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The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

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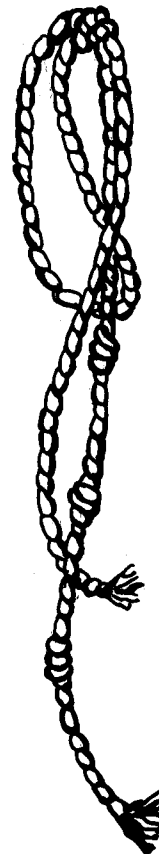
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Standard Abbreviations used in **The CORD** for Early Franciscan Sources

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 Superiors¹

EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful¹

EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo

EpMin: Letter to a Minister

EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order

EpRex: Letter to the Rulers of the People

ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God

ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father

Form Viv: 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

VPLact: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy

¹I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cot: Colonna, First Life of Francis

2Cot: Colonna, Second Life of Francis

3Cot: Colonna, Treatise on Miracles

4Cot: Legend of Saint Clare

5Cot: Legend of Saint Clare

6Cot: Life of Brothers of St. Francis

LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis

LMi: Bonaventure Minor Life of Francis

LP: Legend of Perugia

L3S: Legend of the Three Companions

SC Sacrum commercium

SP: Mirror of Perfection

Francis and Clare, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*. English Omnibus of the *Life of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).

Francis and Clare, ed., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

Response to the *Lineamenta* in Light of the 1994 Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life in the Church

THE SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR OF SAINT FRANCIS

In the past twenty-five years, Franciscan life has witnessed an energy and revitalization of charism that is both gift and task.¹ In light of the 1994 Synod we offer the following responses to the *Lineamenta*:

Prologue

The Franciscan charism is a gift given to the Church through Francis and Clare of Assisi and their followers. The Franciscan life includes elements from both monastic and apostolic religious life, but has its uniqueness. The emphasis is on neither a common place centered on contemplation and the praise of God, nor on a common task centered on the concrete mission of service to the Church and world. It is rather on a common heart: a prophetic witness to Christ and the whole of his gospel.

Francis and Clare's life for the Church is a call acknowledging the primacy of Christ² with all its implications for a radical way of thinking. Their ability to read the signs of the times challenged them to embrace courageously a new worldview, giving birth to an evangelical movement for the enlivening of the Church.

Elements of the Charism

The Franciscan charism is always and everywhere unbounded. In Francis' own words, "The world is our cloister." With Christ, Firstborn of all Creation, nothing in creation is untouched by the Spirit of the Lord.³ Franciscans seek to proclaim the fundamental Goodness of God in all of life and creation. All of life and creation is a gift from God.

The essence of our life is our relationship with Jesus Christ. Our charism gifts the Church in the world, with a radically simple gospel call where we are

The CORD is indebted to Sr. Kathleen Moffatt, O.S.F. for her work on this issue which focuses upon the Third Order Regular. Sr. Kathleen, Executive Director of the Franciscan Federation Third Order Regular, compiled and edited these materials from the 29th Annual Federation Conference.

all sisters and brothers. Reverencing the Spirit's action and embracing continuous conversion, Franciscans live in mutual obedience to one another and affirm the role of minister as servant among them. This is the essential witness of the evangelical life, the prophetic stance⁴ which Franciscans choose to make for the church and the world.⁵

Grasped by Jesus Christ, "Franciscans follow a gospel form of life. We minister more by example than by words. In all forms of service, we reverence the person and seek to enhance the quality of relationships. The call to inculturate the gospel is at the heart of the Franciscan charism. Nurtured by our contemplative stance before God and the world, the sisters and brothers are called to be peacemakers⁷ wherever they are.

Franciscan Contribution to the Church and the World

With all of creation as holy ground, nothing can be ignored by Franciscans. The call to be one with all of creation and all people, especially with the marginal and the oppressed, is fundamental to our presence in the world. This presence is rooted in Christ and for Christ.

In our evangelical life we have no dichotomies. We are not sometimes contemplative and sometimes active; now in community and then in mission. We stand with the poor while not ignoring the needs of others. This life has been and continues to be pondered and inculturated. In each century Franciscans have tried to read the signs of the times and respond to them appropriately. However, some essentials remain constant. Franciscans and contemporary writers capture the essential characteristics of the Franciscan evangelical life. Francis' followers:

- Strive to live in a contemplative relationship to God and to all creation as sisters and brothers.
- Embrace a communal form of life among the people.
- Affirm the role of minister as servant among all.
- Uphold the rejection of violence of every kind, striving to be peacemakers wherever they are in all situations.
- Insert themselves in the world, not having specific works but ready for all kinds of service to promote the Gospel.⁸

The early Franciscans adopted a new worldview as their response to their day. In these times, as sisters and brothers, we are challenged and continue to be challenged to do likewise.

The coming Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life in the Church is a welcomed opportunity to continue the dialogue with our Church authority so faithfully begun by Francis and Clare eight hundred years ago. In this anniversary year of Clare of Assisi (1294-1994), we earnestly ask you to listen and respond with us as God's Spirit leads us in understanding and embracing the call to our evangelical life as Franciscans.⁹

End notes

¹ The mandate of the Second Vatican Council to re-appropriate the founder's charism led the Third Order Franciscans to review the Rule of 1927 against a backdrop of renewed biblical spirituality, an emerging knowledge of the writings of Francis, and the process of constitutional revision. During an International Assembly in Assisi in 1979, the International Franciscan Bureau and Commission were constituted as the bodies responsible to conduct the task of drafting and writing a new rule. On 8 December 1982, Pope John Paul II confirmed *The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis*. Franciscans in the United States have attempted to deepen their awareness and understanding of the Third Order Regular Franciscan heritage, thus the Franciscan Federation Third Order Regular of the Sisters and Brothers of the United States of America was founded in 1965. Membership in the Franciscan Federation consists of over 16,000 sisters and brothers who embrace the Federation's mission of peacemaking, concern for the poor, and care of creation in light of the TOR Franciscan charism.

² Col 1:15-18; Adm 5:1; RegNB XXIII:1; EpOrd 13; EpCler 3; EpFid 11:12; 3EpAg7.

³ Prologue of John 2-4, 10, 16-18; Eph 1:9-10; and Col 1:15-23.

⁴ 2 Pt 1:19 and Rm 8:18-30.

⁵ I.F.C. (*Conferenza Francescana Internazionale*) was established in response to the vibrant era of Third Order Regular collaboration in the writing of a new Rule, promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1982. This affirmation of the new Rule came from an international assembly of over two hundred general superiors. These sisters and brothers expressed the wish that a permanent structure be created to insure that the common bond of their Franciscan heritage and the cooperation achieved would continue effectively. In October 1985 such a structure was approved. Today, the IFC represents over 150,000 Third Order Regular sisters and brothers throughout the world. Membership consists of more than 426 autonomous pontifical and diocesan institutes.

⁶ Mk 1:14-20; Anthony Carrozzo, O.F.M., "The Church in Dialogue with the World," Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Formation Conference, July 1988; Michael Higgins, T.O.R., "The Charisms of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis of Penance," paper prepared for Adrian van Kaam at Duquesne University, December 8, 1988.

⁷ FRANCISCANS INTERNATIONAL - a non-governmental organization at the United Nations founded in 1989 is open to individuals of the Franciscan family, religious and lay, who personally subscribe to the values and the work of the UN; commit themselves to promoting UN activities in the three foci of *care of creation, peacemaking, and concern for the poor*; and work with other Franciscans as a local UN group.

⁸ *The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis and Commentary*. Pittsburgh: Franciscan Federation, 1982; Joseph Chinnici, O.F.M., "Evangelical/Apostolic Tensions," Saint Bonaventure, NY: Super Conference - Our Franciscan Charism in the World Today, July 1987; Video presentation by Joe Chinnici, O.F.M. in 1987 for Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, Aston, PA; Margaret Carney, O.S.F., presentation on the Franciscan Evangelical Life delivered to the General Assembly of the Sisters of St. Francis, Rochester, MN, 1993; Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, O.F.M., Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Stuart Taylor, *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.

