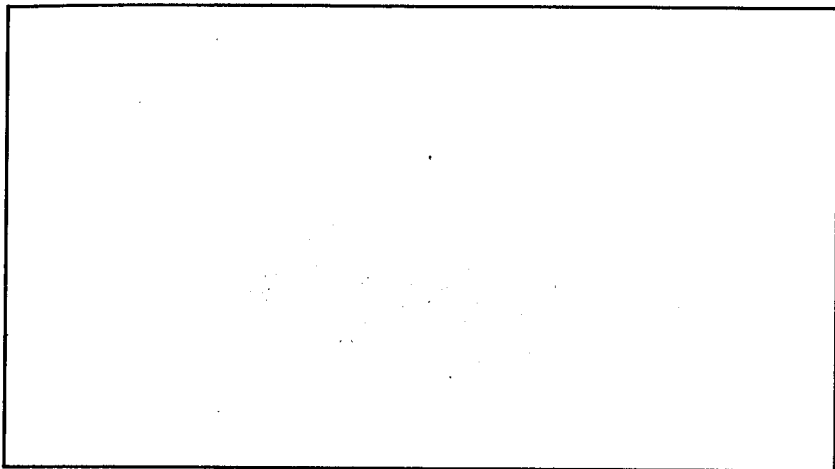


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A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

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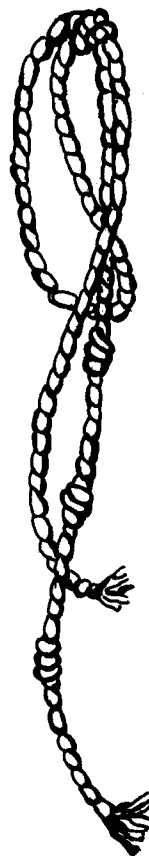
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The CORD

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Standard Abbreviations used in The CORD for Early Franciscan Sources

I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions
BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo
CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun
EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony
EpCler: Letter to Clerics¹
EpCust: Letter to 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
¹I, 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).

A Reflection Francis: His Charism and Life

JEAN SCHWIETERS, O.S.F.

The initials OSF have been a part of my identity for thirty eight years. Over the years I have glibly explained their meaning to those inquisitive enough to ask. I never realized how very little I understood their meaning myself. Through my exposure to the person of Francis in a Franciscan Studies class I have come to know that those three initials represent a fascinating, unbelievably stressful and sometimes elusive history. What they have uncovered for me are new insights into the person history reverently remembers as Francis of Assisi and an Order he haphazardly founded. Only recently have historians and scholars attempted to piece together the fragments of the Franciscan story scattered here and there, buried in long forgotten places.

When I first came to know Francis he lived in a world that seemed transcendent and eternal. Francis was timeless. He belonged to all ages and to all cultures without exception. It was as though he was seen as the subject of a painting without a frame. Over the centuries his image could be placed against any background and he seemed to fit there. Through summer studies, however, I was given insights which have enabled me to visualize Francis within the context of a definite time in history and, hence, a more specific background. I was given a frame into which I could place his image and see him as a twelfth century figure — one whose background added color to his character. These colors include: CLOTH, CONVERSION, CROSS, CHARISM and CHOICE.

CLOTH fills in the tones of his early life, the time of character shaping. Born the son of a merchant, the rising rival class whose greed for money made them a threat to the nobility, Francis quickly learned the benefits of money

Sr. Jean, reflecting on her summer of Franciscan Studies, invites others to enter more deeply into the mystery of Francis through prayer and study.

exchange. It not only gave him security and popularity, but pleasure and power as well. He also quickly learned that it provided little as far as meaning and purpose.

It was during an empty and colorless time in his youth that God burst into his darkness with the colors of crisis. Splashed against the dry canvas of his soul he felt the movement of the Spirit and heard the whisper of a mandate that would change his life forever. In this paradoxical time of light in darkness and darkness in light he was born anew. CONVERSION brought with it the beginning of a background devoid of all that cloth had secured. There was pain and confusion. There was ecstasy and vision. He felt frightened and alone. He experienced strength and presence. In a sweeping gesture of denunciation he wiped away what had been familiar and predictable, taking on the humiliation of a fool. For the first time in his life he began to see beyond the glorified figure affixed to a cross and saw the beauty that existed in the cross itself.

It is God shining through Francis that makes this drab little man able to illuminate the undefined background which surrounds him.

The CROSS! How it symbolized the ageless quest to know self, God and others. Through both the comfort and confrontation of the Scriptures, Francis came to embrace the cross which was to become in his life the image of what it meant to be conformed to Christ. He began to move gradually into a state of conversion. Through his daily dying to self he was able to breathe life into others. Through the recognition of his own sinfulness and need for God he shared the transformative power of ongoing conversion. The intrigue of his dance with divinity brought with it a blurred and yet brilliantly stunning dabble to his ever-changing yet static, faith filled background.

Both the charm and the passion of Francis have fascinated and beckoned many over the years. For centuries he has been the subject of inquiry. Who is the Real Francis? What is his CHARISM? How was his life and that of the early friars different from so many of the penitents who have struggled over the years to be free from heresy and elitism? What gave credence and endurance to the movement he began? How could this uneducated, non-cleric have anything to offer the world of church authorities and theologians? How could someone so poor be so rich in wisdom and understanding?

It would seem that the charism this poor itinerant preacher offers is so multifaceted that it is simply reflective of the God he sought with such passion and intensity. It is God shining through Francis that makes this drab little man able to illuminate the undefined background which surrounds him. Only in relationship to God does this ragged beggar, whose name means "freedom," challenge us to find our identity and expression in the Incarnate Son of God.

And so, the final colors we add to the background of our saint is our CHOICE. In freedom Francis calls those who respond to the invitation to choose a life of penance, humility, poverty and contemplation. It is through devotion to and desire for the Eucharist, as central to our lives, that we too shall come to know the mystery of God's unending end ever-present love. We are further invited to dwell on the Scriptures, as Francis did, to learn the meaning of obedience and fidelity to God. And finally, it is in and through the writings of Francis himself that we will more deeply come to comprehend "what is ours to do."

Once we have painted the historical background for our portrait of Francis we can once again remove the frame. We can begin anew to create a background that is linked with our own. To know Francis today we must know him in history.

Now whenever I print the initials OSF I will smile as I recognize their meaning for my life and the challenge they offer me.

* * *

Reflections on The Immaculate Conception

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

One of the theological topics which has interested the Franciscan movement since its earliest days is the Immaculate Conception. It was, after all, John Duns Scotus, who proposed some of the important theological insights which permitted a further development of what was to become the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. This essay is a short reflection on the necessity of the Immaculate Conception from an existential point of view.

What Happened In Nazareth

The core of the importance of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is found in the interaction between the messenger of God, Gabriel, and Mary.

In Gabriel's greeting, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you," we hear that Mary was recognized as someone who was graced. The Greek word used here is a bit ambiguous, for it could be translated variously as "full of grace, or highly favored, or gracious, etc." The term seems to point to the fact that Mary is an appropriate choice for this encounter. Furthermore, more important than the actual translation of this phrase is the fact that the Greek verb used to describe Mary's condition is in the perfect tense. One uses the perfect tense in Greek to speak of an action which began in the past and which is still true in the present. Thus, one would use the perfect tense to say that it had snowed if it had snowed yesterday and there was still snow on the ground today. The fact that Luke used the perfect tense means that he wishes to communicate that even before the messenger of God met Mary, she was already "graced." Her heart was already filled with the love of God. This, in fact, is one of the few scriptural proofs that we have for the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (that Mary had been somehow prepared for the role which she was to play).

Fr. Jude, who teaches Scripture at the Washington Theological Union in Silver Spring MD, has taught at the Franciscan Institute during the summer sessions. In his reflections on Mary, Fr. Jude offers us an enriching blend of intellectual and spiritual insights.

