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THE CORD
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1. MSS should be submitted on disk (or typed on 8 1/2 x 11 paper, one side only, double spaced).
2. The University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 13 ed., is to be consulted on general questions of style.
3. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized or, in typed manuscripts, underlined.
Titles of articles should be enclosed in quotation marks and not underlined or italicized.
4. References to Scripture sources or to basic Franciscan sources should not be footnoted, but entered within parenthesis immediately after the cited text, with period following the closed parenthesis. For example:
(1Cor. 13:6). (2C 5:8).
(ER 23:2). (4LAg 2:13).

A list of standard abbreviations used in *The Cord* can be found inside the back cover. The edition of the Franciscan sources used should be noted in the first reference in a mss.

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Editorial

Seven years ago Sr. Elise Saggau of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota accepted an appointment as editor of *The Cord*. When this important journal reached its Golden Jubilee year in 2000, Sr. Elise worked on a series of events that marked this milestone. With that task safely behind her, she began to look forward to another jubilee—this time her own fiftieth anniversary of religious profession in our Franciscan family. With the same “care and solicitude” that marked her shepherding of each issue of the magazine, she elaborated a plan to step down from her post at the close of 2001. Following a round of farewell celebrations here at St. Bonaventure’s she will attend the Spring Franciscan Experience at St. Isidore’s in Rome in preparation for her August jubilee back home in Little Falls.

During her tenure, *The Cord* has maintained its reputation as a truly important English language source of continuing education and formation in Franciscan spirituality. Its accessibility and affordability keeps its subscription base stable in a time of great uncertainty for small publications. Its pages are home to authors with established international reputations as well as new writers seeking a place to test their ideas and concerns. By providing Franciscan organizations with an important advertising vehicle, she has created an important networking function as well.

Ever alert to new material by which to gauge the worth of her contributors, Elise has become one of the most informed women in the country when it comes to knowing what is in print and what is worth reading in the ever increasing supply of English “franciscana.” Her duties at the Franciscan Institute encompassed a great deal of service to incoming students, summer school programming, text editing for countless volumes, and coordinating our University Sisters’ gatherings. When the summer students of 2001 offered their farewells, they did so with gusto, humor, and a real sense of impending loss of one who had their good so totally at heart for so many years of quiet but essential ministry.

In September of 2000 Elise and I hosted Sr. Mary Frances Laughlin who assisted Philotheus Boehner, OFM, five decades ago with the founding issues of *The Cord*. Listening to her reminiscences, we realized that women have long played a part in the inner workings of Institute publications. Clearly, Philotheus was happy to invite competent associates from among the Third Order sisters to participate in the important venture of the fledgling research center. Elise has maintained that real but often invisible tradition and now she has paved a way for its continuance.

Motherhood in God, Jesus, Francis, and the Franciscan Tradition

Robert Stewart, OFM

My personal interest in the metaphor of motherhood as applied to God, Jesus, and Francis arose from an incident that happened to me while I was living in Africa among the Zulu people. The Zulu people are keen observers of the behavior patterns of those around them and are excellent mimics of the sounds and movements of those observed. They have a practice of assigning nicknames that sum up someone's behavior. Often there is a polite name and a less polite name. I was told that the name given to me was *inKukbukazi*, which means "mother hen." I was not certain if this was the polite or the less polite term, but I must admit I was not pleased. However, I was consoled by this passage in Matthew's Gospel:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing (Matt. 23:37).

Here Jesus compares himself to a mother hen. If the comparison was all right for Jesus then it was all right for me.

From that time on I began to be interested in the imagery of motherhood applied to God and to Jesus. As I became more familiar with the writings of Francis and the Franciscan tradition, I saw that motherhood imagery was very much part of this tradition. There is much to be learned from an examination of the metaphor "Mother" as applied to God, to Jesus in the Scriptures and in the Church tradition; then it is possible to see how it is applied in Francis and the Franciscan tradition.

Old Testament Images

The powerful image of God as Mother is found in the Bible from the opening chapter of Genesis through the prophetic writings to the late wisdom literature. At first sight the image of the Spirit hovering over the waters (Gen.

Sr. Roberta McKelvie of the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters began her service as editor at the beginning of January, 2002. An Institute graduate like her predecessor, Roberta did her doctoral work at Fordham and pioneered research on the life and legacy of Bl. Angelina of Montegiove, foundress of the Third Order feminine conventual tradition. She also serves as coordinator of the summer program for Poor Clares ("Know Your Vocation") at the Institute and is a staff member of the Franciscan Pilgrimage Program.

These two women share a common and abiding concern for our vocation as Franciscans. To count them as friend and co-worker has been both a blessing and an experience of our "sisterhood without borders" at its best. To Sr. Elise we offer our blessing for years of grace, health, and serenity. To Sr. Roberta we extend a welcoming hand and our hopes for a mutually beneficial term as editor of this journal.

To you, our readers, we offer our assurance that we work to support you as you pursue your own evangelical *itinerarium* month by month, year by year. Hail and farewell! Happy New Year! Pax et Bonum!

Margaret Curney, o.s.f.
Publisher



1:2) may not seem maternal, but as Derek Kidner says: "This is the mother-bird hovering or fluttering over its brood."¹ He points out that the Hebrew word for hover is the same as the one used in Deuteronomy and has a female connotation:

Like an eagle that stirs up its nest
And hovers over its young
That spreads its wings
And carries them on its pinions (Deut. 32:11).

An image of the mother eagle taking care of her brood evokes God's care for his people during the Exodus: "I carried you on eagles wings and brought you to myself" (Ex. 19:4). This same image is also found in the psalms: "Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me under the shadow of your wings" (Ps. 17:8).

During the Exodus, Moses uses mother images. In exasperation he addresses God:

Did I conceive these people?
Did I give them birth?
Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms,
As a nurse carries an infant
To the land you promised on oath to their
forefathers? (Num. 11:12)

This outcry must be placed in conjunction with the frequency with which God speaks of himself as mother, bearing the Israelites in his bosom, conceiving them in his womb:

But now like a woman in childbirth
I cry out, I gasp and pant (Is. 42:12).

Listen to me, O house of Jacob
You whom I have upheld since you were conceived
And have carried since your birth. . . .
I am he; I am he who will sustain you (Is 46: 3-4).

As a mother comforts her child
So I will comfort you
And you will be comforted over Jerusalem (Is. 66:13).

Wisdom literature presents the wisdom of God as a feminine principle:

I am the mother of beautiful love, of fear, of knowledge,
And of holy hope; being eternal, I am given to all my children, to
those who are named by him (Si. 24:18).

Wisdom reveals the feminine and motherly nature of God:

Yahweh conceived me (*quanan*) at the beginning of his way,
The first of his acts of old.
I was woven in the womb (*nissakti*) at the first,
before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths, I was brought forth (*Holati*)
when there were no springs abounding with the waters.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
Before the hills, I was brought forth (*Hotati*) (Prov. 8:2-25).²

Jesus as Mother: New Testament Development

The image of the Motherhood of God is also found in the New Testament, especially in the Johannine writings where the idea of birth is a common theme:

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (Jn. 1:13).

Peter develops another feminine image, breast-feeding, as he speaks of children being nurtured by their mother's milk. "Like new born babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (Peter 2:2-3). Additional writings refer to Peter and Paul as themselves providing milk for beginners, and so they should themselves be seen as mothers.

The New Testament introduces us to Jesus talking of himself as a mother. Jesus applies to himself the Old Testament image of God's care for Jerusalem as a mother bird watching over her young. "He will cover you with feathers and under his wings you will find refuge" (Ps. 91:4) is echoed in his lamentation over the holy city:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing (Matt. 23:37).

Christ's application of the Old Testament metaphor links together God as mother with Jesus as mother. Michael J. Suggs, commenting on this passage, says: "Matthew intends the saying to be understood as a word of incarnate wisdom whom he sees in Jesus."³ He links the text to wisdom, which is imaged as wife, lover, and wise woman. All these reveal the feminine and motherly nature of Jesus.

Quite a number of early theologians refer to the Godhead in feminine terms. Clement of Alexandria says: "God became a mother from all eternity in giving birth to the eternal logos." He also makes allusion to "the Father's loving breasts" and "to the milk of the Father."⁴

The idea of the **womb of the Father** was expressed in the Council of Toledo in 675:

We must believe that the Son was not made out of nothing, nor out of some substance or other, but from the womb of the Father, that is, he was begotten or born from the Father's own being.

Later still, Anselm emphasizes the centrality of Christ in maternal imagery that flows from God to Christ to Paul to all who preach the Gospel by their lives or words. In the prayer to St. Paul, Anselm writes:

But you, Jesus, good lord, are you not also a mother? Are you not that mother who, like a hen, collects her chickens under her wings? Truly, master, you are a mother. For what others have conceived and given birth to they have received from you. You are the author; others are ministers. It is then you, above all, Lord God, who are mother.⁵

However, it is particularly among twelfth-century Cistercian authors that we find maternal imagery referring not only to male authority figures but also to God and to "Mother Jesus." Bernard of Clairvaux uses "Mother" to describe Jesus, but his emphasis is not on giving birth or even conceiving but is seen as maturing. He writes: "If you feel the strings of temptation, such are not so much the wounds as the breasts of the crucified. . . . He will be your mother, and you will be his son."⁶ Breasts to Bernard are a symbol of the pouring out towards others of affectivity or of instruction and almost invariably suggest to him a discussion of the duties of prelates or abbots.⁷ This theme became a favorite theme of many Cistercian writers.

This tradition reached its zenith, however, in Julian of Norwich, who wrote:

This fair lovely word "mother" is so sweet and so kind in itself that it cannot be said of anyone or to anyone except of him and to him who is the true Mother of life and of all things. To the property of motherhood belong nature, love, wisdom and knowledge and this is God.⁸

Julian, in chapter 48 of the "Showings," refers to Mercy as being compassionate with the tender love of motherhood and speaks of the God of Mercy. In chapter 52, she sees God rejoicing to be our Father, rejoicing to be our Mother.

