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NOVEMBER, 1987

The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW



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The CORD

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Standard Abbreviations used in The CORD for Early Franciscan Sources

I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony EpCler: Letter to Clerics1 EpCust: Letter to Superiors EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful¹ EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo EpMin: Letter to a Minister EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order EpRect: Letter to the Rulers of People ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father FormViv: Form of Life for St. Clare

Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221 LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God LaudHor: Praises at All the Hours OffPass: Office of the Passion OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix RegB: Rule of 1223 RegNB: Rule of 1221 RegEr: Rule for Hermits SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues Test: Testament of St. Francis UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect loy II. II refer to First and Second Editions.

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis 2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis 3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles CL: Legend of Saint Clare CP: Process of Saint Clare Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis

I.M: Bonaventure. Major Life of Francis LMin: Bonaventure, Minor Life of Francis I.P. Legend of Perugia L3S: Legend of the Three Companions SC: Sacrum Commercium SP: Mirror of Perfection

Omnibus: Marion A. Habig, 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).

AB: Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., ed., Francis and Clare: The Complete Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

On Being Heroic

BRUCE RISKI, O.F.M. CAP., S.T.L.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE to become a saint? Perhaps no question is more seldom asked. Deep down we really don't want to be saints! We really know what it takes. But we don't ever speak of it to others. We don't allow ourselves to think of it; certainly, to never ponder it. We know there's involved a "nasty" word. We'd feel much better about it if we could strike it out with gusto from the dictionary. That "awful" word is heroic.

This is not to say we don't read splendid spiritual books and the lives of the saints. We may even be avid readers of spiritual matters. We may recount enthusiastically, in one way or another, the exploits and events in the lives of the saints. We impress many with our repertoire. We may even be considered "pious" and "devout". And that, truly, is what we are. Our minds and wills are bent on the supernatural. Our souls are satisfied and dynamic. We accomplish incalculable good in whatever way with our storehouse of spiritual things.

So we pass the days, the weeks, the months and the years. We are joyfully happy, and rightly so, with the successes we have achieved for God, for His Church, and for souls. We indeed deserve a resounding pat on the back for our services. The acclaim of others is "truly right and just."

Yes, we have made many sacrifices. Success is only born in sweat and blood. We even have learned, to a surprising degree, that there is only true life in the cross.

We have had our share of ups and downs, ins and outs, in the Way of the Cross, which is the straight and narrow road that leads to Heaven. Despite it all, we have, by the powerful grace of God, learned the reality of the optimistic words of Our Lord: "My yoke is sweat and and and the control of the optimistic words of Our Lord: "My yoke is sweat and and other the optimistic words of Our Lord: "My yoke is sweat and and other the optimistic words of Our Lord: "My yoke is sweat and other the optimistic words of Our Lord: is light." We have not hesitated to benefit others by our disdesired with our whole being that others join in this

Fr. Bruce Riski, O.F.M.Cap. is chaplain at the Carmelite M Wisconsin. He is recovering well from complicated by-pas

steady joy. God is a God of His word. New vistas opened up gloriously before us. The vast panorama in view almost stunned us. We received new lights, insights and understanding far beyond what we had ever expected or could have possibly conceived.

The spiritual life, we uncovered, was not pious sounding rhetoric, or a way of life really meant for others, or a dull prospect for those "willing to take a chance," or fulfillment only in oblique ways, or a goal meant for a shameful few. We could see first hand that the sky was the limit with a most generous and imaginative God.

We gasped at the possibilities that the staggering panorama presented to us. We had never dreamt that this could happen to us. It was something unique, unusual and yet strikingly beautiful and attractive. We felt like children standing before a candy counter displaying all sorts of varieties at reasonable prices. We just did not know where to look or what to touch or what to ask for. We became stupified by it all. It seemed too much to hope for; too much a reward for steadfastness, loyalty and devotion to God's cause. We blinked and rubbed our eyes in almost breath-taking disbelief. We lost our wind. Even our second wind. It didn't seem that such opportunities were possible. This was exceedingly far more than we expected. Surely, we thought, we must be dreaming.

We stopped right there. It just couldn't be for real. We were in strange and unfamiliar country. The Lord took us kind of "by storm." He overwhelmed us without warning. God swooped down upon our souls like a hungry eagle ready to lift us up still higher. The prospect of being transported to an area of rarified air frightened us. We knew full well that our God is a jealous God. We never imagined He could be *that* jealous.

In the very center of the gigantic panorama was a bridge, a span that was lost in the mist and fog at the other end. It seemed like it had no visible supports and that it had as a valley below only an abyss — an endless, awesome abyss.

Suddenly, a notion permeated our being. We had arrived at a juncture. However, the way to the bridge was cluttered with obstacles. Not impossible to overcome — nothing is impossible to a relentless God.

We shivered at the task before us. But we had gone a long, long way. We had matured spiritually enough by this time to suspect what truly lay before us. We somehow thrilled at the same time. A tug-of-war ensued then within us. We were baffled to a certain extent as we knew God deals with faithful souls on an individual basis. Here, right now, was a chance of a spiritual lifetime. We had prayed for something like this in our finest moments of union with God. We never considered seriously that God means business. Now that the "spiritual dream of a lifetime" was ours for the asking, we balked.

Why could not life be simpler? Why does God pick on us? We have labored hard and well — it's time to relax and enjoy the fruits of many hardships, we tell ourselves. We figured we had gone far enough; that it would be nice to recall our past accomplishments and secretly to enjoy what we recalled. We liked what we saw. Ah! but so did God! He liked it very much. God liked it so very much, He wanted us to do still more for Him. We could do so much more now that we saw we had completed only a part, but key part, of our journey to eternal life. We resented in some fashion that we had much more to go. It struck us that God absolutely wanted all. Fruitful as our lives were, it just wasn't enough.

We gawked. That couldn't be for us. Wondrous though it appeared; inspiring as it is to read about others "going beyond" this point — we felt most uncomfortable and uneasy. Surely, God made a mistake. It simply couldn't be! How could we make profitable use, personally and outside ourselves, of what we viewed. Would it not be better to either shut our eyes or turn away? After all, God would not punish us severely for standing still. He would never forget or cease to desire to reward us for what we already had done for Him. God is not an unreasonable God, demanding though He be. Surely, He would come to terms; an understanding, shall we say?

Listen, dear God, to what we have to say. We have, through many years, been exemplary to the best of our abilities. We were not all the time exactly what we should have been, but we kept struggling — and we made handsome progress. At no time was it easy. Asceticism never is. We have borne the heat of the day. The Church needs new blood. Let the younger ones take over. This is what the times require — zip, zeal and vitality in our day. We are tired — so tired. Life, as You know, has not been a bed of roses. Daily we carried our cross. And we must admit You helped us no end. You never failed to come when we called upon You. You are a merciful, kind and mighty God.

