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The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

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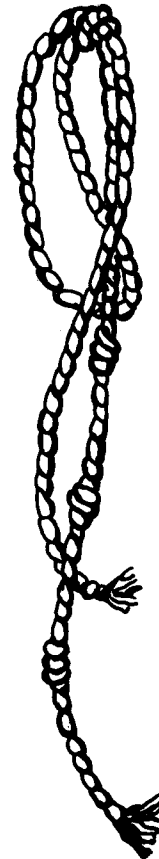
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Standard Abbreviations used in The CORD for Early Franciscan Sources

I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions	Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221
BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo	LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God
CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun	LaudHor: Praises at all the Hours
EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony	OffPass: Office of the Passion
EpCler: Letter to Clerics ¹	OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix
EpCust: Letter to Superiors ¹	RegB: Rule of 1223
EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful ¹	RegNB: Rule of 1221
EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo	RegEr: Rule for Hermits
EpMin: Letter to a Minister	SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady
EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order	SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues
EpRect: Letter to the Rulers of the People	Test: Testament of St. Francis
ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God	UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare
ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father	VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy
Form Viv: Form of Life for St. Clare	¹ I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis	LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis
2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis	LMin: Bonaventure Minor Life of Francis
3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles	LP: Legend of Perugia
CL: Legend of Saint Clare	L3S: Legend of the Three Companions
CP: Process of Saint Clare	SC Sacrum Commercium
Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis	SP: Mirror of Perfection
Omnibus: Marion A. Habig, ed., <i>St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis</i> (Chicago Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).	
AB: Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., ed., <i>Francis and Clare: The Complete Works</i> (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).	

A Greccio Remembrance

LARRY JANOWSKI, O.F.M.

This is not a story about the first Christmas. We know all about that story. This is a story about Christmas eve in the year 1223 - 771 years ago tonight - in a mountain town in the Rieti Valley of northern Italy. It is a true story of a real people, but it is told in *imagined* words, words that might very well have been those of Giovanni Viletta, also known as John of Greccio.

JOHN When the prophet Micah said Bethlehem was "too small to be among the clans of Judah," he could easily have been talking about our town. Greccio is a jewel in the Rieti Valley, but still just a shrug of a town, of little importance to anyone who didn't live there.

Perhaps that's the reason this Christmas story had to happen there. God seems to have a soft spot for things and people who are ordinary and of little importance. Who would suspect that, in our little nothing town, among such ordinary people, God's love could come alive as it did that night?

[SONG: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"]

Just 60 miles north of Greccio is Assisi. Now there's a town! A proper city, with fortified walls and an even an old Roman citadel looming above it on the way up to Mount Subasio.

Of course all towns, even little ones have their well-known families and, in Assisi, *the* name was Bernardone, a name positively dripping with wealth and influence. And *the* Bernardone was Pietro, a very rich businessman - easily the wealthiest man in Assisi. His son, Francesco, was rapidly following in his father's footsteps.

Larry Janowski, a friar from Assumption Province, shares a Christmas drama with readers of *The CORD*. "A Greccio Remembrance" is presented annually by the friars and friends of St. Francis Friary and Retreat Center, Burlington, Wisconsin, as a holiday program before the celebration of Midnight Mass. It is arranged as a dialogue for two speakers, but a single skilled reader could easily take both parts. The text includes some suggested songs, which could be sung by a choir, the congregation, a combination of both, or quite simply and powerfully used as background melodies to present the images of the text to the imagination.

Of course, by the time the night I'm telling you about happened, things were much different for Francesco. He was already 41 years old, and he was rich no longer. Why not? Well, about 20 years before he had caused quite a sensation when he stripped himself naked in front of Bishop Guido and practically the whole town, and ended up giving all his fancy clothes back to his father.

That was when he and his friends decided to take up the gospel as a pattern for their lives, leaving everything else behind. Yet even after he left home to take care of lepers in Gubbio, none of us suspected the boy would one day become a saint, even if he was good and generous.

For all of his many virtues, for all of his father's wealth, he had a simple and practical side as well. It was the side I understood best. For example, Francesco once changed clothes with a beggar in Rome just so he'd know what it was like to beg for food and have people look down on him. And when he wanted to know what Jesus felt when he was hungry, he fasted. Simple. Practical. I like that.

I think most of us need to feel things to understand them. It makes sense, doesn't it? It's something like God becoming flesh . . . so we would know what God is like, so we could sense and feel the Love that God is . . .

Which brings me back to that night back in 1223. Francis was spending Christmas with his brothers at the little hermitage on our mountain. A few days before, he came to me. He was carrying what looked like a bundle of sticks.

FRANCIS (*Excited*) John, look at this!

JOHN At what? It looks like a bird's nest.

FRANCIS Yes. An empty bird's nest. Isn't it wonderful? Do you see the way it's still lined with down to make a warm place for the baby birds?

JOHN Yes. I see that. So?

FRANCIS It reminds you of Christmas, doesn't it?

JOHN (*Doubtfully*) It's a handsome piece of work. Well built. Probably a lark or sparrow, but, Francis, what does it have to do with . . .?

FRANCIS (*Interrupting*) John, I have an idea and I need your help.

JOHN (*Suspiciously*) I'm sure you do. And what is your idea?

FRANCIS I want to celebrate Christmas in a new way, and this little nest has given me an idea.

JOHN You got this idea from that bird's nest?

FRANCIS Yes! Don't you understand? I want to arrange everything as the gospels say it was in Bethlehem. If we can actually see what it was like, we'll better appreciate the poverty of the birth of Jesus.

JOHN (*To the audience*) I had my doubts, but Francis could be very persuasive.

So, on Christmas eve there I was, half way up the mountain where the brothers had their hermitages. It was very cold and very late when I stepped out of the cave to look down over the valley. All the people of the town had been invited, but who knew if anyone would come?

I wouldn't have come myself if Francis hadn't asked me. It had been a hard year in Greccio. The harvest was poor, and there was much illness and it seemed that so many people had died in the last year. I felt for my neighbors, and—even if Francis didn't—I would understand if they did not feel like celebrating either in this strange and dark place.

[SONG: "A Time Will Come for Singing,"
Gentle Night, St. Louis Jesuits]

JOHN My mood was as dark as the moonless night. For that reason, the lights I began to see in the valley below stood out brightly as, gradually, people began coming out of their houses with torches and lanterns on long poles.

The lights formed little groups, like constellations of restless stars, and began to wind their way up the steep mountain slopes. It seemed as though, on that night, the stars were not in the sky, but in the valley — and they were floating up to us! Was this what the angels heard and saw looking down from heaven, as the shepherds made their way to where the star was hovering over Bethlehem.

[SONG: "Do You Hear What I Hear?"]

JOHN I looked around the cave at what the people would find once they got there. It wasn't much. Francesco's request had been very modest. There was only my own white ox, Olivia, and my neighbor's homely donkey. Oh, and a feeding trough filled with hay.

I said to Francis, "If you want to re-create the scene in Bethlehem, you should have gotten some people to act the roles of Joseph and Mary and the shepherds."

