judgment,

because those he is now converting by his private prayers the Judge will give to him unto glory [2 Cel. 164, p. 494].

Francis saw his own responsibility to his brothers and sons in a similar way. "He believed that he would be without future glory unless he made those entrusted to him glorious with him, those whom his spirit brought forth with greater labor than a mother's labor in giving birth to her children" (2 Cel. 174, p. 502).

This same concept found vivid portraval in the parable Celano tells us Christ revealed to Francis as the means by which he should request the approval of his Rule before Pope Innocent. It is the story of a king who loved a beautiful woman in the desert and begot handsome sons by her, then returned to his kingdom. When the sons were grown, their mother sent them to the king to claim their inheritance. "This woman was Francis, because he was fruitful in many sons, not because of any softness in his actions" (2 Cel. 17, p. 377). The Legend of the Three Companions records the same parable and interpretation, but without the justification: "This vision was shown to blessed Francis while he prayed, and he understood that the poor woman was himself" (L3C, p. 935). The single phrase "not because of any softness in his actions" seems to be

the only instance where Celano seems conscious of breaking medieval male tradition by his "maternal" references. It occurs early in the second biography and seems to stand for all the subsequent references which often do describe actions of tenderness or compassion.

But perhaps the most mysterious feminine reference of all those applied to Francis is found in Celano's second biography and has to do with Lady Poverty. In his first life of Francis, Celano shows us Francis taking

Poverty as his "Lady." She is Christ's spouse. Francis "espouses" true religion (1 Cel. 7, p. 235). The same relationship is detailed in Chapter 7 of the Legend of the Three Companions (Omnibus, p. 896). However, in the second life by Celano, Francis himself espouses Poverty (2 Cel. 55, p. 411). But also in this second biography there is an instance where Francis' identity merges with that of Lady Poverty. According to Celano, there was an occasion when three poor women, whether real or angelic. or the product of hagiography. met Francis and greeted him as though he were Lady Poverty himself. "When Francis approached, they reverently bowed their heads and praised him with this new greeting: 'Welcome,' they said, 'Lady Poverty' " (2 Cel. 93, p. 438). Francis accepts the feminine title "immediately... with exquisite joy, inasmuch as there was nothing in him that he would rather have men salute than what these women had chosen." A few moments later, the women have disappeared and they realize it was a miracle of the Lord. If the progress of the identification of Lady Poverty is followed carefully, in one respect Francis' final identification with her identifies him (or his soul) as the spouse of Christ!

Another revealing area of Francis' personal assessment of masculine and feminine qualities and roles can be found in the symbolism of his poetry. Here, where he is most spontaneous, most lyrical, we find personifications that embody and lead us back to the unity and uniqueness of his mystical perceptions.

In his "Praises of the Virtues." wisdom is "Oueen Wisdom." much as we find in the biblical sense where wisdom is also personified in feminine form. 14 But here, her sister is "pure, holy Simplicity." We are reminded of Christ's admonition to be "wise as serpents and simple as doves (Mt. 10:16). Thus the apparent paradox between wisdom and simplicity that is crucial to Francis' concept of the ideal brother has its foundation in Christ's teaching. Poverty, the most beloved to Francis of all

virtues, appears here as "Lady Holy Poverty." Later we will find the full personification unfold in the Sacrum Commercium (Omnibus, pp. 1549-96). And here also, Francis introduces us to his sister "Holy Humility." "Lady Holy Love" is then praised with her sister "Holy Obedience" (Omnibus, 132-33). It is significant that the first virtue in each set is given a noble title. The unique addition of Francis' paradoxical insight is that each is given a less attractive, untitled "sister" to keep her pure. The synthesis of the two virtues within the personality prevents pride and makes conscious the realization that is central to Francis: all good is from God; all evil from himself. Simplicity, humility, and obedience keep one from glorying in the greatness of the gift of wisdom, the radicalness of poverty, or the generosity and tendency to self-will in love. These are powerful virtues, but they are powerful through their meekness in the sense of the Beatitudes. Because they are associated with meekness, to Francis" medieval mind they are feminine.