Above all it is in speaking of Jesus as Mother that she waxes most eloquent. She postulates this teaching about Jesus:

I saw and understood that the high might of the Trinity is our Father and the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, and the great love of the Trinity is our Lord. . . . And furthermore I saw that the second person, who is our Mother, substantially the same beloved person, has now become our Mother sensually, because we are double by God's creating, that is to say substantial and sensual.⁹

She also wrote that "Jesus is our true Mother in nature by our first creation, and he is our true Mother in grace by his taking our created nature."¹⁰

Julian also meditates on Mary's motherhood:

So our Lady is our Mother, in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in Christ, for she is mother of our savior, and our savior is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come.¹¹

Jesus is mother because we were born in him, grow in him, and through his passion have been united to him. Finally in the Eucharist, we are fed by him. Caroline Walker Bynum points out:

In spiritual writers from Anselm to Julian, we find three basic stereotypes of the female or the mother: the female is generative (the *foetus* is made of her very matter) and sacrificial in her generation (birth pangs); the female is loving and tender (a mother cannot help loving her own child); the female is nurturing (she feeds the child with her own bodily fluid).¹²

Francis as Mother

We are now in a position to look at Francis's use of maternal metaphors for himself. We can also begin to see how mystical motherhood, rooted in God language, became an important theme in the Franciscan tradition. Francis writes: "Brother Leo, health and peace from Brother Francis. I am speaking, my son, in this way—as a mother would—because I am putting everything we said on the road in this brief message and advice" (LtL 2). Here Francis is possibly influenced by the Cistercian idea of the maternal role of an Abbot. But he is more probably influenced by an idea rooted in Pauline teaching. He associates the maternal concept with bringing forth others to life through the word of God.

Like a mother feeding and looking after her own children, we felt so devoted and protective towards you and had come to love you so much that we were eager to hand over to you not only the Good News but our whole lives as well (1Thess. 2: 7-9).

Francis also bequeathed this maternal spirit to his followers:

Let each one confidently make known his need to another that the other might discover what is needed and minister to him. Let each one love and care for his brother as a mother loves and cares for her son in those matters in which God has given him the grace (ER 9: 10-11).¹³

Francis, in the Later Rule (1223), returns to this theme of the maternal responsibility of the brothers towards one another. Here he lays greater emphasis on the maternal relationship of the brothers and asks the friars to become “supermums” to their companions on the way:

Wherever the brothers may be and meet one another, let them show they are members of the same family. Let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the spirit (LR 6: 7-8).

And in his Rule for Hermitages, Francis says:

Let those who wish to stay in hermitages in a religious way be three brothers or, at the most four; let two of these be “the mother” and have two “sons” or at least one. Let the two who are “mothers” keep the life of Martha and the two “sons” the life of Mary and let them have one enclosure in which each one may have his cell in which he may pray and sleep (RH 1-2).

The second biography of St. Francis written by Thomas of Celano (*The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*) recounts a delightful story in which Brother Pacifico calls Francis mother:

When the man of God was staying at Siena, a brother from Brescia happened to come there. He was very anxious to see the stigmata of our Holy Father and insistently asked Brother Pacifico for a chance to do so. He answered: “When I take my leave, I’ll ask to kiss his hands, and when he offers them, I’ll signal to you with a wink, and you will get a look.” When they were ready to leave, the two of them went to the saint and Brother Pacifico, on bended knee, said to Saint Francis: “Give us your blessing, my dearest mother, and give me your

hand to kiss!” He kissed the hand, offered reluctantly, and signaled the brother to look. After they left, the father suspected a holy trick had been played on him. He called Brother Pacifico back and said to him: “The Lord forgive you brother. You sometimes make a lot of trouble for me!” Pacifico immediately prostrated himself and humbly asked: “What trouble have I caused you, dear mother?” But blessed Francis made no answer, and the incident ended in silence (2C 137).

Odo of Cheriton gives testimony to Francis as mother in one of his Sunday Sermons, published in Paris at the end of 1219:

Brother Francis, asked who was going to take care of his brothers since he received all [who came to him] indifferently, answered: “A certain king made love to a woman who lived in the woods and she bore a son. After she had raised him for a time, she came to the gate of the king, so that he might take care of the son from then on. When this was announced to the king, he said: ‘So many evil and useless men eat food at my court; isn’t it only right that my own son should be fed among them?’” After he told this story, Francis said that he was the woman whom the Lord had impregnated with his word, and that he had borne these spiritual sons. “And so, if the Lord provides for so many unjust people, you should not wonder how he is going to supply nourishment for his own children along with the others.”¹⁴

In this testimony we see both the generative and the nurturing elements of motherhood referred to by Francis.

Patristic Testimony

Origen applies the idea of motherhood to the Church and to the individual believer. The Church is joined to her heavenly spouse

so that she may conceive by him and be saved through this chaste begetting of children brought forth by the spotless Church or by the soul that seeks nothing bodily but is aflame with the single love of the Word of God.¹⁵

Augustine is more explicit about the need for Christians to follow Mary’s role in conceiving and bringing forth Christ into the world.

Do in the chambers of your soul, what you view with amazement in the flesh of Mary. He who believes in his heart unto justice conceives Christ; he who with his mouth makes profession of faith unto salvation brings forth Christ.¹⁶

In both *Letters to the Faithful*, Francis connects spiritual motherhood with the mystical espousal between Christ and the soul and with the brotherly or sisterly love of Christ.

All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength and love their neighbors as themselves, who hate their bodies with their vices and sins, who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who produce worthy fruits of penance. Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them, because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and make Its home and dwelling place among them, and they are children of the heavenly Father whose works they do and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers to Him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven. We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through a divine love and a pure and sincere conscience, and give birth to Him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others (1LtF 1: 1-10).

Clare's Vision

Perhaps the most unusual presentation of Francis as mother is the testimony of Sister Fillipa, reported in the canonization process of St. Clare:

She [Clare] was climbing a very high stairway, but was going very quickly, almost as though she were going on level ground. When she reached Saint Francis, the saint bared his breast and said to the lady Clare: "Come, take and drink." After she had sucked from it, the saint admonished her to imbibe once again. After she did so what she had tasted was so sweet and delightful she in no way could describe it.

After she had imbibed, that nipple or opening of the breast from which the milk comes remained between the lips of blessed Clare. After she took what remained in her mouth in her hands, it seemed it was gold so clear and bright that everything was seen as in a mirror (Proc 3:29).¹⁷

The powerful symbols of this account express a reversal of genders as Clare is nourished by "Mother Francis." What of the golden nipple that became a mirror? In Clare's spirituality the mirror became a central symbol in which she saw Christ. Francis is associated with Christ as a mirror reflecting what gives meaning and purpose to her life.

Marco Bartoli, in *Clare of Assisi*, gives an historical analysis and a psychological interpretation of this vision. He also considers the culture in which this vision took place as well as Clare's personal culture and the symbolic images she uses. He reveals how Clare's love for the Lord was strengthened and mediated through Francis, through whom she came to know and love the poor, humble, and crucified Christ.¹⁸

Spiritual Motherhood in the Franciscan Tradition

Starting with the idea of motherhood in God, in Jesus, and in Francis, the followers of Francis restored and developed a neglected metaphor of the generative role of God and Christ. They used feminine imagery in their theological emphasis on love as the primary motive of creation and the incarnation. Positing and teaching the centrality of Christ, born of Mother Mary to be for us the one in whom we are to be reborn through baptism in the womb of the Church, they reverted to metaphors of generativity, bearing, and conceiving. Following Francis, they stressed the goodness of creation in all its physicality, centered as it is in Christ. Such imagery demanded a Jesus who is both mother and womb.

The development of maternal images, begun in the eleventh century, climaxed in the Franciscan movement. Franciscans taught and developed the idea of the humanity of God. This humanity made present in Jesus shows us a compassionate, loving, nurturing God, full of what were seen as feminine virtues. In and through Christ's humanity, we are reborn into divinity. Mary becomes the disciple among disciples, mirroring the pattern of God's activity. She conceived Christ in her heart through faith before she conceived him physically. For Franciscans, Mary's motherhood became the model; for, like her, all are called to conceive Christ in their hearts through obedience and bring him to birth in the world.

Scriptural Background for the Disciple as Mother

The section in Matthew that speaks of Jesus' kindred opens the way for us to become mothers of Jesus and as such mothers of God:

He was still speaking to the crowds when his mother and his brothers appeared; they were standing outside and were anxious to have a word with him. But to the man who told him this Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand towards his disciples he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12: 46-50).

Luke's gospel has Jesus answer: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice" (Lk. 8:21) These texts in no way disparage Mary; rather they remind us that claims of physical relationship come after those of spiritual relationship. Mary was pre-eminently the one who listened to the Word of God and put it into practice. In her obedient response to the message of the Angel Gabriel, she conceived Christ physically, but she had already conceived Christ by faith in her heart.

Mary is the model for every disciple of her Son. We are all called to do the will of the heavenly Father and to pronounce the "fiat" to his Word. By so doing each of us becomes a mother of Christ. It is also part of our evangelical vocation as members of the Body of Christ to assist one another to be mothers of the Word of God.¹⁹ St. Paul speaks of himself as going through the pains of childbirth to bring forth the Word in others. "I must go through the pain of giving birth to you all over again, until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:9). This motherhood is the main thrust of Paul's evangelical outreach:

Like a mother feeding and looking after her own children, we felt so devoted and protective towards you, and have come to love you so much, that we were eager to hand over to you, not only the Good News but our whole lives as well (1 Thess. 2:7-8).