How often we praised You for Your invaluable assistance! How often we glorified You for blessing our efforts and good will! How often we thanked You for advancing us in the spiritual life! But, God, dear God, You desire still more! Oh, not as in the past. We are rather proficient in those matters. They are basic, fundamental. We are not spiritual pros. From experience and above all Your grace "we know what the spiritual life is all about." Except, that is, what You reveal in the endless panorama before us. But that is for saints. We have led a saintly life. That is more than enough for us. We were sure — though it is shaken-up a bit right now — we were sure You'd be more than satisfied.

Consider the material. Weigh the circumstances. Surely, we were not fit material; surely, we are not quite ready for a continuance of our journey

to everlasting life. First, consider what You have to work with. There are flaws in our personalities — one thing or another. It would impair the work You have in mind! In addition, we don't fast or abstain strictly enough, or curb our tongues sufficiently, or service our fellow human beings well enough. We have a lot to work on as should be well-evident to You! Besides, our present circumstances don't lend themselves for what You have in mind. We would be much like a flower left out of the greenhouse. We would shrivel-up and freeze in the unknown that You beckon us to. It would be foolhardy to venture out into the darkness of the soul — what with excruciating spiritual sufferings, and, dryness of soul to top that off — does not wisdom and prudence dictate the journey come to a temporary halt? Later on, after recuperating, we would finally accede to Your wishes, and resume the journey — from this juncture. Can't You understand our point of view, o condescending God?

But no! You say not a word. You tug. We feel it. We buck it. We do not want to budge . . . maybe an inch — but no more! All right, then our God! We give up! We surrender! All!

What sweetness and consolation fill our souls, now, o Divine Capturer of our souls! Never had we reckoned it could be this way! What went on before was just a preparation for this . . . the *real* preparation! How could we have been so stupid? To say it was worth it would be crude. It is most sublime. For this we were created. Nothing less. Ever more. We now get an inkling of the full definition of the word: infinite.

Innumerable times we lived and loved Your Presences: in the soul, nourished by the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, the primary purpose of which is to nourish, expand and deepen the life of union of our souls with the Triune God indwelling in our souls; the living Presences You have among the poor, in the Word that is preached them ("the poor have the Gospel preached to them"); and, Your "creative" Presence whereby You are everywhere, keeping everything in existence (since they do not have the reason for their existence in themselves). It took concerted effort and a driving persistence. O God, You are not easily attained. You manage to keep just a foot or two ahead of us. In our buoyant love for You, we did not notice You were leading us along the path we dearly and secretly desired. For You are all we hope and live for, without which all else is as nothing. You were showing us the Way while we were basking in the blinding sunshine of Your Presences. We never got lost though many times we did not know where we were going.

Then it happened! We traversed the bridge without knowing it! Like St. Therese, the Little Flower of Jesus, we were whisked "up the stairs"

— i.e., we crossed the bridge unknowingly and found ourselves in the joy of Your various Presences, at times, and almost mostly so, even in the state and condition of love! Words became useless or unnecessary. But we are only at the end of the bridge, ready, hopefully, to fall into the infinite Abyss, which is You!

Let us fall where we may — where you will! It matters not. It is clear to us that this is the point in the spiritual life that You make Your "strongest pitch": Be Heroic! What does it take to be a saint? Heroism. Now it really, truly and absolutely, can be said that all else was a required and necessary preparation for this. This is true juncture. This is where nearly all stop — either to fall back or remain "at ease". This is where we decide whether to go "all the way." This is where we decide whether to be a saint spelled with a small "s" or a capital "S". This is the most important and consequential decision we have to make in life. By far.

What does it take to make a saint — spelled with a capital "S"? Heroism. It is the key word in the dictionary. All other words are tame when and if compared with this one. It means absolute and that means absolute — absolute poverty of spirit and poverty of material goods. Poverty of spirit demands a total renunciation of fame, honor, position and pride of life on the one hand; on the oither hand, it demands that we accept contempt, disdain, misunderstandings and rejection. Poverty from material goods demands complete detachment from wealth, possessions and greed. To do both requires one to hate self and to love only God for His own sake. "He who would save his or her life, must lose it." Lose means bereft of everything. Hate means shunning in horror at anything that is not of God. It's useless and meaningless anyway. So?

Is it difficult? You doggone right it is. It calls for the heroic! It calls for being worthy of a spiritual "Medal of Honor." Is it a "freak" of the spiritual life? Of course not.

Is it easily (!) within reach once we get to the point where we feel we've gone "far enough; time to relax and enjoy our past labors and faithfulness"? Yes, indeed! Then — for sure — we are ripe for heroism. It is then comparatively easy, for we have well-prepared ourselves for this step, for this unique decision.

That not enough make this choice explains why there are so few canonized saints in the Church. It explains why the world is in throes. It explains why there must be a Purgatory. It explains why we are not as happy and fruitful as we could be; as we should be.

It's tough — it seems almost impossible to reach. We must, nonetheless, stick with it — leaving all to God, as we must leave all to make this act, this decision. Leave all to God. We are nothing. Let us begin for up 'til

now we have truly done nothing — but prepare! God it is Who will do all for us.

God does it all! We are totally in His Divine Heart, submerged, consumed in His devastating Love, and there we will find ourselves. Who we are; what we ought to be. Love will rush us headlong into God, the infinite Abyss. "My God and my All!" Congratulations to us all! God is All!

Symphony

I picked my way over the messed greying stones carbunkling the hill, searching for wonder among ordinary trees and mediocre stones.

As the sun gave way to an impatient moon I listened, hoping to hear a note break the silence

and orchestrate the stones, grass and trees into a symphony of passioned intimacy

that it might help me understand the serenity of La Verna.

Seamus Mulholland, O.F.M.

Travelling With St. Francis

DONALD DeMARCO, Ph.D.

I HAVE JUST finished reading some letters complementing me on an article I wrote about St. Francis of Assisi which appeared in the December 1986 issue of The CORD, a Franciscan Spiritual Review. Receiving these letters represents the completion of a circle and the fulfillment of a hope. One writes articles for strangers, and is animated by the prospect that the written word might transform a nameless stranger into a personal acquintance. Art uses images to touch hearts and enlighten souls. Therefore, it always aims at moving from the abstract to the personal. Though it begins in solitude, art always endeavors to end in community. At the same time, I thought another circle should commence, one that goes back out to my unseen audience, recounting some of the remarkable circumstances that surrounded the formation and development of my modest literary efforts on the Poverello of Assisi.

All good things must begin, as William Butler Yeats once said, in the "rag and bone shop of the heart." Our journey here has a genesis that is of comparable humility: in the community washroom of the men's dormitory at Gannon University. It was early in the morning and the occupant of the sink on my left, assiduously attending to his ablutions, was a Franciscan priest from a college in Massachusetts. "What's going on at your school this summer?" I asked, hoping that the effort I expended in raising my voice against a wide assortment of gargling and gurgling sounds would prove successful. My good Franciscan companion raised his head slightly and said in agreeable tones, "A workshop on Franciscan Aesthetics." It may have been the competing sounds of cascading water and clearing throats that altered his message a little. At any rate, I thought he said, "Franciscan Ethics." My next volley through the washroom's thicket of cacophanous sounds was much more ambitious and probably utterly inap-

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propriate for that hour of the young day. "Did you know that Lewis Mumford has pointed out that St. Francis and Henry David Thoreau are alike in that they both espouse the wantless life?" Under the circumstances, such a remark could justifiably be regarded as assault. Should I have meditated more deeply on the more salient fact that my involuntary communicant was still unshaven, unexercised, and uncoffeed? Yet as an intellectual gambit, it was timely and appropriate. At least I thought so. It also seemed opportune that Thoreau is a native of Massachusetts. Surely it is not without interest that a distinguished critic of contemporary society, Lewis Mumford, would link St. Francis and Thoreau together on an ethical point. And what a fascinating point it is. Both Francis and Thoreau preached that a person is free to the degree he is *independent* of material things. Our consumer society preaches the opposite, that people are free to the degree that they are dependent on material possessions.