Later in the "Praises" they are set up against their negative opposites whom they defeat. Satan, false learning, and avarice are conquered by Wisdom, Simplicity, and Poverty respectively. Satan is traditionally described as male, and it might be argued that in medieval society learning was certainly a male privilege. Greed and avarice and the anxieties of this life were easily associated with the merchant's desire to achieve status by wealth and the medieval husband's obligation to be the sole support of his family and provider of inheritance for his sons.

But male qualities are not always portrayed as negative. The imagery and personifications used in Francis' "Canticle of Brother Sun" are perhaps the most vivid expression of the positive synthesis of the masculine and feminine elements within his own personality. Moon, Stars, Water, and Death are "Sister," Earth is "Mother." Wind and Air and Fire are "Brother," and the sun is "my lord Brother Sun" (Omnibus, pp. 130-31). It would seem doubtful that Francis actually weighed carefully the gender he assigned to each of the creatures. More likely, the masculine or feminine designation rose spontaneously as he composed out of free response to the qualities his personality associated with these elements. A little symbolic conjecture reveals their aptness. Moon and stars are reflective of the greater splendor and overwhelming aggressive radiance of the sun. They are less severe in intensity, a source of comfort and guidance in the darkness of the

night, and they exert a more subtle, but real, influence than the powerful dominance of the sun. Water is the medium of the womb. It is the more tangible and nourishing parallel to the currents of Brother Wind. The masculine Wind scatters seed which is received by "Mother Earth" and nourished by Sister Water, Under the force of "lord Brother Sun" she brings forth "various fruits with colored flowers and herbs." Brother Fire is joyful, rowdy, strong—an element of defense, delight, or destruction-difficult to handle, but highly valued, a source of power. Death is perhaps the most surprising in its feminine conception. Medieval drama frequently personified Death as the black-robed male executioner. messenger of the High King, or angel. But Francis perceives it as "Sister," as a Door, a passageway to a greater Birth, and therefore feminine, maternal— welcomed rather than feared by those who are ready for the second birth. Here again we didcover the unifying synthesis of paradoxical perception: Death is Birth.

There is a beautiful implicit appreciation of the balance and proportion of masculine and feminine traits, powers, and gifts in this poem—a proportion that has its origin in Francis' own personality. Francis of Assisi is definitely manly. He is daring, aggressive, dramatic, and heroic. He sublimates chivalry into the most exalted service of complete love of God through radical following of the gospel Christ. He battles inner and outer demons unflinchingly. He is afraid of no person or force within society. But the very power and fullness of his manhood is reached by his allowing the gentler, so-called maternal or feminine, aspects of his personality to also find conscious and full expression and be synthesized in his Self, no part of which is then held back from God or others. Like the creation he sings of in his "Canticle," no part of his inner universe is silenced. All parts of himself praise God, and in their act of praise synthesize into a remarkable wholeness that makes him indeed the "vir Catholicus," the universal man.



# Francis of Assisi:

# Man of Reconciliation

FRANCIS DE RUIJTE, O.F.M.

Y OU WILL NOT find the term reconciliation in Saint Francis' Writings. 1 But his biographers quote many examples of of reconciliation, for instance of cities (Arezzo, Siena, Gubbio, Assisi), of people hostile or opposed to one another (2 Cel. 89; LP 27; Fior. 25), or even at war with their own selves (1 Cel. 101; 2 Cel. 52).

Francis was a reconciliator, or rather a pacifier: he bypassed the reconciliation phase (in which people are brought to agreement, outwardly) and attained the phase of appeasement or pacification, which is an inner attitude.

We must ask ourselves what brought about Francis' desire to pacify at any cost, for it cannot be said that, either by nature or

(The italicized text is a free quotation from Col. 1:20.)

Thomas of Celano in all the five books he wrote (viz., the First and Second Lives of Francis, the treatise on his Miracles, the Life for choir use, and his Life of St. Clare) used the word only three times:

- 1. 2 Cel. 188 (Omnibus, p. 512): "Not to seek popularity"=friendly favors (conciliatos favores).
- 2. 3 Cel. 99 (not in *Omnibus*): "She was advised to reconcile herself to her husband" (based on a quotation from 1 Cor. 7:11—viro suo reconciliari.

These findings are based on the Thesaurus celanensis. Note by translator.

