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The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

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The CORD

A Monthly Franciscan Spiritual Review

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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

EpRect: 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 VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy

II, II refer to First and Second Editions.

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis

2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis

3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles

CL: Legend of Saint Clare

CP: Process of Saint Clare

Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis

LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis LMin: Bonaventure Minor Life of Francis

LP: Legend of Perugia

L3S: Legend of the Three Companions

SC Sacrum Commercium

SP: Mirror of Perfection

Omnibus: Marion A. Habig, ed., St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis (Chicago Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).

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



On How Certain Brothers Recognized The Truth Of The Words: The Lord Corrects Those Whom He Loves

HERMANN SCHALÜCK, O.F.M.

1.

At that time — it was the beginning of the month of Ramadan, as it was also for Christians the beginning of the penitential season in preparation for Paschaltime — during the week in which Desert Storm in Arabia and Mesopotamia began to abate, lo! Brothers John of America, William of Britain and Transalpine Hermann, all belonging to that house in Rome called the Curia of the Friars Minor, set out for the East. They set out for the regions once known by the names of Carpathia, Valaquia, Moldavia, Transylvania and Dacia, regions now inhabited by the tribes of the Magyars and the Czechs as well as by descendants of people from Saxony and Suevia in Germany. The three pilgrims from Rome were anxious to visit their brothers living in these regions who, through many long, dark years, had suffered a great deal of injustice and persecution. In these latter months, however, at the end of most severe affliction, they now saw, in accordance with the plan of a benevolent God, a new light appear and they began to awaken to new life. The pilgrims wished to experience, in the example of their brothers in exile, a new driving force for their own faith and the service they were rendering in Rome. They, on their part, came to offer these brothers encouragement and solidarity.

Though the experiences related here took place some three years ago, readers will resonate deeply to the Franciscan values so beautifully expressed by the author.

2.

The three companions from Rome chose for their first stopping-place the country of the Magyars, a place called SZEGED, in the Province of St. John Capistran. Precisely here, on the banks of the river Theiss, is located the ancient convent of which blessed James of the Marches had been the Guardian. On their arrival, the three companions were greeted by Brother Claudius, the Provincial of that Province, and by the local bishop. During the forty years previously, those with power in the land and those who had embraced an ideology opposed to God, had profaned this building and had all but destroyed it completely. In these latter years, however, it was coming to life again in an extraordinary way. Our pilgrims were overjoyed to hear that just in those days a great number of young people, by divine inspiration, were asking to be received to obedience as members of the three Provinces of the Magyar tongue. In this same house, which was being reconstructed with great sacrifice and the contributions of numerous brothers the world over, these men would receive formation in accordance with the Gospel and instruction in sacred theology. Brother John celebrated the holy liturgy, joined by all the friars and the people of the place; and its principal theme was: "Whoever has not the courage to dream, does not have the strength to strive." In the name of Jesus they recalled the exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the desert. For themselves and for all the oppressed, wherever they might be, they celebrated the memorial of their liberation by the Lord. And they asked the Lord of History to deign to heal this dissolute world and to render their brothers capable, wherever they might be, of being servants of evangelization, of healing and liberation, now most of all when the Chapter of Pentecost was imminent. Afterwards they renewed their strength with a good, strong fish soup and slept for some hours on hard straw mattresses. The three companions then set out once more under the maternal protection of Brother Claudius of Budapest, who had now become their guardian on their journey.

3.

In Transylvania, which today forms part of Rumania, they first visited the place called MARIA RADNA, where the memory of the Mother of the Risen Lord is kept alive. There, three very old friars who had survived a long period of oppression, were overjoyed and immensely grateful for the visit. Other friars came from all the surrounding countryside as soon as they heard of the arrival of their guests from Rome. After having been forbidden to do so for so many years, they now took their habits out from their hiding places and put them on for the first time in ages, as a sign of belonging to a brotherhood which extends all over the world. This was also an act of thanksgiving for the fact that the Lord and their brothers in the whole world had not abandoned them in their time of exile. When they had exchanged greetings and the kiss of peace and had fortified themselves with the large loaves and the dry wine of those cold regions, they went in procession into the sanctuary to thank the Lord and his

Holy Mother for these signs of consolation. When a huge crowd had gathered together from all the surrounding villages, they all sang this chant which, in a wonderful manner, the Lord himself inspired them to do at that moment:

"Hail Mary,

You who take upon yourself the hopes of the oppressed, Sign of salvation and of unexpected liberation, You have been chosen by the Lord of History, Blessed are you among all the poor,

Holy Mary, Mother of Europe, of Latin America,
and of all the poor
in all the world and throughout all time,
pray for us
that we may listen to the Spirit of God and obey him
in this hour
in which the peoples of the whole world are becoming awake.
May the hour soon come
in which everybody may experience full and complete justice
joined to a lasting peace;
and where the new era of liberty
may be there for all to see.

4.

They then visited TEMESVAR, DEVA, HUNEDOARA and finally a place founded by the Germans, which bears the name of HERMANNSTADT. For that reason it held particular interest for Brother Transalpinus. After a tiring journey along the course of the river Moros and through the Carpathians covered with snow, they reached the country of the CZECHS, where the friars of the Province of King Saint Stephen, (969-1038), even to this day take care of the sanctuary of the "Mother of the Afflicted." Here one can also see a slab which records that away back in August of 1938, the Minister General from Rome, a certain Brother Leonard Mary, had visited this sanctuary and the friars who take care of it. The three companions remained there for some days during which time they themselves saw to the heating of the bare cells by hauling great trunks of firewood from the woods which were still under snow from the Carpathians. They held a meeting with the friars of the whole Province and mutually updated their information about the death and resurrection of the Fraternity throughout Europe and other areas, giving thanks to the Lord for having changed bitterness into sweetness of soul and body. At the end Brother John celebrated the Holy Eucharist with the friars and all the people who had gathered in from the countryside. And with great astonishment they heard the words which declare that the future belongs to the poor of all the earth, that the

afflicted will be consoled and that the persecuted shall all receive a new home close to God (cf. MT. 5, 1 ff).

They drank from the living font of the memory of a God who liberates and they ate of the bread which constitutes the sacrament of the closeness, the fidelity and the solidarity of that God with this world groaning in birth pangs. As a salutation of peace and farewell, and in the name of the friars of the whole world, they sang the "Magnificat" there facing the "Mother of the Afflicted": the Lord himself puts down the mighty from their thrones and raises up the little ones (cf Lk. 2).

5.

While our pilgrims were making the return journey — from BUDAPEST on the Danube to ROME and Latium on the Tiber — lo and behold, a warm spring sun shone all over the country. After a long and severe winter the ice began to melt before the warmth of the sun, a fresh stream of water ran longside the road and in the clear air the first flowers began joyfully to adorn the plains and valleys of the Balkans. So the three companions returned to their Curia invigorated, strengthened and interiorly enlightened. Tired were they from their journey, but convinced that the Lord corrects, chastises and purifies them and the whole fraternity while, at the same time, never ceasing to love them and build them up.

In praise of Christ. Amen

Brother Hermann.

All of this was seen, heard and faithfully written down by Brother Hermann Transalpinus on the Solemnity of the Lord's Ascension, A.D. 1991.

* * *

Reflections On Perfect Joy And Liberation Theology

JUDE WINKLER, O.F.M., CONV.

One of the most famous incidents during the life of Francis is his explanation to Brother Leo of the meaning of "Perfect Joy." This account appears in two versions. The first is an independent tradition which Esser held to be authentic. The second is a slightly different version found in the Fioretti, Chapter IX. In this account, Francis asks Brother Leo what perfect joy is. After a few ideas which would appear to be filled with joy because they would be associated with great triumphs, Francis responds that perfect joy lies in being shut out on one's own friary by a brother because one arrived late. That brother would not only refuse to let one in, but would then beat one severely for causing such a disturbance. Perfect joy would be knowing that the friar really recognized one and yet did what he did, and in being willing to take all of this suffering as form of participation in the cross of Christ.