Clare's Writings

Clare was struck with wonder when she considered that a woman's womb was needed so that God could come into the world as a human being. The womb of Mary was the receptacle to receive and carry the Son of God whom the heavens themselves could not contain. In her Third Letter to Agnes she wrote:

May you cling to His most sweet Mother who gave birth to a Son whom the heavens could not contain. And yet she carried him in the little enclosure of her holy womb and held Him on her virginal lap (3LAg 18-19).

This was one of the paradoxes of the gospel—that which is most precious, most vital, on whom history revolves, came without fanfare, despised, needy, and poor. Jesus, God incarnate, in whom all things were created, lay hidden in the womb of a woman living in a despised village, in a backwater of the great Roman Empire. But Clare understood that Mary's motherhood was more than an historical event, as important and moving as that was. She saw it also as a symbol.

As the glorious Virgin of virgins carried [him] materially, so you too, by following in her footprints, especially [those] of poverty and hu-

mility, can without any doubt, always carry Him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body (3LAg 24).

Motherhood is more than a physical matter and more than a matter for women alone. Carrying, nurturing, and making life grow is the duty of all. Clare and Francis saw cherishing and nourishing as essential to interpersonal relationships. The mother who nurtures is also the sister or brother who is cherished and this extends to everything in creation.

Bonaventure

In the meditations that make up *The Five Feasts of the Child Jesus*, Bonaventure develops the theme of mystical motherhood. In the Prologue he explains how it came into his mind

that by the grace of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High, a soul dedicated to God could spiritually conceive the holy Word of God and only-begotten Son of the Father, give birth to him, name him, seek and adore him with the Magi and finally, according to the law of Moses, joyfully present him in the Temple of God the Father.²⁰

In his first meditation, Bonaventure writes:

When at length it has rejected and despised previous imperfections and former desires for worldly things, and has resolved to lead a new life by the gracious kindness of the Father of lights from whom is every good endowment and every perfect gift (Jas. 1:17), it conceives mystically by the gift of grace.

What is happening here? It is nothing other than the heavenly Father by a divine seed, as it were impregnating the soul and making it fruitful. The power of the most High comes upon the soul and overshadows it (cf. Lk. 1:35) It is a joyous conception.²¹

Having conceived by the Holy Spirit, the devout soul is led to avoid wicked company. Bonaventure concludes with the words:

If you recognize that you have conceived God's most dear Son by a sacred resolve to strive for perfection, then keep away from the deadly poison I have just mentioned and, like a woman in labor, hasten with desire and longing towards a happy delivery.²²

Bonaventure continues in the second meditation:

Let us consider and mark well how the blessed Son of God, already conceived spiritually, is born spiritually in the soul. He is born when, after good advice, due thought and prayer for God's protection, we

put into practice our resolution to lead a more perfect life. That is to say, he is born when the soul begins to do that which it long had in mind, but was afraid to undertake, through fear of its own weakness.²³

...
Once this birth has taken place the devout soul knows and tastes how good the Lord Jesus is (cf. Ps 34:9). And in truth we find how good he is when we nourish him with our prayers, bathe him in the waters of our warm and loving tears, wrap him in the spotless swaddling clothes of our desires, carry him in an embrace of holy love, kiss him over and over again with heartfelt longing and cherish him in the bosom of our inmost heart.²⁴

In the Major Legend of Francis, Bonaventure links together the Motherhood of Mary with the Motherhood of Francis by returning to the theme of how Francis gave birth to a brotherhood of poor men.

Through the merits of the Mother of Mercy he conceived and brought to birth the spirit of the truth of the Gospel" (LMj 3:1).

Francis gathered all his sons around him and explained many things concerning the kingdom of God. . . . Then he disclosed to them his plan to send them to the four corners of the world. For already the lowly and seemingly sterile simplicity of our holy Father had brought to birth seven sons. And now he wished to call all the faithful of the world to repentance and to bring them to birth in Christ the Lord (LMj 3: 7).

Chapter 3 concludes with the allegory of the rich king who married a poor but beautiful woman, to which Francis, by way of interpretation, adds: "The sons and heirs of the eternal King have been born of a poor mother by the power of the Holy Spirit and they will be begotten by the spirit of poverty in our poor little Order" (LMj 3:10).

Finally, Bonaventure uses a maternal theme in the "Tree of Life" (30), where he presents the Church as having been born from the side of Christ.

Then, in order that the Church might be formed out of the side of Christ sleeping on the cross, . . . the divine plan permitted that one of the soldiers should pierce open his sacred side with a lance. While blood mixed with water flowed, the price of our salvation was poured forth, which gushing from the secret fountain of the heart gave power to the sacraments of the Church to confer the life of grace and to become for those already living in Christ, a draught of the fountain of living water springing up into eternal life.²⁵

This theme of wound and womb, delivery and birthing, became familiar among the Franciscan mystical writers. James of Milan, who wrote the "*Stimulus amoris*," developed these themes in powerful imagery that could serve as a conclusion to our survey of the Franciscan contribution to maternal imagery.

O most beloved wounds of my Lord Jesus Christ! Once on entering them with my eyes open, they were filled with blood. Seeing nothing else, I began to enter, feeling my way into the depths of the inner organs of his charity which surrounded me on every side and deprived me of any possibility of turning back. Here I live, nourishing myself with food that nourishes Him, becoming inebriated with his drink. I am immersed in a sweetness so great that I am unable to tell you. He who out of love for sinners stayed in the womb of the Virgin now deigns to carry poor me within his inner parts. But I am greatly afraid that the moment of birth will come, depriving me of the delights which I now enjoy. In any case, if he delivers me, he must suckle me at his breast like a mother, warm me with his hands, carry me in his arms, console me with kisses and caress me in his lap.²⁶

This indeed is a Franciscan picture of "Mother Jesus" conceiving, bearing, birthing, and nurturing a person.

This imagery faded during the period of the Reformation, Trent, and the counter-Reformation, but the theme of bearing God within us like Mary re-emerges in the 1982 Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular. "Within themselves let them always make a dwelling place and home for the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (2:8).

Conclusion

Spiritual motherhood as the mystical birth of God's Word in the soul of every Christian rests on the foundation of motherhood in God, in Jesus, and, for the Franciscan family, in Francis. The recognition of the maternal side of God, Jesus, and Francis, as well as that of common humanity in the Christian tradition, has a great deal to say about the way authority is exercised in the Christian family. When this ancient tradition is restored to the forefront of Church life, it will lead to a nurturing presence, which will serve to relativize the powers of domination and violence.

Spiritual motherhood sets free the life-giving forces within each Christian. It reveals to them the mystery that God dwells and grows within them and that they are called to bring forth Christ to the world. The model is Mary, who conceived Christ in her womb, allowed him to grow in the darkness while nourishing him with her own body, and then brought him forth when his time had arrived.

Spiritual motherhood fosters the nurturing, loving, and caring side of human nature, which may serve as an antidote to every form of violence. When the maternal side of our nature prevails, the peace that Christ came to bring to the world and which Francis preached may be established.

We hope that this theme of spiritual motherhood serves to help us be sisters and brothers to one another, members of the family of God, the family of Christ, the family of Francis, begotten of tenderness and living always in that tender, loving, all good God.

Endnotes

¹D. Kidner, *Genesis* (I.V.P.: London, 1967), 45.

²C. V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Almond: Trowbridge, 1985), 84. This translation was made by Camp to bring out the maternal imagery employed in this passage.

³M. J. Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1970), 67.

⁴*Quis dives salvetur*, PG9, 641.

⁵Anselm, *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1973).

⁶Letter 322, pl 182, col 527.

⁷C. W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (UCLA Press: Los Angeles and London, 1982), 115.

⁸Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 298-299.

⁹Julian, 294

¹⁰Cf. Julian, 296.

¹¹Julian, 292.

¹²Bynum, 131.

¹³All quotations from Francis's writings and early biographies are taken from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, volumes 1 and 2, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New City Press: New York, 1999, 2000).

¹⁴*Francis of Assisi, The Saint*, Vol. 1, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New City Press: New York, 1999), 591.

¹⁵Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson, *Ancient Christian Writers*, Vol. 26 (Westminster/Md.: London, 1957), 38.

¹⁶Augustine: *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 38 (Washington, 1959).

¹⁷All quotations from Clare's writings and early biographies are from: *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. and trans. Regis J. Armstrong (Franciscan Institute Publications: St. Bonaventure, NY, 1993).

¹⁸Cf. Marco Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, trans. Francis Teresa, OSC (Darton, Longman, Todd: London, 1993).

¹⁹Eric Doyle, "Introduction," *Bonaventure: Bringing Forth Christ, Five Feasts of the Child Jesus*, trans. Eric Doyle (S.L.G. Press: Oxford, 1999), viii.

²⁰Doyle, 92.

²¹Doyle, 3.

²²Doyle, 6.

²³Doyle, 7.

²⁴Doyle, 8.

²⁵*Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (S.P.C.K.: London, 1978), 154-155.

²⁶William J. Short, *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition* (Darton, Longman and Todd: London, 1999), 108.

Mary becomes the disciple among disciples, mirroring the pattern of God's activity. She conceived Christ in her heart through faith before she conceived him physically. For Franciscans, Mary's motherhood became the model; for, like her, all are called to conceive Christ in their hearts through obedience and bring him to birth in the world.

About Our Contributors

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The Sacred Exchange Between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty: An Example of “Vernacular Theology”

Brett Huebner

In his recent book, *The Flowering of Mysticism*,¹ Bernard McGinn discusses the mystics of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, including Franciscan mystics. In the Introduction, he provides a description of “vernacular theology.”² McGinn recalls the development of mysticism in the twelfth century and notes critical differences between thirteenth-century mysticism and earlier monastic mysticism. Regarding the mystics of the thirteenth century, he comments:

[They] were deeply indebted to the tradition of monastic mysticism initiated by the church fathers and developed by the monks of the medieval West. This monastic phase or layer of mysticism reached its fulfillment in the twelfth century, especially among the Cistercians and the canons of the Abbey of St. Victor outside Paris. . . .³

According to McGinn these groups, the Cistercians and Victorines, both played significant roles in the development of Christian mysticism. However, he believes that the mystics of the thirteenth century, who built on these earlier mystics, offered even more crucial contributions to the development of Christian mysticism.