This text consists mainly of quotations taken from the Writings of St. Francis and his early biographers. They were selected by friars of the Franciscan province of Belgium. The English adaptation was done by Francis de Ruijte, O.F.M., an experienced spiritual director, currently pursuing studies in Franciscan Spirituality at the Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University.

by education, he was a man of peace. Right from his childhood he belonged to the "minores" party. At the age of 16 he participated in the destruction of the Rocca Maggiore. At 20 he fought against Perugia.

How can we explain his change of attitude? Is it merely a reaction against his tumultuous past? The answer is, in part, found in the Legend of the Three Companions: "Said Francis to his brothers, 'Since you speak of peace, all the more so must you have it in your hearts' " (\$58). First peace must be in the heart. Because his heart had changed (a metanoia), Francis had become a man of peace.

To understand this profound change, we should have to undertake a complete analysis of Francis' conversion. At least let us outline the main points of his inner evolution.

#### Outward Release

FIRST WE SEE an outward release which manifests itself in three principal ways. Foremost among these is an indifference to money—that, after all, is the easiest. Even in his youth Francis had been generous. He would gladly give to the poor. From now on, he will give even more, especially to the lepers and to the church.

There is also evident a gradual detachment from the easy life,

the luxury, and the parties to which he had been accustomed, and even from his former friends.

And then there is the loosening of his family ties—also a slow process—climaxed in his total surrender at the trial before the bishop.

Being thus freed of everything. says his biographer Thomas of Celano, "Peace will walk hand in hand with poverty all along his way" (1 Cel. 15). The same holds good for the first brothers: "Because of their poverty, they had peace of mind everywhere; not embarrassed by any fear, nor distracted by any worries, they awaited the next day without apprehension" (1 Cel. 39). This attitude of the early brotherhood is summed up by Saint Bonaventure in his Major Life of Francis: "Without any material possessions, no desire to have anything, and no fear to lose anything, their hearts were at peace" (4.7).

## II. Inward Liberation

SECONDLY, without doubt, this outward release is real yet incomplete. Saint Francis' peace does not come only from the absence of goods but from a more inward liberation, from a release of self.

Let us remember the fear he had for his father Bernardone, his shame to beg in front of his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>N.B.: Francis uses the verb "to reconcile" at least once in his own Writings ("Letter to All the Friars" 13):

<sup>12</sup> to show all possible reverence and honour for the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,

<sup>13</sup> in whom all things in heaven and on earth have been pacified and reconciled with almighty God.

friends and relatives, his attempts to avoid lepers. He learned to conquer himself. He did so because he clearly understood that he had to, in order to find "the hidden treasure," the kingdom, the Lord. Before becoming a pacifier, Francis had himself to be inwardly pacified.

A rapid survey through Francis' 27 Admonitions is sufficient to show us what inner peace is and how it expresses itself.

You are *not at peace* in the following situations:

- 1. when you follow your own will (Adm. 2, 3).
- 2. when you boast about the good that the Lord does in you (Adm. 2, 3; 12, 2; 17.1).
- 3. when you dismiss your superior (Adm. 3, 7).
- 4. when you claim the office superior as your own and are disturbed (dis-pacified) about losing your position (Adm. 4, title and v. 3).
- 5. when you boast about God's gifts (Adm. 5, 4-8; 19, 1).
- 6. when you envy your brother for the good he does (Adm. 8, 3).
- 7. when you get upset or angry or are scandalized, when someone sins (Adm. 11.2).
- 8. when you get angly or disturbed in the defense

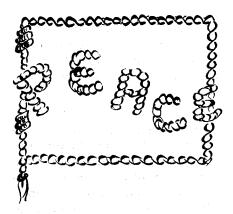
- of your rights or interests (Adm. 11, 3).
- 9. when you are scandalized or distressed at the first word spoken against you or the first thing done against you (Adm. 14, 3).
- 10. when you grudgingly accept reproof, accusation, and blame (Adm. 23, 1).
- 11. when you are not amenable to the rod of correction (Adm. 24, 2).
- 12. when you are unwilling to accept rebuke with courtesy...even when you are not to blema (Adm. 23, 2-3).

On the other hand, you are at peace in the following situations:

- 1. when you don't hold any grudge at the wrong done to you but instead love your enemy (Adm. 9, 2).
- 2. when you don't get upset or angry, should your superior give an order that is against your conscience (Adm. 11, 2), but keep peace of soul.
- 3. when, despite all that you have to suffer in this world, you remain at peace in mind and body (Adm. 15, 2).