⁹ Walter Brueggemann says it well when he asserts: "God's new thing is not a grand religious act but an invitation to a fresh, dangerous social beginning." [Taken from Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel, Interpretation*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990: 27.

The Prophetic Heart: The Evangelical Form of Religious Life in the Contemporary United States

JOSEPH P. CHINNICI, O.F.M.

The Spirit is stirring in the depths of the Franciscan soul, much as the breath of the All Powerful shadowed the waters at the creation (*Gn* 1:2); or Wisdom danced before the throne and passed "into holy souls from age to age and produced friends of God and prophets" (*Wis* 7:27); or the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you" (*Jer* 1:4); or the angel saluted Mary and invited her into the fulfillment of the promises: "Do not fear, Mary. You have found favor with God. You shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus" (*Lk* 1:30); or a man of Macedonia stood before Paul and invited him: "Come and help us" (*Acts* 16:9); or the disciple John "heard behind him a piercing voice like the sound of a trumpet: "Write on a scroll what you now see" (*Rev* 1:10); or lastly, much as the Lord himself quickened the hearts of the people with the words, "Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is brother and sister and mother to me." (*Mt* 12:50)

But this birthing takes time: seven days for creation; the length of history for Wisdom; a journey towards maturity for Jeremiah; nine months, a wedding (*Jn* 2), a requesting to see (*Mk* 3:31), a crucifixion, and a Pentecost for Mary; a lifetime of labors for Paul; the perspective of old age for John; a daily welcoming of the tree of the cross, with its groanings, its blossoms and flowers and fruits, for the disciples. And we, poor Franciscans that we are have been "at it" for less than thirty years. Our own process may be said to have begun with the Second Vatican Council's decree on the renewal of religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, October 28, 1965; it has now brought us to this day, twenty-nine years later.

Fr. Joe Chinnici, Provincial Minister of the Santa Barbara Province of the Order of Friars Minor, teaches at the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, CA. Fr. Joe, author of the book Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic Spiritual Life in the United States, gave this keynote address at the 29th Annual Franciscan Federation Conference in Chicago on August 31, 1994.

Where are we? Let me attempt to address this question in three parts:

- drinking from the springs of remembrance by reviewing some key elements in the rediscovery of our Franciscan charism since *Perfectae Caritatis*
- presenting some reflections on the internal poetics of the evangelical life within the context of the culture of the citizens of our own large nation-state
- offering some brief suggestions, by way of conclusion, on how, in this context, we might continue to construct a social language, a structural skeleton for life's journey into Love.

I. THE SPRINGS OF REMEMBRANCE

Most of us are very familiar with the experience of Clare after the death of Francis. We must take seriously the lamentation of the sisters, who wept with grief as they peered through the little window at the opened coffin (*ICel* 116). Clare relates in her *Testament* how she feared in herself and for the frailty of others (*Test* 37-38). We catch a similar story about Giles, Francis' life-long companion. He spent St. Martin's Lent, from November 1 to Christmas, trying "to resign himself to the certainty that the Poverello would never again come to visit." The saint appeared to him in a dream, and Giles exclaimed: "Oh, Father, I wish I could have a talk with you." Francis replied, "If you want to talk with me, watch yourself."¹ *Stude tibi*: the words recall to mind the ancient monastic discipline of self-reflection designed to help people recover the lost covenantal image of themselves. The whole point is that Francis has not died: he lives on in Giles, and Giles can rediscover Francis by looking at his own experience.

It is the same message to us today: The first step in the recovery of the evangelical vocation is to be convinced that the Franciscan charism did not die on October 4, 1226. "Led by divine inspiration" (*TOR Rule* 2:1; *RegNB* 2:1; *RCL* 2:1) we carry it in our hearts. Yet we do not carry it in exactly the same way as did Francis, Clare, or Giles of Assisi. I mention this at the very beginning because one of the key experiences which many people shared after the Council was that the categories "contemplative," "monastic," "apostolic," and "secular institute" just did not fit our family. We seemed to share in all four forms. The lived experience and value of being "brothers and sisters" in community did not sit well with the purists of the apostolic form; "our cloister is the world" (*SC* 63) hardly resonated with traditionally contemplative religious; itinerancy scratched uneasily inside a monastic garment; the existence of an approved religious rule predated any twentieth century form of secular institute. When the contours of another option, the "evangelical religious life" were first outlined, the feeling emerged in many quarters, "this fits," "this is who we are." The reassuring experience was soon followed by the bewildering recognition that the "evangelical life" was not described in the *Code of Canon Law*, nor in traditional treatises on religious life; our formators did not know what we were talking about, nor did history convey to us any clear tradition, inheri-

tors as we were of a Franciscan rule shaped by an enclosed monastic form and stuffed into the apostolic body of the American Church. The cry, "that's it," was succeeded by "What's it?" This response needs to be shifted to the question: "Who are we?"

Let me review this history of the discovery of our evangelical religious heritage and its ambiguities by analyzing some of the key steps in the renewal process which has taken place since 1965. It seems to that the period can be broken into two parts:

1965-1981: a period marked by the renewal initiated by the Council, a series of extraordinary general chapters, experimental constitutions, and a focused attempt to recover the charisms of our founders and foundresses, both in the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was during this period that critical Latin editions of the writings of Francis and Clare were published and some of you participated in the international meetings for the rewriting of the Third Order Regular Rule.

1982-1994: a period of definition and reception. These twelve years began with the celebration of the eighth centenary of the birth of Saint Francis and have culminated this past year in a similar centenary for Saint Clare. The final *Rule* of the Third Order Regular Franciscans was given approval in 1982; subsequent years have seen a more precise definition of the "evangelical form of religious life," the adoption of definitive constitutions, and the publication of the first complete English language editions of the writings of Francis and Clare.²

In my reflections on the course of this history, the following points become immediately evident:

(1) The renewal initiated by the Council is only in its infancy. In the light of history, the reforms of Lateran IV (1215) and the Council of Trent (1545-1563), probably the most far reaching for religious life, took generations to establish themselves and underwent several mutations and enormous conflicts in the process. These earlier reforms did not contend with such basic issues as the rise of capitalism, industrialization, the revolutions of the eighteenth century, secularization, and the formation of a global church; they did not make any explicit call for a return to the sources.

Among ourselves, we are not yet dealing in any large numbers with the existential impact of the Council on people. In fact, while those who accomplished the major work of renewal in our congregations in the 1960's and 1970's have generally passed out of leadership, the first generation (those who grew up during the conciliar years yet knew the pre-Vatican II forms) has only begun to make its mark; and the second generation, those born during the years of the Council and generally unaware of the purpose and central points of the re-

newal, has not reached a "critical mass." Those of us of the swing generation must genuinely ponder: Are we answering questions no one after us is asking, refusing to address certain issues simply because they are not *our* issues, or are we trying to formulate the tradition so that the best of the past will not be lost yet will address a completely new group of people?

(2) It is clear that we are the first group of American Franciscan religious to have at our disposal critical editions of the sources; a life focused on a single *Rule* as opposed to customs, constitutions, and apostolic needs; and significant new understandings of the rise and growth of the penitential movement. Our nineteenth century forbearers knew nothing of the *Letters to the Faithful* or the evolution of the *Rule* from Nicholas IV (1289) through Leo X (1521). While the *Rule* of 1927 was framed in the context of the 1917 *Code* and incorporated some references to Franciscan sources, the 1982 *Rule* was shaped by a complete recovery of the sources and published before the 1983 revision of the *Code*. We now know in a critical way that significant foundresses such as Francis Bachmann (1824-1863), Ignatius Hayes (1823-1894), Alfred Moes (1828-1899), and others were formed by the constitutional and jurisdictional interpretations of their age. A Counter-reformation Church and the demands of the frontier structured their spiritualities.³ All of this seems to indicate that for enlightenment in our situation we can rely not on the way in which our forbearers envisioned religious life or interpreted its ascetical practices but only on their pursuit of its heart. Yet we have inherited both the renewal occasioned by a return to the sources and our nineteenth century roots.