He elaborates on several characteristics of the thirteenth-century mystical tradition. One characteristic is the way the mysticism of that century responds to the growing urbanization of Europe. He writes:

The Benedictine monasticism that had dominated religious life in the West since the eighth century was admirably suited to the dispersed rural life and the feudal structure of early medieval society, but it was ill-suited to the commercial world of the towns and growing cities of the later Middle Ages. At the start of the thirteenth century, Western

Christianity was confronted with the necessity of “re-urbanizing,” that is, of creating appropriate religious responses, both institutional and spiritual, to answer the needs of a rapidly changing, urbanizing society.⁴

Since the early Middle Ages the monks had identified their lifestyles with the *vita apostolica*. They based it on the image of the Christian community described in Acts 4:32. “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.”⁵ In the twelfth century, however, clerics and reformers began to argue for a more outward-oriented view of the apostolic life, suggesting that “preaching and evangelization of the world were not merely permissible but were central to a *truly* apostolic way of life.”⁶ A priority began to be placed on the example of Christ’s preaching from town to town and on the example of his disciples, who were sent without purse, wallet, or sandals into the world. Francis of Assisi and his followers were a part of this change, and their movement was soon in the forefront of this new trend.

As European urbanization grew, so did vernacular literacy among the populace. In this spirit, Francis instructed his brothers, telling them that, “. . . when they preach their *language be well-considered and chaste* for the benefit and edification of the people” (LR 9:3).⁷ Among other similar trends in the mysticism of that period are changes in “forms of language and modes of representation found in mystical texts.”⁸ McGinn speaks of “three interactive modes” of theological language, the “monastic, the scholastic, and the vernacular.”⁹ The first had been prevalent as a means of expressing the faith ever since the time of Gregory the Great. The second had arisen with the schools in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The third, the vernacular, became increasingly more popular in the thirteenth century.

Vernacular Theology

This vernacular mode of theology was directed to audiences different from the monastic and the scholastic. In one sense, it was directed to a wider audience, one not necessarily trained in Latin. Yet, in another sense, this audience was narrower. It was limited to the locale in which the language of the texts could be understood. The audience for a monastic or scholastic text would be restricted to those educated clerics and teachers of theology who could read Latin, while vernacular texts could be read by a greater number of persons literate in their native tongue. Yet, a monastic or scholastic text could be read by educated clerics and theology teachers across the continent, while vernacular texts were restricted to a country or region where the language of the text would be understood.

McGinn makes another important point regarding the rise of these vernacular expressions of theology. Some texts written in Latin could still maintain a vernacular flavor. The first example he gives is that of the Latin writings of Francis of Assisi, which, he says “are certainly not the product of a scholastic mind, or even of one trained in monastic thought, though they bespeak a deep theological vision.”¹⁰ These texts would be capable of reaching the educated clerics and theology teachers with a message often reserved for vernacular audiences.

What exactly does McGinn mean by “vernacular theology”? This is a two-part question. First, a text must meet McGinn’s criteria for “vernacular” theology. Second, it must still qualify as “theology.”

Vernacular

What qualifies a text written in Latin as “vernacular? McGinn uses the following three characteristics to define a text as fitting into *vernacular* theology even if it is written in Latin:

- 1) Inclusive of everyday life and humility.
- 2) Authoritative because of grace, not because of office.
- 3) Accomplishes its theological goals with its own unique methods, one of which is the mystical vision.

The first characteristic of vernacular theology is its greater inclusiveness of common life and humility compared to monastic and scholastic theology. Noting the research of Eric Auerbach,¹¹ McGinn believes this trait runs throughout the various “vernacular theologies” and gives them a “singleness of spirit that fueled these attempts to appropriate the Christian story.”¹²

The second characteristic of vernacular theology concerns how it obtains its authority. McGinn suggests that the way a vernacular text becomes authoritative if classified as “vernacular” is different from the way a monastic or scholastic text becomes authoritative. A medieval theology text might become authoritative by either of two ways. It could gain authority *ex officio*, that is, it could be commissioned or authored by a person with high office in the Church. Or, it could gain authority *ex beneficio*. This means that the audience could perceive it to be inspired by a gift of divine grace. While monastic and scholastic texts were often commissioned and written by Church officials, vernacular texts became authoritative *ex beneficio* rather than *ex officio*.¹³

McGinn elaborates more fully on the third characteristic of vernacular theology. This characteristic is its use of methods distinct from the methods of monastic and scholastic theology. The vernacular method most relevant to this present study is “mystical vision.”¹⁴ What is most important about the

mystical vision is “the *kind of vision* presented, the *purpose* for which it is given, and the *effect* it has on the recipient.”¹⁵ He goes on to suggest that the kind of visionary literature most widespread in the latter part of the twelfth century was the tour of heaven and hell, as exemplified later in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. However, in the thirteenth century, a new genre of vision became more prominent. This genre “involved ecstatic transport to the supernatural realm, where a revelation in pictorial form was given to the seer, most often by a heavenly being.”¹⁶

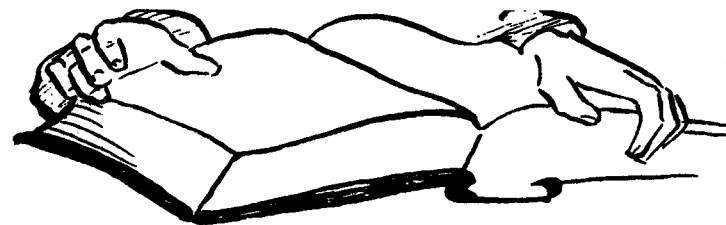
Theology

McGinn asserts that “all forms of medieval theology tried to be true to two goals—deepening the understanding of faith and enkindling charity so that the believer could arrive at a higher understanding of love.”¹⁷ The goals of vernacular theology were the same as those of monastic and scholastic theology.

The difference comes in how these goals were accomplished, as indicated above. Monastic and scholastic texts accomplished these goals by their own standard methods—monastic by means of biblical commentaries or rhetorical sermons and scholastic by the *lectio* or *summa* formats. “Vernacular” texts used a greater diversity of methods to accomplish the same goals—the aforementioned *vitae* or visions. To be theology, however, a medieval text needed only to have these two goals—to increase understanding of the faith and to enkindle charity.

Sacred Exchange as Vernacular Theology

The Sacred Exchange Between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty is an early Franciscan work that praises the ideal of voluntary poverty.¹⁸ Both its author and its date of authorship remain unknown.¹⁹ In his text the author admonishes his readers to fulfill the Franciscan vision of Gospel poverty by creating a story in which Francis seeks out “Lady Poverty,” the embodied, personalized figure of that Franciscan ideal.



Sr. Mary Regina, PCPA

Although written in Latin, the Sacred Exchange is an example of vernacular theology because it meets the three characteristics that define a theological text as vernacular. And it is theology because it attempts to accomplish the two goals of medieval theology—increasing the understanding of faith and enkindling charity.

Sacred Exchange as Vernacular

Common Life and Humility

The emphasis on common life and humility appears at the very beginning of the Sacred Exchange. Clearly, the author views poverty as central to the Franciscan vision. He tells us that “holy Poverty shines with a certain prerogative before” all other virtues.²⁰ The vernacular theological emphasis on humility is expressed as an emphasis on the centrality of poverty. The author writes that the Son of God himself “fell in love with this virtue with a special affection.”²¹ Here we have reference to poverty as an object of Christ’s love. The author also notes that Christ states that the poor are blessed, “for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”²²

The Sacred Exchange also makes frequent use of the common vernacular theme of marriage, using it as a metaphor for Christ’s relationship with the principle of poverty. The author personifies poverty as a lady and then speaks of her as the bride of Christ. The author first speaks of an “espousal” of Lady Poverty, putting the words in the mouth of Francis as he recruits others to follow him to her dwelling place. He states that the “espousal of Poverty, brothers, is wonderful.”²³

When Francis praises Lady Poverty, he refers to her as “the queen of virtues,” desired by the “Creator of heaven and earth,” who “left his house and gave up his inheritance” for her.²⁴ Francis exclaims that the Lord “adorned you as a bride with a crown.”²⁵ He speaks of the Lord’s own desire for poverty, a desire that led him to make her his spouse, his queen with a crown, the queen of virtues. Later in the text, Francis proclaims that, when Christ’s followers abandoned him at his hour of need, Lady Poverty alone, “most faithful spouse, most sweet lover, did not abandon him for a moment.”²⁶

In her response to Francis’s praise, Lady Poverty refers to herself as the beloved of the Most High King, saying: “That anointing teaches you everything you have uttered about the most high King Who, by his grace alone, took me as his beloved, taking away my reproach from the earth, and glorified me among the most celebrated in heaven.”²⁷ Here we have Lady Poverty, for the first time in the text, making a statement of her own regarding her spousal relationship to the Most High King. She then recounts how she had been with the first man in paradise, only to be exiled when fallen man desired to work to

obtain wealth. She wandered in exile until Christ sought her out, embraced her, and then left her behind “as a covenant to his faithful chosen ones.”²⁸

Then, Lady Poverty takes Francis and his companions through a lengthy discourse on the role she has played since the time of Christ, including the rise of the good religious and the fall of many into greed and sloth. Near the end of this discourse the author causes her to make an interesting spousal implication, quoting the Lord’s words to her, which are the words of the male lover to his beloved, the “Sulamite,” in the Cantic of Canticles: “Return, return, Sulamite, return, return that we might behold you.”²⁹ In speaking of the relationship between Lady Poverty and the Lord in terms of Canticles, the author drives home the idea that, here, in this text, these two are espoused and very much love each other.