## III. Francis at Peace

FRANCIS SANG about his inner peace in his Canticle of Brother Sun. After he had composed it, a serious dispute happened to arise between the Bishop of Assisi and



the podestà. As a result, the bishop excommunicated the podestà, and the podestà issued an order forbidding anyone to sell anything to the bishop, to buy anything from him, or to make any business transaction with him. Said Francis: "It is a great shame to us, that at a time when the podestà and the bishop so hate each other no one can be found to reestablish peace and concord between them." On this occasion he added the following strophe to his canticle:

All praise be yours, my Lord, for those who forgive for love of you

and bear illness and trial; happy those who endure in peace.

By you, Most High, they will be crowned.

Then he called one of his companions to ask the podestà to go to the bishop's house. When the brother had left, he said to two others: "Go and sing The Song of Brother Sun before the bishop, the podestà, and those who are with them. I trust that the Lord will at once put humility and peace in their hearts, and that they will return to their former friendship and affection." And, as Francis had foretold, peace and concord were restored between these two men. From great discord and scandal they returned to complete harmony (SP 101 and LP 44).

The circumstances are also instructive, under which Francis wrote the other verses of his Canticle:

already very sick...living in a cell made of mats near San Damiano [LP 42]: hardly able to bear the light of the sun during the day or the light of fire at night, his eyes causing him so much pain that he could neither lie down nor sleep, so to speak, a horde of rats running around and over him.... In all that Francis remained peaceful and wrote his Canticle to Brother Sun [LP 43 and SP 100; cf. 2 Cel. 213]

He lived peacefully in spite of his sufferings, as if he had already entered the kingdom of God. He remained unshaken and joyful, singing in his heart (Eph. 5:19—1 Cel. 93).

On the other hand, there is no doubt that Francis has known his hours of trouble. He is described as being sometimes worried about his own salvation or that of his brothers, fearful also about the future of his Order, disturbed over the scandals caused by some of the brothers. Each time he complains about it in his prayer to the Lord, and each time, too, he regains inner peace in the Lord's presence (2 Cel. 116-117; LM 83).

### IV. Conclusions

WE SHOULD read these texts over and over. Then we would discover Francis' secret: he was a peacemaker because he had inner peace, peace deep within his heart. But he came to this inner state of pacification through a long series of renunciations, and even more so through a steadily growing closeness to his Lord. That, after all, goes together with renunciation.

Thomas of Celano describes in his first biography of Francis this continual search for the Lord: the "hidden treasure," as Francis calls it, which he finds in the grotto during his novitiate years (1 Cel. 6) or in suffering and tribulations at the end of his life (1 Cel. 93; LP 43; SP 100; 2 Cel. 213) is his Lord Jesus. It is the reign of Jesus that takes over Francis' life and fills it with peace. This treasure removes all the rest and takes the place of his former wealth and money, as well as his youth's lightheartedness and aspirations. Thus Francis appears as a man focussed on God, without luggage, free, his heart liberated, in peace. With his brothers he forms a group of pilgrims completely free, without fears, capable of announcing true peace.

Bonaventure has put it in one phrase, short but loaded with meaning: "He announced peace, preached salvation, and united in the bond of true peace great numbers who, separated from Christ, had been far from salvation" (LM 3, 2). We find here the words "unite," "peace," "salvation," and "Christ"-all used synonymously. To announce salvation is to make peace, because it is to proclaim Jesus Christ, the true Peace. To be in sin, far from Christ, is equivalent to not being pacified. Preaching is the same as announcing lesus. the Savior and our Peace (Eph. 2:4). That is why Francis, in all his preaching, first said, "The Lord give you peace" (1 Cel. 23; Test. 23).

The pacifier, the preacher of peace, must first of all be himself a peaceful man if he wants his mission to be successful. To be at peace implies to be free of material possessions, to be free of any desires, to be free of our very selves; above all it means to be one with Christ. This explains Francis' demands in his admonitions: material poverty, and even more, spiritual poverty—poverty which makes free, free of everything, free of your own

self, free of all longings and ambitions except to possess "the hidden treasure."