There are two ways of reading our own experience. Caught as we are in the confluence of Franciscan and apostolic inheritances, which for the first time we are intellectually clarifying, we can feel a loss of identity and mission. Neither "apostolic" nor "evangelical," we can lose ourselves in the quicksand of second guessing, passing judgments from one ideological perspective or another. Our own society almost dictates this approach to us; its political and ecclesiological context begs for dualistic categorizations: male or female, person or fetus, fundamentalist or liberal, lay or religious, the priesthood of all or the ministerial priesthood, apostolic or monastic, active or contemplative. Mission statements, strategic planning, market analysis, product differentiation - all of these methods call for precise analysis and reification. We sit uneasily with ambiguity, irony, metaphor, the coincidence of opposites; we want a clear system, part of the inheritance, I suppose, of an ingrained scholasticism.

There is an alternative. As an historian, I would like to suggest a reread of our own tradition. It seems to me that Francis, Clare, and companions - and even to some extent the nineteenth century foundresses - found themselves in a similar situation, caught as they were in the confluence of a Gospel grace, the

pastoral project of the Church, the categorizations of the society, and the religious wilderness of the time. They discovered that it was the ability, under the inspiration of the Spirit, to hold all of the parts in tension that created their significant evangelical option. All of them refused to short-circuit their social, ecclesiological, and personal reality. They inherited not a scholastic system of *sic et non* but a monastic wisdom of both/and.⁴ Thus they remained in Assisi but lived on its margins; they identified with the *pauperes Christi* but refused the heretical option; they professed obedience to the Church, embarked on new initiatives, and embraced the consequences, placing the cross of Christ at the heart of the struggle over power and vision.

In a society where God has no publicly visible body and the Church very little credibility, the mission of evangelical religious is to open up the experience of God-with-us for Catholic Christians in the Church and for all our fellow citizens in their call to be human.

In such a framework, our contemporary experience poses for us a simple question: While we long for a coherent intellectual and practical position, is it not true that genuine religious life has generally caught fire only in the midst of long, hard, practical experience, the acceptance of life's ironies, the struggle with others to put heart and mind and behavior together, and the discovery of God in that very experience? In this view, the conflicts we experience are part of our evangelical life, not signs of its disappearance. They form the point of entry into the prophetic heart enfolded by Jesus and Mary, the disciples, and our forbearers.

(3) History indicates that in our contemporary experience the first articulations of the "evangelical form of religious life" occurred in the context of the two great *internal* dialogue partners in the process of renewal: the teachings of the Church - whether conciliar, papal, or congregational - and the return to the sources. Thus, the key years of 1982 and 1983 saw the celebration of the centenary of St. Francis, the English edition of his and Clare's writings, the promulgation of the *Codex Juris Canonici* with its application to religious life in *Essential Elements*, and the overarching presentation of "apostolic spirituality," sponsored by the USIG and supposedly applicable to most religious institutes. At that point in time, there was concern simply to articulate the distin-

guishing characteristics of the "evangelical option": a focus on Christ as the head of all creation, the presence of God's glory in human flesh, the goodness of all that exists, witness by word and example, the reality of being brothers and sisters with its consequences for governance and the structures of community, the existence within a congregation of a multiplicity of works based on the talents of each person, and the anthropological foundations of prayer.

Although it was recognized that all religious life is Gospel based, the term "evangelical" referred to the phrase uniquely placed at the beginning of the three rules (Francis, Clare, and the Third Order Regular): *vivere secundum formam s. Evangelii*.⁵ It stood for an alternate religious option, one which moved not from the needs of the world or canonical definition, but from a direct Catholic experience of the Spirit. The focus was thus on being in-Spirit, in-personed in Christ, the formulation in words of a particular experience of God, the recovery of a Franciscan specificity which had its own Scriptural, theological, and ecclesiological warrants. This thrust has continued up to the present in the response of the Federation to the upcoming Synod's *Lineamenta*.⁶

Thus, our vocation to celibate chastity in community needs to be interpreted in such a way as to reinforce each person's (married or single) unique call to desire, possess, and be possessed by genuine love . . .

I think it is important that we continue to stay focused on the fact that our "evangelical option" is a unique form of the religious life. It has been clearly contrasted, at least on a theological level, with its monastic and apostolic counterparts. The different historical records are clear; some of the anomalies between the current *Code of Canon Law* and the evangelical tradition are now being recognized in the Congregation for Religious. Yet, curiously, we Franciscans still seem unaware of the importance of these issues. On a practical level, we often float around in the soup of religious eclecticism. In some instances, the dominant themes continue to be taken not from a grappling with our own experience and tradition, as mixed as it might be, but from religious publications and national religious organizations to which we belong, both of which generally argue from the perspective of the very fine but different tradition of apostolic religious life. I cannot tell you how many times people have asked me to *define* "evangelical life."

The evangelical religious life means witness - witness as a Roman Catholic to the good Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It means taking seriously and

publicly naming the fact that God, who encompasses all things, is the personal heart of the evangelical life and the goal of our desires. It means talking about this search for God, a community of Three in One, whose Word became flesh in the womb of a woman, and giving it a social language which communicates to people *WHO OUR GOD IS AND WHO WE ARE*. It means making visible in the midst of struggle a poetics of love. If this is still elusive, perhaps some further guideposts along the way can be gathered by reflecting on some signs within our contemporary American culture.

II. EVANGELICAL POETICS AND AMERICAN CULTURE

I have tried to describe the incipient emergence of the "evangelical life" from the twin currents of the teachings of the Church and a return to the sources. In the last ten years, our experience has placed on our tables significant developments in another dialogue partner: American culture. Let me describe in this context what I think is the key issue which structures our evangelical poetics.

We live in an exceptionally violent and rancorous era within American culture - and we carry this violence around with us in our own bodies. Abuse and its partner in death, victimization, are the birth twins of a society imploding on itself. We have been here before, except that now we have no frontier which can act as a safety valve. The massive sea rhythms of nativism, spawned by the new immigration, severe economic distress, and the collapse of foreign purpose, have once again uncovered the deeper veins of prejudice in American life: racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, xenophobia. Bitter debates in the local and national political arenas, the move of the media towards tabloid journalism, character assassination by civil suit, procedural wrangling and economic lust in the judicial system, fratricide in the schools - all of these signs are both occasioned by and the cause of the collapse of people's confidence in every major social institution traditionally functioning as a mediator of values and vision: the political process, the legal and educational systems, the family, and the Church.

With no frontier - social, geographical, economic, intellectual, or spiritual - the passions and energies fueling the debates turn in on themselves, implode as nuclear matter implodes to create a social Hiroshima. My own historical sensitivities tell me that what is happening is a virtual attack on, even hatred towards, what it means to be human, what it means to be in relationship, what it means to be both infinite in desire and limited in capacity, full of grace and sin at the same time. Theologically, I think there has entered into our souls a deep prejudice against the Incarnation. We do not like the fact that we and our neighbor are human. The Church can serve as the bell weather compass, as we observe the body of Christ bleeding in our midst, the wounds caused by its own

members. In this atmosphere people reject the hard saying of the bread of life, refuse table fellowship with sinners, leave the neighbor by the wayside, and become scandalized at the water and blood flowing from Christ's side. This atmosphere breeds fundamentalism, gnosticism, reliance on authority, perfectionistic movements. It is also, thank God, the atmosphere in which the evangelical life first flourished - but will it today?