This account talks about an extreme manifestation of virtue, so much so that people have often wondered whether the account might show a bit of masochism on the part of Francis. Furthermore, in recent years a popular movement in the Church has been the development of Liberation Theology. The basis of this theology is that all human beings are due certain rights based upon their status as being children of God. If these rights are not given one, one has an obligation to struggle to obtain them so that the reign of God might be further manifested upon this earth. Perfect joy would seem to have nothing to do with this theology. In fact, it almost seems to be the antithesis of the idea that one should demand justice. Are these two ideas reconcilable? Do these concepts have anything to offer each other as possible correctives? This article will be a meditation upon the source of perfect joy and its most appropriate application to liberation theology.

Why is Francis Filled With Joy

Exactly why is Francis so thrilled to be beaten and thrown into the mud and snow? It is not that Francis enjoys the pain and suffering for their own sake, for that truly would be masochism. Rather, Francis is filled with joy for a

Fr. Jude teaches scripture at the Washington Theological Union. He is also summer lecturer at the Franciscan Institute and has in recent years been guest professor at his Order's theological seminary in Romania.

number of reasons. The first is that which he himself states: that he is sharing in the cross of Christ.

St. Ignatius of Loyola speaks of the three stages of the spiritual life. The first stage is not to do anything which would cut one off from the life of Christ. In other words, one would avoid all mortal sin. The second stage is not to do anything which would be offensive to Christ. This means that one would avoid all venial sin. Finally, the third stage is that one would want to participate in the suffering of Christ.

This is a Biblical idea, especially seen in the later letters of Paul. As he approached his death, Paul spoke more and more about the Christian's responsibility to respond to the cross with joy. In the Pauline letter to the Colossians, we see the development of the Pauline spirituality of the cross. The author of this letter, which might not be Paul but is certainly within the school of Pauline spirituality, speaks of how he, in his own flesh, is making up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ (Col 1, 24). What could possibly be lacking? Was not the death of Christ enough to buy us freedom from our slavery to sin? Yes, but there is one thing lacking: to make it present again. The mystery of the death and resurrection happened a long time ago. It is difficult for people to believe in the great love which is behind this event. They might feel that they have never seen it or touched it. Therefore, it is necessary for Christians to make this event present again. In their own sufferings, they incarnate the mystery of the cross. They become sacraments, visible signs of the invisible reality. In them, people can once again believe in the love of the cross.

The Cross and Love

But why is the cross a sign of love? On the cross, Jesus took upon himself our pain and suffering, and especially our alienation, and he transformed them for all time. The greatest source of our alienation is sin, for by practicing egoism we shut ourselves off from the love of others. We create a world of loneliness in which we are the only god whom we worship. We become trapped in a prison of our own invention. Jesus takes upon himself this loneliness, and destroys it by his act of faith.

Jesus enters into this loneliness through his suffering. Jesus suffers terribly on the cross. Suffering itself is usually a source of alienation. In the midst of suffering, we feel as if we are shut off from everyone around us. We feel as if it is impossible to trust, especially in the idea of a loving God. In the midst of his tremendous suffering, Jesus shouts his creative word over the void of alienation and chaos, he shouts, "I trust you, Father, I love you, Father." In an instant, what once separated us in an agony of isolation now becomes an opportunity to reach out and trust.

Even the alienation which our original sin had caused between ourselves and nature is bridged, for as the spikes enter his flesh, Jesus continues to love those spikes into existence. He accepts the spikes' song of praise as they fulfill their nature even as they tear into his hands and feet.

This trust and love is incredible. No wonder people living in our era find it difficult to believe in so great a love. No wonder it would be necessary to represent this redemptive mystery over and over again so that people could possibly believe that they no longer have to be alienated, that they can trust once again.

Francis Overcomes Alienation

This is exactly what Francis is doing. He is accepting the suffering; he is receiving as a share in the cross of Christ. In his act of trust and love, he is telling everyone, including the friar who is causing the suffering, that our sins need no longer alienate us. He is re-presenting the Pascal mystery on that cold ground on which he is lying, bruised but certainly not defeated.

On one level, Francis is shouting out to the Father, even as Jesus did, I trust. He is allowing what should be a source of alienation and confusion between him and God to become a source of union. He is living compassion (cum-passio — to suffer with). He is living the ultimate surrender into the hands of a loving God. Rather than wondering whether God loves him in the midst of his suffering, Francis is proclaiming the opposite. He understands that his suffering is the very sign that God loves him. The Passion has become passion, and Francis can only respond with joy for the great dignity which the Lord has bestowed upon him, the dignity of being able to participate in his cross.

The union extends beyond this, however, for this moment is also one of union with the brother who is beating Francis. For one thing, Francis now knows that his love for the brother is absolutely pure. It is possible to love someone for the wrong motivation. One could love someone because that person is friendly, or beautiful, or well connected, etc. Francis knows that at this moment that there is no other reason to love the brother who is beating him than to share the outrageous love of God. Francis knows that the brother does not deserve

this love, but he also knows that he himself does not deserve God's love and yet God had given it to him. And so Francis does not allow the brother's act to separate him from the brother, but rather allows it to become a source of union between him and the brother.

Furthermore, Francis recognizes what the brother is doing is wrong. It is a terrible, sinful thing. Yet, seeing the situation with the eyes of God, he recognizes that the one being hurt the most in this whole event is the brother who is beating him. Francis sees this as the brother's attempt to create his own egoistic world, to make himself more lonely. Francis refuses to play this game, but like Jesus on the cross reaches out to him all the more, knowing that at a first moment this will probably infuriate the brother all the more, but that at a second moment the brother will recognize Francis' action for what it is: pure love. That is a cause for deep joy: that Francis can know that his love is pure.

But there is even more. Francis recognizes that the brother would not have done this to him if he were not already a hurting person. The pain of life must have damaged the psyche of this brother terribly, and whether the pain came from the outside (the brokenness of life) or was self-inflicted (sin) was not terribly important to Francis (just as it is not all that important to God). He only saw a hurting person before his eyes. And so Francis was filled with joy to take a little of this man's pain upon himself, even in this physical manner. He entered into a deepest form of compassion with his brother, for as the man beat and beat him and saw only love in return, the brother must have slowly recognized that he was still loved. He must have recognized that his love was stronger than his self-destructive tendencies. His pain must have been slowly melted away by the fire of Francis' love, and he must have been healed. Francis must have cried profound tears of joy that he was able to be an instrument of healing for his brother.

Liberation Theology

This is exactly the intersection point with liberation theology. The Christian living in the slum of Sao Paolo must recognize that what is being done to him/her is unjust. He/She must fight for justice. But how? What is his/her most powerful weapon? Francis would respond perfect joy.

That person must look upon the millionaires who are causing his/her misery, and he/she must feel their pain. This sounds absolutely outrageous, but if this is not done, then liberation theology quickly descends into a substitution of one form of oppression for another form of oppression. The rich are made poor and the poor are made rich. Then the former rich can suffer. This is not the message of Christ. Christ loves both the rich and the poor, and he feels the pain of them both. But who can best heal the situation? The person who is oppressed actually holds the trump card, for that person is already on the cross.

Concretely what does this mean? Is this passivity in the face of oppression? It is hardly that, for if one really loves the millionaire, then one feels the responsibility to help that millionaire recognize the hell which he/she has created for him/herself. By oppressing others, the millionaire has become one's own god, has closed oneself in a fortress of loneliness. That person is often so hurting that he/she has become immune to the pain which one has brought upon oneself. That person does not even recognize the hell of loneliness for what it is.

To say that I realize that the most hurting one in this whole situation is the one who appears to be the richest, but is actually the loneliest, is to see the world with the eyes of Christ.

That is why the poor person must love the millionaire. That is why the poor person must even be willing to suffer for that person. To fight for my own rights is one thing, but the power associated with that fight is so intoxicating that it can lead to greater alienation and pain. Rather, to fight for my rights for the sake of the one stealing my rights, to say that I love him/her so much that I will no longer let him/her do these things to me. To say that I realize that the most hurting one in this whole situation is the one who appears to be the richest, but is actually the loneliest, is to see the world with the eyes of Christ. It is to trust and love the Father as one is being crucified, it is to love those who are nailing the spikes into one's hands, it is to love the spikes into existence. It is perfect joy.

Thus, one certainly fights for justice. One does all those things which promote one's dignity, marches, hunger strikes, lawsuits, etc., but the underlying reason why one is doing these things has changed. One is doing them for the other, and not for oneself. Stendal in "The Red and the Black" states, "Love grants equalities, it does not seek them." In this Gospel irony, it is the poor person who is offering equality to the rich person by offering love.