The reaction of Mary to this greeting is interesting. She was greatly troubled. (Please understand that this reflection is a theological meditation and not a theological proof, so I would ask the reader to allow this author the luxury of some speculation). Why would she be troubled by a greeting such as this? Is it possibly because this messenger seems to know her through and through? That is what the messenger's greeting seems to indicate. He knows her attitude toward God, he knows of her deepest hope, of her profound love (her graced condition). Does she feel naked before one who can see her very heart? Does she feel tremendously vulnerable?

Then the messenger speaks again to her heart and delivers the message for which he has been commissioned. He invites her to be the mother of the "Son of God."

Vulnerability

It must have been difficult for Mary to have responded to this strange request. Yet, the original greeting that the messenger had proclaimed hinted at Mary's spirit of availability, of her readiness to serve. We cannot even begin to know what went through her mind. One thing must have struck her, though, for it was at the center of her invitation. She felt terribly vulnerable, and yet she must have realized that she was not the only vulnerable one in this encounter. God had become vulnerable. God was placing "Himself" in her hands. She could have easily said no, and made God look like a love sick old fool. It is exactly in this that we see the importance of the Immaculate Conception.

Original Sin

We all suffer from the effects of that first sin of Adam and Eve which we call the original sin. From the time that we are conceived, we are affected by the sin and selfishness of the world. We know of babies who are born affected by the crack or alcohol that their mothers have consumed. We know of babies affected by the agent orange with which their fathers came into contact. There was even an experiment done a few years ago concerning children in their mothers' wombs. The mothers would watch their favorite soap opera during their pregnancy. When the children were born, one would only have to play the musical theme of that soap opera to calm the children. The environment affected the baby even in the womb. It is no stretch of the imagination to believe that these children are also affected by the poison of sin which surrounds them from the moment of their conception. Every choice for sin made by the mother, the father, anyone who comes in contact with this child in the womb, somehow hurts the child. When the child is born, the child has already suffered so much hurt that it is difficult for the child in the future to choose love.

What is the reaction of these hurting people to their world? As with all people who are hurting, whose egos are damaged, they choose self-aggrandizement, even at the price of hurting others. Their ego strength is so weak that they believe they must rob dignity from others in order to survive. These are basically good people, but because of the hurts caused by sin, theirs and others, they respond to situations in a way which even they find repugnant. They try to get ahead, even at the cost of hurting others. They take advantage of any opening to be thought of as superior to others. They put others down on their way up the ladder of success. This is done in big ways and small. It might involve a few gossiped words about another or it might involve actual crimes against another. Augustine would call this all concupiscence, one of the results of the original sin.

Mary's Reaction

What of Mary? If she had been harmed by sin, if she, like we, had suffered from the damaging effects of our own and others' egoism from the moment of conception, how would she have responded to God's outrageous vulnerability? There is only one way she could have responded if she were damaged by sin: she would have asked what was in it for her. She would have taken advantage of God's vulnerability. Is this not what Adam and Eve did? God took a chance on them. He even planted a garden for them and provided them with their own private zoo. And what was their response? They tried to become more powerful than God. They took advantage of God's vulnerability.

But this is not what Mary did. She realized that while she felt naked and vulnerable before the messenger of her Lord, God had made Himself naked and vulnerable before her. He had spoken to her heart, and allowed her to see His heart. And so Mary did not seek to take advantage of God's vulnerability. Rather, she accepted God's invitation to enter into a dance of mutual vulnerability and passion. She responded with open arms and an open heart to her Lord. And the Word became flesh.

This could only have happened in one who had not been damaged by the pain of sin. The Immaculate Conception was necessary for Jesus to be born among us.

The Vulnerability of God

This reflection hints at another possible reflection. Did Mary see something more in God's vulnerability? Did she realize that this vulnerability was not so much an effect produced for the occasion, but was rather an insight into the very essence of God? We tend to speak of God in terms of power, but might it be that God is much more love and surrender? We see this in the Gospel of John where the author of this gospel redefines the meaning of glory. Whereas

Mary did not seek to take advantage of God's vulnerability. Rather, she accepted God's invitation to enter into a dance of mutual vulnerability and passion. She responded with open arms and an open heart to her Lord. And the Word became flesh. This could only have happened in one who had not been damaged by the pain of sin.

previously, glory signified power and prestige, here the hour of glory is the cross, and glory means the pouring out of God's love.

Those who have tried to be godlike by grasping on to power have always made themselves into grotesque caricatures of God, whether it be Lucifer, or Adam and Eve, or each one of us every time we sin. This is seen in Psalm 8. This psalm, which is written in a chiasm, asks the question, "what are we humans in the eyes of God?" The psalmist is mystified by the fact that God would give us honor and glory, which are attributes normally associated with God. This is because we have been created in the image and likeness of God (This psalm is, in fact, an exegesis of the priestly account of creation found in Genesis 1, 1-2, 4a). We have been given dominion over the earth. But what does this dominion mean? The answer lies in the part of the psalm which is parallel to these verses. There are two types of people mentioned. There are the enemies and there are the children who sing the glory of God. The implication is that the enemy are those who refuse to sing the glory of God, for they have made themselves their own god. On the contrary, the babies who sing the glory of God are those who have become so simple and childlike that they can glory in the wonders of nature, that they can see a butterfly as if for the first time and be filled with awe and gratitude. It is the babes who are Godlike, not those who define dominion in terms of grasping and holding onto power.

God is eternally vulnerable and eternally loving. God pours Himself out for the other, whether it be for the other in the Trinity or for the other whom He had created. This pouring out, this eternal kenosis, seems to be power, but its not "power grasped" as much as the creative power of love. Becoming Godlike means following Mary's example of responding to this eternal love with vulnerability. It means entering the eternal dance of mutual vulnerability and passion so that once again humanity and God might be one, and God's love might be incarnate.

Saint Francis' Devotion to Mary

ANN WEMHOFF, O.S.F.

According to evidence found in Franciscan sources, devotion to Mary was an integral part of Francis' spiritual life. Since Mary has been venerated under many titles by people throughout the ages, perhaps we will have a clearer understanding of Francis' unique relationship with her if we can determine how he experienced her influence in his life. Because our spirituality is reflected through our prayers, this search will begin by studying the prayers of Francis himself. In them we find the following five references to Mary:

Hail, O Lady,

Holy Queen,

Mary, holy Mother of God:

you are the virgin made church

and the one chosen by the most holy Father in heaven

whom He consecrated

with His most holy beloved Son

and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete . . . (*SalBVM* 1)

. . . You brought about His birth

as true God and true man

by the glorious, ever-virgin,

most blessed, holy Mary . . . (*RegNB* XXIII:3)

. . . and through Your love

we humbly beg the glorious Mother

most blessed Mary ever-virgin . . . (*RegNB* XXIII:6)

Holy Virgin Mary,

among women,

there is no one like you born into the world:

you are the daughter

and the servant of the most high and supreme King

and Father of heaven,

Sr. Ann Wemhoff has studied at the Franciscan Institute. This article is based on a talk given to the Companions of the Sisters of St. Francis of Colorado Springs in Lincoln, Nebraska on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception 1993 by Sr. Ann.

you are the mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ,
you are the spouse of the Holy Spirit . . ." (*OffPass* Antiphon 1, 2)

Forgive us our trespasses:

Through Your ineffable mercy

through the power of the Passion of Your Beloved Son

together with the merits and intercession of the Blessed

Virgin Mary . . ." (*ExPat* 7)

There are two aspects of Francis' devotion to Mary that are directly or indirectly present in all of these prayers and in almost every reference made of Mary in the early records of the life of Francis. One is that Mary is the Mother of God. The other is that Mary was a virgin. In other words, Francis experienced Mary primarily as the Virgin Mother of God. It is important to note that Francis often prayed to Mary in a Trinitarian context as seen in the first and third quotes above.