In other words, a peaceful man is a man without sin, for peace and sin are opposed to each other. Sin is something negative: it is hostility which sets one man against another, it is judging and condemning (and often a means of justifying yourself). On the contrary, peace is something positive: it is not only the absence of hostility, fighting, or adversity, but an intimate encounter with the Lord, the Lamb of God who takes away and destroys all sin and all enmities, judgments, and condemnations.

If you have met the Lord, you are justified, pacified, without resentment, and without the morbid need to judge or condemn anyone. As Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians (2:13-16): "Jews and pagans, you used to be so far apart from one another; but you have been brought very close, by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, and has made the two one, breaking down the barrier of hostility that kept you

apart, killing hostility by the cross."

In concluding, let us bring out some guidelines for truly living in peace:

- 1. First you must strip off your old behavior with your old self (Col. 3:9), your pretentious rights and your resentments.
- 2. Next, close your eyes and your heart to any evil and error, present or past, in your brother; for otherwise you cannot make peace with him.
- 3. Have confidence in others, not because of themselves, but because of Christ who has reconciled them.
- 4. Be creative and imaginative in finding, like Saint Francis, the word and the deed that will draw people together.
- 5. Finally, be patient, not expecting peace immediately, and not becoming discouraged.

"I recommend my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ to avoid quarrels (Titus 3:2) and disputes about words (2 Tim. 2:15), not to criticize others, but to be gentle, peaceful and forebearing, courteous (Titus 3:2), and humble" (Rule of 1223, 3, 10-11).



# Conversion with Francis

THADDEUS HORGAN, S.A.

SSISI IS a charming hill-A top city in Umbria. As one drives down the State Highway just past Spello it appears in the distance to the right. As the car approaches Rivo Torto its charm increases. It appears to be dominated by the vellow stucco and pink stone of the buildings which softly reflect the sun. Mount Subbiaso's large rounded shape seems to sit there like a properly placed stage prop. The scene justifies its being a tourist stop. The city's domes and spires suggest it is also a pilgrimage place. In fact, it is both, depending on the visitor.

Being a Franciscan in the Penitential tradition could be like a tourist experience, or it can be, as it should be, a pilgrimage. Like

Assisi, Franciscanism has become a charming legend which idealizes lofty goals. It can become a refreshing spot that somehow lifts us out of reality and makes us feel good. Assisi's guides have a lot of nice little stories to tell the tourist, and the

scenery is a perfect blend to add just that touch of beauty needed to uplift our spirits. The charm of the place, its suggested images of a past religious chivalry, and its relics can almost put us in touch with the impossible dreams of a self-assured simple sanctity at which all the world likes to smile. A tourist trip is refreshing and, like all vacations, unreal because we have to return to our everyday lives.

Or we can step beyond the preserved atmosphere of a thirteenth century city and take into ourselves, not the images, but the realities of Assisi. Assisi is the city of people who lived at the threshold of the Renaissance. Like other men and women of his day, Francis of Assisi experienced the trend in society that made men and women the center of the world. Assisi is his monument. It still is a city of people experiencing anew the trend to make the human person the center of all reality. But it is a city with a religious flavor. It is a living contradiction to the trends of the

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time. Its men and women may hawk souvenirs and try to entice visitors into "genuinely quaint" restaurants built during the past twenty years, but they cannot change its basic appeal. Assisi turns one's attention to God. It exists today because of the fame of a man turned to God. The neighboring town of Spello which in many ways is as charming as Assisi lacks that one basic quality. It is just another quaint Umbrian town. Assisi is the place to go, and for one reason: it is the town of the joyous penitent, Francis of Assisi.

The city is a contradiction. It holds the mementoes of pain, denial, and the hard realities of a human life. But these very things are enshrined in a motif of joy. People who go there to see only the joy are tourists. People who go there to see the reality that constituted that joy are pilgrims.

On walls all over the city small multi-colored tiles proclaim Pax et bonum. That sums up Francis' life. It was the goodness of God that turned his life into a pilgrimage for peace. By God's grace the path of the pilgrimage was revealed to him: Conversion.

Franciscan Penitential life is a pilgrimage along the path of conversion. Our guide is Francis. Saint Clare wrote in her Testament that "The Son of God became for us the Way; and that

Way our Blessed Father Francis, his true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example." Our guide teaches us by word and example. We are not to try to copy him. Rather, on our pilgrimage we should try to assimilate and make part of our lives his teaching and his example. We cannot be Francis of Assisi. We are ourselves. It is that selfthat is called to conversion.