The rolling hills of Massachusetts, attired in their bright summer foliage, were dancing in my mind and I recalled the great love for nature that Francis and Thoreau both shared. It should be a good topic to discuss at the workshop, I mused. Francis and Thoreau have much in common, at least superficially, though their real, substantial difference is really the difference between Christianity and pantheism.

I was in luck. My next-sink neighbor in our porcelain paradise not only possessed keen hearing, graciousness, and affability, but he was also an intellectual. He found the remark most interesting and even wanted to know in what work did Mumford record his observation. Our ensuing conversation led to the suggestion that I might actually come to his college and participate in the Franciscan workshop.

When we parted company, I told him that I would do more reading on the subject and see if I could come up with an acceptable presentation. I promised to call him after I returned to Canada. He gave me his card and thereby informed me of his full title: President and Academic Dean of St. Hyacinth College and Seminary. He explained that he himself was not authorized to invite me to the workshop, but would speak on my behalf with its organizer.

Since the workshop was a little more than a month away, I had plenty of time to meditate on my impertinence. How could I be so brazen as to try to muscle my way into a workshop on Franciscan ethics? And to badger a kindly Franciscan who, no doubt, had hoped he could complete his morning ministrations in peace. Nonetheless, amidst moments of self-castigation, I did do some more reading on the subject and my ideas began to take shape. As key references fell into my lap, my confidence increased and my fear that I was audaciously crashing a conference on Franciscan ethics began to dissipate.

Because St. Francis was on my mind, I found myself telling my daughter Elizabeth about such charming Franciscan stories as the Wolf of Gubbio. The part where St. Francis addressed the menacing wolf as "Brother Wolf' drew an appreciative sigh from her seven-year-old heart. She suddenly remembered that she had a book about St. Francis and ran off to her bedroom to get it. We were all set to embark on some serious Franciscan story-telling when the phone rang. It was the president of St. Hyacinth College with the news that the way had been cleared for me to speak at the workshop. I returned to my daughter and said to her: "You may not believe this, but that was a Franciscan priest in Massachusetts inviting me to talk about St. Francis to other Franciscans!" She looked at me searchingly and after a long pause said: "I don't believe you." But I sensed that underneath her slow and emphatic declaration of incredulity lay a reservoir of doubt. I went on to cite names and places that must have sounded somewhat convincing because she then said to me: "That would be a miracle.!" Maybe it was. St. Francis, at any rate, would have had an easier time believing in a miracle than in a far-flung coincidence. Elizabeth, bless her heart, did believe in miracles (though no longer in Santa Claus), but she had to test them first and make sure they could not be accounted for by a more prosaic explanation. Respecting her appreciation for the pragmatic, I promised to bring back to her hard evidence of my stay at St. Hyacinth. Yet I wonder whether she saw the miracle not so much in Providential as in telepathic terms. Did she believe my Franciscan friend 500 miles away in Massachusetts actually overheard our story-telling and was at once moved to invite me to share the same stories with his confreres? It would be in keeping with the humility of Franciscan friars to enjoy listening to stories told to children retold to them. Come to think of it, isn't this the normal way that Christianity is spread? When children grow up, they tell the world about the God they learned from their parents.

There would be two detours on my way to Granby, Massachusetts. The first was Lake Chatauqua, New York, where I had to speak on a different subject. Lake Chatauqua is a 19th Century Victorian community that is as charming as it is cultured. One afternoon while I was there, a steady downpour kept me imprisoned in the town library. I took this opportunity to acquaint myself with whatever books on St. Francis the library had available. I found one book that was unfamiliar to me and discovered a quotation attributed to Francis that seemed particularly important: "La Cortesia è una delle proprietá di Dio." (Courtesy is one of the properties of God). This phrase was destined to have an important place in my talk.

Francis, being worthy of his name, had a great affection for France and its culture. His mother was French and his father, a merchant who travel-

led to France, brought back with him intrigueing stories of knighthood and courtly love. Francis may have introduced the word "Cortesia" into the Italian language. It reflected a number of qualities — chivalry, politeness, graciousness — which the Poverello of Assisi believed were also attributes of God. But why, I pondered, is the plural word delle used to modify the singular noun proprietá?

My second detour provided me with the answer while I was teaching a course on bio-ethics at Holy Apostles College in Cromwell, Connecticut. One of my students, a native of Rome, Italy, explained to me that the plural modifier was a linguistic device that helped to express the notion that God is greater than any one singular individual. Similarly, the Hebrews had employed the plural form Eloim to represent the singular, but grandiose, Divinity. My stay at Holy Apostles was beneficial in another way in preparing me for the workshop. Its president, who had studied Thoreau many years ago, could still quote his prose and poetry from memory. I duly recorded some of the more pertinent samples he recited during our lunch-hour conversations, and eventually incorporated them into my workshop presentation.

At supper one evening, when I first disclosed my plans to speak at the upcoming workshop, my companion at the table just happened to be a young man who was not only interested in becoming a Franciscan, but had already been in communication with the vocation director at St. Hyacinth. He was anxious to see the college and seminary but because he did not have a car, did not have a convenient way to make the hour's trip to Granby. I invited him to accompany me. He accepted, and we had a most pleasant two-day sojourn.

When we arrived at St. Hyacinth, we entered by way of the front door, which, from a practical point of view, was the wrong door. While we were waiting in the reception room, my eyes fell upon a stack of plasticized cards showing St. Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio. My vindicating evidence for my daughter was at hand. One of the workshop's participants, as it turned out, proved to be rather knowledgeable about this famous legend and apprised me of the latest scholarship done on the symbolic meaning of the wolf that Francis had tamed.

Later, when I was being shown around the college, I was introduced to a delightful nun from Italy who cooked meals for the Friars. When I asked her to identify her home town, she said: "Campolieto." "My father was born in Campolieto," I happily informed her, "in the province of Campabasso!" She was absolutely flabbergasted. Since she had arrived in America, she had not met a single soul who was either from that tiny village or even knew of somone who was born there.

The coincidences (or Providential occurrences) were multiplying. I also

noted that where I was staying in Cromwell was flanked on one side by the Padre Pio foundation of America (Padre Pio was a Franciscan Capuchin) and on the other (and across the street) by a woodland shrine to Francis of Assisi. I was literally surrounded by the spirit of St. Francis. It seemed undeniable that Francis had been my constant travelling companion ever since I left home where, incidentally, "St. Francis of Assisi" is the patron of my parish.