Other titles which Francis gave to the Blessed Mother are found in his "Salutation of the Blessed Virgin," part of which was cited earlier. This prayer is a breath-taking reflection in which he ponders the wealth of her attributes. In litany-like fashion he graces her with the following names referring to her relationship to Christ:

Hail, His Palace!

Hail, His Tabernacle!

Hail, His Home!

Hail, His Robe!

Hail, His Servant!

Hail, His Mother! (*SalBVM* 4, 5)

Deep convictions often develop early in life. Celano writes that Francis was devoted to Mary as the Mother of God even before he had any permanent followers. During the difficult period after he had renounced his father, a friend named Bernard of Quintavalle often invited him to stay overnight in his home. Bernard observed that Francis slept very little but spent most of the night in prayer ". . . praising God and the glorious Mother of God" (*ICel* IX: 22). What was the source of this devotion? Francis listened to the voice that spoke to him from the cross in San Damiano which said, "Francis, go and repair my house. You see it is falling down" (*LM* II: 1). Because Francis always interpreted God's inspiration literally, he set out to repair neglected churches in the vicinity of Assisi. One of these was Saint Mary of the Angels, also known as the Portiuncula. Bonaventure writes:

. . . he came to a place called the Portiuncula where there was an old church dedicated to the Virgin Mother of God which was now abandoned

with no one to look after it. Francis had great devotion to the Queen of the world and when he saw that the church was deserted, he began to live there constantly in order to repair it. He heard that the angels often visited it, so that it used to be called St. Mary of the Angels, and he decided to stay there permanently out of reverence for the angels and love for the Mother of Christ (*LM II:8*).

Notice that in this quotation Mary is referred to under four titles: Virgin Mother of God, Queen of the world, St. Mary of the Angels, and Mother of Christ. These frequent references to Mary reflect the depth of Francis' devotion to her which took root in this place. In fact, this church was to be the cradle of the new Order, and was very dear to Francis. Bonaventure relates how the Blessed Mother was involved in the development of Francis' early vocation.

As he was living there by the Church of our Lady, Francis prayed to her who had conceived the Word, full of grace and truth, begging her insistently and with tears to become his Advocate. Then he was granted the true spirit of the Gospel by the intercession of the Mother of Mercy and he brought it to fruition (*LM III:1*).

After Francis had attracted a group of followers, and they returned from Rome where they had received the approval of their lifestyle from the pope, Francis brought them to Saint Mary of the Angels. It was there that the Order of Friars Minor had been founded by the merits of the Mother of God, and it was there, too, that it would grow to maturity through her intercession (*LM IV: 7*).

Later Celano gives the reason for this deep devotion which Francis had for Mary:

Toward the Mother of Jesus he was filled with an inexpressible love, because it was she who made the Lord of Majesty our brother (*2 Cel 198*).

Bonaventure reiterated this primary reason why Francis had such a profound devotion to Mary, and added another one referred to previously in the reflection on the Portiuncula. Because Mary is the Mother of God, she is also the Mother of Mercy (*2 Cel 198*).

He embraced the Mother of our Lord Jesus with indescribable love because as he said, it was she who made the Lord of majesty our brother, and through her we have found mercy (*LM III: 5*).

Bonaventure also describes how on the feast of one of the apostles, Francis heard the scripture reading in which Christ sent the apostles out to preach, and admonished them not to take anything with them. As usual, Francis was inspired to imitate this lesson literally. After he had given his clothes back to his father, he had chosen to wear the leather belt of a hermit. When he heard this gospel passage, he exchanged it for the simple cord of a mendicant. This was a symbol of his acceptance of a life of poverty in imitation of the poverty of

Jesus and His Mother (*LM III: 1*). Later, after Francis had several followers, he again imitated Christ literally by sending them out to preach. When he did so, he did not forget to ask for guidance from the Mother of God. Both he and the brothers withdrew and prayed so that they would go where the Lord wanted them to go. The first time this occurred was after the first chapter of St. Mary of the Portiuncula. After they had prayed, Francis said:

"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the glorious Virgin, His Mother, and of all the saints, I choose the country of France . . ." (*LP 79*)

Francis experienced Mary primarily as the Virgin Mother of God

Francis' dedication in imitating the poverty of Jesus and His Mother was not a passing fancy. In the Legend of the Three Companions we find another example of when Francis gave a literal interpretation to what he heard:

Once during a meal a certain brother remarked that the Blessed Virgin was so poor that she had hardly anything to set before her Son our Lord. On hearing this, Francis sighed, deeply moved, and leaving the table, he ate his bread sitting on the floor (*L3S V: 15*).

This spirit of compassion for the poor, the needy and the sick was present during the earliest years of his conversion. It was grounded in his great compassion for the suffering Christ and His Mother, and his deep desire to imitate them. Bonaventure tells about Francis' response when one of the brothers failed to be compassionate towards a beggar:

"My dear brother, when you see a beggar, you are looking at an image of our Lord and his poor Mother . . ." (*LM VIII: 5*)

So much did devotion to Mary permeate the spirituality of Francis that it indirectly influenced that profound experience of the Stigmata. In the Legend of Perugia we read:

One day blessed Francis went to the hermitage of Mount La Verna. He liked its isolation so much that he wanted to keep a Lent there in honor of St. Michael. He had climbed the mountain before the feast of the Assumption of the glorious Virgin Mary. He counted the days between the feast and that of St. Michael: there were forty. Then he said: "In honor of God, of the blessed Virgin Mary, his Mother, and of blessed Michael, the prince of angels and of souls, I wish to observe Lent here."

It was during this time of penance and prayer that Francis was visited by the Seraph and received the stigmata. What the Legend of Perugia fails to make clear was that Francis had probably gone to La Verna on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, and had already completed a fast from that feast until the feast of the Assumption. Bonaventure writes:

In her honor he fasted every year from the feast of Saints Peter and Paul until the Assumption (*LM IX: 3*).

Early in his conversion process, when the friars were first living at the Portiuncula, Francis placed all of them under Mary's loving care.

After Christ, he put all his trust in her and took her as his patroness for himself and his friars (*LM IX: 5*; See also *SP 55*).

Celano also referred to this dedication when he wrote the first biography of Francis shortly after his death:

But what delights us most, he made her the advocate of the Order and placed under her wings the sons he was about to leave that she might cherish and protect them to the end. Hail, advocate of the poor! Fulfill toward us your office of protectress *until the time set by the Father* (*Gal 4.2*) (*2 Cel, 198*).

As mentioned earlier, Francis' devotion to Mary is best reflected in his own prayers. In fact, Celano writes:

He sang special *Praises* to her, poured out prayers to her, offered her his affections, so many and so great that the tongue of men cannot recount them (*2 Cel, 198*).

Probably the epitome of the influence the Blessed Mother had on Francis is found in the Antiphon from the Office of the Passion which was prayed at the beginning and end of all the hours. It serves as an appropriate closing for this article, since it summarizes the depth of devotion which Francis had for the Blessed Mother in her relationship with the Trinity as well as in the context of the Communion of Saints:

Holy Virgin Mary,
among women,
there is no one like you born into the world:
you are the daughter
and the servant of the most high and supreme King
and Father of heaven,
you are the mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ,
you are the spouse of the Holy Spirit.
Pray for us
with Saint Michael the Archangel
and all the powers of the heavens
and all the saints
to your most holy beloved Son, the Lord and Master.

Meeting In The Square

If Celano's description of you is accurate, then, my friend, with all due respect, you must have looked an emaciate when you were nude before the bishop.