A Necessary Prerequisite

This all sounds outrageous, and in a sense it is. The cross is after all folly. Yet, it is also outrageously redemptive. But before a person can enter into this mystery of the cross, there is one prerequisite. That person must have experi-

enced the overwhelming love of God. A person cannot give a love which the person has not first received. Thus, there is a first step in sharing this message with any group which is oppressed. One must help these people feel God's love in their lives so that they can learn to love themselves. If I accept suffering when I do not love myself, it is because I feel that I somehow deserve the suffering. I do not deserve better. This is not redemptive. This only creates more pain and alienation. This is not what God intends. Rather, I should be able to see that what is happening to me is unjust because I am loved by God and I do deserve better. Francis certainly knew he deserved better than what he was receiving. That is exactly why his response was redemptive, because he was freely accepting the pain in order to offer an invitation of freedom to his oppressor.

Thus, the basic message of the call to liberation is correct: in the reign of God none of God's children should be oppressed. Every Christian is called to fight for justice, but not to kill for it, only to die for it. In this death, there truly is perfect joy.



Claremount On Palm Sunday

Forsythia at a distance, ghost in yellow draperies.
Azalea bushes, jarvis-red, alive with honey bees.
Dogwood, a waterfall of bloom all bridal pink and white.
Faint redbud, like remembered pain in season of delight.
Around my bench, grape hyacinth, old friend,
In grasses none but birds and me have trod.
No one to ask a question of but God.

Bernetta Quinn, O.S.F.

The Georgia Martyrs In The Tradition of Franciscan Evangelization

CYPRIAN J. LYNCH, O.F.M.

This paper will concern itself with the remote spiritual heritage which inspired Peter de Corpa and his companions to come to Georgia and to endure martyrdom in witness to the faith rather than the immediate circumstances of their heroic deaths. It was from their spiritual father, St. Francis of Assisi, who died more than 300 years earlier, that they derived their inspiration, values, ideals, motivation, evangelizing zeal and readiness to lay down their lives.

The primary sources of the spiritual heritage the martyrs carried with them to Georgia are the words of Francis himself, together with the writings of his early companions and first biographers. Because their simple prose carries a force and flavor which not even the most eloquent modern biographers can match, I have crafted this paper almost entirely from their words.

Our story begins one day, late in the year 1205 in a little church on the outskirts of Assisi where a carefree young man, who had begun to question the meaning of his aimless, self-indulgent life, was praying for enlightenment. Suddenly a voice from the crucifix before which he knelt said to him three times: "Francis, go repair my house" (L:M 2, 1). Believing he was being directed to imitate the ascetics who in those days dedicated their lives to rebuilding ruined churches, Francis assumed the garb of a hermit, and for the next two years divided his time between repairing churches and nursing lepers.

On the Feast of St. Matthias in February, 1208 he heard read at Mass the gospel passage which recounts Christ's commission to the Apostles. "Go after the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this announcement: "The reign of God is at hand!"... Provide yourselves with neither gold nor silver nor

The author delivered this paper on October 3 of last year at a public session on the cause for the canonization of the Franciscan Martyrs of Georgia at which Bishop Raymond W. Lessard, D.D., Bishop of the Diocese of Savannah, Georgia presided. Fr. Cyprian has published numerous articles on Franciscan spirituality and history in various periodicals and encyclopedias. He is professor emeritus of the Franciscan Institute.

copper in your belts; no traveling bag, no change of shirt, no sandals, no walking staff" (Mt 10, 6-10). At that moment, "the Spirit of Christ came upon him and clothed him with such power that he adopted the way of life described, not only in mind and heart, but also in his daily life and dress" (LMin 2, 1). Garbed now as in itinerant preacher, the former mason and part-time nurse "began to preach penance to all with fervor of spirit and joy of mind" (1Cel 23). "He filled the whole earth with the gospel of Christ" and "made a tongue out of his whole body" (1 Cel 97).

"As the force of his teaching and the sincerity of his life became known, others were moved by his example to live a life of penance. They renounced everything they had and came to share his life and dress" (LM 3, 3). But because he was uncertain whether they too were called to proclaim penance and peace in the manner of the Apostles, Francis felt the need again to consult the gospel.

Early one morning in the spring of 1208, he went with his first two followers to the Church of St. Nicholas in Assisi and opened the book of the gospels three times, "proposing to follow what counsel should first appear" (2 Cel 15). The first text they came upon was Christ's admonition to the rich young man: "If you seek perfection, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor" (Mt 19, 21). At the second opening of the book they found Christ's commission to the Apostles: "Take nothing for your journey" (Lk 9, 3). The third time, they were confronted with the doctrine of the Cross: "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self" (Lk 9, 23). Francis was now certain that he and his companions were called to live the life of apostolic preachers. "Brothers," he told them, "this is our life and rule, and the life and rule of all those who may wish to join us" (L3S 29).

In the spring of 1209, when his followers numbered 11, "he wrote for himself and his brothers, present and to come, simply and in few words, a form of life and rule, using for the most part the words of the holy gospel" (1 Cel 32). But, unwilling to trust solely in his own inspiration, he determined to "go to our Holy Mother, the Roman Church, and lay before the supreme pontiff what our Lord has begun to work through us; so that with his consent and direction we may continue what we have undertaken" (L3S 46).

After pope Innocent III approved this primitive rule and commissioned the brothers to preach, Francis had the assurance that his personal charism was in harmony with the church's institutional charism. Then "he went about the towns and villages announcing the Kingdom of God, preaching peace, and teaching salvation and penance unto the remission of sins. . . He acted boldly in all things, because of the apostolic authority granted to him" (1 Cel 36). Full of new confidence, he assured the brothers: "God has shown me beyond all shadow of doubt that, he will make us grow into a great multitude and that the Order will spread far and wide, by favor of his blessing" (LM 3, 6).

In 1211, "burning intensely with the desire for holy martyrdom, he (Francis) wanted to take ship for the region of Syria to preach the Christian faith and penance to the Saracens and infidels" (1 Cel 55), but he became stranded on the coast of Dalmatia and had to return to Italy without attaining martyrdom or converting a single Saracen. "However, the prize of martyrdom still attracted him so strongly that the thought of dying for Christ meant more to him than any merit he might earn by the practice of virtue." Therefore, two years later "he took the road towards Morocco with the intention of preaching the gospel of Christ to the sultan and his subjects, hoping to win the palm of victory in this way" (LM 9, 6). "He was carried along by so great a desire, that at times he left his companions on the trip behind and hurried to accomplish his purpose, drunk, as it were, in spirit" (1 Cel 56). Although he became ill in Spain and was once again prevented from realizing his goal, he did not renounce the desire to preach to the Saracens and attain martyrdom.

In 1217 he dispatched companies of friars to "every province in every country where the Catholic faith is cultivated, observed and venerated" (L3S 62). Francis himself set out for France, but was turned back by his friend and advisor Cardinal Hugolino who chided him for sending his brothers "to undergo so many trials so far away and die of hunger" (LP 82). As a matter of fact, those who went to Germany at that time were mistaken for heretics and badly beaten.

The failure of this first missionary expedition outside Italy expanded, rather than contracted, Francis' evangelizing ambitions. Although he obeyed the cardinal and returned to Italy, he still insisted that, "God has chosen and sent the friars for the benefit and salvation of the souls of all men in the whole world. They will be welcomed not only in the countries of the faithful, but in those of unbelievers as well, and they will win many souls" (SP 65).

At the conclusion of the general chapter of 1219, he sent groups of friars not only to the Catholic nations beyond the Alps, but also to Moslem lands in North Africa and the Near East. He himself "courageously surmounted all dangers in order to reach the presence of the sultan of Egypt" (LM 9, 7). "Inflamed with that perfect love which drives out fear, he longed to offer himself as a living victim to God by the sword of martyrdom; in this way he would repay Christ for his love in dying for us and inspire others to love God" (LM 9,5).

Francis' appreciation of the gospel message was so profound that he assumed its mere proclamation would effect conversions; and his conviction of the divine origin of his mission was so firm that, when the sultan asked who

had sent them, Francis boldly replied that he had been "sent by God, not by man, to show him and his subjects the way of salvation and proclaim the truth of the gospel message" (LM 9, 8).