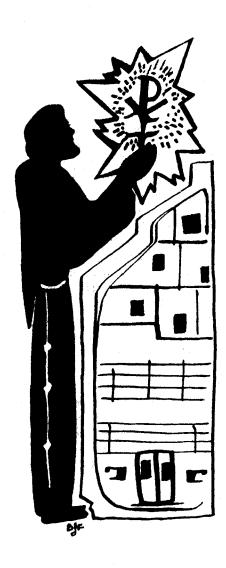
My two workshop presentations were well received and I was most graciously entertained by the good friars of St. Hyacinth. Among the souvenirs I brought back for Elizabeth were the picture of St. Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio, and a holy card citing a provide saying of St. Francis: "Love creation but love the Creator most." She still proudly displays both of these items on her bedroom bulletin board.

After I returned to Holy Apostles College, I decided to transpose my oral presentations into a publishable article. Soon thereafter, I returned to Canada and mailed the newly finished piece to the editors of The Cord. Yet I had the nagging sense that it was not saile scomplete. Something was missing. The ending needed to be rounded out better. A book entitled Not As The World Gives was lying on my desk. I had acquired it while I was in Cromwell primarily because it was written by one of my favorite authors — Dietrich von Hildebrand. But I had brought it back to Canada unread. I now opened it and began reading, I quickly realized, to my amazement, that von Hildebrand had written it to present St. Francis' message to today's laymen. As I continued reading I soon found the key that I needed to give my article its proper conclusion. I then dispatched my revised version to the editors of The Cord and they published it a few months later in their Christmas issue.

Informing me that my article would be published in The Cord, one of the editors stated that I would receive three cones of the issue in which it appeared and that, regrettably, would be "the only form of compensation" they could give me. "How wonderfully in keeping with the spirit of poverty that Francis so loved," I thought. But it was also delightfully ironic, for travelling with St. Francis was a more joyful and extraordinary a compensation than I could ever have imagined.



Cloud of Witnesses



I dreamt I was Home today, while driving (winding really . . .) all along Northern Boulevard. My soul had this dream or memory, she saw the road softly evaporating into the womb of the dark tunnel. where she passed to the lullaby of Durufle's Requiem into the heart of the Light. Francis came first, not as I had seen him in Assisi O, he was bitter cold then! His haunted eyes ached to express the love within --even his frame leaned Heavenward. And the hands, the feet and the side were mute also for winter had all but sealed them frostbitten and silver blue. But now, released from that body of death the frozen wounds opened, reopened, and opened again like summer roses

loved by the sun,

and he made their gesture of welcome and embrace. And then. my boy was there. Aloysius greeted me as his long lost and awaited relative. He gestured too (still pale) with the flickering hands of light Guercino's painting promised. Aloysius motioned to my room but before I could enter in, an ocean of sound like the flap and flutter of a thousand wings swept by me and the Spirit said: "This is the Cloud of Witnesses you have cried with, prayed with, anointed and died with, and carefully tucked into the womb of the dark tunnel. They bid you return home and await the Father's will. There be as the Lowly Handmaid . . . powerless and conversant only with

William Hart Mc Nichols, S.J., S.F.O.

angels."

St. Bonaventure's Sermons: Resource for Lectio Divina

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THE GREAT BODY of medieval sermons appeals to us to help a congregation grappling with modern problems, caught in the cross-fire between faith and conduct. Few of them, if any, could be preached as they stand, in front of people attuned to many voices other than Christian, men and women sensitized to the short and pithy, to the advertisement-type homily. They should have to be, not merely translated from Latin, but transposed into an entirely new key. The scholar will always find them of great value as monuments of Christian literature. Great works of art in themselves, they presupposed the highest education and training and the most meticulous preparation (for preaching was itself a whole art — ars concionandi — the noblest of all, even from an academic point of view). The audience was, in a sense, "classified" by the time the sermon had become a doctoral rather than a strictly pastoral discourse. But this does not mean that none of the great sermons were "popular"; far from it; many were delivered to vast congregations of ordinary Christians. Nevertheless, something more akin to the original design of the more formal of these sermons is served by their incorporation as readings in the Liturgy of the Hours; but for this there are criteria, which it is not within our scope to delve into.

The Dimensions of Scripture

The most striking thing, however, about the typical medieval sermon must be its rootedness in the Bible; Scripture pervades it from end to end, and the entire discourse is built up around a text. It was, above all else, an expounding of Scripture, with a view to its (often detailed) appli-

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Biblical Meditations

In the broad sweep, the advances made in exegesis and in biblical scholarship generally, rarely lessen the value or interest factor of these great (written and preached) "meditations." Thus it is that as ready-made biblical meditations they can perhaps best serve us today. Their structure and technique (see Bougerol 137-138), their reflective selection of a "theme" and (usually) "protheme" and incorporation of an "initial prayer"; their isolating of a scriptural line and examination of its elements — cause, phrase, or word — all this can help us to select our own "prayer word" and can spark off our personal reflections.

Used for a lectio divina, these sermon-meditations could be a great instrument of contemplation. Lectio divina, that ancient form of contemplative reading of Scripture, belonging to the monastic tradition, is a prayer form that appeals to many people nowadays. Lectio is a "looking into" (inspectio) as well as the "teasing out" of a pericope. The Bible is its principal material, though it also uses the commentaries of the Fathers and the classic monuments of spiritual literature. Comprising in its technique elements of both study and prayer, lectio is an attentive soul's close scrutiny of the Scripture. The root of all lectio, and its purpose, is, nonetheless, contemplation — that intuitive gaze in stillness, the gaze of con-centration upon God whose word is allowed to penetrate the fibre of one's being. Meanwhile, a contemplative reading of the word is in reality its mystical interpretation; the contemplation sought is an "inward understanding" of the word (the intellectus mysticus of St. Gregory the Great).

The medieval sermon, for its own scope, follows similar lines. A text is singled out and analysed with a view to its "inward understanding." A clause, a phrase, a paragraph, a word, is regarded as an element in the

stages of understanding: each is looked into, and the honey of the purpose of its being (there in Scripture for our salvation) is extracted. Many authorities, mainly patristic ones, are cited in support of interpretation or application.

Lectio in a Seraphic Key

St. Bonaventure's sermons, a great number of which are extant, are especially companionable with Bible meditation. Bonaventure develops a captivating biblical theology out of the literal sense; but the "Prince of mystics" is equally at home with the mystical interpretation. His habitual approach is through "Affectivity" and his whole thrust is towards contemplation, the very goal, according to him, of spiritual life itself. Meanwhile, his fondness for the "signal-quality" in words and his ability to unearth multiple meaning, often open out what in his writings is a single term into a medium of transcendence. Nor is the Seraphic Doctor's probing for multiple meaning indulged in for its own sake; what it does is to employ our *imagination* in the service of our whole spirit. Imagination, in turn, bursts open fixed horizons and continually challenges established positions, and thus becomes an agent of moral and spiritual conversion. This happens to belong to the very stuff of which deep Scripture-rooted prayer is made.