After Lady Poverty finishes her discourse, Francis and his companions speak of the love between Lady Poverty and the Lord. She agrees to dine with them at the place where they are staying. She descends the mountain with them and they sit down to their meager feast. In response to her request for wine, they say that it is “not good for you to drink wine because Christ’s spouse must avoid wine like poison.”³⁰

After their banquet is concluded, Lady Poverty blesses them and proclaims that she is overjoyed. “What I have desired I now possess, for I am joined on earth to those who bear the image of Him to Whom I am espoused in heaven.”³¹ With some final exhortations and blessings from Lady Poverty to Francis and his companions, the author completes the text.

Ex beneficio

The Sacred Exchange also illustrates the second characteristic of vernacular theology—how a text becomes authoritative. The text is written for a “vernacular” audience. While it is Latin-literate it is also “vernacular” because the author has gained it *ex beneficio*, by grace, rather than through an office. The author had a charism, a gift of grace. The audience is not necessarily trained in the monastic tradition or in the scholastic method. It may be that the audience is comprised of some people from these traditions, but the defining characteristic of the audience is this second “vernacular” characteristic. The Franciscan friars reading this text are not doing so because it carries the authority of something written by a pope, a university doctor, or a minister general. They are reading it because it applies to their common heritage with its great principle of poverty about which the text speaks.

Mystical Vision

Finally, the Sacred Exchange fits McGinn’s description of a mystical vision. It is important to note what kind of vision it is, what its purpose is in

being given, and the effect it has on its recipient. As for its kind, it is among those visionary texts that relate the story of a privileged group of persons being removed "to the supernatural realm, where a revelation" is given to them by "a heavenly being." In this case, Francis and his companions are the privileged group of persons, or "seers," to use McGinn's term. And, in this case, Lady Poverty is the "heavenly being."³²

The purpose of the vision is to instill the evangelical ideal of poverty into Francis and his companions, who are the recipients of the vision. The effect of the vision on them is just as Lady Poverty had intended. In his zeal to imitate Christ, Francis promises and resolves "to keep the judgments" of Lady Poverty's justice.³³

Sacred Exchange as Theology

The text, though written in Latin, uses vernacular methods to accomplish the twofold theological goal—to increase understanding of the faith and to enkindle charity.

The vision presented to Francis and his companions attempts to deepen the faith of its Franciscan audience by impressing upon them the great union between their order's ideal of Gospel poverty and the Savior himself. It treats poverty as the ultimate virtue, above all others. The author calls Lady Poverty the spouse of Christ. Francis notes to his companions that the espousal of Poverty was wonderful. With that statement, the author connects his audience with Francis as a model of evangelical poverty. Yet, by calling her beloved by and espoused to Christ, the author connects his audience with Christ himself as the supreme model of evangelical poverty. The author forces his audience to consider whether they really are Christ's true followers or can continue to be if they refuse to embrace the virtue of poverty.

According to the teaching of the Church at that time marriage was understood to be an indissoluble union.³⁴ Further, the Church considered it a sacrament because it signified "the union of Christ and his Church and the union of the faithful soul to Christ."³⁵ This the author of the Exchange knew well, as did his readers. If this was the understanding of marriage concerning human couples within the Church, it applied no less in reference to the love of Christ for Poverty and the love of the poor for Christ.

Truly, Francis is the imitator of Christ. Lady Poverty remarks that she is now joined "on earth to those who bear the image of Him to Whom I am espoused in heaven."³⁶ Francis has a bride—the same bride Christ took. That which transforms Francis into the image of Christ is actually his very union with poverty. Lady Poverty could not be joined to someone who was not in the image of Christ her husband, because being joined to her is what makes a person in Christ's image. It is this deeper understanding of faith that the au-

thor intends to communicate to his audience. He presumes that the indissoluble nature of marriage is firmly entrenched in the minds of his Franciscan brothers and that they will easily apply that understanding of marriage to the point he makes regarding their relationship to poverty. Just as a man is indissolubly bound to his wife, so Christ is bound to poverty; and the Franciscan brothers, bound indissolubly to Christ by virtue of their Christian faith, are likewise bound to poverty. For they cannot be bound to Christ unless they are bound also to his bride, Lady Poverty.

The text enkindles charity in its audience by imploring them to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the whole Order and for others by giving up whatever is now hindering their full obedience to the Gospel rule of poverty. With a profound understanding of their indissoluble linkage to poverty, they are moved to do the things poverty demands of them, embracing the virtues of obedience and simple faith and pursuing the practice of imitating Christ in all that they do.

Conclusion

Thus it may be concluded that the Sacred Exchange is an example of vernacular theology written in Latin. It includes the common and the lowly. It is authoritative because of grace rather than because of office. It is written in the form of a mystical vision of Francis and his companions meeting with Lady Poverty. The author's vision uses the common, everyday theme of "marriage" and the lowly, humble theme of "poverty" to accomplish the twofold theological goal of increasing the readers' understanding of faith and of enkindling charity within them. Even today the message of The Sacred Exchange remains an invaluable part of the Franciscan heritage.

Endnotes

¹Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998).

²McGinn, 19-30.

³McGinn, 1-2.

⁴McGinn, 3.

⁵Robert G. Hoerber, ed., *Concordia Self-Study Bible. New International Version* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 1662.

⁶McGinn, 6.

⁷From *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, Vol. I (New York: New City Press, 1999).

⁸McGinn, 18.

⁹McGinn, 19.

Conversion, the Vowed Life, and a Changing Paradigm

Roland J. Faley, TOR

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Franciscan Federation of the Brother and Sisters of the Third Order of Penance held in Baltimore, Maryland in August, 2001.

There is an explicit reference to the three vows in the opening of the Rule of the Friars Minor 'But once that is said, the substance of the vows is incorporated into the text of the Rule itself without a detailed theoretical presentation of their meaning. There is, for example, no specific chapter on chastity. When the work on the 1982 revised Rule of the Third Order Regular was completed and presented to the Holy See for approval, the single criticism offered was the absence of a chapter on the vow of chastity. This was due, of course, to the example of Francis himself. But the situation was nonetheless remedied to meet ecclesiastical requirements.

It is safe to say that the vowed life of the thirteenth century was not simply identical with that of the post-Tridentine Church. There is no doubt that the understanding of the vows today has moved to another stage. This shifting paradigm is best illustrated by a short excursion into the recent past, the period of my own formation in religious life.

Let me begin with the Rule of 1927. There had been no complete revision of the Rule since the sixteenth century. The Rule of 1521 was itself composed of rules and statutes from an even earlier era. To do the work on the twentieth-century Rule, the Holy See selected a small group of Franciscan scholars who were charged with the task. This group did not originally include any member of the Third Order. However, the Minister General of the Third Order Regular was belatedly added to the group.

What did the Rule of 1927 contain? It drew attention to the juridical meaning of the three vows and traced the various stages of our religious formation and life. What it lacked was any sense of the specific character of the Order in terms of its defining charism. Unfortunately it did not breathe any life or spirit.

¹⁰McGinn, 22.

¹¹See McGinn, 19, notes 86 and 87.

¹²McGinn, 19.

¹³McGinn, 21.

¹⁴Another very common method vernacular texts use is hagiography in the form of the *vitae* of the saints. McGinn takes care to point out that not all mystical theology is "visionary narrative" or that a visionary narrative is what makes a text mystical. However, he allows that many mystical texts of the vernacular variety do indeed take the form of a visionary narrative. See McGinn, 26.

¹⁵McGinn, 27.

¹⁶McGinn, 27.

¹⁷McGinn, 19.

¹⁸For this background information and the English translation of the Sacred Exchange, I have used *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. I.

¹⁹Guesses on that date range anywhere from 1227 to the late thirteenth-century controversy between the Spirituals and the Community. Guesses as to authorship are also wide-ranging. For a good discussion of authorship and date of this document, see *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. I, 523-527.

²⁰ScEx, 529, Paragraph 1.

²¹ScEx, 529, Paragraph 2.

²²ScEx, 529, Paragraph 2.

²³ScEx, 533, Paragraph 13. Cf. Stefano Brufani, *Sacrum commercium sancti Francisci cum domina Paupertate*, (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1990), 137. (Capitulum 3:10, *Mirabilis est, fratres, desponsatio Paupertati.*)

²⁴ScEx, 534, Paragraph 16.

²⁵ScEx, 535, Paragraph 18.

²⁶ScEx, 536, Paragraph 20. Cf. Brufani, 142. (Capitulum 6:10, *Tu autem, fidelissima sponsa, amatrix dulcissima, nec ad momentum discessisti ab eo.*)

²⁷ScEx, 537, Paragraph 23.

²⁸ScEx, 539, Paragraph 31.

²⁹ScEx, 548, Paragraph 52. Cf. Brufani, 165, (Capitulum 26:1) and compare to *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, editionem quartam, ed. Roger Gryson, trans. B. Fischer, H. I. Frede, H. F. D. Sparks, W. Thiele, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 1000-1001 (Ct 6:12).

³⁰ScEx, 552, Paragraph 62. Cf. Brufani, 173. (Capitulum 30:21, *et tibi bibere vinum non est bonum, quoniam sponsa Christi vinum debet fugere pro veneno.*)

³¹ScEx, vol. I, 553, Paragraph 64. Cf. Brufani, 174. (Capitulum 31:4: . . . *quod desideravi iam teneo, quoniam illis sum coniuncta in terris, qui mihi imaginem representant eius cui sum desponsata in celis.*)

³²McGinn, 27.

³³ScEx, 550, Paragraph 57.