Although the sultan "was deeply moved by his (Francis') words and listened to him very willingly" (1 Cel 57), he showed no inclination to embrace Christianity. "Francis now realized that there was no hope of converting the Moslems and that he could not win the crown of martyrdom; and so, by divine inspiration, he made his way back to the Christian camp" (LM 9,9).

Failure of this third attempt to convert the Saracens and attain martyrdom had the unexpected effect of further enriching Francis' understanding of his Order's mission. He shared this insight with the friars in a letter he addressed to the entire Order shortly after his return to Italy. "Praise God because he is good," he exhorted them, "and extol him in your works, because for this he has sent you into the whole world that by word and work you may give witness to his voice and bring all to know that there is no other Almighty besides him" (EpOrd 8-9).

He was now convinced that his brothers were divinely commissioned to invite all peoples, believers and unbelievers, to become authentic worshipers of the Father in spirit and in truth; to give joyous witness everywhere to the goodness and greatness of God; and to urge everyone to render their Creator and Redeemer the worship that is his due. They were plenipotentiary preachers and practitioners of the gospel whose arena of evangelization was the entire world which Christ came to redeem and to which he sent his Apostles.

During the remainder of his life, Francis never relaxed his efforts to communicate to his friars, and through them to all people everywhere, that profoundly worshipful attitude which he expressed so often in the fervent prayers that enrich his writings. He wanted his preachers to make all "who bear the image of their maker and are redeemed by the blood of their Creator" (LM 9, 4) aware of their high dignity as God's handiwork and their happy condition as forgiven sinners. All the friars were to urge everyone they met to "fear and honor, praise and bless, give thanks to and adore the Lord God Almighty, in Trinity and in Unity, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, Creator of all" (RegNB 21, 2).

Francis forewarned the friars, however, not to be troubled if this saving message went unheeded, because its very proclamation was itself an act of worship; and if their efforts won them the prize of martyrdom, they should rejoice, because the martyr perfectly imitates and fully participates in that supreme act of worship by which the Son of God humbled himself and became obedient unto death on a cross. "The highest form of obedience," he told them, "in which flesh and blood play no part, is to go among the unbelievers under

the inspiration of God, either to help one's fellow man or with the desire for martyrdom" (SP 48). And in the earlier Rule, he wrote: "All the brothers, wherever they are, must remember that they have given themselves and handed over their bodies to the Lord Jesus Christ. And for love of him, they must make themselves vulnerable to their enemies, both seen and unseen, for the Lord says: "Whoever shall lose his life for me will save it unto life eternal" (RegNB 16, 10-11).

He charged the five friars he sent to Morocco in 1219: "Keep the Lord's Passion ever before your eyes. It will strengthen you and dispose you for courageous endurance. Go, my sons, and trust in God. He who is sending you will strengthen you and give you what is pleasing to him." The next year, when he learned that these five friars had won the crown of martyrdom, he said, "Now I can truly say I have five brothers."

In the succeeding centuries, he was to have many other such brothers: 34 of the 89 canonized Franciscans are classed as martyrs; 50 of the 160 beatified died for the faith; and 70 of the hundreds who engaged in the evangelization of the continental United States met martyrs' deaths. Included in this last number, of course, are the five Franciscans martyred in Georgia in 1597.

Love was the motive that impelled Francis to pursue the goal of universal evangelization, whatever the cost. "The unquenchable fire of love for Jesus in his goodness had become a blazing light of flame in him, so that his charity could not succumb even before the flood waters of affliction" (LM 13, 2). "He would not think himself Christ's lover if he did not compassionate the souls whom he redeemed. He used to say that nothing should take precedence over the salvation of souls, because it was for souls that the only-begotten Son of God hung upon the cross" (LM 9, 4). "He burned with love for God worthy of a seraph and, like Christ, he thirsted for the salvation of the greatest possible number of human beings" (LM 14, 1).

Francis' method of evangelization was that of "the only-begotten Son of God, who is wisdom itself. He came down from the Father's embrace to save souls. He wanted to teach the world by his own example and bring the message of salvation to the men he had redeemed at the price of his precious blood" (LM 12, 1). Therefore, his "chief concern was that he should not be a hypocrite in the eyes of God" (SP 63). "A faithful disciple of Christ, he practiced what he preached to others" (LP 71). He told his brothers that they "had been sent by the Lord in these last times to give examples of light to those wrapped in the darkness of sin" (2 Cel 155). "All the brothers," he insisted, "must preach by their works" (RegNB 17, 3), but those who had been given the gift of preaching by word "must act rather than teach; acting and teaching must go together" (SP 73).

Francis himself possessed such a marvelous ability to harmonize actions with words that his personal exemplification of gospel values rendered their explication superfluous. He never tired reminding his friars that mastery of this art demanded "unwearied application to prayer and the continual practice of virtue" (LM 11, 1). "The preacher," he told them, ",must first draw from secret prayers what he will later pour out in holy sermons; he must first grow hot within before he speaks works that are in themselves cold" (2 Cel 163). The Franciscan evangelizer must therefore labor long and hard to cultivate a balanced sense of mission and mysticism, otherwise he will be incapable of inwardly experiencing and outwardly expressing the worshipful, redemptive love exemplified by Christ in his Passion.

Universal evangelization became an official objective of the Order of Friars Minor in 1223 when Pope Honorius III approved the final version of Francis' Rule. The third chapter of that document contains instructions on "the way the brothers should act among men," and the ninth gives directives on the manner and content of their preaching to believers. The twelfth chapter is unique in that it lays down regulations to be observed by "those who go among the Saracens and other unbelievers." This is the first instance of a founder including among the objectives of a religious order the evangelization of non-Christians.

Over the centuries, however, it has been much more the example of Francis' ardent love for God and for souls, than the terse legal language of his Rule, that has inspired his followers by the thousands to carry the gospel to lands where it had never been preached, often at the cost of their own blood.

The numerous quotations from the writings of Francis, his early companions and first biographers cited above suggest a list of the basic elements of evangelization as he conceived it.

THE MISSION:

- to preach penance and peace with fervor of spirit and joy of mind;
- to announce the message of salvation to all whom Christ redeemed by his precious blood;
- to repay Christ for his great love for us and inspire others to love him;
- to bear witness that there is no other Almighty but God alone;
- to invite all peoples to become authentic worshipers of the Father in spirit and in truth;

to urge all to give their Creator and Redeemer the honor that is his due.

THE MESSAGE:

do penance and keep the commandments; embrace peace and become children of peace; have courage and rejoice in God; love him greatly who loves us so greatly.

THE METHOD:

preaching by word and example;
being subject to every human creature for God's sake;
bearing witness to being a Christian;
being gentle, peaceful, unassuming, courteous and
humble, and speaking respectfully to all;
proclaiming the word of God openly when it is his will
to do so.

THE MOTIVE:

love for Christ Crucified and for the souls he redeemed by his precious blood.

MARTYRDOM:

the supreme act of worship,
the perfect imitation of Christ,
the highest expression of love of God and neighbor.

Francis did not arrive at his appreciation of the gospel concept of universal evangelization by dint of deliberate intellectual effort, nor did he attempt to inculcate it by precise pedagogical methods. It never occurred to him to constrain within the limits of a rigid system the complex of elements which constitute evangelization. His first followers grasped his perceptive insights by hearing him proclaim them in inspired gospel language and seeing him exemplify them by dramatic gospel action. He therefore felt no need to devise a precise plan of evangelization.

It was inevitable, however, that the learned men who were drawn to the Order in ever greater numbers after its founder's death, would feel a need to give his affective effusions doctrinal justification and to express in theological terms what he had simply felt and lived. The great Franciscan doctors, particularly St. Bonaventure (1221-1274) and Bl. John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308),

began the task — which continues until today — of developing and reinterpreting, in the light of changing historical circumstances, those elements of evangelization which had been the constant subject of Francis' prayerful consideration, without however destroying the freshness of his gospel message and manner.