As individuals we have values, opinions, prejudices, likes and dislikes. All of these and all that makes up our personalities are called to conversion. Aware of our humanness we know from the outset that this will take time. It will be a lifelong pilgrimage. Its beginnings are in our faith. And we are sustained on the way by obedience to the will of God. From time to time we will have to recall that, as Francis did. He was like us, as human, as faltering, as hesitant. Unlike Saint Paul, he did not fall off a horse and see the light instantly and totally. Francis' experience of his vocation was gradual and developmental. Here I would like to review that experience to point out how real it was, despite the legends; how much like our vocational experience it was, despite our supposition that "it couldn't have been"; and how similar with circumstances changed it was to ours despite our tendency to think that the grace given Francis "couldn't be given to us."



That grace is available to all Christians because it is fundamental to being a Christian. The underlying theme of the Gospels is conversion to God, belief in the Good News, and acceptance of the Kingdom of God. Mark 1:14-15 is a summary of the whole gospel proclamation meant for all, everywhere, in every era. It is concerned with every human being and connotes a free choice to establish a fundamental relationship with God. It is a response to what is asked by God of us. As Karl Rahner points out, the call of God is both Iesus himself as the presence of the Kingdom of God and his Spirit who offers us freedom and

forgiveness to overcome the narrow limits of our sinfulness.<sup>1</sup>

Biblically, sinfulness means alienation from God. It is hard to admit our sinfulness. That is the first obstacle to conversion. Yet, like us, Francis of Assisi was a Christian from birth. Like all young people he was ambitious to be somebody, to make his mark, to accomplish something with his life. Seeking glory through knighthood was not a very unusual dream for a well heeled merchant's son. Seeking opportunities on his own terms to prove himself is also a common human experience. So is a sense of dissatisfaction, of pondering the worthwhileness of it all, and feeling unsuccessful. He tried again and again to be what he thought he should be.

The first moment of the grace of conversion offered him and to which he responded was when he opened himself up and wondered if God had willed something other than his own self-perceived future. He felt a need for God and struggled with what this meant. In our lives our failure to accept our need for God is the greatest cause of alienation in our lives. In a word it is sinfulness. Look at Francis and how he groped with this. It was not until

he was 23 that he fully realized his basic need. He fumbled with it, tried to open himself up to discern the meaning of his need, and wandered about "seriously," so much so that his peer group noticed a difference in him. Then through a series of dreams born of his experience he started to convert.

What had happened? Francis underwent a changed view of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus' first preaching (Mt. 4:12-17) had to do with changing his hearers' understanding of what the Kingdom of God was about. It was not territorial, nor were its signs power, prosperity, and might. Rather, it was, is, and is to be the active rule of God over all creation through the Messiah. It was the reality of a relationship of love alive and active in the world. Francis realized this. His heart began to change, that is, the source of all his being and personality and energy was turning more and more to God. Francis experienced on his pilgrimage what it meant to change his fundamental values from those of his society to those of God. The experience made him aware of what total dependence on God was. It was the beginning of his appreciation of poverty as the safeguard of the security of God in one's life. It made him realize that to be turned to God means leaving aside values that the times propose—like consumerism, accumulating this world's goods, and putting trust in the genius of humanity alone.

As is doubtless true of us, Francis was still not totally converted. For two more years he wrestled and struggled. He had learned of God's pardon and all embracing compassion. Saint Iohn's words meant much to him. as they should to us: "I am writing this, my children, to stop you from sinning, but if anyone should sin, we have our advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who is just; he is the sacrifice that takes our sins away, and not only ours, but the whole world's" (1 In. 2:1-2). He increasingly became aware of the grace and pardon and compassion of Iesus. He became pardoning and compassionate. His love increased, his awareness of all creation's participation in redemption increased, his knowledge of Christ increased. And all this was done by prayer and deeds. Turning to God also was turning to neighbor. All of this gave him peace.

But Francis still had a hard time forgetting himself. The life of conversion was up-hill. Francis experienced the great jolting that all dying to self entails. Little by little he assimilated the gospel message. With each step he had to expend energy. Finally one day he met a leper. He had a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Karl Rahner, S.J., Encyclopedia of Theology (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 292.

particular revulsion for lepers. He could not see himself with his talents, abilities, and self-perception having any contact with lepers. Yet he knew God called him to heroic love, to complete selflessness, and to total conversion. He dismounted and embraced what he thought he hated.