The poet in me sees the symbolism, understands the dynamic pragmatism, yet what attracts me about the incident is the intensity of your innocence:

for that impetuousness I love would rather be without everything, even a father, than be without the Father of all fathers.

However, a thought, so bear with me awhile for there is sympathy in me for Pietro: neither you nor I doubt that he loved you and in younger days would laugh and smile

I see with the eyes of a poet:
but Pietro — with what eyes did he see?

Séamus Mulholland, O.F.M.

Toward a Franciscan Consciousness

JOSEPH D. DOINO, O.F.M.

Introduction

The title of this talk may strike one as more than unusual. I hope to show in this presentation that the theme of consciousness itself cannot be overlooked in church life today, no more than it can in life in general. As a result, I feel that the theme of "Franciscan Consciousness" is one that in the current stage of renewal and ongoing formation deserves our special attention. I hope that an exploration of it can provide new inspiration and direction for our own lives and those of our brothers as we faithfully pursue the call of the Holy Spirit in these privileged times of the Second Vatican Council.

The Dynamics of Human Consciousness

Allow me to begin this reflection by quoting from a speech of Vaclav Havel, president of the former Czechoslovakia, to the United States Congress on February 21, 1990. On that occasion, referring to the democracy movement all over eastern Europe, the noted political spokesman made this significant comment:

The specific experience I'm talking about has given me one great certainty. . . . Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in our Being as humans. . . . We are still a long way from that "family of man"; in fact, we seem to be receding from the ideal rather than drawing closer to it; interests of all kinds: personal, selfish, state, national, group and, if you like, company interests still considerably outweigh genuinely common and global interests. We are still under the sway of the destructive and vain belief that man is the pinnacle of creation, and not just a part of it, and that therefore everything is permitted.¹

Havel claims that a "global revolution in the sphere of consciousness" is absolutely essential to a radical change in our life as a human family. He is using a

Those who knew Fr. Joe personally, the editorial staff and many readers of The CORD, knew him preeminently as "Franciscan." With sincere gratitude both for Fr. Joe's reflections on and his embodiment of a "Franciscan Consciousness," The CORD here proudly presents one of Fr. Joseph Doino's last major presentations. Fr. Joe delivered this talk at the Order's International Congress on On-going Formation held at Assisi in October 1993.

psychological principle we moderns have come to recognize and accept: there are various levels to our consciousness, each of which determines the nature and depth of our engagement with life and its values.² Early in this century, William James called on his contemporaries to be more aware of the profound shifts that can occur in consciousness.³ He warned them that it is possible to live one's life without suspecting the existence of potential forms of consciousness that alone allow us to lead complete lives.

In our day we have become accustomed to the phrase "heightened consciousness." Basically it is the first step in initiating the process required for radical change in human attitudes and decisions. But this first step can be taken only by those who seriously acknowledge the effective relationship between a change in consciousness and true conversion. Furthermore, our desire for ongoing conversion must be fueled and nourished by sustaining a heightened consciousness. We must be willing constantly to expand and deepen our awareness of ourselves and our relationship with God. Not to do so will of necessity cause us to settle for a life of half-attained commitments, to a life of mediocrity and superficiality.

As Havel suggests, our inability to make desired changes in our international as well as our personal lives is due to the way our every-day consciousness refuses to move beyond blind and self-destructive egotism. We choose to live exclusively from our empirical ego which can only respond to sense impressions and intellectual processes, but this "surface life or surface consciousness is but a scrap compared to the depths of which [we] are capable."⁴

Besides our own egocentricity, we must face the yet-to-be determined effects of the computer and of the science of information, known as cybernetics, on human life and consciousness. More and more we are becoming immersed in the age of computational man, where the utterly intelligent, the utterly rational who possess ruthless unhampered logic, will be the most valued citizens. Affectivity will thus become less important, not only in major decisions but in the experiences of our daily consciousness. Geometry will displace poetry, measurement will eliminate imagination. One can only conjecture as to the new mode of thinking that will be needed to relate to the kind of environment this particular technology creates. There is already talk of a "cybernetic consciousness" whose moral implications are unimaginable.⁵ At any point in our daily lives we would do well to question ourselves regarding the depth of awareness from which our actions flow. Such a self-examination could prove most liberating, especially as regards activities that are religious in nature. What is the level of awareness with which I gather with my brothers for the celebration

of the Liturgy of the Hours or of Eucharist? How deeply do I allow myself to experience my ministry, my work? Am I so caught up in professionalism as to rest content with thoughts of self-fulfillment, self-satisfaction, pleasing others?

Francis and Consciousness

Without using our modern terminology, Francis raised such issues both directly and indirectly in a most insistent way. Without using the word, he gave special attention to the level of consciousness with which we encounter life each day. While encouraging his brothers to be attentive and faithful to their work, he insists that nothing is to “extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all other things of our earthly existence must contribute” (RegB V). His use of the word “devotio” (“devotion”) is ample proof of the depth of consciousness to which he is referring. The word, as we have come to realize, refers to an inner attitude, a sense of total consecration, being centered wholly on God, totally free from all selfish ambition.⁶

In his admonitions, Francis masterfully conducts the brothers into the deep reaches of consciousness, liberating them from all semblance of self-seeking intentions. His words show how sensitive he was to the possibility of allowing our attention and intention to be consumed by something other than God. In his own inimitable style he attempts to move the brothers to an awareness of the depth and dynamics of their inner lives. His own pre-conversion years had revealed to him how concerns for the self can subtly but forcefully take control of our desires and limit our perceptions of reality. One can be so caught up in daily concerns as to lose contact with the true self, with God, with others. Looking back, he must have been horrified at the way his insatiable desire for glory became the conscious focus of his inner drives and energies. The bitter taste of ashes was the result of having come to the realization that he had been substituting self for God in consuming idolatrous behavior.

This feeling was all the more intensified as he remembered the countless times he had pronounced the name of God as a young boy when his education at San Giorgio had brought him into repeated reading of the psalms. How many times had he read and spoken the phrase “the glory of God”? How far his consciousness was from the reality! Presumably he joined in the liturgical celebrations accessible to Assisi’s populace. Yet his adolescent heart, flooded as it was with dreams of military accomplishment, paid little heed to the reality celebrated in word and sacrament.

Like so many of his own day and of our own, Francis had used the living words of the Christian tradition with little or no attentiveness to their content. He was to undergo a radical change in consciousness; and the grace of his

conversion worked a revolutionary change in his reverence for the preciousness of Christian language. It became his ongoing and feverish desire never to allow an empty or heedless word to fall from his lips. Every word he thinks and speaks comes from a heart totally absorbed by its content.

It is quite reasonable to surmise that the recollection of his past failings evoked from him the concern he expresses in the strong plea he makes to the Minister General regarding the clerics’ recitation of the Divine Office (EpOrd 40-42). They are to be reminded that saying the office with devotion before God means “not concentrating on the melody of the voice but on the harmony of the mind, so that the voice may blend with the mind, and the mind be in harmony with God.” It is so important to Francis that precious words of prayer be not merely pronounced or sung, but be truly experienced as living words. This, he indicates, requires a discipline of consciousness so that even the desire to sing melodiously cedes to an awareness where voice, mind, and God are totally in harmony. In this way only can the depths of the inner heart experience that to which we are invited in praying the Liturgy of the Hours. This one example indicates how the correlation between consciousness and the experience of reality is so intuitively present to Francis.

The Church and Consciousness

In our own times popes, theologians and biblical scholars have seized upon this correlation in surprisingly emphatic ways. In a General Audience held on July 15, 1970, Pope Paul VI referred to the Second Vatican Council as “a new and original act of consciousness and of life, an event that opens surprising new ways to the church for its internal development, for relations with our separated brethren, for relations with followers of other religions and with the world as it is, magnificent and complicated, formidable and tormented.”⁷ This striking statement needs no further comment.