Inspired by the dynamic theology of evangelization inherited from their Order's founder and developed by its eminent doctors, Franciscans over the centuries have eagerly embraced missionary challenges other groups hesitated to undertake. The fervor of Seraphic love, the mystique of martyrdom and the eschatological urgency of their task as they conceived it, inclined them at times to resort to a tactic which has been labeled "outrageous, conspicuously ineffective, yet designed to engage the forces of heaven at some mystical level." It is therefore sometimes difficult to determine whether the individual Franciscan evangelizer's "foremost aim was to persuade infidels of Christianity's truth, or to attain self-fulfillment by suffering death at their hands."

In view of its far-reaching effects on the evangelization of the New World, the reform impulse which swept through the Franciscan Order at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries must surely be judged providential. This movement manifested itself with particular vigor in Spain where, by the dawn of the Age of Discovery, the Observants, as those friars who desired to revive the spirit of the founder, restore primitive observance of his Rule and renew the vigor of his Order's intellectual life came to be known, numbered in the thousands.

In the Chronicle he completed shortly before his death in 1508, Nicholas Glassberger reported that the announcement of Columbus' discoveries aroused such intense enthusiasm among the friars attending the Observants' general chapter in the spring of 1493 that many of the capitulars, "stirred up like elephants at the sight of blood" and "most eager for martyrdom," immediately sought permission to undertake evangelization of the newly-discovered Caribbean islands.⁶

A small number of friars accompanied Columbus on his second voyage, but systematic evangelization of the Antilles did not commence until 1502, when Francisco Ximenez Cisneros (1436-1517), the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo and former provincial of the Observants of Castile, dispatched 17 carefully-chosen Observants to the island of Hispaniola (Haiti — Dominican Republic).

Evangelization of the North American mainland began in 1524 with the arrival in New Spain of 12 Observants who "began one of the most exciting and challenging periods in the history of the expansion of Christianity" and became known as the Twelve Apostles of Mexico. Their mission was orga-

nized by Francisco de los Angeles Quiñones (1480-1540), who desired to join the group himself but was prevented from doing so by his election as minister general the previous year.

The Obedience and Instruction which Quiñones issued to these 12 pioneer missionaries had a deep and lasting influence on the Franciscan evangelizing enterprise throughout the Americas. These two documents restated and revivified the basic principles of evangelization enunciated by St. Francis, explicated by the Franciscan doctors and exemplified by Franciscan missionaries over the previous 300 years.

The Obedience was addressed not just to the 12 sent to New Spain in 1524 but to all friars who would thereafter engage in the work of evangelizing the New World. They were all, Quinoñes insisted, commissioned to exalt the glory of God's name and build up his church on earth. Like Francis, they must thirst for the salvation of both believers and unbelievers, all of whom had been redeemed at the price of Christ's blood. Inflamed with love of Christ, they must glory in the Cross, subject themselves to every creature; and be ready, desire and even seek to shed their blood for the conversion of those to whom they are sent. And since the day was far spent, the eleventh hour at hand, and this aging world nearing its end, it was most urgent that they devote their best efforts to preaching by word and example, without however neglecting the contemplative aspect of Franciscan life. Because they labored without hope of earthly reward, the world would judge them demented, but they must be convinced that the folly of the highest poverty will convert the world.

Quinoñes began his *Instruction* to the departing missionaries by reminding them that they had been deputed to maintain the continuity of the divine mission begun by the Father when he sent his Son into the world to communicate divine life to all who would believe in him. This mission was carried forward by the Son who empowered the Apostles to continue his life-giving work among men. The mission of the Apostles was in turn passed on to their successors to be continued until the end of time.

Francis and his followers had by apostolic authority been made participants in this divine mission, but those presently being sent to America also had reason to "act boldly in all things," because they were being sent not only by authority of the minister general, but likewise by apostolic mandate of Pope Adrian VI whose bull, *Carissime in Christo*, made the spiritual conquest of New Spain a mendicant enterprise. Finally, Quinoñes reminded the twelve that love of God and neighbor must be the controlling motive of their great evangelizing venture. On these two feet, they must travel through the New World urging its inhabitants to worship the Father in spirit and truth.

The five Franciscans who gave their lives in defense of the unity and sanctity of Christian marriage on Georgia's Golden Isles in 1597 exemplified to an heroic degree the principles St. Francis enunciated more than 300 years before and which Quiñones restated only 74 years earlier. These friars already occupy a prominent place in the mainstream of their Order's rich tradition of evangelization. It is hoped that the church may soon grant them a place in its roster of the blessed.

Martyrdom, accepted as an affirmation of the inviolability of the moral order, bears splendid witness both to the holiness of God's law and the inviolability of the personal dignity of man, created in God's image and likeness...

Fidelity to God's holy law, witnessed by death, is a solemn proclamation and missionary commitment usque ad sanguinem (even to the shedding of blood), so that the splendor of moral truth may be undimmed in the behavior and thinking of individuals and society.⁹

Endnotes

- ¹ Accounts of the deaths of the five Franciscans martyred in Georgia in 1597 may be found in Maynard J. Geiger, *The Franciscan Conquest of Florida* (1573-1618) (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1937) 86-99; John Tate Lanning, *The Spanish Missions of Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935) 82-110; and Luís Jerónimo de Oré, *The Martyrs of Florida* (1513-1616), trans. Maynard J. Geiger (New York: J.F. Wagner, 1937) 73-99.
- ² "Chronica XXIV Generalium," *Analecta Franciscana* (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurac, 1895-1983) 3: 581-82.
- ³ "Chronica XXIV Generalium," 21.
- ⁴Robert I. Burns, "Christian-Islamic Confrontation in the West: The thirteenth-Century Dream of Conversion," *American Historical Review* 76 (1971): 1395. A classic instance of the use of this tactic is the case of St. Nicholas Tavelic and this three companions who suffered martyrdom at Jerusalem in 1391. In his homily at their canonization in 1970, Pope Paul VI said: "The four friars who were the heroes of this tragic missionary adventure were motivated by two intentions. One was to preach the Christian faith and confute the religion of Mohammed, courageously, but certainly not cautiously and wisely. The second was to issue a challenge and provoke danger to their lives." *Acta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum* 89 (1970): 165-66.
- ⁵ Benjamin Z. Kedar, Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward Moslems (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 125.
- ⁶ "Chronica Fratris Nicolai Glassberger," *Analecta Franciscana* (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1895-1983) 2: 523.
- ⁷ Edwin E. Sylvest, Motifs of Franciscan Mission Theory in Sixteenth Century New Spain (Washington, DC: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1975) 4.
- ⁸ The texts of both the *Obedience* and *Instruction* are included as appendices in Juan Fernandes Meseguer's "Contenido misológico de la Obediencia et Instrucción de Fray Francisco de los Angeles a los Doce Apóstoles de México, "*The Americas* 11 (1954-1955): 473-500.
- ⁹ Pope John Paul II, Veritatis slendor, 92-93.

The Transitus: A Rite Of Intensification: Part III

DANIEL GRIGASSY, O.F.M.

The energy which motivates and mobilizes this ongoing exposition and critique of the Transitus is best articulated in the clever words of Michael Foucault: "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do does." For approximately three centuries, Franciscans have gathered on or before the Solemnity of St. Francis to ritualize a world of meaning clustered around the symbols of psalm, relic, and story. In the doing of the rite, something has been done unto us. During and after the Second Vatican Council, a major cultural and ecclesial shift brought on the disassembling and restructuring of the rite. In redoing the rite, then, one would suspect that something new has been done unto us. Yet, the question must be asked: Does the doing of the rite redo us, does it undo us, or does it do little if anything to us in the doing?

After surveying multiplicity and pluriformity in both pre-and post-conciliar Transitus rites, one post-conciliar rite will be used here as a test case out of which several participant-observers will reflect. The rite to be scrutinized is idiosyncratic in that it is out of step with the ritual boundaries of the rite in **Franciscans at Prayer** yet it includes all the familiar ritual units sown into the fabric of the continuous death narrative gathered at random from various unspecified sources. The sequence of ritual units were: entrance and greeting, narration of the death of Francis, Canticle of the Creatures, John 13, reflection, distribution of bread, blessing of Francis, lighting of candles, Psalm 142, solemn commemoration of Francis' death, a closing resurrection hymn. The Guardian presided; the Vicar offered the reflection. Soon after a brief music practice, the presider and the homilist entered in silence and near darkness. Light returned to the space with the closing resurrection hymn.