In his Testament, Francis tells us what then happened: "The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, the grace of beginning to do penance in this way: that when I was in sins, it seemed extremely bitter to me to look at lepers, and the Lord himself led me in among them and I practiced mercy with them. And when I came away from them what seemed bitter to me, was changed to sweetness of spirit and body for me; and after that I did not wait long and left the world."

For Francis, this was his victory over self. He experienced concretely dependence on God (poverty) and the lowliness (humiliation) of life that characterized Jesus. He had literally put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Or to phrase it another way he replaced egoism in his heart with living out what it means to be in the body of Christ. He broke the fetters that bound him away from

God. His appearance before the Bishop of Assisi and his encounter with his father symbolized that no longer would the values of this world, the expectations of his father and peers, or his own desire for greatness on his own terms, hold him back from fully realizing the will of God. Damian Isabel, in the introduction to the Workbook for Franciscan Studies, points out that "this historic moment was the external sign of what already happened to Francis interiorly."<sup>2</sup>

Francis retired then, as was the custom among the penitents of his day, to a hermitage on Mount Subbiaso. There he lived a life of penance in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. His alms, however, were no longer material; they were the witness of his life. He consciously chose to be poor and little like Jesus who emptied himself and did not cling to his equality with God. Phillippians 2 contains the great hymn of the early Church about Christ. It sums up Francis' goal of living the life of Christ.

Yet for all this, Francis' conversion was not complete. During this period of his life when reflection on the Word of God had such an important effect

on him, he grew and developed in what might be called the biblical virtue of "steadfastness" or "singlemindedness." All the while it became clearer and clearer to him that conversion. however personally experienced. has an ecclesial or communal side to it as well. Francis, as he came to understand this. responded by going about fixing up chapels. It was a normal response—he did the things at hand which he could do in his effort to discern God's will. He was ready to risk himself even for what he might have felt unprepared to do. He did not hesitate to ask and get help from others in the Body of Christ. The practical implications of this in our lives are obvious.

We may remember clearly that Francis heard the words "Go and repair my house" from the cross at San Damiano, but we might tend to forget that God works more often in ordinary circumstances. The totality of his call came to Francis while he heard the Gospel of Saint Matthew proclaimed at Mass. The passage was Mt. 10:7-13. After receiving an explanation and reflecting on it, Francis knew what he must do. His vocation was to be united

to God in prayer, to live literally the life of Jesus, and to proclaim to others the Good News of the Gospel. Francis began to preach penance (1 Cel. 23). At this moment, Franciscanism came into being. Francis was to incarnate in himself the entire meaning of the Incarnation and to proclaim it to others so they would do likewise.

This, too, is conversion. As Francis' subsequent life shows, conversion is continuous, should be constant, and ought to be total. In our life's pilgrimage on the path of conversion as Penitential Franciscans let us learn from the experience of Francis. We can be like visitors to Assisi. Either we are tourists and see Francis as extraordinary and "oooh" and "aah" at all the sights; or we are pilgrims, who recognize that Francis attained peace and joy because of his fidelity to his call to conversion, his steadfastness in prayer, his singlemindedness to preserve his changed heart. and his obedience to proclaim by his living and example as well as by his preaching, the Good News that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>See p. 19; I recommend, in this connection, pp. 8-28 of this work, as well as Chrysostomus Dukker's *The Changing Heart: The Penance-Concept of Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1959), for further insight into the meaning of Francis' conversion.

# Habit

The garb of most common man, Now given in this moment, Descends as the prodigal's inheritance.

No habit of perfection, Only symbolic confirmation Of sin's consistent habit.

Sign of what is, Hope of what becomes, All contained within.

All stand as priest-friars. Black habit becomes liturgical garment For the fraternal sacrifice.

Within, the empty sacrifice. Nothing is offered But the nothingness of sin.

The black is proclamation Of void too wide to be filled By any created thing.

But in death's last moment, The common man will discover Deception no longer present.

Calvary, finally fully manifested: The Cross, no thing, but a person. It is Christ who wears the habit.

Timothy Johnson, O.F.M. Conv.