Pope John Paul II reechoes this theme in many places. For example, in his encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis*, he speaks of “the present-day consciousness of the Church.” The “church’s consciousness,” he says, “is and must remain the first source of the Church’s love as love in turn helps us to strengthen and deepen her consciousness.” He attributed to Paul VI “a witness of . . . an extremely acute consciousness of the Church. . . . This heightened consciousness,” he concludes, “is the result of what the Spirit said to the Church through the Council of our time.”⁸

Both popes show a strong conviction regarding the correlation between the quality and richness of the Church’s life and the depths of its consciousness. Pope Paul VI’s description of the Council as a “new and original act of consciousness” merits particular personal application regarding our own

Franciscan lives. In general, however, we cannot fail to notice the place the theme of consciousness has assumed in official Church statements. Most recently, the 1993 "Directory for Ecumenism" (n. 20) reiterates the words of the 1985 Synod of Bishops in stating that ecumenism has "inscribed itself deeply and indelibly in the consciousness of the Church." A thorough reading of the document reveals how these words are another way of describing a profound spiritual transformation in the Church's appreciation of the ecumenical movement. For something to be inscribed "deeply and indelibly in the consciousness of the Church" means even more than a heightened consciousness. The point, however, is that consciousness as a word and as a dynamic reality has entered the our christian lexicon in new and unusual ways.

The Prophetic Consciousness and True Worship

An interesting perspective of this theme is given by Walter Brueggeman in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*. He tells us that "the task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."⁹ His description adds substance to the frequently used term "counter-cultural." It also enables us to appreciate the prophetic understanding Francis had of the ministry of all the brothers. In his Letter to the Entire Order, he outlines this prophetic ministry in forceful words: "... He has sent you into the entire world for this reason that in word and deed you may give witness to His voice and bring everyone to know that there is no one who is all-powerful except Him" (EpOrd 9).

The correlation between consciousness and the experience of reality is so intuitively present to Francis.

As prophets, the brothers are to speak and live the language of those whose consciousness is possessed by a spirit of worship of the living and true God. They are to understand themselves as sent to witness to the mercantile world whose idols are money and power. They are to be the voice of the true God who alone can free those trapped by the controlling symbols of the new economy. Their word and example are to be an invitation to an alternative consciousness which alone can bring them into relationship with the all-powerful God. Only in this way can people's energies be liberated from the idols to which they have given control over their lives.

Francis describes the beginning of the dynamic that leads to idolatry, something which he had experienced first hand in his early days. In his second admonition he alludes to Adam's appropriation and exaltation of the self. It is actually the self that is being glorified in false worship. The desire for self-glorification releases demonic forces and corrupts the spiritual energies that are reserved for God alone. Consciousness is concentrated on created realities that are intended to feed our desires for self-glory. It is the ultimate alienation of the self possible to the human spirit.

We would do well to hear from one of the great scholars of the twentieth century, Max Scheler, who writes at length on this topic.¹⁰ As a philosopher of religion, he argues that "the religious act is an essential endowment of the human mind and soul," and that "there can be no question of whether this or that man performs it." There is a standing law that "every finite spirit believes either in God or in idols." He issued a call for the "shattering of idols" which are a product of the "permanent self-delusion of putting a finite good (e.g. a woman, money, knowledge) in the place of God or of treating it "as if" it were God." What he has been describing, he says, are "some of the important consequences of the idea that finite consciousness by nature possesses a correlative sphere of absolute entities and values, which it fills with one kind of content if not another."¹¹

Permit me to quote Scheler at length:

Thus man believes either in a God or in an idol. There is no third course open! But it follows that if a man's faith in his idol is shaken, if he is disillusioned about the place it ought to occupy in his system of ideals, if the false god for which he felt such inordinate love, hope and faith is sent toppling, then all about him should look on that man with love and awe, arrested with emotion. Now is the time when something great may take place within him; he may grow ripe for belief in the one True God. To that God our hearts and minds have a natural bias, a natural link of significance. Once the idols are shattered and there is a void where every man can only be full, the soul inclines of itself to return to God, and to him it will return unless it is distracted and turns aside after new idols.¹²

The prophetic ministry of the brothers as Francis describes it would be an effective means for the "shattering of idols." Their word and example would furthermore be a graced invitation to awaken to the internal depths where lie the one absolute Source of truth and being, of freedom and joy.

There is no doubt that Francis' greatest concern was that he and the brothers live their lives each day in conscious contact with the Ultimate Reality operative within. Franciscan scholars express this in various ways. Joseph Ratzinger, for example, writes with great conviction "that Francis himself was led by a consciousness that was strongly eschatological though lacking in

apocalyptic tone” and that “without this eschatological consciousness Francis and his message is no more understandable than is Christ and the message of the New Testament. . . .”¹³

Much more can be said about our theme; we can, however, at this point draw one important conclusion: religious founders, like St. Francis discovered new sources of personal energy, integration, harmony, untapped potential, because they were led to deep shifts of consciousness and lived from its extraordinary reaches. Such men and women ceased to be survivors like the rest of humanity and were led to creative expressions of Christianity which continue to impact history in powerful ways.

Thanksgiving and the Franciscan Consciousness

In the case of Francis, we have a man who was convinced that all Christians possess the graced potential to lead such lives. He shows us this most clearly in his famous Chapter xxiii of the *Rule of 1221*.¹⁴ There he invites all strata of society to enter into the every-day inner stance of the friars. He and the brothers reveal to the entire world that intense gratitude directed toward the ever-present, inexhaustible, indescribable and absolutely undeserved goodness of God is their primary mode of consciousness. Thanksgiving, gratitude, is not merely an idea or a virtue that he cultivates next to others; it is the conscious basis of their entire lives. It is more like a climate which enfolds and penetrates all of his waking moments.¹⁵ From this derives the incredible energies of their lives, their creativity, adaptability, their zeal for the Kingdom, their desire for intimacy with the all-good God.

One does not really know Francis without participating in the remarkable canticle of thanksgiving that possessed his inner heart and desire. A constant *leitmotif* in all of his writings is gratitude rising from his perception of the immediacy of God's goodness that is the very nature of God himself and that is refracted in all created reality. Gratitude is thus at the very heart of the Franciscan charism.

Chapter xxiii of the *Regula non Bullata* indicates so strongly that gratitude was to be the stance of all who wished to be one with Francis and the brothers in their life experience. This chapter has been called a *manifesto*, a declaration of the brothers' self-understanding before the world. David Flood characterizes the chapter thusly:

The literary genre of this prayer is that of a *laude*, a style of preaching widespread in the religious movements of the age. A *laude* gives the brothers' message a rhythm which turns doctrine into chant. Thus, they sing rather than argue. Less intent on convincing than in gathering men into their movement, they display a religious enthusiasm which makes listeners either dance or flee. . . . The brothers were singing; they had wonders to sing about; and they sang a song that was catching . . .¹⁶

“We thank you” is a recurring phrase in this unusual chapter and it sweeps across creation, redemption, and final judgment. The opening words should not be skipped over hastily: “We thank you for yourself.” These words tell us of the richly personal nature of the lived relationship of faith to which Francis had led the brothers. For them God is inconceivable except one's faith be set afire with the recognition of His immeasurable generosity. This gratitude is not only for the past; it springs from an acute consciousness of how this generosity is operative in every moment of one's personal history: “He has given and gives to each one of us our whole body, our whole life. . . . He did and does every good thing for us” (*RegNB XXIII:8*).

Intense gratitude directed toward the ever-present, inexhaustible, indescribable and absolutely undeserved goodness of God is their primary mode of consciousness.