Several interviews were conducted within a week after the enactment of the ritual, thus allowing a critical distance between the event itself and reflection on it. Questions were put to two non-Franciscans who were first time ob-

This concluding presentation of Fr. Daniel Grigassy's three-part study of the Transitus (cf. CORD, Oct., Nov., 1993) includes detailed and fascinating interviews with participants in the service. His own assessment raises challenges for all Franciscans in crucial areas of our lives that often go unnoticed or are simply taken for granted. The CORD is grateful to Fr. Daniel for giving us the privilege of publishing a work of such fine quality.

servers, two young Franciscans relatively new to the tribe and still in a liminal state of socialization, two seasoned Franciscans whose memories still hold on to various ways of doing the Transitus, and one so-called specialist regarded as one sensitive to the art of ritual activity, its significance, and its consequent demands.

First -Time Observers. Both first-time observers had never before been exposed to the Transitus, but they experienced the rite in a similar way with few though significant variations. The same rite will be referred to throughout the record of their impressions and evaluations. The reporting of this information will suspend the author's analysis. The intention is to highlight the multivocality of the seemingly simple ritual and to disclose the variety of interpretations operative within the same rite. Five general questions were posed to two first-time observers: 1) What attracted you to the Transitus? What were your expectations?; 2) What did you like best about the rite? What left you uncomfortable, uneasy?; 3) What do you think the rite is trying to say about Franciscans? about St. Francis?; 4) What do you think motivates people to come together every year to do this?; and 5) Did you feel like an observer or a participant?

In response to the first question, both first-time observers were drawn to the Transitus by an invitation from friar-friends and a desire to observe this important feast with them. Their expectations conformed with other positive liturgical experiences with this particular community at worship. Since other liturgical rites had been positive and effective, both first-time observers anticipated another prayerful and challenging experience.

The second question keyed into the dominant symbols of the rite. The homily or reflection and the distribution of blessed bread were positioned on the forefront of memory of both persons interviewed. One of the two further nuanced his claim. He said the homily was just one more part in the flow of narrative events since so many were taking part in storytelling. But in the course of the homily, the first-time observer distinguished between the historical narrative laced through the entire rite from the personal testimony of one friar who reflected on the death-event insofar as it forms and informs our own life stories. "From that point on," the same observer said, "I was more aware of what followed and it all made more sense." The homily created cohesion.

Both felt the reflection and the distribution of bread stood out as the essential elements of the rite. One claimed the silent entrance, the greeting, and the beginning of the death narrative were interesting and set the stage, but did not help the rite as a celebration. This observer anticipated a festive celebration but found it lacking in the actual flow of the rite. However, the interviewer flinched when the interviewee said the "celebration of the Eucharist" followed nicely after the reflection. Only after some further discussion did the interviewer press

the question: "Was the breaking, blessing, and distribution of bread by the presider in fact Eucharist for you?" Without hesitation this rather well-educated and informed Catholic layman responded affirmatively. His reasons were interesting: "Since we did not go through the standard ritual used at Mass, the rite drew attention to itself in a favorable way. The presider raised his hands over the bread without speaking a word. The simplicity of that symbolic gesture," he said, "did away with the need to go through the standard movement. The narrative, the blessing, and reenactment of the Last Supper in the reading of John 13 created a powerful Eucharistic celebration." He continued: "The silent blessing was refreshing and alive. Its sheer simplicity reflected the need for sharing which the rite was all about."

As these first-time observers pinpointed the pluses of the rite, they also noted the minuses. One questioned the meaningfulness of the praying of the psalm: "It didn't help me feel celebratory — something like Mass. It was like going through the routine of a ritual." After the interviewer informed him that the praying of the psalm was the one constant element in the historical unfolding of the rite, the one interviewed thought it only a historical nicety. He insisted that "for an outsider, it defeated any sense of celebration." The sung response was "perfunctory" and the psalm's significance could have been heightened if all sung the entire psalm with the cantor since the words of the verses were lost in the solo. In sum, then, both felt a "hook-up" during the reflection and the distribution of bread, or, as one called it, the "celebration of Eucharist." With the singing of Psalm 142, it seemed as though "everything important had past and we were now going through a perfunctory rite."

In posing the five question listed at the beginning of this section, numbers three and four fused together: 3) What is the rite trying to say about Franciscans? about St. Francis? and 4) why do people find a need to come together every year to do this rite? Both first-time observers agreed: followers of Francis need to understand their roots, "to evaluate where you are now, where you come from, and where you are going." The recollection of roots places a demand and a challenge on the Franciscan community. The tradition has not died but lives. The homily brought this home clearly: "A sense of history and your place in it came through in the recurring call to re-root yourselves in the story of Francis."

Notice the constant referral to Franciscans in the second person by the non-Franciscans interviewed. This is significant for the fifth and final question: Did you feel like an observer or a participant? One first-time observer responded to the question by citing the narrative as an "old liturgical tool which makes the events so past-oriented." Like the reading of the passion narrative during Holy Week, listening to Francis' death narrative puts one in the role not

of participant but of listener and, hence, observer. "You can lean back and let it go." In general, both of those interviewed felt more like observers than participants. From the time the psalm began, one said, he was "outside." During the homily and the bread-action which he called "Eucharist," he was "inside."

Both discussed the candle symbol and offered worthwhile insights. One said the lighting of candles has been done so many times for so many different rituals that it did not convey a sense of vitality or energy in the Transitus. The other claimed: "It never had much meaning anyway." He wished to clarify his statement: "The lit candle is symbolic in such an obvious sense that I would reduce it to a sign; it's used in so many liturgies, it's become a 'quick sign'." At this point the interviewer put the question: "Do you think we could have done without the candles?" Again, without hesitation, the response was "yes." A reference then was made to the comment in the leaflet regarding the presider's extinguishing the large candle symbolizing Francis. The community is advised to keep their tapers lit to symbolize "the spirit which Francis has imparted to the world." Those interviewed felt the message so obviously clear that specifying its significance in a directive drained all life from the symbol.

Summarily, the first-time observers are perhaps the most trustworthy analyzers since they are not predisposed to read all kinds of inflated significations into simple ritual movements. The one conclusion which can be drawn is that the rite creates more confusion than one might think. For the non-Franciscan, the ritual as a whole is "nice." However, when the non-Franciscan is pressed into articulating just what precisely makes it "nice," a great deal of conflict in ritual forms surface. Different angles of vision freight the rite with a variety of meanings, at times too many for it to bear. The weight of operative ritual meanings has the power to crack the spine of the ritual.

The Simply Professed. Two simply professed friars minor who participated in the same Transitus rite were interviewed next. Variations were made on the same themes of the five question put to the first-time observers: 1) What is the rite supposed to do?; 2) Who is the rite for?; 3) What does the rite as a whole say about us (Franciscans)?; 4) In any rite, language and symbols interact and comment on one another. What do you see as the key interactions in this rite?; 5) What would you say are the needed elements of the rite (without which the rite would no longer by the Transitus)? a) Does it matter when the rite is celebrated?; b) Does it matter who presided at the rite?; c) Does it matter what friars wear during the rite?; 6) Do you sense conflict, tension, or violence in the rite?; 7) If you were far away from a Franciscan community on the evening of October third, would you feel obliged to do something? If so, what? If not, why not? In other words, how important is this rite to Franciscans? to you? Could

we (you) skip it? While all the questions could not be discussed with equal time and intensity, the reporting responses will give the reader some feel for the degree of intensity with which each friar approached the questions. The two simply professed friars will be referred to as Friar A and Friar B.

What is the rite supposed to do? Friar A said its purpose is to recreate the scene of Francis' death, to set the tone and prepare us for the solemnity of the following day. Its focus is on the reenacting of events, somewhat like the Stations of the Cross. Like the liturgy of Good Friday, it is simple yet solemn. Friar B claims the rite makes present the event for us and gives us a chance to go back to where it all began: "We return to our roots; the rite takes us back so we can move forward."