³⁴Already by 1140, Gratian had established "a two-stage process of conjugal union" that involved both the consent of the two parties involved and also the consummation through sexual intercourse. Peter Lombard had stated that only present consent was necessary to have a binding marriage. Pope Alexander III (1159-81) spoke definitively in stating that a marriage was indissoluble either by present consent or by consent to marry in the future, which then became effective by means of sexual intercourse. See Constance M. Rousseau, "The Spousal Relationship: Marital Society and Sexuality in the Letters of Pope Innocent III," *Mediaeval Studies*, 56 (1994): 91-93.

³⁵Rousseau, 91-93.

³⁶ScEx, vol. I, 553.

It was simply a given to be attached to the constitutions of the Third Order Regular congregations. Most religious of the Order had no really clear idea of why it was there.

The treatment of the vows in the constitutions of that time was largely juridical. It looked to parameters, grievous and non-grievous offenses, and obligations. It was a largely negative approach. For example, the interests of poverty would be upheld by doing without and living as poorly as possible. Ownership was excluded; material goods, limited; family contact, limited. Nothing of value was to be in one's possession. Poverty was a denuding of oneself in the search of a more perfect life.

This understanding of poverty has little significance for us today. In an age when friars and sisters, even those in formation, have great mobility, advanced technology, an adequate monthly allowance, and first-rate educational opportunities, such an understanding of poverty has very little meaning. When young religious hear us speak of those days, it sounds medieval and strikingly incomprehensible to them.

The treatment of chastity was short on motivation and strong on safeguards. When it came to offenses, everything was serious. To sin against the virtue was to sin against the vow. Limits were established through mortification of the senses, custody of the eyes, and avoidance of any relationships that might lead one astray. So-called "particular friendships" were a great taboo. Such relationships included any kind of closeness with others of the opposite or same sex. Honesty compels me to admit that it was years before I understood the full implications of what that meant. Today young religious are taught the importance of authentic human friendship as supportive of a chaste life. This is due to the fact that human sexuality today is viewed in a wholly different way. Today formation in celibacy is much more positive, enabling one to walk between the Scylla of genital relationships and the Charybdis of psychological distance and isolation. Much of what was taught in an earlier age appears today as largely irrelevant and meaningless. It is for this reason, as we shall see, that chastity in the new Rule appears under the rubric of fraternal love.

In an earlier juridical approach to obedience, young religious learned the difference between a serious violation (disregarding a formal directive) and a venial transgression (including minor offenses against general discipline). The superior was invested with a status that enabled him or her to speak in God's name. Obedience to constituted authority bound one to everything that was not sin; decisions, right or wrong, were not open to question. The emphasis fell almost exclusively on the superior-subject relationship, and to contravene the superior's will was to put oneself in a sinful state. In many women's communities, for example, annual assignments were made on August 15. These were posted on the house bulletin board, and all the sisters, whether staying or

leaving, were to have their bags packed in expectation of whatever would come. Personal concerns were always subordinated to the formal decision. Today discernment is the word in play; and, while it is not always used judiciously, it is the customary way in which decisions affecting one's life are made. Some smaller communities are self-governed and do not have a designated superior. For a variety of reasons the role of the superior in religious life today has diminished considerably.

Much of this is readily applicable to any religious institute, not just Franciscans. This is not surprising, because the uniformity that characterized religious life in the past resulted in a generic approach to the vowed life. It was not the charism—at least, certainly not in the Third Order Regular—that determined the way in which the vows would be lived. Canon law was the overarching determinant in dealing with the vows, and the law was the same for everyone.

I realize that this is a very sketchy outline of a former paradigm, but I do not believe that it is a caricature. This was the way many of us were trained in the vowed life. I further suggest that a new paradigm has emerged which reflects a new age and a new ethos. It also reflects the spiritual outlook of religious life of the twenty-first century. History shows us that there was no single way of living the vowed life through the centuries; hence another paradigm shift should come as no surprise.

The Rule of Life

When work on the revised Rule of the Third Order Regular began in the early 1970s, it grew out of the realization that the Rule of 1927 failed to express adequately the charism of the Order. Work on constitutions in various Tertiary institutes had begun and in some instances completed with no attention having been given to the document that should have undergirded constitutions—the Rule of life. The work of the 70s was complicated and difficult, since there were a number of initiatives already underway to revise the Rule of 1927. The major proponents were the French and German projects and the one sponsored by our own generalate, known as the Madrid Document. This last was so named because it grew out of an international congress of men and women Tertiaries who met in Spain to deal with the Rule-question in the mid-70s. It was then that the results of historical studies on the origins of the Order saw penance or conversion of life as the charism of the Order. The problem arose in trying to bring these various initiatives together with something of a unified vision. This led to a number of impasses on the journey during those rather turbulent years.

By the time we reached the major assembly in Rome in 1982, there was still a lack of clarity. This meeting brought together about two hundred reli-

gious superiors of the Third Order Regular to reach a conclusion on the new Rule. In the text presented, there were four equal fundamental values: prayer, poverty, humility, and conversion—all four undifferentiated as to priority. It was our position (i.e., those who were of the Madrid persuasion) that, while all four are basic Franciscan values, conversion of life remains the over-arching distinctive charism. By the end of the assembly, the final text found conversion of life in its proper place. In the important article 2, wherein the distinctive character of the institute is stated, we read: "The friars and sisters are called to persevere in true faith and *penance*. They wish to live their evangelical *conversion of life* in a spirit of prayer, of poverty, and of humility." Newcomers to the life are said to begin a "*life of penance*." It was further decided to include as a prologue to the Rule Francis's Exhortation to the Faithful, which prominent Franciscan scholars claim was originally written to the penitent followers of the Poverello. The Rule, given overwhelming approval on the final vote, proved to be a monumental step forward in the history of the Order. While there may be discussion within the broader Franciscan family about the defining charism, there is no longer any doubt within the Third Order tradition.

The Vowed Life

"In this is love—not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (1John 4:10). It is within this framework that any consideration of the vowed life takes place. We are not working toward some elusive goal or climbing a mountain to get somewhere. Nor are we in some time-honored tradition called "striving for perfection." We are now in a state of salvation; we are drawn out of darkness into God's wondrous light. It is because he has first loved us that we want to respond generously. In taking vows, it is not a question of emptying the house so that God can fill it. Rather, we are so filled with God that there is no more room in the house. We have found the treasure in the field; and, that being the case, we are willing to surrender everything in its interest.

This notion of God's self-donation on our behalf is seen in three special mysteries that were at the center of Francis's life. All of them appear in the second edition of the Letter to the Faithful, today better described as an Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance. The first mystery is the incarnation by which God took on human life in the womb of the Virgin (v. 4). The second is that the Son of God, who was born for us, "[offered] himself through his own blood for our salvation" (v. 11). The third is that in his humility he continues to remain with us in the Eucharist (vv. 6-9). It was the love of God, manifest in the incarnation, passion, and Eucharist, that gave Francis a deep sense of gratitude. It is within this context that the vows have their mean-

ing. Gratitude is the cornerstone of our observing the vows and living the Christian life in general.

The Vows Today

With the aforesaid in place, we can look at the vows to see how ongoing conversion of life finds expression today. This we shall do in the light of the quote from Micah 6, which this conference has appropriately designated as its scriptural centerpiece.

Poverty: "To act justly"

Article 7 of the Rule reads: "The sisters and brothers are called to heal the wounded, to bind up those who are bruised, and to reclaim the erring." This, it would seem, is at the heart of penitential poverty. While called to live a simple and uncluttered life, the main issue is not the computer or the car or the place where I have dinner. Poverty means to stand with those who are left out of today's society. That means the poor in a variety of senses: the homeless, the physically or sexually abused, the imprisoned, the unwed mothers, the illegal immigrants, the unemployed, the rejected homosexuals, the suicidal, the drug addicts, as well as the disadvantaged in distant lands. And the list goes on.

The charism of the Order is conversion of life—an ongoing process in our own life as well as a deep desire to see the unconverted turn to the Lord in hope. Franciscan penitents should find themselves with those left out of modern society. That means walking in shoes that are not our own. Therein lies the call of poverty.

This implies a corporate discernment and a collective undertaking. The very essence of religious life is a common witness. It may be fine for one or another of us to be involved in prison ministry or working with battered women. But is that an expression of what my community stands for? As a body we must ask ourselves in what ways are we called to give focus to our ministry through collective action. This is certain to bring the charism to life.

We are called "to act justly" in the words of Micah. So our poverty means the willingness to have our minds fashioned by the needs of society today without seeking wealth or power, influence or domination. These are the riches to be avoided and they are not found in purses or bank accounts. Our true riches then become compassion, availability, and a willingness to help. This does not exclude a car in our garage, a carpet on our floor, a microwave in our kitchen, a computer in our office, or a television in our recreation room. But it does exclude a comfortable settling into life as it has always been and basking in the sun of an unending spirit of *laissez faire* and apostolic immobility.

Chastity: "To love tenderly"

It is within this second injunction of Micah that I would like to consider the vow of chastity or consecrated celibacy. Considerations of this vow in an earlier age never included aspects of affectivity or intimacy. Relationships were carefully circumscribed; rather than being taught how to love, we were taught not to love. While many of us survived all of this, others clearly did not. Religious life has more than its share of malformed and dysfunctional people.