FRANCIS (*Shocked*) Giovanni! Who could dare represent those holy people? I wouldn't presume such a thing. Don't you see what we have prepared? It's a place for the infant Lord to lie. A warm place on a cold night. Only a place. That is enough.

JOHN When all those good people did finally arrive at the cave I could see from their faces that they did not know what to expect. The brothers had invited them, in Francis' name, to come to Mass in honor of the Lord's birth, but for an altar, there was only a large white slab of stone, and tied up in front of it were the ox and ass with the empty manger between them.

Some of the folks laughed and scratched their heads, but little by little, without anyone explaining it to them, I could see that they began to understand.

Like our Lord Jesus himself, Francis had a genius for using ordinary things to remind you of God so that even *I* could see it! Before our very eyes we could see the love of God because we could see how Love did not hesitate to come to us, even though his birthplace was so ordinary, so poor. As a matter of fact, the hay and animals and the cave reminded us that God seems most at home among the poor and unimportant.

Soon the walls of our little cave echoed the same kind of glory that the angels sang in the heavens over Bethlehem. "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth."

[SONG: "Angels We Have Heard On High"]

JOHN Then the Holy Mass began right over the manger, and when we came to the gospel, Francis sang it in his role as deacon.

If you knew him when he was young, you remember how Francesco loved to sing. His mother taught him the old French folk songs, and when his father returned from his journeys he brought along the modern ballads of the *troubadours*.

Of course, Francesco was older now. And because he sang only of God, all his songs were love songs. His voice was still sweet, and that Christmas Eve it filled the cave and drifted out over the valley where more of our friends were gathered because we couldn't all fit in the small grotto.

[Taped or "backstage" voice chanting just the first lines of the gospel in Latin or English.]

"In illo tempore: Exiit edictum a Cæsare Augústo, ut describerétur univérsus orbis. Hæc descriptio prima facta est a præside Sýriae Cyríno: et ibant omnes ut profiteréntur singuli in suam civitátem."

"In those days Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole world. This first census took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone went to register, each to his own town."

JOHN (Over the singing, which fades.) Then Francis preached. Frankly, I don't remember what he said. He usually said the same thing

whenever he preached. He reminded us about God's love and about how we must turn from sin and embrace the gospel of Jesus.

I *do* remember that on that night, every time he said the words, "the Child of Bethlehem" or Jesus' name he smiled and touched the tip of his tongue to his lips as if he'd been eating honey and the sweet taste was still lingering there.

Then, toward the end of his homily, a strange thing happened. I had to rub my eyes. The manger was no longer empty. There was a baby in it! I swear it! A beautiful little baby with dark hair and rosy cheeks. (*Joy changes suddenly to alarm*). But it lay still as a stone. How it hurt to see the baby so still. It looked lifeless.

I found out later that no one saw this but me, and if I am crazy then so be it, but I swear that Francis saw the baby too. Not only that, but he walked over to the manger, bent down and, ever-so-gently, roused the little one so that it awoke smiling, as if from a deep sleep.

It began to come together for me then: the night, the child, the love of God, and even my friend, Francis. In his gentle, practical way, he was showing me how Christ had been lying lifeless and sleeping *in me* - in the emptiness of my heart - until the simple act of a simple man touched my heart, and the sleeping Christ came alive. I could see in a new way, how God so loved our world as to send his son to rouse us from our sleepy sins.

It didn't matter that others didn't see the child. What everyone *did* see was that we need to be like that manger, that sparrow's nest: Empty. A place for God to fill.

The Mass continued as usual, yet everyone said later that it was like no Mass they had ever been part of. Christ was not brought *down* upon the distant altar of our church; we could sense Christ *right among us*, among us ordinary people and in our very ordinary lives.

On that night of all nights, we could tell that "God was with us," and we could do nothing less than offer him ourselves, which, of course, was all he wanted.

[SONG: "In the Bleak Mid Winter"
(text: Christina Rossetti; music: Gustav Holst)]

JOHN I wouldn't be surprised if Francesco's idea of re-creating the scene of Jesus' birth caught on. In your heart, I mean. I wouldn't be surprised at all.

Being a Franciscan Priest: An Evangelical View

An Interpretive Translation of St. Bonaventure's *Apologia pauperum* 12:3-8¹

Translated and Annotated

by

ANTHONY M. CARROZZO, O.F.M.

Around 1269 Saint Bonaventure responded to the critics of the mendicant movement at the University of Paris and elsewhere with his moving defense, the Apologia Pauperum.

Among the concerns of those critics was the increasing presence of priests within the mendicant movement. In Chapter 12 of his work, then, Bonaventure turns his attention to this issue, arguing for the value of the mendicant priesthood, which he places in a beautiful evangelical context.

Such a reflection is as necessary today as it was in the 13th Century, for today some seem to see little or no room for priesthood within the fraternity.

Yet the fraternity, like the Church it is called to reflect, is priestly, as is wonderfully proclaimed by Peter (1 Pt 2:5). In fact, R. Gibson sees this universal priesthood as the foundation of religious life, when he writes: "In itself, the religious state is simply the full exercise of the universal priesthood of those who are baptized and confirmed. In effect, the essential act of this universal priesthood consists in the offering of a spiritual sacrifice by means of

This paper formed the basis of a talk given by Fr. Anthony Carrozzo, Provincial Minister of Holy Name Province, to the friars throughout the province at their Regional Day gatherings. A collection of addresses, homilies, and presentations made between 1987 and 1994 on Refounding in the Franciscan Tradition by Fr. Anthony has recently been published by the Franciscan Institute.

which the Christian offers himself to God as a 'living and agreeable sacrifice.' (Rm 12:1) Religious consecration is no other than the full realization of this spiritual sacrifice. . .² Such a view is evidenced in St. Francis' Letter to the Entire Order where he addresses all the brothers as "reverend and most beloved brothers."³

Within the priestly Franciscan fraternity, there is not only room for but also a warm welcome to those who exercise the ministerial priesthood, as is evidenced in the same letter, in which Francis addresses himself to all his priest-brothers "who are or will be or desire to be priests of the Most High."⁴ In doing so, however, Francis also addresses the behavior he expects from his priest-brothers, which should be priestly but not clerical, as is clear from his attitude toward the developing eucharistic praxis of his times.⁵

It is in this context that we need to retrieve the Bonaventuran appreciation for an evangelical exercise of the one priesthood that we all share.

The ministry of the priest is to return⁶ God's People to Him. This happens through a seven-fold hierarchical infusion:⁷ teaching beliefs, renewing virtues, setting forth examples, interceding with prayers, attending to injuries inflicted by enemies, warning against insidious dangers, and beating back hostilities. There are seven metaphors in Sacred Scripture⁸ that reveal these priestly tasks: the architect, the farmer, the shepherd, the intercessor, the doctor, the watchman, and the leader.