Who is the rite for? This seemed rather obvious to both friars: of course, for the people participating. Friar B felt the rite got him "involved in Francis' death." The narrative from his biographies, the celebration of his death, offers a commentary on his life. "When I'm there watching him die, I get a tableau of his whole life. The rite sums up his life. In doing that, the rite gives the friars a chance to begin again." Friar B made a reference to a conversation with a first-time observer, one other than the two interviewed. The newcomer was struck by the simplicity of the celebration. Just as one who is not educated in exegesis can read the gospels and appreciate Jesus, so too can an individual attend the Transitus and come to an appreciation of Francis of Assisi.

What does the rite as whole say about us (Franciscans)? "The rite reflects the need which all Franciscans have to get back to our roots and revisit our tradition and symbols." Both friars agreed here, but neither was willing to take the next step in trying to articulate what precisely these roots, traditions, and symbols meant. One wonders if they had a clue in which direction to go.

What are the key interactions of language and symbol in the rite? The reading of the death narrative and the distribution of bread took on key positions. Friar A was hesitant about the candles: "I've seen so many different ways of doing the candles, I'm not sure what it means anymore." Friar B felt the narration, the narrator, and the one taking the part of Francis within the narration took on special significance. In a sense, he thought, the narrator represents the onlookers and through his commentary is able "to distance us from the action." Along with these key interactions, the same friar felt the symbol of light was significant since Francis was caught up in the light. The bread, too, an image of Christ, points to Francis' conformity to him. Friar A saw the Guardian's blessing of the friars a significant gesture which is most appropriately offered by the Guardian. While both agreed that the blessing should not be given to

everyone present, but only to the friars, they differed on whether the Guardian is necessarily the one who blesses.

What are the needed elements of the rite without which the rite would no longer be the Transitus? Stripping the rite to its bones, Friar B pointed to the death narrative as the essential element. While a simple reading of the narrative would be inadequate, some enactment of the narrative seems necessary. Dramatic tension is needed to make the rite effective; action must accompany word. When pressed on the precise meaning of action within the narrative, the friar listed the reading from John 13, the blessing and distribution of bread, the blessing of the friars, and the singing of the Canticle and of Psalm 142. A mere reading of the narrative without accompanying action would be inadequate. Friar A disagreed with this position. He felt the ritual reading of the narrative text makes up the essential element of the rite and would adequately constitute the Transitus.

Does it matter when the rite is celebrated? Friar A's response directed attention to the credibility of time: "Since we are creatures bound by time, we sanctify time in various ways. There is a rhythm in communicating an event in conjunction with the solemn feast. And this rhythm needs to be respected. It is incongruous to have the Transitus on the evening of October first and on the next day celebrate the memorial of the Guardian Angels. It's like shifting Good Friday to Monday in Holy Week. This tendency undermines the importance of the rite for the life of the community. Time and place are not to be treated lightly." Friar B was less enthusiastic about the credibility of time and simply said, "It's more important to celebrate the Transitus than to celebrate it on October third. Of course, I wouldn't celebrate it in July."

Does it matter who presides? Friar A prefers the Guardian as presider, not for juridical reasons but for the symbolic value of Guardian as spiritual father, leader, and symbol of unity. The issue was of little significance for Friar B since this Transitus was the first one in his experience at which the Guardian presided. Although the presider need not be the Guardian, he ought to be one who is "established" within the community, one who has been faithful, and one who is esteemed for his life of virtue. It is curious to note that Friar A who privileged the Guardian's presiding also insisted on the October third memorial whereas Friar B who did not insist on the Guardian presiding also did not consider essential the October third date for the Transitus.

Is there conflict, tension, violence in the rite? A clarification immediately arose: What constitutes violence in the rite? To explain this apparently strange idea, the notion of "something lost/something gained" was used, a stripping away of one thing so that another may take its place. While Friar A saw the Transitus as regarded by many as comforting, peaceful, satisfying, he main-

tained that if we leave it there, we miss what the rite is trying to do. He proceeded to point to the breaking of the bread, Francis' blessing of the friars, and the extinguishing of candles as embodying and heightening conflict and tension. As the bread is broken, we need to be broken. Francis' farewell alerted his band of followers to their imminent loss. The extinguished candles symbolize this finality. Friar B saw the tension in the rite on two levels. First, in the breaking of bread, Francis is broken; in the partaking of bread, we share his brokenness. Secondly, Francis enters into a cosmic struggle just as John's Jesus in the thirteenth chapter of his gospel. As one is wrenched from life in death, so too the commemoration of a beloved dead person wrenches one's own life. We are all born into this cosmic struggle and we will all pass out of it in due time. Therefore, by the end of the ritual, the participant is left with a certain uneasiness and discomfort.

What would you do (if anything) on October third if you were alone? Both responded similarly to this question: they would read the death narrative and pray out of it. If the text were not available, they would reconstruct the scenario in their imaginations and pray out of it. Could we do without the Transitus? Both believed we could. Friar B said, "Yes. We could do without a lot of things. But it is something that enriches our understanding of Francis."

Two Solemnly Professed. Two seasoned friars minor offered their reflections on the Transitus. The same seven questions asked of the two simply professed were posed to these two thoroughbreds who have been solemnly professed for at least thirty years. As one would suspect, their responses were consistent with the classical spirituality in which they were formed. Certainly, no denigration of their functioning spirituality is intended; in fact, the opposite is true. Their insights are instrumental for a retrieval of significations in the rite. A look at the seven responses make that evident. Since both friars shared similar views, there is no need to differentiate them in their responses. The following record points to the simplicity, straightforwardness, and one might say, obviousness which their analyses take on. The purpose of making explicit the varied implicit interpretations of this memorial rite is to heighten the dimensions of the Transitus which are multivocal and polyvalent, and to acknowledge the reality of the various lenses through which participants interpret the same ritual event. Such a perspective will help Franciscans become less ritually naive.

For these two seasoned friars, the purpose of the Transitus is to recreate the scene of our Holy Father's passing so that present day Franciscans might keep alive the memory of such a noble and courageous death. It permits the friar, sister, or secular to evaluate the extent of his or her own conformity to Christ in the way of Francis. Just as the Good Friday rite helps one celebrate

the solemnity of Easter, so the Transitus prepares the Franciscan for the following day's festivity.

Secondly, although the local community of believers has always been included in the memorial event, the rite itself is especially for Franciscans. Third, the rite as a whole draws a picture of the followers of Francis "on the way." As "pilgrims and strangers" in a foreign land, Francis' followers look to union with God as a joyous homecoming at the embrace of Sister Death.

Fourthly, the reading of the death narrative and the singing of Psalm 142 were considered the key interactions in the rite. "Francis' farewell discourse," as one friar called the narrative, recreates his continual admonishment to the friars that all things are passing away and our vision should be at the finish line where Christ will be all in all. Therefore, the essentials needed to constitute the Transitus as Transitus were thought to be the death narrative and the singing of the psalm. Great importance was placed on the celebration of the rite at the appropriate time of sundown on the eve of the solemnity. There was no question regarding the presider. In every and all cases, the spiritual father of the community is to preside, namely, the properly appointed Guardian. Both thought it extremely inappropriate for a friar to dress for the rite in anything other than the Franciscan habit.

Perhaps the response to the seventh question was most telling. On more than a few occasions, both friars had actually found themselves separated from a fraternity on the evening of October third. They were driven to involve themselves in a similar activity: a recreation of the scene of Francis' passing in their imaginations, the praying of Psalm 142, and a closing prayer for God's blessing on their community and personal solidarity with it. The concluding remarks of these two thoroughbred friars minor were also interesting. One friar recalled the simplicity of the pre-conciliar rite, the similarity between the pre-conciliar Good Friday ritual as compared to that of the Transitus. For example, just as the cross on Good Friday was venerated with a kiss by the barefooted friars only after a triple genuflection, so too was the relic of Francis venerated at the closing of the former Transitus. The rite was remembered as simple, unencumbered, straightforward, and prayerful whereas the rites of the last twenty-five years have been building up layers of verbal explanations which clutter and distract. In the earlier days, explanations were usually left unstated yet communication happened nonetheless. The friars' imaginations were free to fill in the blanks.

The Ritual Specialist/Expert. An interview with a so-called "specialist" respected within the Franciscan community as one sensitive to ritual movement and the consequent demands placed on the community proved most provocative. The prophecy of the cultural anthropologist, Victor Turner, proved true: "... laymen will give the investigation simple and exoteric meanings, while special-

ists will give his esoteric explanations and more elaborate texts." The interviewer was prepared to offer the same seven questions posed to the two simply professed and two solemnly professed friars. However, after the first question was posed, the following six collapsed in upon themselves. The main line of the exchange will be set out here.