In reaction to this social fracturing, commentators and historians are now giving attention, as they were not in the 1965-1982 period, to the development of the good society, the common good, the public church, mediating institutions, the importance of religious discourse in American political life, and the cohesive force of shared symbols in community life.⁷ Younger people come in with these issues. For ourselves, questions of a common culture, the public significance of religious life, evangelical leadership styles, social mission, the need for congregational coherence, and the symbolic structures of fraternity have become clearer. The Nygren/Ukeritis study and the preparations for the upcoming Synod have made these issues even more evident on a general level.⁸

Our vocation to be poor, in such a way as to indicate that one becomes rich through interdependence . . .

A new question has thus been posed: How do we Franciscan religious in the cultural context of the United States construct a language of congregational social identity reflective of the distinctive elements of the evangelical life? In other words, while continuing to deepen our theological and spiritual articulations, we are challenged to fashion a formational pedagogy, the elements of a practical asceticism, a common social language, a structural skeleton which can embody our evangelical experience. Our workshops are designed to approach this task in four areas: authority, being brothers and sisters, praying, and mission. Let me offer in this address a general perspective with focus in two areas: a) our starting point; b) the recovery of the ancient disciplines.

Our Starting Point:

We often understand Francis, Clare, and the sisters and brothers of penitence as leading lives marked by specific religious characteristics: habit, withdrawal from the world, contemplation, life in community, the practice of the vows, works of charity. Thus we have learned to begin with what makes them

distinctive. But let us approach these practices not from the inside out, but from the outside in. Why is it that Celano in his *Legend of Clare* (Preface), can challenge all of his listeners (all Christians, the citizens of Assisi, Perugia, Rome, and elsewhere, perhaps even a passing infidel) with the following words: "Therefore, let the men follow the new male disciples of the Incarnate Word, [and] the women imitate Clare, the footprint of the Mother of God, a new leader of women." How does it come about that the *Legend* narrates such strong connections between Clare's life and the welfare of the city, or that even unbelievers responded to her public bearing, or that the citizens of the cities saw her life as mediating to them bodily health (21-23, *Process* 2:18, 4:11)? Why is it that Francis of Assisi, a man dedicated to virginity and living in a world with distinctive symbols of communal life, finds all sorts of people, married and unmarried, rich and poor, running after him? (*ICel* 37) What kind of self-understanding would enable him to write letters to the rulers of the people, the clergy within the entire Church, and all the faithful? What in Francis, Clare, and companions would others find so attractive as to be moved to listen to them? Surely, it would not be those elements which made their life distinctive, separate, consecrated into a race apart; it would instead, be characteristics which made their lives one with their fellow citizens.

Our vocation to community, in such a way as to model responsible life as a citizen of the world . . .

From this perspective, what is outstanding even in the early history of the Third Order Regular movement is not what makes it distinctive but what makes it universal: its emergence from the lives of ordinary men and women and their desire to live together for God and neighbor; its identification of the *Letter to All the Faithful* as one of its charter documents; its appeal to the rule of Nicholas IV (1289), where one searches in vain for specific definitions of religious life associated with enclosure and the practice of virginity. Instead, what is discovered in these documents are those elements culturally interpreted as symbolic of every Christian's call to holiness and every person's call to witness a human life with his or her neighbor.

Given this argument, I would simply like to say that in terms of the poetics of the evangelical life in the context of American culture, the challenge lies in our discovering a method of living together, a pedagogy of formation, a practice of asceticism, and a way of speaking about God which opens up to the

human desire for the truly beautiful, the joyful, the affectionate, and the free. In a society where God has no publicly visible body and the Church very little credibility, the mission of evangelical religious is to open up the experience of God-with-us for Catholic Christians in the Church and for all our fellow citizens in their call to be human. Thus, our vocation to celibate chastity in community needs to be interpreted in such a way as to reinforce each person's (married or single) unique call to desire, possess, and be possessed by genuine love; our vocation to be subject-to-all, in such a way as to build up each person's call to be free within the context of his or her social unit (family, neighborhood, city); our vocation to be poor, in such a way as to indicate that one becomes rich through interdependence; our vocation to community, in such a way as to model responsible life as a citizen of the world; our vocation to pray, in such a way as to unveil the presence of God in all people, things, and circumstances.

Our vocation to pray, in such a way as to unveil the presence of God in all people, things, and circumstances.

Paradoxically, the specific difference of the evangelical life lies ultimately in its witness to universality. This penitential vocation is very difficult in its rigor and discipline. It pursues only one truth: through faith, the finding of God in the condition of being human. In its prophetic center, this is a stance of faith. It means the total acceptance of the visibility of Love in the Incarnation, God's presence in limitation, imperfection, death, and even sin, and the crusade to make that love more visible. "God forbid that we should glory" save in this "cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Gal* 6:14).

The Recovery of the Ancient Disciplines:

Practically speaking, the pedagogical and formational methods which Francis, Clare, and others adopted to achieve their goal of making the experience of God visible were inherited from the long tradition of Western monasticism. The difference was that whereas the nuns and monks practiced their asceticism within the social model of the enclosure, and the hermits retreated to the hilltop, and the wandering preachers called for reform, the members of the evangelical alternative mirrored the fruits of these disciplines - a pure heart, humility, thanksgiving, courtesy, gentleness, peace, joy, patience, the blessing of persecutors, love (*RegNB* XVII:15, *RegB* X:8-11, *RCI* X, *TOR Rule* V:20, IX) in their life together as sisters and brothers and in the marketplace of the

city. The disciplines, they discovered through the grace of the Spirit, provided them with a means of addressing the knots of human existence which their own hearts shared with all of their fellow citizens: pride, vainglory, envy, avarice, cares and worries, detraction, complaint, anxiety, dissension, division, wrath, insult (*RegB X:7, RCI X:4, TOR Rule IX:30*). They knew at first hand the connection between the goal of their life - the incarnation of the poetics of love - the breaking of the addictions of social slavery and sin, and the necessity of a pedagogy for the Spirit. Thus, even if people did not agree with the brothers and sisters, they could see by their manner of life that an alternative economic structure based on gift-giving, the social sharing of the fruits of work, and communal living was accompanied by peace, joy, and dignity. Even if people still had trouble living with their spouses, they could at least see that the brothers and sisters were not afraid joyfully to embrace the cross of mutual engagement in their local "community of lepers." It was the democratization of the wisdom which they received which characterized the life of Francis and Clare.

What is the wisdom which we have received? Is it not true that one of our contemporary difficulties is the loss of a tradition of spiritual wisdom in our communities? There are, I think, many different historical reasons for this, not the least of which was the legitimate desire to rid ourselves of the vestiges of an oppressive institutional and sacralized structure. Was it not the experience of many of us in the 1960's, that although we found ourselves practicing daily meditation, examination of conscience, self-disclosure to the superior, silence, communal penances, chapters of faults, and cloister, the overarching subordination of life to order and efficiency coupled with a preoccupation with the control of sin had reduced these practices to formal impositions. The renewal of our life and its social mission dictated for many the rejection of what was termed "the monasticization of the Franciscan life." It is only now, thirty years later, that we are in a position to reassess the personal and communal basis for some of the ancient disciplines. The question now before us is, I think, which of these disciplines and values can legitimately serve our poetics of love? How do we interpret them today? We are engaged in a process of rediscovery.

It would be impossible here to present the application of all of the ancient disciplines, structures, and virtues to the creation of the evangelical option. At this point, let me simply list some of the more significant ones which consistently surfaced in the lives of Francis, Clare, and companions, and which I think might be helpful today.

1. Self-knowledge and self-disclosure. Have you ever wondered why the Franciscan sources are dominated by forms of speech which reveal both the personal experience of God and the barriers to its incarnation? Both Francis and Clare wrote *Testaments*; both engaged in revealing to their companions

"what happened along the way." One of the amazing facts about Clare is not that she had a dream of Francis but that she actually used it as a pedagogical device in the community.⁹ What would the practice of self-knowledge and self-disclosure look like today?