A Franciscan should derive inspirational benefit from the biblical theology elaborated in many of the sermons of St. Bonaventure. In several major ones a leit-motif will be evangelical perfection. This fulfilment of the gospel is a goal which entails two important moves: firstly, one must become that gospel's disciple (= pupil) by hearing and listening to it as a word and message; reciprocally, some become disciples (= messengers) by teaching and preaching the gospel as doctrine. Secondly — though not secondarily — one must become the gospel's disciple (= follower) by observing its directives and counsels in a way of life totally obedient to and structured in accordance with the Good News. Now, a contemplative lectio of the word constitutes one of the vital steps, necessary at least at some stage, if one is to be transformed by the gospel; it is already, therefore, one of the ways in which the gospel may be "carried out" and "observed." Thus, as an inward, mystical observance, lectio divina becomes a method of following out the interior evangelical journey.

The sermon which follows in translation, uses a short Lucan line as text and is repleted with Franciscan topics. It treats of poverty as the prerequisite of gospel discipleship; of following in Christ's "footprints." It quotes the Rule of the Friars Minor, and makes an indirect recall of St. Anthony's preaching; love in fraternity is depicted as a reflection of the Trinity.

Christ's teaching took the depth⁸ of poverty as its starting-point. The principal foundation of evangelical perfection is firmly set in unencumbered poverty. Hence Christ's Apostles, who made the holy gospel their profession and on whom the Lord was to found his Church, are shown, in the words chosen for text, to have left everything: Leaving all things, they followed him.

In the statement are indicated two things which everyone needs for salvation, viz, to discard and to attain: to discard whatever hampers and drags one back; to attain the completeness that prepares one for action. In the words chosen as our text, Leaving all things means disregarding what is earthly. Admittedly, not everyone is bound to actually relinquish all; only those in a "state of perfection", who are bound by the vow of poverty. At the same time, all are bound to leave off an attachment to things; not to be overwhelmed by this attachment to the point of setting their heart on fleeting wealth and, upsetting the order of things, choosing the creature in preference to God.

His habitual approach is through "affectivity" and his whole thrust is towards contemplation, the very goal, according to him, of spiritual life itself.

The second point in the text, they followed him, has to do with the desire for what is eternal.

Leaving all things, then, is about whatever hampers us and drags us back. The Apostles left everything, like true envoys whose mission would resemble that of Christ; and they did this in three ways. First, by ridding themselves of oppressive weights, so as to follow after Christ more easily; second, by releasing themselves from fetters which would slow them up, so as to be unencumbered in denouncing evil; third, by removing stumbling-blocks, so as to be more effective in promoting good.

To begin with, they "left all" by throwing off oppressive weights to be more free to run after Christ who rejoiced as a giant to run the way of evangelical perfection, because no earthly load weighed on him. Indeed from the first moment of his birth he consecrated poverty in his own body; he lived in the world in a most poor fashion, associating with the

poorest of human beings; then at the end, naked he lay on the cross, and after his resurrection he appeared in the guise of an outsider. It follows that someone who is destined to be an envoy of Christ ought also to walk even as he walked. But anyone who travels in decorated chariots and horses, in richness and display, is neither following in the trail nor taking the place of Christ, because his way of life lacks the signs of poverty which are the credentials of Christ's envoy.

Peter, with this in mind, addressed the Lord, in Matthew 19:27.

Behold we have left all things and followed you: what therefore shall we have?

And Jesus said to them: Amen I say to you that you, who have left all things and followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the seat of his majesty, you also shall sit on twelve seats judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Now Peter was a fisherman; poor, he sought a living by the work of his hands. And still he has the confidence to make the rather large statement, 'We have left everything and followed you.' And he is inquiring about remuneration when he asks, 'what therefore shall we have by way of reward?' The reason why he said this is that, as Gregory states, "As much was left aside by his followers as what those who were not his followers might have set their hearts on."

So, well done, Peter, well done, all you other Apostles! By leaving all you obtained the biggest reward. In no other way, to be sure, did you win command of the Christian faith; never would the Lord have founded his Church on you, never raised you to judgment seats, without first bringing you down to this, the rock-bottom, and fixing you there. Indeed, this is the summit of highest poverty which has established you, Apostles, as heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven: it has made you poor in possessions but exalted you in virtue." Surely it is not to be wondered at that the height of poverty so exalted them, so enthroned them, made so much of them. For just as we observe in the material world how the rarer and lighter an object is, the higher it rises; so is it with the spiritual. The purer a person is, and more full of the capacity grace gives to rise out of earthly greed, the higher is his ascent.

Next, they "left all" as though releasing themselves from fetters which held them in check, in order to be more sure of themselves in denouncing evil. The Apostles, to be sure, gave nobody a wide berth where either passion for gain or dread of its loss was involved, as if chains of some sort held them in check. Nor did they refrain from speaking the truth; on the contrary, "the old and the young, without distinction, they smote with the javelins of truth." Whereas, the anxiety attached to earthly power

and the press of business in worldly ambition generate an incertitude before the counterfeit, in people who have no wish to abandon the earthly. These would rather pay attention to flattery and ambition than take their stand by the truth.

This is why Mathathias and his sons, leaving behind all they had in the city, fled to the safety of poverty (lest they should consent to the orders of King Antiochus who was introducing the Jews to idolatry, after they had constantly said no to his messengers and even killed them out of zeal for the Law and for truth). We read of them in 1 Maccabees 2:27ff:

Mathathias cried out with a loud voice in the city, saying: Everyone who has zeal for the law, and maintains the covenant, let him follow me. So he and his sons fled into the mountains and left all that they had in the city.

To those blessed men, it was more glorious to be killed while holding to what was true than to be praised while clinging to what was false. O how glorious it is to die for truth! It crowns the one who proclaims it, even if it doesn't convert the one who hears it. O God, would that today there were many like Mathathias, many like John the Baptist, many more Apostles Paul! — people who would not suppress the truth before leaders, and especially before prelates. No behavior does more harm than that of leaders, more especially prelates. As Gregory says in the Pastoral Rule: "Nobody in the Church does more hurt than he who holds the name and rank of dignity or sanctity but whose conduct is perverted. This is because nobody has the pluck to confront such a man with his faults. Instead, a sinful man is honored and respected for his status, while his wrongful behavior spreads as the shocking example it is."

The third move in "leaving all" was to get rid of so many stumbling-blocks, in order to promote good more effectively. Bearing upon this is what is said in Matthew 4:19, Come after me, and I will make you fishers of people. And at once they left their nets and followed him. See here how the Apostles, in order to fish for people more effectively, left earthly things, in case they would present a stumbling-block to those they were to fish for. Just as the way one lives speaks louder than the tongue, and example is better than words, so is an unworldly attitude together with mortification, more persuasive. One who is poor and has crucified self with its passions and desires is more persuasive than one who is rich and indulges in extravagant care of himself. Who would ever have believed anything the Apostles said about unworldliness, if they were seen to be wordly men at heart? Had the Apostles been men who were out to make themselves securely rich — why, people everywhere would have run

from them: of at least, their conduct would have kept people far from the love of God.