First, the ARCHITECT. Scripture describes this priestly instructing in the faith in Paul's message to the Corinthians: *As a wise architect, I have laid the foundation (1 Cor 3:10)*. The stones in the building correspond to the articles of faith in the soul in which Christ dwells: *Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone: In whom all the building, being framed together, groweth up into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph 2:20-21)*. So, as the builder is related to the building, the priest is related to the people by establishing and promoting the splendor of truth.⁹

Second, the FARMER. The priest assists God's people in renewing virtues by tilling the field in the spirit of St. Paul: *I have planted, Apollo watered (1 Cor 3:6)*. If the people of the Church are a field and a paradise planted and vibrant with many virtues, the one who informs the people regarding right living can correctly be called the farmer, represented by Adam whom *the Lord God took and put into the paradise of pleasure to dress it and to keep it (Gn 2:15)*.¹⁰

Third, the SHEPHERD, according to Jesus' words: *But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep... When he has let out his own sheep, he goeth before them (Jn 10:2, 4)*. The priest does this when he becomes an example of holiness¹¹ before the people. Thus Peter, to whom the Lord said *Feed my sheep (Jn 21:17)*, exhorts priests to feed the people entrusted to them

by not lording it over the clergy, but by being made a pattern of the flock from the heart (*1 Pt 5:3*). This is the pattern then: the holier the life of the pastor, the better the life of the people.¹²

Fourth, the INTERCESSOR, who stands before God in prayer: *For every high priest taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that pertain to God, that he may offer gifts and sacrifices for sin (Heb 5:1)*. The priest, then, pleads the cause of the people before God and also pleads the cause of God before the people¹³ entrusted to his care in the spirit of the Third Book of Kings: Keep this man and if he shall slip away, thy life shall be for his life (*20:39*). For this reason, the Wise Man says in Proverbs: My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, thou has engaged fast thy hand (*6:1*).¹⁴

Fifth, the DOCTOR,¹⁵ who heals injuries inflicted by enemies following the example of the Good Samaritan who bound up [the injured man's] wounds, pouring in oil and wine (*Lk 10:34*). The Samaritan represents Christ the Healer and those who cleanse vice in His Name.¹⁶ That is why Scripture counsels: Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man: and the Lord shall raise him up: and if he be in sin, they shall be forgiven him (*Jam 5:14-15*).¹⁷

Sixth, the WATCHMAN, who warns against imminent danger in the spirit of Ezechiel: *Son of Man, I have made thee a watchman to the House of Israel (3:17)* and he adds: *If the watchman see the sword coming--that is, signs of imminent temptation--and sound not the trumpet,*¹⁸ and the people look to themselves, and the sword comes and cuts off a soul from among them: he indeed is taken away in his iniquity. And I will require the blood at the hand of the watchman (*33:6*).

Seventh, the PROTECTOR, who beats back hostilities like the noble Machabeus: *He put on a breastplate as a giant, and grit his war-like armor about him in battles, and protected the camp with his sword (1 Mac 3:3)*. The Church, *comely as Jerusalem: terrible as an army set in array (Cant 6:4)* is responsible for Solomon's litter surrounded by *threescore valiant ones of the most valiant of Israel, all holding swords, and most expert in war (Sol 3:7-8)*.

Hence the sevenfold functions of the priestly office.¹⁹

If the Christian people presently resemble a building in shambles because so great a number have strayed, would any architect lay off those who work with him²⁰ in erecting and supporting its structure? Such an architect would have to be so wise that he believes himself to be self-sufficient or so foolish that he desires the complete collapse of the dilapidated Church.²¹

If the people are compared to a dry and rocky field,²² as happens when wisdom and virtue disappear, would any diligent and hard-working farmer fire the laborers who work with him, particularly those who freely offer their work and learning,²³ unless he is insane enough to want upon the land of [God's] people thorns and briars [to] come up (*Is 32:13*)?

If the Christian people are a flock, some of whom are wandering and lost, living in the midst of wolves, straying from divine laws, would any compassionate shepherd cast out those who were leading the sheep back to the road? Would he not rejoice with the Good Shepherd: *Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost (Lk 15:6)*.

If the people are like oppressed debtors filled with guilty feelings over their sins, would any sensible person be appalled by those who wish to ease their burden²⁴ through increased intercession with God, partly begging forgiveness and partly paying off the spiritual debt through their penitential lives?²⁵

If a spiritual plague exists so that *the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is sad so that from the sole of the foot unto the top of the head, there is no soundness therein (Is 1:5-6)*, would any faithful doctor dismiss well-trained orderlies,²⁶ unless he wanted to kill the wounded and the languishing?

If cruel enemies were everywhere and swords were vibrating over the heads of citizens, as often happens when Christian people are surrounded by many temptations, would any watchful sentinel, in the most terrifying darkness of a deep and horrible night, refuse to have others with him to guard the camp?

Finally, if there is almost constant turmoil among the faithful, besieging the Church to ferociously mangle, kill, and devour it, as happens on account of frequent scandals, continuing crimes, and tyrannical rules, would any prudent protector refuse the help of those who fight the common fight, who go so far as to expose themselves to risk and to sacrifice their very persons²⁷ *as a wall for the House of Israel?*

And so, the attitude of a priest toward the people²⁸ is to be the same as that of a father toward his son, of a mother toward her offspring, or of a nurse toward an infant. Paul obviously declares this in speaking of those who converted to the faith: *For in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you (1 Cor 4:15)*; in speaking of giving birth to them: *My little children, of whom I am in labour again until Christ be formed in you (Gal 4:19)*; and in speaking of feeding them: *I gave you milk to drink, not meat; for you were not able as yet (1 Cor 3:2)*. It is desirable for a father to sustain a vulnerable son, for a mother to foster a weak child, and for a nurse to feed a crying baby. So too it is a great consolation for a priest to care for God's people in these ways.²⁹ For this reason, the Lord says to the apostles and to their successors: *The harvest indeed is*

great, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest (Mt 9:37-38), suggesting that the clergy should not only bear patiently with mendicant priests, but ardently desire these evangelists to reap the multitude of the divine harvest.

End notes

¹ *Opusculum XI. Apologia Pauperum*. Cap. XII, pp. 317-318. Since Bonaventure used the Vulgate Bible, all Scripture quotes are from the Douay-Rheims Bible which is more revelatory of the nuanced metaphors that Bonaventure employs.

² Quoted in Allan Von Kobs, *Ordained Religious Brothers* (Roma: Gregorianum, 1993), 22.

³ *EpOrd 2* (AB, 55). ⁴ *EpOrd 14* (AB, 56). ⁵ Cf. *Footnote 20*.

⁶ Bonaventure uses the word "*reductio*," a term that he frequently uses (e.g. *De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam*) to refer to "the return," that is, the task of the Christian to give back to God the gift that has been given by God. Since all of life is a gift from God, it is our vocation to return the gift, worn and tarnished as it may be (cf. parables). In this text, the work of the priest is to assist in the return of the gift of God's people to Him.

⁷ Bonaventure is not referring here to an ecclesiastical hierarchy but rather to the mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius, who perceived a hierarchical pattern in all of creation. This Pseudo-Dionysian influence is obvious in Bonaventure's seminal work *De Triplici Via*.