2. Mutual Mentoring. We are used to perceiving Francis as teacher in his admonitions and *Letter to Leo*. Would it be possible for us to see Clare as his "amma," in the ancient tradition of spiritual fathers and mothers? How might this tradition help us today, revealing to us how some of the strongest bonds of our communal life are the willingness to be mentored by those in our community who are spiritually wise and the experience of shared "example and edification"? Are not these realities related to the social task of witnessing?¹⁰

3. Mourning. The reality of "tears," is spread through the writings of Francis, Clare, and companions. It is a gift of the Spirit but is also intricately connected with their experience of the journey through the world, life in the marketplace of the suffering community and world. They are "mourning for lost salvation." Are we rediscovering the experience and meaning of tears in the contradictions of our life?¹¹ Can personal and communal tears wash away our sins?

4. Discretion. Discretion was the "*fons virtutum*" for the ancients, a chief characteristic of anyone in leadership and anyone who wished to distinguish vice from virtue in their experience. It constantly appears in the *Rules* of Francis and Clare under the rubric of "necessity." Who determines "necessity"? How is "discretion" incorporated into the daily experience of the evangelical life? What view of the human person does it presuppose?¹²

5. Pilgrimage. The overarching experience of being in "exile," "on pilgrimage," with its accompanying experiences, disciplines and virtues (loss of security, hardship, hospitality, travel together, perseverance, patience, desire for the promised land) is fundamental to the evangelical option and an image/rubric under which Francis and Clare view their prayer, their life in community, their mission in the world. What are the contemporary consequences of being on "pilgrimage"?¹³

6. Hesychia (solitude, freedom from disturbance). A prerequisite for "mindfulness of God" and keeping a "pure heart" is solitude and the creation of an atmosphere of peace. What role did this ancient discipline and way of praying play in the evangelical life of Francis and Clare? Is it possible to recover this tradition of "praying always" today? What structures of community would support it?¹⁴

7. Lectio Divina. "Life under the Word of God" surfaces constantly in the way of Francis and Clare, who reinterpreted in their own context the Benedictine tradition of "lectio." What is the role of Scripture, its reading and discussion, as

the interpretive base of life in formation programs and the daily practice of the evangelical way?¹⁵

8. *Contemplation.* Is there not a distinctive way of contemplation in the evangelical life, one which builds from the affections and personal social experience, through the Gospels, to participation in God's Love? How does our way of praying relate to the reality of being brothers and sisters on pilgrimage in the world?¹⁶

I believe that each one of these areas of life, founded in the ancient tradition, has a particular evangelical twist and application. We are only now in the process of rediscovering the true meaning of this tradition, its accompanying methods and pedagogy. Does it imply a "re-monasticization" of our way of living? I do not think so; it does imply that we are willing to abandon our eclecticism, to *resocialize ourselves*, and to bring out of our storehouse the flesh and blood of our tradition in such a way as to feed future generations.

III. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

I believe we are in a process of marrying and birthing, creating a family, becoming spouses, mothers, and brothers of our Lord Jesus Christ. (*TOR Rule*, Preface) It is not easy. Learning to love has always a dimension of embracing in darkness, where only the stars guide us. However, I guess I would like to make a plea that we continue to discover, and that we do this with all of our intelligence and practice, making use of the historical tradition and contemporary insights which have been given to us. We need to develop a poetics of love, a politics of how to live together, and a pedagogy of spiritual wisdom. And, in a society and Church which are rife with conflict, I think we need to do this a little more self-consciously:

- Is it possible for us to develop with the other members of the Franciscan family a general training program for our formators in the evangelical life?
- Is it possible for us to continue to create a forum, regionally and nationally, where we can be honest about what works and what does not work: in leadership, in mission, in prayer, in community life?
- Is it a worthwhile project for us to make a concerted effort to *reinterpret* the Franciscan intellectual tradition of the mystics and theologians?
- Is it possible for us to create handbooks, commentaries on the *Rules*, study guides, and practical tools for sharing, which will enable us collectively to move towards deepening the charism of the evangelical life?

Above all, can we develop more faith in God's presence in ourselves. It is true that as one philosopher, a specialist in John Duns Scotus, told me: In the Franciscan world, you do not acquire wisdom without breaking a few eggs in the process. But all of our *Testaments* and your own *Rule* end with a blessing. The Son of God, born of a woman, after all, did die for us. Isn't it a blessing to be human, to be Christian, to be Catholic, and to be Franciscan?

Endnotes

¹ As narrated in Raphael Brown, *Franciscan Mystic: The Life of Blessed Brother Giles of Assisi Companion of St. Francis* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1962), 121.

² I have tried here to list only some of the more well-known documentation, omitting the full information on numerous biographies of Francis and Clare. Obviously, each religious institute underwent its own process of assimilation of these issues. Publications on the "evangelical life" can be obtained from the Federation offices. Fuller bibliographical information can be found in the following:

A) For Church documents: Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, I: 1982; II revised: 1992).

B) For Franciscan sources: I. Omaechevarria, OFM, ed., *Escritos de santa Clara y documentos contemporaneos*, Madrid: Biblioteca de autores cristianos, 1970; Marion 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, 1972, 1983); Kajetan Esser, OFM, ed., *Die Opuscula des Hl. Franziskus von Assisi: Neue textkritische edition* (Grottaferrata, 1976); Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap., Ignatius C. Brady, OFM, eds., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); Armstrong, ed., *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

C) For Third Order Regular information: Raffaele Pazzelli, TOR, *St. Francis and the Third Order* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989); *The Franciscan Sisters, Outlines of History and Spirituality* (Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 1993), especially chapter XII where development of the 1982 *Rule* is detailed and the research on the penitential movement listed, 202-203.

³ There needs to be a complete compilation of the number of studies completed on the foundations of the Franciscan life in the United States. Here, reference is made to Sr. Adele Francis Gorman, OSF, and Sr. Jeanette Clare McDonnell, OSF, *The Call and Response: A 125th Anniversary Tribute to Mother Mary Francis Bachmann, O.S.F., Foundress of the Sisters of Saint Francis of Philadelphia*, n.p., n.d. [1980]; Brian de Breffny, *Unless the Seed Die: The Life of Elizabeth Hayes (Mother M. Ignatius, OSF), Foundress of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception*, n.p., n.d.; Sister Mary Assumpta Ahles, OSF, *In the Shadow of His Wings: History of the Franciscan Sisters* (Saint Paul, MN: North Central Publishing Company, 1977); Carlan Kraman, OSF, *Odyssey in Faith: The Story of Mother Alfred Moes, Foundress of Two Franciscan Congregations and Saint Mary's Hospital, Rochester, Minnesota* (Rochester, MN: Sisters of Saint Francis, 1980). Further information can be found in Pazzelli, *The Franciscan Sisters*.

⁴ The contrasts between the monastic/scholastic ways of thinking have great consequences for the ways in which we approach religious life. The classic exposition is Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961). See most recently, Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁵ The significance of this term has been well established in M-D. Chenu, OP, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, selected, edited and translated by Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Duane V. Lapsanski, *Evangelical Perfection: An Historical Examination of the Concept in the Early Franciscan Sources* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1977).

⁶ The Sisters and Brothers of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis, "Response to the Lineamenta in the Light of the 1994 Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life in the Church."

⁷ Significant works calling attention to these issues are Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985); *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1991); Michael J. Himes, and Kenneth R. Himes, OFM, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993); Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). Within the field of the history of religious life, confer for examples: Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁸ See David J. Nygren and Miriam D. Ukeritis, "The Religious Life Future Project: Executive Summary," in *Review for Religious* 52 (1993): 6-55; Synod of Bishops, "The Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World," in *Instrumentum Laboris* (Vatican City, 1994).

⁹ As background, see: Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert* (Oxford, 1993); Columba Stewart, "Radical Honesty about Self: The Practice of the Desert Fathers," in *Sobornost*, 12 (1990): 25-39; "Radical Honesty about the Self: The Tradition of the Desert Fathers and Its Heirs," *Ibid.* 12 (1990): 143-156.