Francis' thanksgiving reaches into all of reality, natural and supernatural. It is a passionate response to God's passionate love for humanity revealed in the cruciform love of Jesus Christ. His gratitude knew no limits. St. Bonaventure in a poignant scene shows how remarkably thanksgiving pervades the consciousness of Francis (*LM XIV:2*). Rather than give in to the suggestion of a brother that he pray for relief during intense suffering which the brother thought God had unduly laid upon him, Francis gently yet emotionally chides the brother, kisses the ground, and thanks God for even his sufferings. How faithful he is to what he asks of the sick brothers in Chapter X of the First Rule: And I beg the sick brother to give thanks to the Creator for everything; and whatever the Lord wills for him. . . . Similarly, those in positions of authority in the brotherhood should be able to discover reasons for being grateful in the pain and suffering brought to them by a sinning brother (*EpMin*).

Francis was grateful for lepers, for his brothers, for creation, for his charism, for his brother and Lord; he was grateful for knowing God. This was his basic stance. He lived it; he preached it; he demanded it of his followers; he shared it with others. The Christian consciousness of Francis and the brothers expands our own if we move with them in gratitude from the heights to the depths, from the length to the breadth, from the past to the present and future of God's unspeakable goodness. Neither time nor place nor circumstance nor any created reality is to divert the rich energies of our hearts from that Franciscan gratitude that is so preoccupied with the “fullness of Good, all good, every

good, the true and supreme good" (*RnB* xxiii:9) which evokes an uninterrupted desire "to love, honor, adore, serve, praise and bless, glorify and exalt, magnify and give thanks . . ." (*RnB* xxiii: 11).

Francis was keenly aware of the effects of a life without gratitude. He knew how when developed into a life-stance, the failure to give thanks can enslave one to self in a crippling way. Grace had transformed him and led him to a daily consciousness of God's unceasing benevolence which resulted in the most unusual dance of genuine freedom recorded in human annals.

The more we read Francis, the more we recognize the power and validity of his intuitions. Isn't it so that one does not really recognize reality as it is unless one lives in gratitude? If, for example, we do not appreciate those with whom we live, or the people to whom we minister, or the life we are given, or the incredible gifts of our Christian and Franciscan lives — if we, in other words, are not living out of a conscious awareness of these and so many other gifts, we are indeed out of touch with reality. In fact, most of our difficulties and struggles begin when we fail to be grateful, when we see people and reality primarily in terms of meeting or not meeting our self-centered demands and expectations.

The world has always been attracted to the remarkable realism of St. Francis. Rarely, however, does it attribute this to the unusual way in which his consciousness is suffused with gratitude for all that surrounds him. Francis experiences reality as always proceeding from the creative generosity of the heart of God. This vision fills him with that gratitude which makes possible the most unusual relationship with the world, self, others and God himself that never ceases to evoke universal wonder and admiration. His attentiveness to reality, however, is intimately related to his conviction regarding the reality of the Incarnation. This event, whereby God takes to himself our human history with such absoluteness, reveals the unimaginable love which embraces and sustains all reality from beginning to end. Francis knows from experience that failure to live from this vision leads to but a partial view of reality and ultimately to unreal dreams and illusion. It can actually lead to complete breakdown.

The invitation to a daily conscious relationship of gratitude to God has profound implications. Francis' wisdom possesses value not simply for the people of his times. Perhaps without realizing it, the world is still trying to catch up to the powerful intuitions of the saint. By this I mean that certain insights of the poverello possess perennial value for wholeness of life, even in divergent cultures. Let me give you a striking example.

About seven years ago, the New York Times in a special science section featured an article entitled: "In Japan, Gratitude to Others is Stressed in Psy-

chotherapy."¹⁷ Written by David Goleman, the article spoke of a new therapy sweeping over Japan. It is called Naikan, which means "inner observation," "looking within"; and basically it provides the patient with an intensive experience of gratitude and appreciation. This, it claims, serves as an effective way of healing "the psychic wounds of modern life." Though related to Japanese culture, it has been found by Doctor David Reynolds, an American therapist, to transcend culture in many of its aspects. He speaks of its effectiveness in his own American practice.

Naikan is a form of self-reflection or meditation that emphasizes the goodness of others towards us. Together with this recognition is the conscious acknowledgement of how little the patient has returned to such people. The memory is made to recall as far back as possible how much our loved ones have given us. Its basic tenet is that one takes without thought or gratitude. As a result very little of one's self is offered to our world.

This therapy is rich in imagery, symbols and history. It is built from a healthy, realistic, penetrating guilt which, however, is not a kind of mental flagellation, nor a self-punishing moralism. It is a demolishing of the ego, and a recollection of how little of what a person has been or is deserves to be called a self. One comes to a soothing awareness that despite obvious limitations others have continued to provide love and support. Typically, a Naikan patient is made to empty a drawer of its contents and "thank each object in it for what it has done: a spoon, for example, for having ladled out soup."

The article also speaks of another therapy, often used in tandem with Naikan; it is called Morita. Where Naikan attempts to cultivate a sense of appreciation and gratitude to others, Morita emphasizes the "Zen focus on here and now awareness." This is designed to help people see their world more clearly. It tries to get people to do what they need to, regardless of their feelings at the moment. A typical Morita exercise is to ask the patient to close his eyes and describe the room in which he finds himself. In the Zen tradition of the focusing on the here and now, the patient is made aware of a choice: to focus on that bleak inner monologue of complaints, or on the richness of what is actually going on around them.

Naikan and Morita therapy provides the client with the crucial lesson of how to live in reality or to live properly and gently. In both cases one comes to a deep experience of surrendering the self. Though there is occasional guidance from an experienced traveler, in both cases the patient is called upon to journey alone. When successful, the wonderful outcome is a desire to serve others.

The ten most common experiences related by those who have undergone

Naikan therapy deserve mention. They relate at least to some degree to what we know of Francis and the first brothers.

Allow me to list them:

1. A light is seen;
2. The client's body feels buoyant, tears pour out;
3. People and nature appear to be beautiful;
4. The client becomes more level-headed, sensible;
5. There is a feeling of joy, happiness, celebration of life;
6. The client feels more settled, develops the ability to take another's point of view;
7. There is a feeling of gratitude, closeness, and a desire to serve others;
8. The patient has a sense of being changed in a fundamental way;
9. There is an increased desire to take proper care of oneself;
10. There is a decreased anxiety and an increased sense of peacefulness.¹⁸

When we consider these stated results, we cannot but wonder at the genius of Francis. Though he and the brothers were mocked by many as fools, they were indeed possessed of a sanity, a freedom, an enthusiasm which can only be revered. Franciscan gratitude as a daily mode of consciousness provides the basis for an unusually well-balanced life.

The Source of the Franciscan Consciousness

It should not surprise us that Francis, a man one would think "had always dwelt among the Scriptures" (2 Cel 106), should regard thanksgiving so highly. Thanksgiving is for the New Testament people the essential Christian posture before experience. These theme become predominant in the Epistles of St. Paul. "Dedicate yourselves to thanksgiving," he writes to the Colossians (3:16). He had already indicated to this same community that the believer is to be "overflowing with gratitude" (2:19). The Greek word Paul employs for thanksgiving in these and many other passages is *eucharistia*, which is our word for eucharist. Paul gives us the original meaning of a word we now fittingly apply to the Lord's supper.

Why does thanksgiving occupy so primary a place in the life of the primitive christian community? The outpouring of the Holy Spirit has brought them to the realization that in gratitude we enter the "Yes" of Jesus. To be thankful is to enter into the inner dynamism of His spirit, which was always to give thanks. He lived out our humanity and reached into the depths of every human heart so as to empower us to be grateful and to give praise.

This inner dynamic of the heart of Jesus is beautifully presented in Matthew's Gospel (11:25-27). Here, as the clouds of hostility begin to gather over Jesus, we hear him uttering the deepest prayer of His heart, and it is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving:

I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will . . .