⁸ It should be carefully noted that, throughout this chapter, Bonaventure presents the mendicant notion of priesthood in evangelical rather than sacramental terms. His vision, as a true son of St. Francis, comes from his appreciation of the lived Gospels.

⁹ The phrase "*splendor veritatis*" is not used in this text but it is clearly the meaning of the passage as is evident from Bonaventure's description of the seven stages of truth in *De Triplici Via: assensus rationis, affectus compassionis, aspectus admirationis, excessus devotionis, amictus assimilationis, amplexus crucis, intuitus veritatis* (3:3:3). Such a process connects quite brilliantly with this entire passage, for the Seraphic Doctor challenges the priest to assist God's people in the discovery of "the articles of faith in the soul. . ." In his *Conferences on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, when he observes that theology must be within the theologian, Bonaventure states that theology is "a pious knowledge of the truth apprehended by faith" (4:5).

¹⁰ To appreciate this passage fully, it is important to understand the Bonaventurian approach to "right living" outlined in the *Itinerarium*, Chapter 3, in which the Seraphic Doctor presents the journey into God not as a movement from sin to grace but as a movement from the Good through the Better to the Best. When the good soul encounters the best, it strives to be better. So the good Christian in the presence of Jesus, who is the Best, seeks to be better and the good Franciscan seeks the better through the example of Francis, the best *Forma Minorum*. So here the Seraphic doctor sees the field as *paradise and the garden of Eden*. Later he will deal with what sin has done to harm this gift from God.

¹¹ For the friar-priest, this may be the most frightening passage in the work. Like Francis, Bonaventure insists on holiness of life as the fundamental sermon to be preached.

¹² Priests who are prone to bemoan the mediocre ways of the laity need to carefully meditate on these few but stirring words of Bonaventure: we should not rail against their lifestyles but change our own!

¹³ The friar-priest, then, must be aware of both the needs of the people and the desires of God for His People.

¹⁴ Here Bonaventure points out that the priest has given "power to the people." Priesthood, then, is not a position of power but rather one of service. Such a notion can only be understood through a contemplative reflection on the writings of Francis regarding what it means to be a lesser brother and the observations of Bonaventure in *De Triplici Via* where he speaks of the necessity of the soul entering into a relationship to have "the desire for martyrdom" (2:3:8).

¹⁵ Compare to *Six Wings of the Seraph*, in which the Pseudo-Bonaventurian author writes: "The good Samaritan, finding the victim of the bandits lying abandoned and only half alive, poured oil and wine on his wounds. When a member of the community needs help, the head should offer the wind of fervent zeal and the oil of comforting brotherly love" (*The Character of a Christian Leader, a modern version of Six Wings of the Seraph*, translated by Philip O'Mara (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1978)).

¹⁶ One can only marvel at the gentleness of this passage! Bonaventure would have been most uncomfortable in the presence of Franciscan preachers of the 15th and 16th centuries who went into diatribes against the sins of the people. Here he presents the preacher as a doctor who gently and humbly cleans the wounds of the suffering. The image of a caring nurse also comes to mind as does that wonderful passage from Bonaventure's *Commentary on Luke's Gospel*: "[The preacher] must be motivated by a brotherly compassion. . . . As Gregory says: 'He who has no charity for others must never take on the office of preaching. . . .' He must have enkindled within him a sympathetic attitude towards others" (*Prola*:3).

¹⁷ The Seraphic Doctor uses this passage not with its usual sacramental overtones but to show how the priest should approach those in need of healing.

¹⁸ Bonaventure's gentleness does not mean that he does not confront sin and evil. He clearly addressed such difficult issues both within and without the Order, particularly in the spirit of the Rule of 1223:10. In his *First Encyclical Letter*, written after being elected Minister General, he not only urges the brothers "to root out what is evil, promote what is good, revive what is weak, and reinforce what is already strong," but he also writes "*Seeing myself as a sentinel for the House of Israel*, I have decided to write you briefly about certain matters. . ." listing evils that have developed in the Order [Cf. Dominic Monti, *Works of Saint Bonaventure V* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute), 58-59]. In our present passage, he points out that, when the priest sees imminent danger, he would be remiss not to "blow the trumpet," that is preach about it.

¹⁹ Having presented this evangelical vision of the priesthood, Bonaventure turns to the issue at hand: the rejection of the mendicant mission by some of the secular clergy at the University of Paris. While responding to an historical situation, these paragraphs give a magnificent picture of what the Seraphic doctor sees as the Franciscan vision of priesthood in light of the seven evangelical images presented above.

²⁰ Bonaventure does not present the mendicant priesthood in opposition to the diocesan priesthood but in relationship to it. In doing so, he does see one as better than the other. They simply model different thrusts of the one priesthood of Jesus: one primarily sacra-

mental, the other primarily evangelical. This vision reflects Francis' unwillingness to allow his friar-priests to accept the evolving Eucharistic theology and praxis of his times as is evident from his *Letter to the Entire Order*: "I admonish and urge in the Lord that only one Mass according to the form of the Holy Church be celebrated each day in the places in which the brothers stay. If, however, there should be more than one priest in that place, let one be content, for the sake of charity, to assist at the celebration of the other priest" (*EpOrd* 30-31 in *AB*, 58). The position that prevails in the Order, however, is expounded by St. Bonaventure in his *Treatise on Preparing for the Celebration of Mass* (1:9) in which Bonaventure equates the celebration of Mass with reception of Holy Communion, urging the priest not to deprive himself of the effects of Holy Communion. But Bonaventure is not unaware of the fears of St. Francis and the dangers of his position so he urges the priest to consider his motives as he approaches the altar (I:14). For an enlightening analysis of Francis' *Letter*, see Octavian Schumucki's article in *Greyfriars Review* 3 (1989): 1-33.

²¹ Obviously Bonaventure has in mind the initial call of Francis: "Rebuild My House."

²² The Garden of Eden - Paradise - referred to earlier is not what it once was!

²³ The Seraphic Doctor sees the mendicant contribution to be two-fold: work and learning. From its beginning, the manner of Franciscan presence among the people was through daily work. An additional way of presence has developed, namely through the intellectual life, a cause of great controversy among some of the early followers of Francis and tremendous agitation among some of the faculty members at the University of Paris. Bonaventure, however, takes it for granted. See his much earlier work: *A Letter in Response to Three Questions of an Unknown Master* (Monti, *Works of Saint Bonaventure* V, 39-56), which C. H. Lawrence in his book *The Friars* (London: Longman, 1994) calls "A daring apologia for (a) new model of Friar Minor" (p. 58).

²⁴ Franciscan life and preaching should not add burdens to oppressed people. Rather the mendicant ministry should help to "ease the burden." This is done through prayer and penance on the part of the mendicant priest.

²⁵ While the phrase "through their penitential lives" is not included in the Latin text, it is clear from the context and the other writing of the Seraphic Doctor that prayer and penance are Franciscan means of conversion. Here Bonaventure hints at a priestly lifestyle for the mendicant - and particularly - for the Franciscan priest.

²⁶ While quite difficult to accurately translate, I believe the image of "orderly" best describes Bonaventure's notion of the lesser brother who is a priest.