¹⁰ See: I. Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1990); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Docere Verbo et Exemplo* (Harvard Theological Monographs, 1979); Patricia Ranft, "The Concept of Witness in the Christian Tradition, from Its Origin to Its Institutionalization," in *Revue Benedictine CII* (1992): 9-23.

¹¹ See: Irene Hausherr, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East* (Kalamazoo, 1982); Joseph Pegon, "Componction," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique, Doctrine et Histoire* (Paris, 1953), II.2: 1312-1321.

¹² See: Fr. Dingjan, OSP, *Discretio: Les Origines patristiques et monastiques de la doctrine sur la prudence chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 1967; Andre Cabassut, "Discretion," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 1957, III: 1312-1330; Eloi Dekkers, OSB, "Discretio chez saint Benoit et saint Gregoire," in *Collectanea Cisterciensia*, 46 (1984): 79-88.

¹³ See: F. C. Gardiner, *The Pilgrimage of Desire: A Study of Theme and Genre in Medieval Literature* (Brill, 1971); Michael Casey, "Spiritual Desire in the Gospel Homilies of Gregory the Great," *Cistercian Studies* 16 (1981): 297-314.

¹⁴ See: I. Hausherr, *The Name of Jesus* (Kalamazoo, 1978); Michael Casey, "Mindfulness of God in the Monastic Tradition," in *Cistercian Studies XVII* (1982): 111-126; Columba Stewart, "John Cassian on Unceasing Prayer," in *Monastic Studies* 15 (1984): 159-177.

¹⁵ See: David Stanley, S.J., "A Suggested Approach to the *Lectio Divina*," in *American Benedictine Review* 23 (1972): 439-455; Jean Leclercq, OSB, "La 'Lecture Divine,'" in *La Maison-Dieu* 5-8 (1946): 21-33.

¹⁶ As beginning points, see: Michael Blastic, OFM Conv., "Contemplation and Compassion: A Franciscan Ministerial Spirituality," forthcoming; Timothy Johnson, "Visual Imagery and Contemplation in Clare of Assisi's *Letters to Agnes of Prague*," in *Mystics Quarterly* 19 (1993): 161-171.

Franciscan Evangelical Life And the Third Order Regular Charism

CLARE ANDREW D'AURIA, O.S.F.

INTRODUCTION

In 1983, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (SCRIS) published the document, "Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate." This document was designed to aid the bishops of the United States in helping religious congregations whose "Institutes are engaged in apostolic works to live their ecclesial vocation to the full" (Letter of Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of the United States, 3 April 1983).

Since its publication, this document, addressing the two major forms of institutes of consecrated life - *vita monastica*, monastic life, and *vita apostolica*, apostolic life—has elicited numerous responses and has initiated much dialogue, especially among Franciscan scholars.¹ Much of this discussion centers around the distinction, unaddressed in the document, which places a different emphasis on the manner in which these institutes live out the common life. The Church, in fact, has always acknowledged the vital importance of each congregation understanding its rounding charism and encouraged its faithful observance in the life of the institute (Canons 577, 578, 598:1, 673).

It is in this spirit, then, that we speak of three types of religious communities with the different accents and possibilities of the common life:

The Monastic Society centered on contemplation and praise of God;

The Evangelical Fraternity centered on the spirit of simplicity, of benevolence and on a radical witness to Christ and His Gospel;

The Apostolic Congregation centered on the concrete mission of service to the world (*Concilium* 16: 5).

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The purpose of this paper is not to develop the distinctions among these three in any kind of detailed way, although we will allude to such distinctions where appropriate. Our purpose, on the contrary, is to examine the concept of *evangelical fraternity* as Francis of Assisi understood it; to highlight its particular nuances as lived out in the Third Order Regular tradition,² and to develop some of its implication for the future of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia.

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF EVANGELICAL LIFE

Shortly before his death in October, 1226, Francis dictated his Testament. In this document, Francis reflects for himself and for his followers what it means to live the *vita evangelica*, the Gospel life. Appropriately, he begins by remembering his most profound initial conversion experience, that of embracing the leper:

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: 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 (*Test* 1-2).

Evangelical life begins in an experience of penance-conversion-metanoia: that profound, intuitive, and concrete experience of the goodness of God that impels one "in sin" (*Test* 1) to turn toward him in a loving faith response to the central Gospel call to "Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel" (*Mk* 1:15). Evangelical life is the ongoing process of surrendering to being "led by the Lord" (*Test* 2) and, in a spirit of constant and overflowing gratitude, finds its expression in the showing of mercy to all, in the living out of the *Shema* (*Dt* 6:4-5; *Mt* 22:37) in loving God and neighbor.³

Thaddeus Horgan says that "For Francis there is only one way to live evangelical conversion, and that is by living the Gospel literally."⁴ Francis uses two "vivid expressions" to explain "the dynamic way of life which he and his brothers were to lead at the inspiration of the Lord": first, to follow in the footprints of Christ (*RegNB* I:1; XXII:2); second, to live according to the form of the holy Gospel (*RegNB* XXII:41).⁵ This is the essence of evangelical life and it is integrally bound up in the ongoing experience of conversion. Louis Secundo clearly relates the two: "The style of the penitential life is thus for Francis and for his followers the way of living the Gospel and of conforming oneself entirely to Christ."⁶

It is important to examine these two expressions more closely because "each term expresses an important aspect of God's personal call to Francis and the saint's loving response."⁷

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE LORD

Francis follows Christ because he realizes that Christ is the only way to the Father (*Jn* 1:6; *Adm* 1:1): that in the mystery of God's plan--brought to comple-

tion in the fullness of time - all creation would be drawn into unity in him (cf. *Eph* 1:10). The creation of the world and its re-creation begins and ends in Christ. Francis understands that the most perfect expression of the Father's goodness is the Incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ, who is for Francis "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creatures . so that primacy may be his in everything" (*Col* 1:15 ff).

In Chapter 23 of the Rule of 1221, Francis praises the Father in the profound prayer of one who has himself become a prayer (*2Cel* 95): "We thank you for Yourself" (*RegNB* XXIII:1). Throughout this almost mystical hymn on the generosity of God, Francis celebrates Paul's own message to the Colossians: all is created through Christ and for Christ - he who "is before all else that is. In him everything continues in being" (*Col* 1:17). Jesus Christ "lies at the center of all life and of all activity that pulses and functions in the universe."⁸

Christ, then, becomes for Francis the fullest expression of the Father's goodness and love. Because all creation comes into being *in* and *through* Christ, it is sacred for Francis and worthy of reverence (*Canticle*). This is especially true of the human person created and formed in the image of the Son (*Adm* 5:1).

All this, intuited by Francis through his own spirit-life, is later formulated by John Duns Scotus (d. 1308) and expressed as the doctrine of the absolute primacy of Christ.⁹ This doctrine concerning the reason for the Incarnation is considered the essence, the theological foundation, of the Franciscan concept of life.¹⁰ Eric Doyle summarizes the essentials of this teaching:

Stated quite simply, this doctrine in negative terms refuses to accept that sin can adequately explain the reason for the incarnation of the Son of God. In positive terms it teaches that the reason for the incarnation in the first place is God's free and eternal decision to have outside himself someone who would love him perfectly. This is Jesus of Nazareth who is God's masterpiece.¹¹

It is in, with and through this Jesus, firstborn of all creation (*Col* 1:15), that everything gives glory to the Father. Francis' own reverence and joy in the midst of all created reality explains his remarkable grasp of this truth. Francis recognizes the sacred presence within each creature, respects its uniqueness, and appreciates the enormous diversity of all of created reality. He is incapable of appropriating anything as his own - all is seen as gift from the all-good God. He sees *each* creature and *all* of them together as messengers of God through their very existence and can, therefore, welcome all as brother and sister.¹²

Through this awareness of God's goodness in Christ and in all of creation, Francis becomes a person of unceasing prayer (*2Cel* 165; *LM* 9:1). His faith

reveals the Christ who lives in him, prays in him, and leads him to put aside all care and attachment so that the Spirit can make within his heart a dwelling place (*II EpFid* 48; *RegNB* XXII:27).