Chastity must be situated in the context of community. Our Third Order Regular Rule considers this in chapter 6. The two articles of the chapter speak of the chaste life as a shared and caring one. Friendly greetings, concern for the needs of others, caring for the sick, making amends, asking forgiveness, and charitable correction (arts. 20-21) are all concrete expressions of an affective nature. While we must have concern about people who cannot love without genital expression, we must be equally concerned about those who can love only at a distance, who are devoid of human warmth, and who hide themselves behind the mask of their own vulnerability. I am not so naïve as to think that we can ignore some of the traditional safeguards of chastity in a very promiscuous society. There are certainly compromising situations that should be avoided. But their importance derives from the fact that we are exposed and vulnerable. If the penitent vocation is one of ongoing conversion, it inevitably means sharing life with the unconverted. It is they who must feel our warmth and concern. We must touch them without fear. Our love for others cannot remain an abstraction. That means we must be ready for danger. As the saying goes: "If you cannot stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

It is to be acknowledged that, in Francis's teaching, there is emphasis on mortification, denial of the senses, and withdrawal from worldly things. This is evident from incidents related in Celano's writings about the life of Francis. But this clearly reflected the spirituality of the times of which Francis was very much a part. Much of it is different from the teaching of Jesus whose asceticism centered around the Sermon on the Mount. Fasting, for example, was not a characteristic of Jesus' earthly life, since it was not appropriate while the wedding feast was in progress (Mk. 2:18-19). While John the Baptist was seen as abstemious and even somewhat eccentric, Jesus came eating and drinking for which he was unjustly criticized (Mt. 11:18-19). The inner asceticism called for by Jesus far exceeded that of the ordinary practices.

By the same token, Francis was a man of compassion, outreach, and concern. He provided for the hungry and healed the sick. He looked after the lame man at Toscanella and the paralyzed man at Narni. Any encounter with a person poorer than himself moved him deeply. These sentiments, which appear again and again, are expressive of his purity and the transparency of his life.

In Franciscan life, chastity means community. It was a real love shared with others that gave meaning to Francis's celibacy. His love was not limited to one person but was for many. Of the inept and clumsy Juniper he could say: "Would that I had a forest of such Junipers."

Penitential life today in the Third Order Regular may be wasting itself in dispersion. Many individuals are engaged in salutary, even penitential expressions of life, but they do it singly. The sense of community may be weakening, if not in the eyes of the individual, at least in the eyes of the faithful as a whole. There is a difference between identifying the life and work of a Sister Jane or a Brother John and recognizing that of "the sisters" or "the brothers" in our neighborhood. And it is within the latter context that love and support are to be found. This brings happiness to the celibate life.

Effective community does not necessarily mean that all must live under one roof. I have long since ceased to believe in holding people together at all cost. Such has led to some of the most dysfunctional and unhappy conglomerates that can be imagined. But linkage and attachment are important to community. Community itself is important as a collective expression of the charism. How else can our charism, so recently recaptured, find expression in the Church?

Obedience: "To walk humbly with the Lord"

The Micah quote situates obedience exactly where it belongs. We should all be familiar with the clear teaching of Vatican II that decisions ultimately rest with those who are called to leadership in religious communities. To say the opposite is to invite chaos, not only in religious life but in any human institution. This is also clear in article 23 of the Rule. However, it is the *decision-making process* that I wish to bring to the fore at this point. The Rule clearly excludes any form of domination and calls for a mutual willingness to serve one another. The heart of obedience is essentially a following of Christ, who surrendered his own will to that of the Father. With Christ we seek first the kingdom of God and his justice (art. 22).

Penitential obedience is first of all a serious seeking of what God wills for the institute and for its members. It begins in community chapters where we prayerfully discern the will of God. All too often a general or provincial chapter is seen merely as a periodic assessment of where the community is and a moment of accountability of leaders to members. In fact, the chapter is a truly graced moment wherein we come together for the discernment of our call in the Church and the world. In chapter the important decisions are made that most influence our life and mission. My experience tells me that our chapters are often little more than "bandaids," to which I myself have often contributed. Certain themes are repeated time after time, and the conclusions and recommendations vary little from chapter to chapter. We spend an immense

amount of time and money reinventing the wheel. If a chapter sets a major new direction for the community, proposals or resolutions should be excluded from a subsequent chapter or two and accountability be the sole item on the agenda. The chapter should be seen as our major moment in obedience.

To walk the path of obedience is not simple. It stands between the Scylla of an "obedience" imposed on an individual and the Charybdis of personal pre-determination. It often happens that a member who has been requested to render a particular service in the community delays a response in the name of discernment. Then the Holy Spirit answers in the negative. In my periods of frustration in leadership, I used to ask myself if the Holy Spirit ever saw things my way! Obedience means a transparency and candor that allows the will of the Lord to be heard and obeyed. There are moments in which that will may remain obscure. It is then that we must be faithful and painfully accept the decision of the minister.

But our principal obedience is to be attuned to the decisions that have been taken by the community in giving expression to our life and work. That the way God's will is most directly manifest. Am I willing to make the sacrifices that may be required in order "to walk humbly with the Lord"? This collective dimension of obedience is of maximum importance. Those called to leadership must see themselves as obedient to the decisions taken by the chapter regarding the direction of the community. All too often today ministries are chosen in an unfocused manner due to the fact that the needs of the Church are so great. Many requests from dioceses are difficult to turn down because the opportunities are attractive and numerous. This requires a great measure of discipline on the part of community leadership. Leaders need to return always to goals aligned with the charism given in the chapter. To respond to needs in an unthinking way or, worse, to allow individuals to determine their own ministry is simply to put another nail in the coffin of community relevance.

In the matter of obedience and the direction that I have taken here, it is understandable that the need for a local minister may become unnecessary. The community may establish its own lines of personal responsibility, which can actually be more difficult than having a local minister. But, as I have tried to illustrate, this does not make the vow of obedience irrelevant. It simply makes the individual religious more attuned to what God is asking of the religious institute.

The quotation from Micah then becomes our guiding light. To be part of any Third Order Franciscan community today is to ask how we as a body can respond to the needs that surround us in line with our penitential charism. This means that we are humble, attentive, and submissive in accepting the decisions that the community has made. This is "to walk humbly with our God."

Conclusion

Today we are all affected by the decrease in our membership. Future planning is far more difficult today than it was forty, or even twenty, years ago. In the face of atrophying forms, coupled with the conviction of the continued validity of religious life, the question is raised: Is God leading us into new forms of our life? At the moment we can say nothing with certainty, but there are pointers in that direction. It is also possible that we are simply experiencing a transient moment of difficulty in the long history of the Church. Perhaps we are too much caught up in the actual moment to answer a question that will require historical perspective.

But let us not forget that we have been fortunate to live in a graced moment in the life of the penitential tradition. We have lived through a Church Council, the implications of which are still unfolding. Vatican II was *geschichtliche* or historic in the life of Roman Catholicism. It called religious to rediscover their original *raison d'être*. For the Third Order Regular this resulted in a decade of serious study, constant questions, and no small amount of tension. This was a period of debate and counter-debate, both painful and gratifying, which finally resulted in one of the most important moments in an eight-century history. At the beginning of the 1982 assembly in Rome, I still had serious doubts as to what the outcome would be. In such a large gathering of Tertiary religious, there was bound to be stress and tension. And we all experienced it. But because of obedience to the Spirit, it ended on an unforgettable note of peace and serenity. I for one went home convinced that God's will had been done. We were no longer united around the French or German document or the Madrid Statement but rather the one Rule of Life of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis.

With the Rule's approval by the Church's highest authority, a new era of rediscovery was opened. Research was published on the origins of the Order. There was a concerted effort to educate membership on the meaning of the Rule through workshops and study groups. The work on constitutions took new directions and ministry for some became more focused. Above all, we became more aware. It was no longer a question of attaching to our renewed constitutions a dusty Rule that had little significance. Rather we now had a Rule that brought us into contact with a great patrimony. We now know that we are heirs to a great tradition, the Order of Penitents of Francis of Assisi. We see conversion of life as a charism that has immense meaning in today's world.

The time for theory has passed. Our resources may be limited but we are not excused from the task of determining what ongoing conversion can mean to the spirituality and mission of our particular religious institutes. It finds expression in Tertiaries working with native Americans on our reservations, in

a community of sisters working with battered women or single pregnant women. It points to the homeless, to soup kitchens, to abortion alternatives. It includes the reconciliation of the churches or of countries through our United Nations presence. It means helping developing churches in foreign lands. It loves the unconverted addict and helps him or her see what potential means. It never gives up on people and never does enough. In the twenty-first century, this is what Yahweh asks of us as Franciscan Penitents: "To act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with [our] God."

Endnote

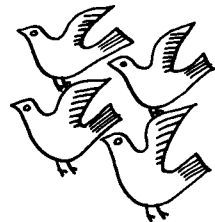
¹ Cf. *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents*, 3 volumes, ed. R. Armstrong et al, New City Press, NY, 1999-2001.

The charism of the Order is conversion of life—an ongoing process in our own life as well as a deep desire to see the unconverted turn to the Lord in hope. Franciscan penitents should find themselves with those left out of modern society. That means walking in shoes that are not our own. Therein lies the call of poverty.

Juncos

Ground feeders
Who go around
In brown wrappers
Like Franciscans
Looking for rejected
And scattered seed,
Their small portion
Of the harvest.

Chet Corey



Robert Pawell, OFM

Poverty: The Heart of Conversion and Cornerstone of Franciscan Life¹

Dorothy McCormack, OSF

This article is based upon a presentation given at the annual meeting of the Franciscan Federation of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third order of Penance, in Baltimore, Maryland in August, 2001.

The heart and dynamism of Francis's life was his experience of God and of the mystery of God incarnate in creation. This experience of God, which was of divine inspiration, led him into the mystery of God who, in Francis's terms, is "all good, every good, the true and supreme good, who alone is good" (ER 23). God also is Trinity—in relationship, a community. The great Franciscan theologian, St. Bonaventure, describes God as self-diffusive goodness. This love, this goodness, was so intense that it could not be contained, and it poured itself out in this beautiful cosmos, this universe which is our home. God chose not to remain a spectator to creation, and so, when the time was ripe, God chose to participate in his creation by becoming one of us. St. Francis taught that Jesus, the Beloved, the center, the heart of the Trinity, "in the womb of the holy and glorious Virgin Mary, . . . received the flesh of our humanity and frailty (2 LtF 4).