²⁷ Again one is reminded of the Bonaventuran notion of "the desire for martyrdom." No one should seek ordination or be allowed to be ordained if he is unwilling to be sacrificed for the sake of the people. Particularly apropos to the mendicant priesthood, then, are the words of Paul: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (*Rm* 12:1).

²⁸ While some may view these images as paternalistic and maternalistic, they surely reflect Francis' approach to authority as described in his various letters. Further, these Bonaventuran images are evangelical and relational, that is, they are founded on the Gospel and in relationship with people.

²⁹ God's people are neither a distraction nor a detriment; they are a consolation IF priesthood is exercised as Bonaventure describes it here.

Christmas Eve at Greccio in 1223

ANN WEMHOFF, O.S.F.

Sometimes we make assumptions or take the information with which we are most familiar for granted. Consequently, we never go back to find out whether or not our impressions and memories are accurate. Sometimes also, because an experience was exceptionally good or exceptionally bad, the memory of it changes over time to become something other than what was originally intended. Is it possible that something like this could have happened to the Greccio experience on Christmas Eve in 1223?

Let us examine the Franciscan sources in order to understand more accurately what Francis really had in mind when he planned that celebration. What happened during the celebration? What was its effect on the people and the surrounding area? Can we draw some conclusions relevant to contemporary celebrations of Christmas?

Some background information might be helpful. Greccio is a small town about 45 miles south of Assisi. What do we know about the Greccio of the 1220's? Early biographers tell us that it was a place dear to the heart of Francis, and that he went there often. In the *Legend of Perugia* we read:

The brothers of the friary at Greccio were virtuous and poor, and the inhabitants of the country, despite their poverty and simplicity, were more pleasing to blessed Francis than those of the rest of the province. Consequently, he often went there to relax or tarry. There was an especially small, poor, and very solitary cell there to which holy Francis liked to withdraw (*LP* 34).

Celano also praised the virtues of the brothers and describes the environment at Greccio.

Francis liked to stay at the brothers' place at Greccio, both because he saw that it was rich by reason of its poverty and because he could give himself more freely to heavenly things in a more secluded cell hewn from a projecting rock (*2 Cel* 35).

We find in the *Legend of Perugia* how much the fervor of Francis and the brothers affected the men of the town.

This article is based on a talk given by Sister Ann Wemhoff to the Secular Franciscans in Lincoln, Nebraska. Sr. Ann, who is a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Colorado Springs, has studied at the Franciscan Institute at Saint Bonaventure University.

His example, his preaching, and that of his brothers were the reason, together with the grace of God, that many of the inhabitants entered the Order (*LP 34*).

In the same Legend we also read about the lifestyle of many of the women of Greccio after they had encountered Francis and his followers.

Many women took the vow of virginity and adopted a religious habit; each one had her own house, but they led a common life; they practiced virtue, mortification, fasting and prayer; one got the impression that they were living apart from the world and their relatives; despite their youthful age and their great simplicity, they seemed to have been formed by holy religious women who had been in the service of Christ for a long time (*LP 34*).

Later there is a description of the influence the brothers had on the entire town.

The Brothers at Greccio, as was the custom of the brothers at that time in many of the friaries, sang the praises of the Lord in the evening. Then, men and women, great and small, would come out of their homes, stand on the road before the town, and alternate with the brothers repeating in a loud voice, "Blessed be the Lord God." Even the little children who hardly knew how to talk, praised God according to their ability" (*LP 34*).

Celano, Bonaventure and the Legend of Perugia all tell the story of wolves and hail that ravaged the village until Francis promised that if the people would repent and confess their sins they would be delivered from these pestilences (*2 Cel 35; LM 8:11; LP 34*). All three also record that the people did repent and began to live holy lives. Consequently, they were freed from the pestilences. Given the high regard Francis had for the people of Greccio as well as their degree of cooperation and participation in the Christmas celebration of 1223 which will be described later, would it be wrong to speculate that the conversion occurred prior to this year? There is no way to prove this theory, and in fact, the written records would seem to indicate otherwise. However, we know that the people of that day did not record history as we do today, and either interpretation is possible.

In any case, it was this town of Greccio which Francis chose to transform into a new Bethlehem just three years before he died. Julian of Speyer, reminds us that, "The holy man...did not wish, if he could help it, to neglect even a jot or tittle of what was narrated in the books of the holy gospel" (*JS 10.53*; see also *1 Cel 84*). Bonaventure relates that before Francis carried out his dream he sought permission of the pope for a special liturgical celebration in Greccio. He did this because he did not wish to be accused of being an innovator (*LM 8:7*).

After he had obtained the pope's approval, and about fifteen days before the occasion, Francis called a friend of his named John who lived in Greccio. Celano describes him as a man with a good reputation who belonged to the

nobility but renounced his position to pursue nobility of soul (*1 Cel 84*). Francis explained his idea to John and asked him to gather the materials needed for the celebration (*1 Cel 84*; see also *JS 53*). Exactly what did Francis ask John to prepare? They are described in three sources:

The manger was prepared, the hay had been brought, the ox and ass were led in (*1 Cel 85*).

... who provided an ox and an ass, stable ... (*JS 53*).

... and then he had a crib prepared, with hay and an ox and an ass (*LM 8:7*).

Note that there is no mention of a Jesus, a Mary, or a Joseph - those figures which play such prominent roles in our Christmas cribs today. John was to prepare only a manger with hay, an ox, and an ass. Perhaps Francis knew instinctively that if the place and the people were properly prepared, Christ would come.

Precisely what did Francis have in mind when he proposed this celebration? Below are three quotations from various sources which give us the reasons why Francis chose to celebrate in this manner:

For I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs, how he laid in a manger, how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he lay upon the hay where he had been placed (*1 Cel 84*).

Therefore, desiring to represent as faithfully as possible the lowly poverty of the infancy of the Savior born at Bethlehem ... (*JP 10, 53*).

... Francis decided to celebrate the memory of the birth of the Child Jesus at Greccio, ...

... his heart overflowed with tender compassion, ... Then he preached to the people about the birth of the poor King ... (*LM 8:7*).

Notice that in each source there is emphasis on the poverty which the Babe of Bethlehem was willing to suffer, rather than on the aspect of gift which has become so prevalent in our Christmas celebrations today.¹ Isn't it ironic that the celebration from which the business people of today expect to make a greater profit than at any other time of the year was popularized by someone who primarily wanted to recall the inconveniences which Christ suffered and the poverty that He was willing to endure for us at His birth? What a conversation piece we would present if we were to set up a crib at Christmas with only a manger, an ox, and an ass! Would we be able to defend it as an example of the poverty which Christ modeled for us as convincingly as do those who use Christmas for monetary gain? Could it provide a counter-cultural symbol allowing Christ to become present in a unique way into a world where material things are often more important than faith in our Savior?

Who was invited to the Christmas celebration at Greccio? What effect did it have on the surrounding environment? In the sources we read:

The Friars were all invited and the people came in crowds. The forest re-echoed with their voices and the night was lit up with a multitude of bright lights, while the beautiful music of God's praises added to the solemnity (*LM 8:7*).