This profound realization makes of him a *living* prayer, and thus he encourages his followers:

Let all of us wherever we are, in every place, at every hour, at every time of day, every day and continuously . . . love, honor, adore, serve, praise and bless, glorify and exalt, magnify and give thanks to the most high and supreme eternal God (*RegNB* XXIII:11).

For Francis, then, there is no dichotomy, but rather a genuine synthesis between action and contemplation. For, those of us who live the evangelical life, live constantly in the presence of God -whether in solitude or with others. We see and reverence God through the Christ in his word, in others, in creation, and in our own hearts. Prayer becomes adoration.¹³

LIFE ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL

Following in the footsteps of the Lord (*EpOrd* 51) means for Francis that he responds completely to the Father's love in the manner of Jesus Christ. This response of faith and repentance describes his total embrace of "life according to the form of the holy Gospel" (*Test* 14; *RegNB* XXII:41).¹⁴

This way of life is not focused on the common life of Ac 4:32, as in the monastic societies of his times; nor is it centered solely on the missionary discourse of Mt 10:5-14, as in the apostolic communities.¹⁵ The Lord reveals to Francis that he is to live the whole Gospel, simply and plainly (*LM* 3:8). For him such an observance of the Gospel centers on the great commandment of love of God and neighbor (*Mt* 22:37, 39; *I EpFid* I:1; *II EpFid* 81).

Evangelical life is not established around a common place as are monastic societies, nor around a common task as are apostolic congregations. It is rather formed around a common heart.

Being grasped by the person of the Gospel whose portrait is drawn in the Beatitudes, Francis can do no less than follow him with all his power and strength, with every effort, wish and desire (*RegNB* XXIII:8). St. Bonaventure tells us, "He received (*concepit*) the spirit of the true Gospel, in order to give birth to it" (*LM* 3:1).

OBEDIENCE

For Francis, giving birth means completely surrendering to the will of the Father as he allows himself to be led by the Spirit in a life of continuous conversion (*Mt* 1:15). Jesus Christ's self-emptying modeled the one and only response needed by Francis in discerning his way to the Father. It is the foundation of all he ever teaches in the shaping and preserving of his brotherhood.¹⁶

Essential to this obedience in its unique form is Francis' call to himself and his followers to "promise obedience to one another" (*RegNB* V:14). Beyond this original insight into Gospel life, Francis prescribes the traditional understanding of obedience understood by those of his times. Even in this directive, however, it is necessary to understand that, for Francis, obedience deals not with law but with revelation.¹⁷ Its goal is not common life, but the facilitating of the Gospel life of love. Obedience helps us to overcome selfishness, to free our hearts from all that is not of God so that the Spirit of God might dwell within, be inspiration, and act in us in absolute freedom (*SalVirt* 14-18).¹⁸

In Francis' view, then, "obedience begins before authority enters."¹⁹ However, for us to live the "true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*RegNB* V:14), Francis believes that what is inspired by the Spirit must be confirmed by the Church (*RegB* I:12). To act without confirmation is to separate ourselves from the Church and from the community/fraternity and to re-appropriate our will. This confirmation from the Church is mediated for Francis through the minister (*RegB* I:8; *RegNB* VI:6). In evangelical life, the minister wields no power (*II EpFid* 42). According to Wayne Hellman, "The ministers do not make obedience, but rather they serve and assist the friars in their obedience to the Spirit of the Lord."²⁰ Such obedience presupposes that both the minister and the members are free of selfishness and reverence the presence and revelation of the Spirit in one another. Then there can be true obedience.

Such relational obedience exists not only between ministers and members, however. Since the Spirit of God dwells in each one, the members obey one another and not just the minister (*RegB* VI:8). It is the Spirit that unites us in mutual charity (*RegNB* V:14). For this reason, obedience becomes the *structure* of evangelical life and Francis can speak of the novices as being received into the "realm of obedience" (*RegNB* II:9; *RegB* II:11). Evangelical life is not established around a common place as are monastic societies, nor around a common task as are apostolic congregations. It is rather formed around a common heart: "the firm will to accept one another in our differences, to respect one another and to walk together" united in love.²¹

From this perspective, *chapters* become essential as the means by which we come together to build up one another in mutual love and encourage one another to live the Gospel and the Rule which each of us has promised the Lord (*Test* 40). As Michael Crosby, says, "The core of Francis' theology of obedience . . . is the bond of mutual fraternal love, which is the means of achieving the highest Christian charity."²²

FRATERNITY

It is this bond of mutual love that forms the center of Franciscan evangelical life. To live the whole Gospel and to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ means, at its deepest level, to build up the kingdom by living in loving relationships (*RegB* III:10-14). Francis uses the word "fraternity" to identify this relationship that each of us has with Jesus Christ our brother.²³ From the outset, then, it is important that we understand the significance of this term and why Francis uses it.

The truth of our love is realized first in our life with one another, a life of essential equality. Thaddee Matura emphasizes that "the strongest and most demanding love is that which is required of me with regard to those to whom I have committed my life."²⁴ Such love presupposes an essential poverty, that active self-emptying love that frees our hearts from self-interest: that ongoing conversion by which we live without appropriating anything to ourselves. This kind of poverty facilitates the building up of the bonds of community/fraternity (*RegNB* VI:10). Its absence undermines and breaks the genuine bond. Eloi Leclerc explains how important this kind of poverty is for Francis:

Francis rightly saw that at the base of the rupture between persons there is always a shrinking back on oneself, a secret desire for appropriation that makes us see everything in terms of ourselves: our personality, our ideas, our project, or our interests When the secret desire for appropriation is thwarted, agitation, irritation, anger, and rupture are the result.²⁵

Because Francis recognizes that such "ruptures" will occur despite the best of intentions, reconciliation becomes essential to living in community/fraternity (*EpMin* 9-12). Realizing that Christ redeemed each of us to reconcile us with the Father by drawing all together in unity in himself, we are ready to forgive one another: to ask for forgiveness and to receive forgiveness. We make peace with one another in a spirit of kindness and humility. Since this relationship is the "circumstance in which we realize our living of conversion, or Gospel life, together,"²⁶ it is here especially that each of us begins to work toward reconciliation and unity in mutual love.

As Matura summarizes, "This profound acceptance of the other without preconditions, realistic and merciful, and exercised in fraternal equality, is to-

gether' with our love of God the central value of our Franciscan existence."²⁷ When we live in loving relationships the Kingdom of God is realized. It is to this that we witness. It is in this that we render our most important service to the Church and to the world.

WORKS OF MERCY

The love of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, impels us to share in his mission: to build up the kingdom through our love of one another. Community/fraternity witnesses that the Kingdom of God not only is possible but has, indeed, already begun. Cajetan Esser affirms that "the Kingdom of God is thus established wherever God is made once more the center of the life of the individual and of humankind."²⁸ Christ our brother, is the center of this new world order because it is he who fulfills our most essential need - the need for God, the need for a loving relationship with God.

In his Sermon on the Mount, especially in the Beatitudes, Christ simultaneously draws a portrait of himself and of the kingdom which he inaugurates.²⁹ He presents a pattern by which those who follow him might live his life. Matura defines life according to the gospel as precisely that by which we receive brothers and sisters in the spirit of Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount.³⁰

To live the whole Gospel and to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ means, at its deepest level, to build up the kingdom by living in loving relationships.

Francis grasps the importance of living the Beatitudes, the values of Jesus Christ. He understands that attitude is all: we must become like a little child - lesser, minor - to enter the kingdom. When we recognize our poverty, our essential and creaturely need for God, the kingdom becomes present (*II EpFid* 61-62). We identify with and become brother/sister to the least (*Mt* 25:40) because these are the ones with whom Christ identified and for whom he is brother (*RegNB* 9:2; *1Cel* 76; *2Cel* 84-85). Leclerc expands on this point:

Living the Gospel means accepting to live with one's brothers and sisters, with all of them; not only with the holy and healthy ones, but also with the lame, the crippled, the mediocre and the sinful. In the midst of all such people it means bearing witness to God's infinite patience, his inexhaustible forgiveness, his constantly renewed grace for that is what God's heart is like.