This prayer, as Joachim Jeremias reminds us, is "the only prayer of Jesus of some length from the time before his passion" and it is a "thanksgiving in spite of failure."¹⁹ Jesus praises and thanks the Father for His special revelation "to the childlike." Jeremias explains that Jesus is not merely following the Jewish practice of the *berakah*, the spontaneous prayer of thanks by the believer for God's intervention in his or her personal history. Rather, Jesus is indicating the characteristic stance of those who believe in and live in the Kingdom: it is one of gratitude. Thanksgiving is one of the foremost characteristics of the new age: "So when Jesus gives thanks he is not just following custom." The new thanksgiving is the living response to the actuality of God. The novel element is that the "childlike" recognize the actual presence of the living God in the person of Jesus. God is no longer known indirectly in the many blessings of life; He is now known directly, in the Son. Jesus tells us that the new thanksgiving is our living response to the actuality of God. In thanksgiving we actualize the Kingdom.

Jesus came in the power of the Spirit. He catches up in his "Yes" our ingratitude, our apathy, our biases and prejudices. He consecrates life once-and-for-all: past, present and future. His gratitude is nailed with Him to the cross, eternalized in the Resurrection so that He lives forever in his grateful humanity, sealed forever in the Father's gracious acceptance.

Neither time nor place nor circumstance nor any created reality is to divert the rich energies of our hearts from that Franciscan gratitude that is so preoccupied with the "fullness of Good, all good, every good, the true and supreme good" which evokes an uninterrupted desire "to love, honor, adore, serve, praise and bless, glorify and exalt, magnify and give thanks . . ."

The early Christians came to acknowledge this in a most unusual way. Early in the second century, in the 100's, they began to gather for thanksgiving, for eucharist. *Eucharistia*, thanksgiving, becomes a uniquely Christian word: it

will from then on stand for the Lord's supper.²⁰ To celebrate and reenact the sacrifice of the Lord is to enter into the dimension of Christ's thanksgiving. Now the words of the eucharistic prayer, "He gave you thanks and praise," take on a new significance. Now we understand why special words of thanks precede the solemn moment of the Holy, Holy. We are being led liturgically to the special moment of glory when the thanksgiving of the great heart of Jesus takes and transforms our unwillingness and inability to render thanks so that we may go forth as truly eucharistic people — people filled with the spirit of thanksgiving as was Francis.

The intimate connection between a life of thanksgiving and the celebration of the eucharist makes eminent sense for followers of Francis. We speak much today of transitions and passages and their importance as intermediary stages in the life-process. I believe that our most important transition is the one we make from our ordinary moments of life into the celebration of the eucharist. In today's culture it is so easy and yet so detrimental to lose sight of the awesomeness of eucharist, so acutely experienced by Francis and which he so strongly asks of his brothers in his *Letter to the Entire Order*. An honest self-examination would, I believe, reveal to us how more often than not our approach to eucharist is casual; we do little or nothing to prepare ourselves for an extraordinary experience of time, of place, of people, of God, of ourselves. A daily consciousness rooted in gratitude fosters the reverence that could lead us to the desired level of awareness necessary for a celebration that is truly table fellowship, the Lord's supper.

The Franciscan Consciousness of St. Bonaventure

Saint Bonaventure was most sensitive to the place of gratitude in the life of Francis. We have already referred to his description of Francis' unusual reaction to the brother who suggested that he pray for relief from acute suffering. The nature of Francis' gratitude revealed in this incident is an indication of his image of God whom Bonaventure describes as the "great Almsgiver." (LM 10). The God of Francis is the God of generosity and love, and from beginning to end the Francis of Bonaventure is the recipient of incredible gifts. In Chapter Eleven, Francis says to a sick canon: "Because of the sin of ingratitude worse things than before are inflicted." When later the canon met death, Bonaventure comments that his misfortune occurred "on account of his vice of ingratitude and his contempt for God, when he should have been grateful for the forgiveness he had received" (LM XI:5).

In a Sermon entitled "On the Manner of Living," Bonaventure reminds his audience of Paul's exhortation to the Colossians (4:1): Persevere in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.²¹ Bonaventure comments that

"thanksgiving, the act of thanks," must claim for itself the greatest portion of prayer; and this not so much in the sense of multiplying words as in terms of love and affectivity. This affectivity both in prayer and in thanksgiving arises from the concentrated and fixed meditation of our destitution in the face of the mercies of God, both general and special, communal and particular. He sums up by saying:

For no one can seek ardently unless he believes that he has need of that which he seeks and has confidence that he will be heard. Nor can anyone devotedly return thanks to God unless he is attentive to the magnitude of the divine gift and the lack of merit on his part...²²

Bonaventure ascribes an important place to thanksgiving not only in prayer but in the entire spiritual journey of the gospel person. This is especially apparent in his mystical work *De triplici via* ("On the Triple Way"). Gratitude is a persistent theme throughout this writing. For the seraphic doctor the heart is expanded through gratitude.²³ More explicitly, Bonaventure speaks of gratitude when he discusses the Illuminative Way which, he says, "consists in the perfect imitation of Christ."²⁴

Bonaventure takes his readers on a meditative journey in the first chapter of his mystical work. He desires that we turn the "ray of intelligence" to the past, the present, and the future. Like Francis he wishes us to give careful attention to the immeasurable goodness of God in the entirety of our human history.

He begins by calling our attention not only to our forgiven sins but even "the sins we could have fallen into if the Lord had allowed it." He then applies this same ray of light to the three classes of gifts bestowed on us by God which pertain to nature, grace, and the "superabundant gifts of love." Bonaventure reveals his own Franciscan consciousness as he takes us into appreciation of our human existence in all of its human richness.

Listen to his words:

Certainly God has complemented our nature.
Consider that He has given us a body —
A body with integrity of members,
Health of constitution,
And the nobility of sex.
Let us look upon the senses:
Has He not given us good eyesight?
Has He not given us keen hearing?
Has He not given us power to speak?
And with regard to the soul:
Has He not given us a clear intelligence?
Has He not given us true judgment?
Has He not given us a desire for good?²⁵

Bonaventure's attentiveness to the gifts of nature should heighten our own consciousness to the way we begin each day with little or no attention to them, not to mention the supernatural gifts which envelop our christian lives. Bonaventure is so acutely sensitive to the gifts of nature that he extends the notion of grace to creation, to what is not ordinarily known as grace proper. It is his purpose to extend our consciousness in thanksgiving, to recognize the giftedness of reality at every level. Faith in the transcendent goodness of the Creating Trinity will not allow Bonaventure to take anything of created reality for granted.

From these gifts Bonaventure moves to the supernatural gifts, properly so called. He mentions among these: the grace of baptism, the Sacrament of Penance, the grace of priesthood which enables us to be nourished with word, forgiveness, eucharist. He tells us that God's "perfect benevolence renders us full of awe and amazement." He directs our attention to the gift of creation itself, the gift of the "only-begotten Son . . . who is both a Brother and Friend to us."

Among these gifts are also the Church and the Holy Spirit. He goes on to remind us that the Christian soul is friend, child, and spouse to God. In view of these wondrous gifts, he exclaims, "Can the soul be anything but grateful to God, meditating on these gifts?"

But Bonaventure does not allow our journey into gratitude to end there. He reminds us of God's promises "to those who believe in Him and love Him." God's promise includes "a place among the Saints, and the very fulfillment of every desire in Him." He then concludes in words which we could easily imagine issuing from the mouth of Francis:

For God is the source and the end,
The Alpha and the Omega,
Of every good.
God considers those who live and desire Him
For Himself alone
As worthy of His goodness,
Which is so perfect that it exceeds every petition;
Far surpasses every desire;
Exhausts every thought!
Must we not desire Him and only Him
With every affection possible?²⁶

The Consciousness of the Contemporary Franciscan

There is no doubt in Bonaventure's mind regarding the essential place of gratitude in our daily Franciscan consciousness. If we desire to walk in the

truth, to awaken to the true reality of ourselves, of others, of the world around us, of God Himself, we must begin our day in gratitude.