The brothers were called from their various places. Men and women of that neighborhood prepared with glad hearts, according to their means, candles and torches to light up that night that has lighted up all the days and years with its gleaming star . . . The night was lighted up like the day, and it delighted men and beasts. The people came and were filled with new joy over the new mystery. The woods rang with the voices of the crowd and the rocks made answer to their jubilation. The brothers sang, paying their debt of praise to the Lord, and the whole night resounded with their rejoicing (*I Cel 85*).

Blessed Francis was there with many of his friars gathered around him. . . A great multitude of people, streaming together from various places, filled the night with an unaccustomed joy, and made luminous by candles and torches (*JS 53*).

Notice that not only the people, but the entire environment was involved in the celebration, including the woods, the rocks, the animals, and the quiet darkness of the night. The joy and excitement of the "Entrance Procession" has already been alluded to. As in preparation for many liturgical celebrations today, Julian of Speyer indicates that there was singing before the celebration in anticipation of the actual liturgy.

The friars also paid their debt of praise to the Lord, and all present acclaimed him with new songs of praise. Blessed Francis, however, was standing before the manger full of sighs of joy and suffused by an indescribable sweetness. Finally, when Solemn Mass was celebrated. . . (*JS 53*; see also *I Cel 85*).

What happened during the celebration? Julian of Speyer writes, "And so, with a new ritual, the festival of a new Bethlehem was celebrated (*JS 53*; see also *I Cel 85*). Celano, Bonaventure, and Julian of Speyer all tell us that a solemn Mass was celebrated. All three also relate that Francis participated as a deacon. He read or sang the Gospel and delivered the sermon (*I Cel 86*; *JS 53*; *LM 10:7*). It must have been a sermon that made a deep impression on those who heard it. Several years later, Celano describes it as follows:

Then he preached to the people standing about, and he spoke charming words concerning the nativity of the poor King and the little town of Bethlehem. Frequently too, when he wished to call Christ Jesus, he would call him simply the Child of Bethlehem, aglow with overflowing love for him: and speaking the word Bethlehem, his voice was more like the bleating of a sheep. His mouth was filled more with sweet affection than with words. Besides, when he spoke the name Child of Bethlehem or Jesus, his tongue licked his lips, as it were, relishing and savoring with pleased palate the sweetness of the words (*I Cel 86*; see also *LM 8:7*).

At some point during the celebration the Christ Child appeared, but He was seen only by John, and of course, by Francis.

The gifts of the Almighty were multiplied there, and a wonderful vision was seen by a certain virtuous man. For he saw a little child lying in the manger lifeless, and he saw the holy man of God go up to it and rouse the child as from a deep sleep. This vision was not unfitting, for the Child Jesus had been forgotten in the hearts of many; but, by the working of his grace, he was brought to life again through his servant St. Francis and stamped upon their fervent memory (*I Cel 86*; see also *LM 8:7*).

Julian of Speyer made the conclusion that this miraculous vision was a sign of divine approval of the entire celebration (*JP 53*). And why should this not be so? As Celano states:

There simplicity was honored, poverty was exulted, humility was commended, and Greccio was made, as it were, a new Bethlehem (*I Cel 85*).

Bonaventure gives three reasons why the vision should not be doubted, namely, the integrity of the witness, the miracles which occurred afterwards, and the truth indicated by the vision itself (*LM 10:7*). As mentioned earlier, the witness was John whose character was described previously. What were the miracles which Bonaventure referred to? Three sources relate that the hay on which the Christ Child had lain was used to cure both people and animals, and Bonaventure writes that it drove off various pestilences (*I Cel 87*; *JS 55*; *LM 10:7*). A reflection on the "truth indicated by the vision" would require a study beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that a person must believe that Christ really did come to earth for our redemption in order to understand that truth.

In summary, the celebration at Greccio was designed first and foremost to recall the humility, poverty, simplicity and inconveniences Christ was willing to endure for us. This was done by preparing an environment that was simple and uncluttered and then celebrating the memory of that event with the surrounding community. The people were involved not only in the celebration, but also in the preparation, each according to his or her means. Because of the Spirit present, not only the people, but also the animals and the entire environment felt the effects of the Divine presence on that memorable Christmas Eve and in the years that followed. What an example of abandonment and poverty that Christmas Eve celebration could provide for our celebration of Christmas in the world today!

End notes

¹The emphasis on poverty is less evident in the *Legenda Major*, but this is understandable given the turmoil surrounding that subject throughout the Order at the time when Bonaventure was probably working on the *Legenda Major*. See: John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from Its Origin to the Year 1517* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press), 145.

THE CONTINUING CHALLENGE OF FRANCIS OF ASSISI

And Francis speaks:

"My Child, this is your Ancient Friend — your Father Francis . . .
We've known each other for many years . . .
You've always appreciated my direct manner . . .

My Son,

Have you the courage to Kiss the Leper?
Dare you to strip naked and call upon God Our Father?
Can you be Herald of the Great King?
Have you the strength to embrace Perfect Joy?
Are you Brother to all the creatures in my Canticle?
Will you preach to the Sultan in spite of fear?
Can you exorcise the demon known as Gloom?
Trust you enough to cast your cares upon The Lord?
Pray you enough to be Prayer itself?
Believe you enough to accept the Miracle of Greccio?
Love you enough to witness the Revelation of La Verna?
Is Easter real enough for you not to be intimidated by Sister Death?

My Son, take care . . .
one day you will have to give an account of yourself."

Fr. Gabriel B. Costa

The Charism and Contributions of the Franciscan Evangelical Life in Church and World

KATHLEEN UHLER, O.S.F.

I am pleased to be asked on this very special occasion in your congregation's life to convey some ideas which are central and critical to our present circumstances as Franciscan women religious in vital relationship with the Church and the world.

The evangelical life, we know, is not lived just by Franciscans, but by all religious who base their rule and life on the gospel. Yet, the Dominicans, Maryknolls, Daughters of Charity and Sisters of Mercy are not contesting, as we are, the designation of their congregations as apostolic in the revised Code of Canon Law.

Why are we doing so? Part of the answer is found in the meaning of the singular way we Franciscans live out the evangelical life - about which I will speak shortly. The other part to the answer flows from the documents of Vatican II, notably *Lumen Gentium*, chapters 6 and 45, and *Perfectae Caritatis*, chapter 2B. The relevant sections of these documents are excerpted and referenced in the "*Lineamenta*" for the 1994 world Synod of Bishops, which [was] held in Rome [in October].

The part of the answer that flows from the bishops' own document, the "*Lineamenta*," or outline of Synod issues and questions, underscores over and over again the autonomy of religious congregations. The bishops stress that the consecrated life belongs *not* to the hierarchy of the church but "unquestionably to the church's life and holiness" (II.14). Religious are the lubricant in the gears and inner workings, spelled H I E R A R C H Y, of the church.