When this kind of witness is given, then, and at that very point the Kingdom of God comes. The light of the Gospel begins to shine in a murky world.³¹

Assimilating the values of Jesus as outlined in the Beatitudes means, for Francis, ongoing conversion, that is, changing his own attitudes and concretizing these changed attitudes in deeds, in "fruits worthy of repentance" (*I EpFid* I:3; *II EpFid* 25). For Francis, however, the task in itself is unimportant. Evangelical life, therefore, has historically, in response to human need, addressed itself to a diversity of ministries. This is especially true of TOR congregations.³² What is paramount for Francis is the manner in which the deeds of mercy are accomplished: in a spirit of minority (*RegNB* VII:15-16).³³ The lesser brothers and sisters, aware of their own need for God, minister to the least of God's people, those identified in the judgment scene presented in *Matthew* 25. This ministry is characterized by mutuality and interdependence: we are sent to give and to receive.

Building this kind of kingdom where needs are filled and all live in essential equality as brother and sister is not an option for Francis but a Gospel imperative.³⁴ The sign that such a kingdom has begun is the presence of a "peace which the world cannot give" (*Jn* 14:27). When we profess evangelical life, we are committed to this kind of peacemaking, to building this kind of new world order that truly reflects God's goodness in Christ through whom all things were made (*L3S* 58).

COSMIC FRATERNITY

This movement toward unity in the Kingdom of Christ our brother, is a Journey not restricted to humankind alone. All creation moves toward fulfillment and, to all of creation, Jesus Christ is also brother. It is through, in, and for Christ that the world created and so it bears his footprints, an understanding that Francis intuitively and Bonaventure theologizes in his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*. Francis experiences God's transcendent goodness in the gifts of creation (*2Cel* 165; *LM* 9:1).

Joseph Chinnici writes that, from the perspective of evangelical spirituality, "it is clear that the world, at the root of its existence is good; it is made through Christ and bears the marks of its Creator."³⁵ Thaddeus Horgan adds that, in such a world view, "There is nothing that is not holy, nothing that is not meant to be united and reconciled. The cosmic Christ is brother to everything."³⁶ Leclerc emphasizes that Francis is "not content only with praising God for his creatures, he fraternizes with them all. And this is new."³⁷ They are brothers and sisters to him and deserve his reverence because they share with him the same good and loving Father and the same redeeming brother, Jesus Christ.

Such a view does not imply that Francis fails to recognize the sin and darkness in the world. But "sin is related to what people do in the world and to it. Sin for Francis is, above all, appropriation, taking to oneself what belongs to God."³⁸ In fact, Francis equates conversion with leaving the world (*Test* 1-4), an image which means that, after his conversion, "he lives within the reality of God's gift; he sees the intrinsic structure and reality of the world, nature, people and himself *to be gift*. His task and that of his followers is to *receive, give thanks, bear witness* to this reality."³⁹ There is no place for the domination or exploitation of nature; we are stewards of the gifts of creation. Sharing, not consuming, is the mode of being in the world. Interdependence is the way to witness fraternity. Those who participate in political, economic, or social structures that foster appropriation and thus rupture cosmic fraternity need conversion and reconciliation because, as Leclerc notes, "To refuse fraternity with nature is also, to be sure, to render oneself incapable of fraternity between all persons."⁴⁰

In our working to create genuine relationships with one another and with all of creation, the Kingdom of God, already begun by Christ, will be built up toward completion; the world will be renewed in the life of the Gospel, in the life of ongoing conversion - in peace, in justice, and in love.

End notes

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Book Review

St. Francis and the Foolishness of God by Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle OFM, Cynthia Lobeda, and Stuart Taylor. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993. \$10.95. Reviewed by Patricia Hutchison, O.S.F.

In the Introduction to their book, *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God*, the authors state: "Throughout the history of the Franciscan community, whenever there has been a crisis, a shaking of the foundations in church and society, a new story of Francis has emerged." (p.1) According to the authors: "It is time once again to tell the story of Francis" (1).

St. Francis and the Foolishness of God is, according to the authors, addressed primarily to the "non-poor, the privileged of the world, the affluent of the late twentieth century" (7). Using the stories of Jesus and of Francis, the authors engage the mind, the heart, and the will of the reader. The stories of Jesus and of Francis, not only inspire the reader, but invite the reader to "imagine new ways of living out the gospel of Jesus Christ" (3).

Written by two women and two men - Catholics and Protestants, lay and ordained ministers - the book offers a richness of perspective and life experience. While the authors do not attempt to present a biography of Francis, they succeed in capturing with energy and fresh insight the "little man" whom so many for over eight

centuries have called Father, Brother, founder, saint, model, and friend. While not claiming to define or explain the Franciscan experience of life in community, they clearly and succinctly lay out the Franciscan ideal of community life as distinct from the monastic and apostolic traditions. While not undertaking a study of Clare of Assisi, they nonetheless, highlight well the role of Clare as partner with Francis and not simply follower and imitator.

Each of the eight chapters presents a particular theme and follows the same format to engage the reader first in the life stories of Francis and Jesus; then in a reflection on one's personal story (Our Stories); then in a reflection on the story of our contemporary world (Signs of the Times); and finally in a call to action (Invitation to Respond). The stories of Jesus are enriched by sound biblical scholarship. The stories of Francis are shaped by the insights of some of his most respected biographers. Yet, the authors present both stories in such a way that the reader is engaged actively in seeking personal meaning and original insights. The "Our Stories" section invites the reader to ponder his/her personal story using focused questions for prayer and reflection. The "Signs of the Times" includes excellent factual data and well-documented statistics to expand the reader's understanding of the contemporary theme. The "Invitation to Respond" leads the reader to

consider the type action to which faith may lead.

There is no mistaking the authors' attempt to move readers toward an ability to view their personal story and the world story from the perspective of the poor. Time and again Jesus and Francis are characterized as men who "journeyed toward the margins." Christ is described as beckoning to us "from the margins, in the human face of the poor, the 'least of these,' inviting each of us to join in the struggle" (34). The original Franciscan community is described as "a community seeking to be faithful to a call to live on the margins and intent on helping one another to be faithful to that difficult mission" (126).

Yet, *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God* is not only a call for action on behalf of justice and peace. Developing the biblical and theological notion of "the Fool," the authors portray both Jesus and Francis as examples who contradict the "wisdom" of the world with a profound and transforming "foolishness." The authors invite their readers to consider and imitate specific aspects of this "foolishness": identifying with and being evangelized by the poor; living in ongoing conversion; striving for community rather than individualism; risking intimacy as a support for selfless giving; overcoming violence by embracing each person as sister or brother;

reverencing creation as a reflection of the Creator; allowing suffering to grow into compassion and prophetic action; embracing the active-contemplative synthesis. They close with a powerful story from Eloi Leclerc's *The Canticle of the Creatures*, told from the prison of a train headed for Dachau in April of 1945. The story is, like the rest of this book, a tribute to the power of life over death, of hope over despair; a proclamation of the Cross which is the only passage to the Reign of God.

The authors suggest that the book will be most fully experienced when shared with others. I would suggest it as a valuable vehicle for faith sharing within religious congregations. Such sharing could lead to support of individual action or a decision for communal action on behalf of justice and peace. Those who seek to strengthen the Mission and Ministry aspect of institutions sponsored by Franciscan congregations should find the book an excellent resource; easily adaptable as a foundation for inservice for leadership, boards, and employees. Likewise, the book could be a tool for initial and ongoing formation in religious congregations. The book would also appeal to adult education and study groups of any Faith tradition. For everyone, the book offers a rich treasure for prayer and reflection, an invitation to conversion and personal and communal transformation.

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