Too often our first moments of awakening are occupied with what we have to do rather than who we really are. If my consciousness is thus occupied, I have already overlooked the most important and most essential aspects of who I am. In placing our doing before our being we can easily fall victim to the modern trap that ensnares us in our egos and robs us of our true identity. Over a period of time this can lead to a secularistic way of approaching our lives, even when they are dedicated to ministry for the Kingdom. In filling my consciousness with things I have to do, as valuable as they may be in themselves, my spiritual energies are already misdirected from God to self.

If we desire to walk in the truth, to awaken to the true reality of ourselves, of others, of the world around us, of God Himself, we must begin our day in gratitude.

Bonaventure provides us with an exercise which can truly free us for a contemplative approach to life. By turning our awakening each day to the contemplation of so many gifts and to prayer of gratitude, we can begin to experience all of reality as Francis did. Were we to pause now and submit ourselves to a review of this day's awakening, how much ingratitude would it reveal? When did I last thank God for the gifts of nature: of imagination, of communication, of speech, of thought, of listening, of reading and writing, and so much more? When did I last awaken to thanksgiving for life, for health, for food and shelter, for the people with whom I live and work?

How many of the supernatural gifts of God do I take for granted each day? Looking back to those mentioned in the *Triple Way* we can add the unique gift of being a Franciscan. Those of us who are ordained should ask ourselves how well we express our thanks for the privilege of celebrating eucharist and other sacraments. Actually, when one undertakes the exercise, the list of God's gifts shows itself to be endless. Were we to spend the remainder of our days awakening in this way, we would never exhaust it. Furthermore, our hearts would be expanded and become more and more conscious of the loving relationship with the really Real which according to Bonaventure is the inmost desire of our hearts.

To begin each day by directing ourselves to a loving awareness of God's boundless gifts is to prepare ourselves for a contemplative encounter with all of life. It is a process of ongoing conversion that can stretch our inner hearts into heights and depths, lengths and breadths hitherto undreamed of. One can best describe this by applying a favorite phrase of St. Bonaventure; it is "a most secret action, which no one knows unless he experiences it."²⁷

Conclusion

This paper obviously in no way exhausts the topic; it is merely a beginning. It does, however, point the way to a mode of consciousness that is uniquely Franciscan. As a matter of fact, without a daily awakening to gratitude, we undermine the possibilities of the gospel life to which God has so graciously called us. Over a period of time this can lead to compromise which, when worked into a lifestyle, becomes mediocrity. We do not cease to be Franciscan, but enthusiasm, creativity, and all we associate with Francis and the early brothers flatten out into routine.

Henri J.M. Nouwen, a well known writer on spirituality, wrote an article in *America* magazine some years ago describing his stay among the poor of Peru.²⁸ For the poor, he says, everything is the free gift of God. "For them," he continues, "all of life is a gift, a gift to be celebrated, a gift to be shared. . . . Children and friends, bread and wine, music and pictures, trees and flowers, water and light, a house, a room or just a bed, all are gifts to be grateful for and to celebrate."

Nouwen calls the poor "a Eucharistic people, who know how to say thanks to God, to life, to each other." Their basic inner spirit is suffused with gratitude and "this basic sense of gratitude is indeed one of the most visible characteristics of the poor I have come to know." There is an interesting convergence of themes here: every-day consciousness, gratitude, poverty, eucharist, and true worship of God. Nouwen is so correct when he says that the poor provide a great challenge to all of us: "to live and to work out of gratitude." Without this basic conscious commitment to daily life and reality, without awakening to a deep encounter to the God who sustains us in a dialogue of unfathomable love, without a consciousness suffused with an acute realization of the gifts within us and about us, our attempts at ongoing formation run the risk of externalism. It is so essential to our lives as friars that our workshops, our house chapters, our continuing education, our fraternal gatherings and all that we so generously undertake enrich our consciousness with thanksgiving. To do otherwise is to begin to secularize our consciousness and thus to rob our experience of time of the graced opportunity for that which is most essential to our Franciscan lives — "to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working" (*RegB* 10).

Francis and Bonaventure each in his own unique way continue to call and empower us to a transformation of consciousness which of its very nature can make us into the Kingdom people whose very lives are themselves as liberating as the Gospel we profess.

End notes

¹ *New York Times*, February 22, 1990. Section A, 14.

² For an enlightening application of this theme to Christian spirituality, see "Toward a Spirituality of Liminality," Bruce Lescher, CSC, in *Review for Religious*, 1981, 727-738. For a more general treatment of consciousness, see *Symposium on Consciousness*, Lee, Ornstein, Galin, Deikman, Tart. (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), especially "Bimodal Consciousness and the Mystic Experience," by Arthur Deikman, 67-88.

³ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Colliers Books, 1981).

⁴ William McNamara, "Psychology and the Christian Mystical Tradition," in *Transpersonal Psychologies*, edited by Charles T. Tart. (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 406.

⁵ See "A Cybernetic Consciousness?" in *Environmental Man* by William Kuhns (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 115-126.

⁶ See Cajetan Esser and Engelbert Grau, *Love's Reply* translated by I. Brady (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1963), 168; see also: "Devotio" by J. Chatillon, in *Dict. Spir.* III, 702 ff.

⁷ *Osservatore Romano*, July 23, 1970, 1.

⁸ Pope John Paul II, "The Redeemer of Man," (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1979) [number 3, page 8].

⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 13.

¹⁰ Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, translated by Bernard Noble (Hamden: Archon Books, 1972), 267.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, translated by Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), 39-40.

¹⁴ For an excellent analysis of the entire Chapter, see Leonard Lehmann, OFM Cap., "Gratias Agimus Tibi: Structure and Content of Chapter XXIII of the *Regula Non Bullata*," in *Laurentianum* V (1982), 312-375; reprinted in *Greyfriars Review* V (1991), 1-54.

¹⁵ See the article "Riconoscenza" by David Azevedo in *Dizionario Franceseano* (Padova: Edizioni Messaggero, 1983), 1558-1570, *passim*.

¹⁶ David Flood O.F.M. and Thaddee Matura O.F.M., *The Birth of a Movement: A Study of the First Rule of St. Francis*, translated by Paul Schwartz and Paul Lachance (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1975), 49-50.

¹⁷ *New York Times*, Tuesday, June 3, 1986. The material in the article is based on the book *Naikan Psychotherapy: Meditation for Self-development* by David Reynolds, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

¹⁸ Reynolds, *Naikan Psychotherapy*, 11.

¹⁹ Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allison, 1967), 78.

²⁰ See: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, translated and edited by Geoffrey N. Bromeley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-77), Vol. 9, 414-15.

²¹ Sermo 1, "De modo vivendi," *Opera Omnia*, Vol. IX, 724a.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See: St. Bonaventure, *The Enkindling of Love also called The Triple Way*, translated and edited by William I. Joffe (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1940), 77 [*Opera Omnia*, VIII: 9a].

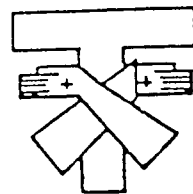
²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14 [VIII, 12a].

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16 [VIII, 6a and 6b]. This translation from the Latin is somewhat free but substantially correct.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁷ *Collations on the Six Days*, translated by Jose de Vinck (Paterson, NJ; St. Anthony Guild, 1970), II, 29.

²⁸ Henri Nouwen, "Humility" in *America*, December 11, 1982, 372.



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