Sr. Kathleen Uhler, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, has her doctorate in Philosophy and presently is working full-time with Franciscans International. Sr. Kathleen delivered this Keynote Address at the Closing Celebration of the 150th Anniversary for the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis in Springfield, Illinois on October 1, 1994.

The document goes on at some length, but truly instructively, to give a contextual definition for an extremely important but elusive term, "charism." And, I quote again from the text:

Through their particular experience of the Spirit, founders and foundresses have expressed in a unique way the essential elements of the consecrated life, so placing them as to highlight a certain aspect of the mystery of Christ, or a fundamental value of the Gospel, or a particular service to the church or others. In this way the diverse forms of life and the varieties of institutes came about. Today their vitality and ecclesial service depend on fidelity to the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out in their initial foundational charisms (II. 17).

This reminds me of the usage Robert Bellah and others make of the idea of "cultural tradition" in their insightful book, *Habits of the Heart*. One of the conclusions they reach is that cultural tradition provides the meaning of the destiny its members share.¹ A familiar aphorism, sometimes attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas, also captures the same meaning: "the end is in the beginning."

The "*Lineamenta*" actually invites us to revisit the memories of our founding persons. Again, one is reminded of the concept of the "community of memory" described in *Habits of the Heart* as a "real" community whose members retell its story, its constitutive narrative, and, in so doing, offer examples of the men and women who have embodied the meaning of the community. The members of a community of memory allow themselves to be *encumbered* by their collective history - good and evil, glory and sorrow - and by adherence to the virtues of their exemplary forebears.²

In the "*Lineamenta*," the ideal of a community of memory is carried further to include the capacity to survive in a new age, to renew in harmony with the "genuine originality and special working initiative" (II.33) of the founders and foundresses. (And, by the way, it is laudable that great care seems to have been taken to use inclusive language in "*Lineamenta*.")

FRANCISCAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHURCH AND WORLD

Let us take a few minutes to retell some of the myriad ways in which exemplary Franciscans have made and continue to make contributions to the Church and the world. Here we are edified by some of the living exemplars of the marks of Franciscanism.

- Paulo Cardinal Evaristo Arns OFM has worked tirelessly with some success to free prisoners in Brazil and to stop the use of torture as a method of controlling them.
- Mary Minor SFO works through the legislature in Pennsylvania with a group called, Citizens Urge Rescue of the Environment (CURE) to prevent adverse human health effects from exposure to hazardous wastes.

- The Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Health System sponsors programs to heal the environment at each of their eight facilities. These efforts are detailed in their Social Accountability Budgets. A similar effort is occurring at Franciscan Sisters of Allegany Health System.
- An Anglican Franciscan brother in New Zealand is speaking out in behalf of the mature unemployed, those over 40, whose numbers are growing dramatically there.
- The Sisters of St. Francis of Clinton, Iowa have instituted a Prairie Planting project to combat soil erosion and to use only organic gardening methods on their 85 acres.
- As you know, because your congregation is such a good supporter of it, there is a Franciscan non-governmental organization or NGO at the United Nations called, Franciscans International.

Allow me to digress with a little of Franciscans International history: The goals of the U.N. Charter and the values of St. Francis are quite congruent. This has been acknowledged and celebrated ever since the day in 1945 when the U.N. Charter was signed, symbolically enough, in San Francisco. In 1981, an English friar, Eric Doyle OFM, dedicated his well-known book, *St. Francis and the Song of Brotherhood*, to the United Nations and UNESCO. Shortly thereafter, Sister Elizabeth Cameron, now deceased, of the Clinton, Iowa Franciscans, introduced the idea of a Franciscan NGO to the Franciscan Federation Board, and the idea was nurtured there and became a reality in 1989.

Through this NGO, many Franciscans around the world are bringing the values, prophetic witness and the presence of Francis and Clare to general assemblies and caucuses and are making a discernible impact on treaties and resolutions. Some examples:

- Recently, at U.N. Headquarters in New York, during the Preparatory Committee meeting for the World Women's Conference to be held in Beijing in 1995, Anneta Duveen SFO collaborated in the origination of proposals on the health concerns of refugee women and on an international law requiring child support from the neglectful parent.
- In Brazil, during the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, Carmela Panini CF, of Brazil, served on the task force that drew up the NGO Treaty on the Peoples of the Americas, The Ethics Treaty, and The Treaty on Richness and Poverty.
- The head of the Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations, Archbishop Renato Martini, is a Third Order Regular member. His statements on the abolition of the world's nuclear military power strongly impressed the U.N. General Assembly Committee on Disarmament last fall.

- In other ways, Franciscans are raising awareness about the peace and justice issues of the day in their home countries. Often this is happening through the organization of national SFO commissions, such as in the USA on the environment and on the family.

As a fulltime staffer of Franciscans International, I am continuously informed about the activities of our Franciscan members on each of the five continents as their actions foment local and global systemic change and impact the lives of countless individuals. Indeed, Franciscans are changing the world.

Within the Catholic Church, on the other hand, the Franciscan influence or "lubrication" is felt by the hierarchy especially in these days. Since the promulgation of the revised Code of Canon Law in 1983, the First Orders have exercised loyal resistance to the Code's suppression of the friar-brother as general ministers and the Third Order Regular Franciscans have loyally resisted being form fitted into either the apostolic or contemplative category of religious institutions. Thus, the Franciscan Federation's "Response to the Lineamenta" was drafted which has striven to clarify for the Church, as well as for the TOR, the nature of the Franciscan evangelical life.

The response of Church hierarchy remains to be seen in the matter of possible institutional forms for religious lay congregations beyond either contemplative/monastic or active/apostolic with a mission *ad gentes* (II.18.a).

THE UNIQUENESS OF FRANCISCANISM

The Franciscan life, whether individual or corporate, has never been tidy; but it has always had its uniqueness and charm. An in-joke among ourselves, often heard during the staging of grand events not unlike centennial celebrations, is the use of the expression, more like an expletive: "Seraphic confusion!" This is usually accompanied by the throwing up of arms and the rolling back of eyes. Indeed, it was only confirmed in contemporary times by color dynamics that the color of confusion is brown.

There are other ways in which the Franciscan evangelical life is unique. Let's look at a few of these.

- It is a movement. Much has been written about this, the plusses and minuses of being a movement, but suffice it to say that Franciscanism is meant to be an organism, not an institution. It consists of people working through concerted activities towards a goal, about which our charism has much to say and we will consider this shortly.
- It is a family -- of men and women; of clerics, lay religious and seculars; of married and single persons; of active and contemplative lifestyles. In the Franciscan family, all members are relative equals.

- Peacemaking and conflict resolution are elements of our ancient Rules.
- It is ecumenical, consisting of members from denominations other than Catholic, e.g. the Presbyterian, Episcopal, Anglican and Lutheran churches.
- Historically, it has always kept close ties with the Islamic peoples.
- In short, the Franciscan movement is uniquely inclusive.

But, while we include many others, others even more disparate than these include us! This flip side of our inclusivity has been experienced by those of us who are privileged to work at the United Nations. We have been *universally accepted* as a natural fit, so to speak, in the embrace of the U.N. community. It is true that people from all walks of life feel an identity and an "at homeness" with Franciscans. They know Francis.