The Importance of Being Sick: A Christian Reflection. By Leonard Bowman. Gaithersburg, Md.: Consortium Books, 1976. Pp. viii-218. Cloth, \$12.00.

Reviewed by Father Wilfrid Hept, O.F.M., a member of the staff of St. Francis Chapel, Providence, Rhode Island.

From the very moment man is born of woman's pain to die in his own, the question "why pain and sickness" naturally presents itself. Whether the answer be philosophical, theological, or scientific, it always leaves us with a gnawing feeling that there must be more to the answer. In a culture where God is a question and the pursuit of earthly paradise is the dream, modern man is inclined to look to medical science for his answer to the question of death and sickness. In his book The Importance of Being Sick Leonard Bowman rejects science as the ultimate answer because it leads to a nightmare of illusion. He uses scripture and the insights of Christian thinkers to come to grips with this most baffling and elusive topic. In a foreword the author points out that his book is not intended to be a fullbloom theology of sickness, nor is it addressed to professional theologians. The book, intended to explore ideals, is a Christian reflection on what can happen in the life of a sick person animated by faith or in the lives of those who serve the sick.

The book is divided into four parts, entitled "The Sick and Health." "Coping," "Caring," and "Some Special Challenges." In Part I the author gives a stimulating discussion of what it means to be sick or healthy. But the most fruitful insights come in Chapter Two, which concerns itself with what the Bible savs about sickness. For the non-scripturescholar this chapter is a nice compendium of the gradual awakening of the meaning of suffering in the relationship of the sick person with God in the light of the Old and New Testament writers. The reader sees the historical development of the attitude toward pain and suffering as it progresses from Old Testament times to its full meaning in the Good News of the gospel. In the beginning the first Psalm gives expression to health and prosperity as a reward for faithfulness to the Law. From this primitive concept the author goes on to consider the problem as it is seen through the eyes of Job and like Job realizes that God's designs are sometimes inscrutable. But it was the prophet Isaiah "who realized that there is a vital connection between suffering and establishing of God's own realm where suffering and death are overcome." The real answer to the question of sickness and death is

found in the gospel account of the God-man Jesus Christ, who conquers sickness and death through his resurrection.

Part II gives some interesting observations concerning suffering for the sick person as well as those who are close to him. There is a rather significant chapter on "Dying," especially as it affects the survivors and has implications for them.

Part III is perhaps the most rewarding for the professional person doctor or nurse; for Chapter Seven is entitled "Professionals and People." and the next chapter "Facing Ethical Challenges." The author points out the high esteem in which the medical profession is held in American Culture. This is indeed an advantage. but it also has its dangers. The Author says, "Revered like a priest, the medical professional may be tempted into a sort of clericalism. especially in his relationship to nonprofessionals. This is especially true of those who unconsciously share the assumption that "salvation is a full life in an earthly paradise." This attitude may cause the doctor to make decisions concerning undue and expensive treatment in prolonging life and other responsibilities that more rightly belong to the family. There is a very good appreciation of the delicate function of the nurse. "Though the doctor has the primary responsibility for the patient's medical care, it is the nurse who cares for him most immediately and constantly." And "The nurse is called upon to walk the delicate emotional

balance between becoming overly involved and becoming depersonalized." While both the professional and non-professional will find good guidelines for "Facing Ethical Challenges" (as Chapter Eight is entitled), the reader will no doubt wish the author had been a little more specific in regard to some of these ethical questions he discusses. This reviewer wonders whether the author, in a desire to avoid religious denominationalism and promote ecumenism, has not been deliberately vague in facing some of the medical ethical questions.

The final Part considers three classes in our society that are of deep concern to every involved Christian: the aging, the handicapped, and the mentally ill. The best way to characterize these chapters is to say they are a realistic evaluation of coming to terms with these limitations in living a full, norma life. The author, however, never loses sight of the ultimate goal of life, which is eternity where imperfections will be no more. Like most of the book this section presents the limitations of our humanity which call for an acceptance not of despair, but of hope—an acceptance not necessarily looking for a cure to sickness but rather for meaning and value in sickness. This meaning and value will come, not from any human relationship of parent and child, husband and wife, doctor and patient—nor even wealth or poverty; but from one's fundamental relationship with Christ. Hence the apt sub-title of this book: "A Christian Reflection."

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