But as we now know, it was the net of poverty which drew people to love and praise God. It was through the pattern these men set, when wordly greed, the root of all evils, was demolished, that Christ's poverty was implanted in the hearts of the faithful; a poverty which is the principal foundation of every good. Today on the contrary, the salvation of souls has deteriorated into something carried on for gold and revenues.

On the other hand, lest perchance our praise of poverty be looked on as a condemnation of the temporal property of the Church, let this be said: the Church's temporal goods are something to be *admitted* on a temporary basis. They are even to be *furthered* howsoever for a number of reasons: for the honor of the Bridegroom, for the adornment of the Bride, for feeding the traveller, for caring for the poor, for comforting the sick, for the devotion of the faithful, and also for community use. And when for these reasons they are allowed, the perfect integrity of prelates will not be diminished thereby. Temporal goods, if properly managed, will increase merit; if, however, they be badly managed, they can only pave the way to damnation. ¹²

The second point in our text is the words, they followed him, meaning they attained the completion which prepared them for action. In three ways the Apostles followed Christ as End and Completion of every good: humbly, without any pride over the light they received from inner knowledge; harmoniously, without ill-feeling, their incentive being love and fraternal fellowship; perseveringly, with the steadfastness needed for bearing continual affliction. Following Christ, then, in this threefold manner, the Apostles were in all respects restored to the blessed Trinity. For, with the brightness of inner vision guiding their reasoning, they were restored to the Son's wisdom. By the love of fraternal charity rectifying their desires, they were restored to the Holy Spirit's kindness. By the vigor of manly steadfastness controlling their resentments, they were restored to the Eternal Father's power. These three, viz, an understanding of divine things, a harmonious relationship with others, and an acceptance of adversities, each one of us needs for salvation.

To begin with, they followed Christ *humbly* and without pride over the brilliance of their internal knowing. For humility it is that uncovers the brilliance of understanding. Pride shuts it out; pride, even 'as it puffs us up, has the effect of clouding over' and robbing us of the light of truth. In John 8:12 we read:

I am the light of the world;

I am the actual light of the world, (Our Lord is saying), 'since I am not merely receiving light from somewhere else. From the fountain of my wisdom, in fact, streams every other created light. And hence, anyone who follows me in humble attitude is not walking in the darkness of error and ignorance; instead, he will have the light of life and of grace, which will give life to his heart and light to his mind.'

Secondly, they followed Christ *harmoniously* without ill-will, their incentive being love and fraternal fellowship, 1 Peter 2:21 bears upon this:



Christ suffered for us and left an example for you to folllow in his steps. He had done nothing wrong, and had spoken no deceit.

O what a lovely statement that is! O how true it is, and worth remembering and applauding! Christ suffered for us who had to be cleansed of every sin; leaving you an example of charity and kindness, that you should follow his steps as they lead you on to the heights of perfection.

If someone asks: 'What was it that moved the Son of God to suffer for us?' — there is no answer to be found other than his kindness and his boundless merciful charity; just as 1 John 3:16 puts it:

In this we have known the charity of God, because he laid down his life for us.

And since that example of great kindness is worthy of imitation, it adds: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Well did the Apostles carry this out: they abandoned all ill-feeling, and willingly laid down their lives to save all the elect. Each one of them could have said:

My footsteps have followed close in his, I have walked in his way without swerving (Job 23:11)

His footsteps, let me say, of charity and kindness; my footsteps, with all the longing love of my heart, for it is great glory to follow the Lord¹⁴ in perfect charity.

Thirdly, they followed Christ perseveringly, with the steadfastness needed for bearing with unremitting torment, as referred to in Luke 9:23:

If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

If anyone wishes to come after me, humbled and mortified, let him deny himself, going through the submissiveness of humility; and take up his cross of unremitting torment, and follow me perseveringly right up to the entrance to the eternal palace. And rightly, in that authoritative source, is humble submissiveness, meaning the denial of one's own will, mentioned first. Next comes the harshness of penance and mortification—"his cross" is what this is called here. And the reason for it is that mortification of self is ruined sometimes by pride, sometimes by gluttony. On this account, if we want to carry the cross of mortification faultlessly, we ought to be humble in heart and abstinent in body.

The sermons are frequently concluded with a prayerful summation of the theme or of some other key-idea that had been developed. If the above sermon had been used as the basis of a *lectio divina*, the following prayer might be considered as a suitable ending. ¹⁵

Let us therefore ask Christ our Lord
to prepare us to lift up our soul
to the Son's wisdom
by dint of the brilliance of faith,
to the Holy Spirit's mildness
through the ardor of charity,
to the Father's power
by means of the certitude of hope;
in such manner
that we may be able to win the endowment
of unveiled vision,
peaceful enjoyment
and untroubled possession [of God, Three in One]...

Notes

¹For the shape and features of the medieval sermon, and for the place of Scripture in Bonaventure's theology, see J. G. Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure* (Paterson, N.J., 1964), in particular 136-144.

²The Works of Bonaventure, Vol. 2, The Breviloquium (Paterson, N.J., 1963),

Prologue, 3-16,

³ A classic definition runs: Sedula Scripturarum inspectio cum animi intentione.

⁴Bonaventure's own preparation was born of peaceful recollection, when he could find it, and he required prayer and reflection of the Scripture teacher, preacher and learner (e. g. in his *Luke Commentary*). He could have made his own what St. Gregory said, in the *Moralia*, on the contemplative reading of the Bible: "The voice of God is heard when, with minds at ease, we rest from the bustle of this world and ponder the divine precepts in the deep silence of the mind."

⁵E. g. Sermon 1 for 3rd Sunday of Advent, Opera Omnia (Quaracchi) IX, 57-58. Through the text of Jn 1:26, There has stood one in the midst (middle) of you... Christ is contemplated as Center, Middle Point, Mediator etc. in three senses: in the incarnation he is the appropriate connecting medium between divinity and humanity; in his life he is the proper middle point in the regulation of all virtue and perfection; in his passion he mediates the influx of life and grace to the Church.

⁶E. g. the sermon on St. Francis, *Learn from me... Op Omn* IX, 590-597; on St. Anthony, IX, 535-538; for Septuagesima, 195-198; sermon 1 for 4th Sunday of Lent. 231-234.

⁷Opera Omnia IX, 372-375. In its trinitarian references this sermon resembles that for 1st Sunday of Advent, 23-26.

8"Altitudo" means both "height" and "depth." "Depth" here seems more suitable in the context.

⁹The (Later) Rule of the Friars Minor, Chapter 6, with "Apostles" substituted for "my dearest brothers."

¹⁰From a responsory in the Office of St. Anthony composed by Julian of Speyer.

¹¹Regula Pastoralis Part 1, chapter 2.

¹²The same remarks are made in (Apologia Pauperum, OpOmn VIII, c. VIII, n. 14), Defence of the Mendicants (The Works of Bonaventure IV, Paterson, N.J., 1966) Chapter VIII, no. 14, 178-179.