CHARISM

Now, let's consider the cause of these unique effects: our Franciscan charism.

For each Franciscan congregation of women religious, there is a double charism: that of Francis and that of their foundresses and founders. (To the charism of Francis there has also been added for many of us in the past ten years the co-charism of Clare.)

In Fr. Joe Chinnici's keynote address on the evangelical life at the 1994 Annual Federation Conference, we were reminded that, as Sister Death approached, Francis said to a distraught Brother Giles, "If you want to talk to me, study yourself."

We hear a confirmation of this manner of continual renewal through self-knowledge in the "Lineamenta" where, once again, the importance of each religious institute's founding charism is affirmed:

In the variety of inspirations and the particular features of each institute, the church acknowledges "the charisms of founders and foundresses," which "are revealed as an *experience of the Spirit*, transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and *constantly developed* by them in harmony with the body of Christ continually in the *process of growth*. It is for this reason that the distinctive character of various religious institutes is preserved and fostered by the church (II.16).

The Franciscan Federation's "Response to the *Lineamenta*" (RTL) serves us well as an articulation of the TOR charism at the close of the second millennium. It states succinctly: "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 all sisters and brothers."

The flow of ideas is from essence to charism: form or essence leads to function or charism. All religious congregations enjoy the same essence - life based on Jesus' own life, the gospel life, the evangelical life. That we congregations function or flower uniquely in the gospel garden one from the other is due to our charism, that particular aspect of Jesus' life in the Gospel which our foundresses' and founders' inspired personalities exhibited *par excellence*.

Francis' personality is one of the most highly concentrated in all of history. He himself has become a symbol, a "representative character" of which Bellah speaks in *Habits of the Heart*. A representative character helps define the way people in a society organize and give meaning and direction to their lives. A representative character provides an ideal, a point of reference and focus, that gives living expression to a vision of life (39).

Since we're in the Land of Lincoln, I'll cite further Bellah's explanation: "Abraham Lincoln was perhaps the noblest example of the mid-nineteenth century American independent citizen." In his language, Lincoln was biblically eloquent and showed a profound understanding of democracy. Yet it was Lincoln the railsplitter who went from log cabin to White House rather than Lincoln the public theologian or Lincoln the democratic philosopher who captured the popular imagination (39-40).

Our charism, following Francis, is "a radically simple gospel call where we are **all sisters and brothers**" (RTL). Francis, the author of the *Canticle of Creatures*, was above all a radical egalitarian. It is the image of Francis and his Sister Birds that has captured the universal imagination and evoked the nature mystic archetype from our collective unconscious.

Your founder, Father Christopher [Bernsmeyer, OFM], is a representative character who embodied in a highly visible manner one or more Franciscan traits. Which are they for you? And, how do you integrate these traits with those of another representative character of your congregation, Our Mother of Sorrows [at Telgte, Germany]?

In the RTL, I suggest, there are three central strands to the cord or plait of our charism - continuous conversion; a common heart; and the contemplative stance. Let's consider each strand:

- At a meeting held recently, when asked what was the charism of the TOR, Kathleen Moffatt, OSF, executive director of the Franciscan Federation, replied immediately, "continuous conversion." When we are on a level with all that is created, we naturally participate in the give and take of lived experience as one in a dance does with one partner, then another. Accordingly, Franciscans live in mutual obedience to one another and affirm the role of minister as servant among them.

- Francis, allowing himself to be "grasped by Jesus Christ," (RTL), ultimately on Mt. Alvernia, replaced his own heart, so to speak, with that of Jesus. To be one with Jesus Christ, the Firstborn of all Creation is to possess a common heart. This is our greatest possession, and the greatest gift we might give in service of all. Thus, as Francis impressed upon us, we minister more by example than by words or deeds.
- Our charism of radical equality with all creation entails the joyful proclaiming of the Goodness of God, the Creator. We are led naturally to the door at the heart of the world, to the point of the source of all being. We await in our poverty God's good favor - to let us experience *le point vierge*, as Thomas Merton called it, the virginal point, or more loosely translated, the point upon which only one can stand. We assume each day the contemplative stance before God and the world. The radical unity felt in this simple, mystical Franciscan way of prayer compels one to make unity and peace wherever one is.

The contribution of Franciscans to the world, and more specifically, of yourselves as the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis, who are now taking leave of a grand anniversary year and facing the future with renewed vigor and vision for the journey which you have called, "New Beginnings" - your contribution to the Church and the world will spring from our TOR charism.

But what can middle-aged, fortyish, fiftyish and beyond women do? We are thrust by Divine Providence into what I like to call the "Elizabeth position" - when Elizabeth found herself pregnant after she had outlived motherhood.

Not to worry! When we have a sacred memory, the charism of the founder or foundress, we have a destiny, a mission to fulfill in the Church and the world. In the words of the Preamble of the General Constitutions of your congregation: "The thoughts and the charisms of St. Francis, based on the gospels, are living and valid for each generation" (6).

With our charismatic eye, we can adopt a prophetic stance and view the signs of the times and see how we might counter the culture even while remaining busy at our individual or institutionalized ministries in healthcare, especially, or whatever it might be. Please bear with my attempts to use healthcare lingo with a touch of humor (intertwining some of Bellah's ideas):

1. We can by our attitudes cure others from thinking of commitments - from marriage and work to political and religious involvement - as forms of self-fulfillment rather than as moral imperatives (Bellah, 47).
2. We can dilate for ourselves the meaning and purpose of the intentional community as distinct from a "lifestyle enclave" which serves basically as a collective support for self-expression (71).

3. We can inoculate discussions of the new world order with a good dose of the notion of substantive justice, which encompasses long-range consequences (26).
4. We can assist in the delivery of a change in the meaning of work by showing its integrative value for all of life and not just for private gains (288-89).

Franciscans are empowered to make all of these contributions and more through the energy exchanged with the Divine in the core of the prayerful heart. The insight of the subtheme of this Assembly, "to celebrate Franciscan women, including (your)selves," is intertwined with the contemplative strand of our charism.

I would like to conclude this address with a poet's description of the contemplation of the celebrant self. In 1855, Walt Whitman, a Brooklynite, published his great tribute to America, the volume of poems which was to become his life's work entitled, "Leaves of Grass." (No, Whitman was not a Franciscan, but he had a contemplative, Franciscan heart.) Whitman was reflecting on the American scene, which was not unlike that found by your sisters when they arrived here in 1875. From the poem, "Song of Myself" in the first section:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
 And what I assume you shall assume,
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
 I loafe and invite my soul,
 I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.
 My tongue, every atom of my blood, formed from this soil, this air,
 Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents
 the same,
 I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
 Hoping to cease not till death.

In section 30:

All truths wait in all things,
 They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,...

And, in section 31, a purely contemplative insight and source for the title of Whitman's life's work:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars,...

Finally, from section 48:

I hear and behold God in every object,
 yet understand God not in the least,
 Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.

End notes

¹ *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985), 28.

² *Ibid.*, 153

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