What is the rite supposed to do? The ritual expert recalled that the rite was originally a devotional exercise which sought to foster commitment. Franciscans were called to associate themselves with a rather remote figure. Nonetheless, the Transitus was one of the more personal devotions in the Order, an exceptional quality in devotional practices in the pre-Vatican II period. In light of the post-conciliar era, the one interviewed was reluctant to judge whether there is a ritual life left in the Transitus. Although it carries personal value for some friars, for others its power has waned. If any strength remains, it is its fluidity of forms. Yet the specialist finds the rite naive in many of its assumptions: it is highly verbalized; it plays back a particular brand of spirituality which many find hard to swallow; it is overweighted with words which communicate a reluctant theology and spirituality. The question necessarily arises: what do people think they are doing in the doing of the rite? What do they think is being accomplished? The specialist claimed that, if the rite has any potential at all, it is toward recommitment. In that sense it is a rite of intensification. But it is quite another question whether it has the power to reestablish commitment and intensify it. The meaning of recommitment mediated through the rite carried somewhat different meanings prior to the council than it ought to carry now.

The interviewer then noted the general uniformity of the pre-conciliar rites and the proliferation of ritual forms after the council. He suggested the tendency to overload the circuits in post-conciliar Transitus rites may point to the suppression of several familiar pre-conciliar Franciscan rituals and the paucity of current rituals which are uniquely Franciscan. Consequently, this may explain the clutter of many recent rituals, folding in bits and pieces of "Franciscan things" to fill out the rite. The specialist's comment on this suggestion was not only a recognition of a void but also a reluctance to speculate on what might fill it.

At this point the interviewer turned to question number four. Since language and symbols interact and comment on one another in a rite, what then are the rite's key interactions? The expert claimed no key symbolic interactions whatsoever in the rite. Although the friars seem to enjoy the rite as an event, time and again the expert experiences it as a sterile ceremony. He finds no possibility of interaction between himself and the text primarily because of the arrangement, presentation, and performance of the text. "It is offered as a historical souvenir." The only interaction of symbols is the approach of each

friar to the presider to receive the blessing. The rite is "highly individualized with no real interaction among the brothers."

Another area of conflict for the one interviewed is the rite as a memorial revolving around the death of Francis as distinguished from the following day's solemn feast. The element of actively "remembering" Francis' death is peculiarly lacking in the ritual as a whole. It hardly goes beyond repainting Giotto's death scenario of Francis and inviting us to stare at it for its own sake. He explained his point in this way: "Death is such a highly coded and important event in a person's life. It is supposed to sum up the experience of the dying person and provide the basis on which the person is judged. I do not see how a ceremony that simply recounts the death of someone can hope to allow that person to enter into the experience which, I presume, the rite is trying to do. So, the experience of dying is not so much what is ritualized, but the experience of a person who had a moment of convergence, a moment of clarity. The rite ought to memorialize a generative person, one who is able to care for what he has created. Then the rite has yet to find a way to actualize the spirit of this person as a role-model for those who highly identify with this individual's brand of generativity." The specialist would expect the rite to accomplish that end, but so many assumptions always get in its way. He concluded: "A mere recounting of the events of Francis' death does not accomplish the desired end of the rite."

The interviewer then posed the obvious question: How would you envision the ritual accomplishing this desired end? The expert sidestepped the question with the claim that he had not yet thought it through adequately. In the next breath he returned to the earlier concern. The desired dynamic of the rite is that Francis ought to be presented as a role model, as one who has integrated all his life-tasks and achieved a certain strength. That desired dynamic ought to suggest some way in which persons can be brought back to their own experience of the way they have faced, or have refused to face, their own life-tasks. In other words, the ritual ought to go through the experience of Francis preparing for judgment, and the gathered community ought to be invited into that experience. To accomplish that end, the rite would have to be rebuilt so that honest respect would be shown for the participant's experience insofar as it has been informed and transformed by Francis' experience. In the specialist's estimation, this has not been accomplished in Transitus rituals: "No matter how cleverly they are constructed, the rituals talk at us. Even with periods of silence, the Transitus is a one-way ritual. A ritual which would respect our experience and want us to go back and review it more deeply would have to set up a process of reviewing life-tasks, just as you are supposed to be doing in reviewing Francis'. Then the function Francis has, it seems to me, would be that he had courage to become self-actualized in a very short life."

Such a review of life-tasks is accomplished more in terms of attitudes and expectations which would be in place long before the community assembles for the celebration of the rite. At issue here, then, is a need for ongoing catechesis: "People cannot just go into a rite and do it. It is true that a rite should be so self-explanatory that it does not need constant commentary. Yet most do not have the preparatory mindset needed to enter into a rite, even when it claims to be self-explanatory. So the first step in rebuilding the rite might be located here. How does one train people a month or two before the feast to understand the Transitus as a ritual about life-tasks, resolved and unresolved, strengths gained and not gained, and thus connect them with the death of Francis, which was precisely the same process?" The proximity of the feast of the Stigmata on September 17 might serve to help us design a processive preparation for the celebration of the Transitus and the Solemnity of St. Francis.

Concluding Remarks. Recall Michel Foucault's insightful phrase: "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do does." Before Vatican II, the Transitus "did" something to us; since that council, the rite continues to "do" something to us. Or does it undo something in us? Or are you indifferent to it?

In the first part of this article, accessible pre-conciliar rites were exposed. Dominant symbols and recurring forms were highlighted. The second part was made up of a sketch of rites spanning the years during and after the council. Interviews and commentaries comprise the third and final part. Questions thred themselves through all three parts, but few if any have been answered. Nor will they be answered in the space remaining.

The sole purpose of this exercise has been to inform the reader of the complexity of an apparently simple ritual which we Franciscans dare to do each year. None of this material has been assembled and exposed before; a huge gap in the study of Franciscan ritual has only been slightly filled after these pages reach the light of day. However, more rigorous work in ritual analysis may contribute significantly to our current task of refounding religious life. Although we witnessed a certain expansion, retraction, and stabilization in the development of the rite, the construction of current rites continues to be eclectic and haphazard, confusing ritual with pantomime, acquiescing to the politicization of the rite, and even blurring the person of Francis with the person of Christ to whom he wished to conform. Lack of coherence in what we are doing when we do the rite leads to skewed perceptions and distorted intentions and identities. Whether we have been about the business in the last five or ten years of refounding, reweaving, revisioning, or reforming religious life, a ritual crisis confronts us, a time of opportunity for forward movement, or a time of stasis and more of the same.

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It would take yet a fourth part of this article to scratch the surface of a critique and evaluation, to apply the tools of ritual studies to more current rites, and to examine their yield. Such a project would best be done collaboratively among those who have these tools available and know how to apply them in field work. After that rigorous exercise, new rituals need to be crafted based on the results of such studies while safeguarding root metaphors which constitute the Transitus as the Transitus.

Still ringing in my ears are the words of an enclosed nun friend who was recently permitted to attend a lecture by Fr. David Nygren and Sr. Miriam Ukeritis, both psychologists from Boston University and authors of a three-year study of U.S. religious orders of priest, sisters, and brothers. The nun told of their testimony that in the last ten years we have done well in developing an intellectual response to the crisis of religious life in this country. Shelves of literature have been generated and have moved the issue forward. But, they claimed, the symbolic trajectory remains largely unattended. We have yet to find ways to respond symbolically lest we remain forever invisible. Perhaps careful attention to the Transitus is one way to bring our way of life to fresh visibility.

Endnotes

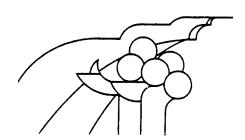
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¹ Michel Foucault, as cited in Margaret R. Miles, Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 1.

² Questions were formed from Victor Turner's insights into the dynamics of ritual from The Forest of Symbols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967) and Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). Strategies for questioning were also developed from the work of sociologists Leonard Schatzman and Anselm L. Strauss in Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 52-92.

³ Forest of Symbols, 45.

⁴ For the text of the study's executive summary, see Origins 22 (24 September 1992): 257, 259-272.