¹³The Quaracchi editors give "supernal;" but one manuscript reads "fraternal"

and this latter seems to suit the context better.

¹⁴Ecclesiasticus 23:38 according to the Vulgate.

¹⁵It appears as the conclusion to Sermon 1 for 1st Sunday of Advent (OpOmn IX, 26); a section on the Trinity in this and one in the present sermon closely resemble each other.

Love's Forest

In ancient forests
Crickets sing: "Will you listen
to our tale of Love?"

"Roam unbridled paths til you hear silent footsteps approach, — God is nigh!

Heart, wild with laughter, Leaps with you and skips a beat; 'Tame the fox in me!'

Seek not fame, fortune, For Poverty claims your soul . . . Earthen Vessel's gold!

Violets meekly nod — Knowingly deck path you trod . . . Feet caught in briers! Beyond Redwood trees, Nesting rattlesnakes hissing — Heart abruptly stops.

Days, nights, quickly go — Sun, Gentle Wind, lift me high; Let me live, not die!

Blaze a trail, follow — Share all you are with others, For Love, your Brother!

Beyond mountain's peak, Silent footsteps await you. 'My Heart, I Am LOVE!' "

Sr. Barbara Mary Lanham, OSF

St. Francis and Some Traditions of Indian Spirituality

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It was in 1980 that I had the privilege of spending a month in an ashram¹ in Rishikesh at the foot of the Himalayas in India. While talking to a Hindu sannyasi² there, I discovered for the first time that St. Francis was considered as one of the patrons of Hindu Ashrams. They consider him as a sannyasi, a jeevanmuktha.³ Now that I am doing Franciscan Studies at St. Bonaventure University, I am beginning to see more clearly how Francis had been a sannyasi. And, of course, now that I am living in a foreign country, I appreciate my own Indian culture even more!

According to Indian spirituality, life is considered as a yatra, a journey or pilgrimage, toward an ultimate goal which is Moksha: release, liberation, salvation. The goal has always to be kept in mind and pursuit relentlessly with concentrated single-minded concern, ekagratha. It can be compared to a target to be hit in one go with the bow and arrow. Either one hits it or misses it! The image of the arrow shows direct pursuit in a straight line: it rules out a round-about way or wandering or drifting or stopping on the way for a while; or taking life easy, following a leisurely speed (Amalorpavadass, 151).

When Francis found the "hidden treasure" (Mt. 13:44), he sold everything in order to buy the "precious pearl" (Mt. 13:45), like the apostles who sold everything to follow Christ. Free of all baggage (Omnibus, 236) Francis continued his pilgrimage towards his ultimate goal of possessing Christ by following His teaching and footprints (AB, 109). With one-pointed concentration and single-minded concern Francis pursued his relentless quest for the Absolute.

If life is a pilgrimage, it consists of stages. One reaches his ultimate goal by passing through four stages:

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- 1. Brahmachargia, the stage of discipleship and initiation into adult life through the study of the Vedas (Scripture). It implies a life devoted not only to study but also to the practices of austerity which are intended to purify the disciple's soul. He must learn to master his senses, to keep himself from all impure contacts, to be satisfied with a frugal way of life, to practice the virtues appropriate to his status, such as humility and obedience (Lingat, 45-46). A brahmachari is initiated into the experience of God (brahmavidya knowledge of God). This is done not so much with books and studies, as by the guidance of a guru. The disciple lives with the guru just as the apostles lived with Jesus. A disciple sits at the feet of the guru to listen to his words of wisdom. He oberves the guru's way of life by working with him and for him.
- 2. Grahastha, the stage in which one gets married and becomes a householder. He is involved in the world and fulfills his duties to family, society, and profession.
- 3. Vanaprastha, a stage during which one goes to the forest. While engaged in household duties and social activities, one should not get so engrossed in them that he forgets his ultimate goal. Hence one goes to the forest for spiritual renewal. He has a fixed abode, a hermitage. He should give himself over to meditation and to study, clothing himself in bark or the skin of animals. He is to abstain from speaking for long periods and he undertakes a prolonged fast, drawing nourishment from the fruits, flowers, roots and vegetation of the forest. Normally the austerities which he undergoes during his life as a hermit are intended to prepare him for the fourth and the last stage sannyasa (Lingat, 46).
- 4. Sannyasa, a life of total detachment and renunciation in view of total possession of the Absolute. His entry into this new phase of existence is marked by an inspiring ceremony wherein he performs a last sacrifice of particular solemnity. He announces in a loud voice his resolution to become an ascetic. He is thereupon dead to the world. He begs for the food needed to keep him alive. He will wander without care for this world or for heaven. He is not allowed to settle in one spot except during the rainy season. He may live only on alms and must eat only once a day, and then only certain natural foods. He should cover himself with rags or even go naked. Thus liberated from all ties with the world, indifferent to joy as to pain, to truth as to lies, he will search only the Atman, the Spirit (Lingat, 46-47).

The above descriptions of the stages of life is very ideal and very few complete them to perfection. All need not physically go through the four

stages but the values and dimensions of each stage are important and indispensable for everyone who undertakes the spiritual quest. In general, the stages are accomplished in various degrees.

Francis seems to have gone through these stages, though not chronologically. He took sannyasa when he stripped himself completely naked in the Bishop's court and announced: "From now on I can freely say 'Our Father who art in heaven, not father Peter Bernardone, to whom, behold, I give up not only the money, but all my clothes too. I will therefore go naked to the Lord" (Omnibus, 372). Francis discards everything that speaks of worldy values and directs his energies to what concerns God alone so that "only the wall of flesh should separate him from the vision of God" (Omnibus 241).

Before Francis took up sannyasa, he did go through the stages of vanaprastha and brahmacharga. Francis was initiated into the experience of God (Brahma Vidya) by God Himself. Jesus was his Guru. He says, "While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world" (AB 154). He often retired to hermitages and to abandoned churches and to lonely places in the wilderness (LM 10) to seek the will of God in prayer and penance. Francis listened to his Guru in the scriptures, in deep contemplation, in the Eucharist, in all of creation, in his superiors, and in the events of life.

Francis learned brahmavidya from the scriptures. The Word of God directed his path as he searched for direction, and he was told: "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me" (Mt. 19:2). Francis exclaimed: "This is what I wish, this is what I seek, this is what I long to do with all my heart" (Omnibus, 247), and he went about doing what he was told by his guru, Jesus, through the words of the Gospel.

Francis listened to his guru in deep contemplation. Bonaventure says: "He tried to keep his spirit always in the presence of God, by praying to Him without intermission... Whether he was walking or sitting, at home or abroad, whether he was working or resting, he was so fervently devoted to prayer that he seemed to have dedicated to it not only his heart and his soul, but all his efforts and all his time" (LM 10:3). Celano tells us that "often without moving his lips, he would meditate within himself and drawing external things within himself, he would lift his spirit to higher things. All his attention and affection he directed with his whole being to the one thing which he was asking the Lord, not so much praying

as becoming himself a prayer (Omnibus, 440-441). Thus Francis let himself be instructed by Jesus, his guru, who dwelt in the cave of his heart as he spent hours in the solitude of the caves with an open mind and an open heart.

Francis approached the eucharist with great unction, reverence, love and devotion because he was so sensitive to the intimacy of God in this sacrament. He admonished his brothers: "See, daily He humbles Himself (cf. Phil 2:8) as when He came from the royal throne (Wis 18:15) into the womb of the Virgin; daily He comes to us in a humble form; daily He comes down from the bosom of the Father (cf. Jn 1:18) upon the altar in the hands of the priest" (AB 26-27).

All of creation was a book of revelation for Francis. He saw God's beauty in the beauty of creation. As a yogi who has achieved harmony with nature. Francis was able to communicate with creatures as persons, and he would call them to praise the Creator along with him. The Canticle of Brother Sun is just one of the examples of his way of praising God through and for creation. In his attitude toward creation he is very much like a Hindu sage who sees God's manifestation in all the works of nature: in earth and fire and air and water, in plant and animal and man. Extraordinary sacredness is attached to every created thing in India. The earth is sacred and no ploughing or sowing or reaping can take place without some religious rite. Eating is a sacred action and every meal is conceived as a sacrifice to God. Water is sacred and no religious Hindu will take a bath without invoking the sacred power of the water which descends from heaven... Air is sacred, the breath of life which comes from God and sustains all living creatures. Fire is sacred. especially in its source in the sun, which brings light and life to all creatures, so also the plants and trees. Animals are sacred, especially the cow which gives her milk as mother; but also the elephant, the monkey and the snake. Finally man is sacred. Every man is a manifestation of God but especially a holy man, in whom the divine presence can be more clearly seen (Griffiths, 154).

Did Francis go through the stage of grahastha? Though the word grahastha literally means the married state of life, it implies solidarity with the world, involvement in society and contribution to it without evasion and escapism. Francis certainly did involve himself in society. In fact, his attention was drawn to the most unwanted, the marginalized people of his society, the poorest of the poor and the lepers. He saw the broken body of Christ in them. Francis lived with lepers in solidarity and served them most diligently for God's sake (Omnibus, 638-639). Furthermore, Francis went about preaching the good news of love, calling people to penance and wishing them God's peace which he himself experienced

deep within. The Legend of Perugia (Omnibus 1022-1023) gives an account of how Francis was an instrument of peace and brought about reconciliation between the bishop of Assisi and the Podestá by sending his brothers to sing the Canticle of Brother Sun which he had composed. David Flood (91) considers chapter fourteen of the Earlier Rule of St. Francis as a model of social action, a model which he describes as "Francis and his brothers received of others and shared with them.... The brothers declared their solidarity with the lepers: they made the goods of life circulate among all."

For Francis, "the reason for entering into a hermitage was not for escaping from reality but rather, in order to enter more deeply into it. It is to seek the Kingdom of God and His justice. This Kingdom is found, not by escaping from the world, ourselves, or others, but by a contemplative discovery of God in the world, ourselves and others" (Carrozzo, 149). Francis was a contemplative in action. For him there was no conflict between contemplation and the service of others. Fr. Bede Griffiths (1) has explained well how an ashramite (one who lives in an Ashram) is called to contemplation, to the experience of God in prayer, in meditation and selfless service:

"The priority has always to be given to the inner life, the experience of the indwelling Spirit in the cave of the heart and his demands times of silence, of solitude, of being 'alone with God'. But this need not and should not be an obstacle to concern for the needs of the world. Contemplative prayer means entering into the depths of one's being where one experiences one's solidarity with all humanity. It consists essentially in the surrender of the 'ego', the private self, and the awakening to the true self, the 'hidden person of the heart,' who shares the concerns of all beings. In other words, it is an awakening to the presence of Christ within and to the action of the Holy Spirit, which is love."

Though Francis spent long hours in contemplation he did not neglect others' needs: "Francis frequently chose solitary places so that he could direct his mind completely to God; yet he was not slothful about entering into the affairs of his neighbours, when he saw the time was opportune, and he willingly took care of things pertaining to their salvation" (Omnibus, 288).

While Francis continued his pursuit toward his ultimate goal under the inspiration and direction of his guru, Jesus Christ, he, in turn, became an upa-guru, one who leads others to the sat-guru, Jesus. No one claims to be a guru "even if one has all knowledge and understands all secrets; has all the faith needed to move mountains" (cf. 1 Cor. 13:2); unless and until a disciple chooses him as his guru. In the case of Francis, he would

say: "The Lord gave me brothers" (AB 154). It was not Francis' personal choice to call others to follow his way of life; the charismatic personality of Francis drew others to follow him as he followed Jesus Christ. His brothers drew inspiration from him. He became the 'forma minorum' to his brothers. He formed them by his very being, and his life spoke louder than his words. As the number of followers increased, there was need that he should give them instructions in writing. And he wrote in his rule how they should live as pilgrims: "the brothers shall not acquire anything as their own, neither a house nor a place nor anything at all. Instead, as pilgrims and strangers (cf. 1 Pet 2:11) in this world who serve the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go begging for alms with full trust" (AB 141) — a life very similar to an Indian Sannyasi.

Francis was a contemplative who preached and engaged in work. His life was a mixture of retreat and activity, of prayer and preaching, of following in the footsteps of Christ. Francis was a living, walking hermitage. He was able to enter into the cave of his heart at any time in any place. He could lose himself in prayer while riding on an ass, or in the middle of a crowd (Omnibus, 443). The brothers were to make of themselves "a home and dwelling place (cf. Jn 14:23) for Him Who is the Lord God Almighty, Father and Son and Holy Spirit..." (AB 128).

Finally, the places where Francis dwelt with his companions, Rivo Torto, the Portiuncula, and the other hermitages, seemed to have been very much like ashrams. An ashram is characterized by its simplicity of life, its primacy of prayer, its openness to all (Vandana, 25-27). An ashram is only a stopping place in which a sannyasi may live for a time — or for all time; but he is always journeying beyond time to the eternal reality. So also, every church, every religion, every human community is only a stopping place, a tent which is pitched on this earth by pilgrims who are on their way to the city of God (Griffiths, 44).

Francis, a sannyasi, lived a life of total renunciation, pursued his ultimate goal with one-pointed concentration and single-minded concern, and hit his target when he received the stigmata on Mount Alverna (Omnibus, 309). He became a "jeevan muktha", a totally liberated man, communicating vibrations of peace and joy to the whole world, to all classes of people of all time and place, up to this very day.



Notes

¹Ashram is a place of intense and sustained spiritual quest for the Absolute by a group of persons around and under the guidance of a guru. Guru is a person recognised by others as a God-realized person and a person of deep spiritual experience. (cvf. Amalorpavadass, 159).

²Sannyasi is a person who makes a complete renunciation of the world in order to seek for God. It is a total abandonment of everything in view of possessing God by self-realization and God-experience. (cf. Amalorpavadass, 158).

³Jeevanmuktha is a person who has attained "Nirvana", total liberation while he is alive.

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