A life of on-going conversion became the way through which this experience of God took root in Francis, deepening and expanding within him. The beginning of Francis's conversion encompassed several years of seeking and several stages along the way, but he finally understood that the best way he could live this life was by "following in the footsteps of Jesus" (1Peter 2:21) and living according to the form of the Holy Gospel, which the Lord revealed to him (Test 14).

Francis grew up in a culture saturated with the ideals of knighthood. In light of this, he was filled with a desire to make the world new again and marched off to Apulia to join the Crusades. On the way, he dreamt of a beautiful palace and a most beautiful bride. The next day he had another dream that directed him to go back to Assisi (2C 6). Shortly after this, while with his friends, he lagged behind them in a preoccupied mood. His friends asked him if he was

thinking about taking a wife. He responded positively. Smitten with the concept of courtly love, he began a love affair with Lady Poverty.

His desires remained—to make the world new again and to court his Lady Poverty. However, he changed his focus and began to look at the world and the marketplace in a different light. His bride led him to the leper where he exchanged the bitter for the sweet. What God showed him in prayer—mercy—he gave to the leper. In his Testament, Francis tells us that this is how he began to do penance. He also says that afterward he lingered a little and left the world. The world he left was the world of his father, the world of the market economy, in which most of the world lives even today. This world sees the goods of the world as finite and limited: not everyone can have everything, so what is mine is mine. One gets what one has through earning power. Finite goods need to be worked for and kept. This is living from a posture of scarcity.

In sharp contrast to this, Francis learned to see in a new way and began to live in a world of gift, of grace. Those I this world saw everything that exists as given by God, the great Gift-Giver. There is nothing whatsoever that we are capable of earning or that we have a right to own. Even our earning power is a gift. In this world everything that is given to us freely is meant to be given away, to be shared. To live in this world means living from a posture of abundance.

Shortly after his experience with the leper, Francis had an encounter with the Crucified Lord who asked him to repair his house (2Cel 10). He began with stone and soon realized that the house to which Jesus referred was the hearts of people. Soon after this, the Lord gifted him with brothers and sisters; the cornerstone of their life together was poverty.

What did Francis, and then Clare, see in poverty? Why did it become the entrance into the gospel way of life? Primarily because they saw in the example of Jesus' life "how for [our] sake he made himself poor though he was rich, so that [we] might become rich by his poverty" (2Cor. 8:9). Francis spelled this out in the Later Rule, Chapter 6. Clare also spelled this out in her Rule, Chapter 6. The Lord redeemed the world by poverty, not riches.

The poverty of Francis [and of Clare] is a response to Christ Jesus, who did not "grasp" or cling to divine status, but let go of it to be among humans as a servant. This Jesus who was born in lowly status, lived as a poor man and died on a cross, the ultimate "letting go." Since He is "the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), as Francis states, the way into God is the way of relinquishment, without grasping or appropriating anything.²

Poverty for Francis and Clare was rooted in their Christology—their understanding of who Christ was and what he came to be for us. The heart of the

gospel life became, then, imitating the Lord in his salvific activities by being poor—poor enough to receive from God's goodness in the world, poor enough to trust that God would provide for them. Through this means Francis, Clare and their companions revealed the fundamental structure of the world as God intended it.

However we understand the primordial or original sin, our life project is to reverse it. In the context of the Biblical image of Genesis, the devil convinced Adam and Eve that they were lacking something. If they would "eat of the tree of life," they would become like God. They had been made in the image of God, so they were not lacking anything. However, they believed the lie that the devil presented to them and so ate the fruit in order that they might acquire what they believed they were lacking. Francis witnessed his father's greed and avarice, his enslavement to possessions, his need to acquire and keep things for himself. For Francis, primordial sin, the root of evil, was acquiring, possessing, appropriating to oneself what belonged to God. He saw that money, property, and power were allied—they divided people into categories (major/minor). Francis grasped the truth that all we have is gift. Gift is not bought or acquired by one's own efforts; it is freely bestowed. If we are going to keep a gift, we have to be able to give it away. Otherwise, it is a possession.

Even if we have gifts that need to be given away we are poor people begging a living from each other, dependent upon each other. Needs create community, provided we share them. Needs can be material, physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, mental, or affective. Whatever they may be, admitting and sharing needs creates community and even friendship—which is what life is about. But we must share both the gift and the need. To be a creature of God is to be totally dependent and totally filled with grace, gift. Then we live in what might be called the *divine economy* of things. When we enter this divine economy, everything is received and everything is given, yet we constantly have everything we need. We realize that we are related to all of creation. The context for living the gospel life is always relational: it is with brothers and sisters. The fruit of poverty, the promise of this "most high poverty" is life in abundance, "the kingdom of heaven" as Matthew and Mark describe it, "eternal life" as John speaks of it—life with Christ.

In his later years, the gift of so many brothers became a great burden for Francis. There was clearly need for organization and government, a gift with which he was not highly endowed. He was being led into his own passion and resurrection. He returned from Damietta (1220) weakened, sick, and almost blind. Dissension had broken out among the brothers. This seriously compromised the primitive ideal that he thought of as "his project" (2MP 81). Added to these sufferings were severe temptations that lasted almost two years. In the midst of his personal struggles, at La Verna prayed to experience the sufferings of Jesus, and in his flesh were articulated the very wounds of Christ.

The Canticle of the Creatures was the gift that emerged from Francis's darkest night. Shortly after his return from La Verna, he went to San Damiano where he stayed for several weeks. In the midst of his suffering he heard a voice inside: "Francis, rejoice as if you were already in my Kingdom." Light entered him and he began to see anew. Out of this new insight, he sang this great hymn of praise. In the words of Ilia Delio: "This Canticle celebrates a homecoming; a reconciliation where Francis and creation are reborn into a primal unity."³

Bearing the marks of the wounds of Christ, he sang about the fraternity of sun, stars, moon, wind, air, water, fire, and our sister, mother earth. This song had been writing itself within him for some time. Now it sprang forth at the end of a long and agonizing journey, an outburst of praise through a fraternal union with all creatures. He doesn't leave the world to go to God; he unites with his fellow creatures as brothers and sisters to go to God—a cosmic fraternity!

For Francis, the intuition underlying this understanding was the universal Fatherhood of God whose first word of his self-diffusive goodness was the cosmos. Francis did not set himself apart from the non-human elements of God's world; rather he made himself at home with them. In his encounter with the poor Christ, Francis learned the fullness and richness of the world of gift. In this light and with this insight, he came to love all creatures as brothers and sisters and to renounce any desire to dominate, control, or possess them. His was an inclusive and welcoming stance toward all of creation—human and non-human alike.

As death approached, Francis added another verse to his song—a welcome to Sister Death. He saw death not as an enemy separating him from life but as a sister inviting him to communion at the banquet of eternal life, the fullness of life and abundance promised to those who embrace and live within the world of gift. This perspective, that even death is gift, is the ultimate piece of conversion, the final surrender to poverty.

Endnotes

¹I want to acknowledge my teacher, mentor, and friend, Joseph P. Chinnici, OFM, who has largely shaped my understanding of Franciscan spirituality.

²William J. Short, OFM, *Poverty and Joy* (N.Y.: Orbis, 1999), 61.

³Ilia Delio, OSF, "Franciscan Life in Evolution: Toward a Christic Universe" (Franciscan Federation Conference, August, 1999).

May we be able to follow in the footprints of Your beloved Son. . .and may we make our way to You, Most High. (LtOrd 51b)

Book Review

Ilia Delio, OSF. *Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to His Life, Thought, and Writings*. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press. ISBN: 1-56548-161-5. Paperback, 208 pages, \$14.95.

Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, known now as St. Bonaventure, lived from 1235 to 1274. He was a prolific writer as well as a professor of theology at the University of Paris. He joined the Franciscans, became head of the Order, and eventually was appointed a Cardinal of the Church.

Delio's book is aptly titled. It summarizes, as much as possible, what St. Bonaventure wrote and taught, and is written in a way that can be understood easily by the average reader. On one level, the book is a kind of catechism. The chapters are named Trinity, Creation, Humanity, Incarnation, Journey to God, Imitation of Christ, Contemplation, Peace, and *Reductio* (all reality leads back to God), just as the chapters of a summary of Christian doctrine might be labeled. Each chapter outlines, very simply and in plain language, what Bonaventure taught on that topic. Bonaventure asks and answers the essential questions: "What is our origin; what is our purpose; and where are we going?" and "What is the meaning and purpose of Jesus?"

In the first chapter, Delio places Bonaventure in the context of his times. Even though not much is known about his personal life, Delio describes what was happening at the University of Paris, "the hub of intellectual life." She describes how the task of administering the Order might have affected Bonaventure's theology because, she says, his path "was one marked by the challenges of an administrator's life and the constant need to clarify the meaning not only of being Christian but of being a follower of the little poor man, Francis of Assisi."

Taking his lead from Francis, Bonaventure's emphasis throughout is on creation. Creation is a river that flows out from God, reflects the glory of God, and returns to its origin in God. However, were it not for humans, creation could not reflect God adequately, because the human is the crown of creation, "spiritual matter," open to union with God. The material world needs the human to be able to praise and glorify God. For Bonaventure, creation is both a mirror reflecting God's power, wisdom, and goodness and a book in which its maker shines forth. Creation is a theophany, and every creature a "little word."

Christ is the ultimate creation. There is a fittingness or congruity between the Word and the world. Without the Word, the world is incomplete.

Original sin was one of the reasons why God became human, but more importantly, the Incarnation is about cosmic completion. Christ is the midpoint toward which the universe is oriented. He is the goal, the model, and the image of creation. Jesus is the form the Word takes when it is expressed externally, the expression of the Father's humility.

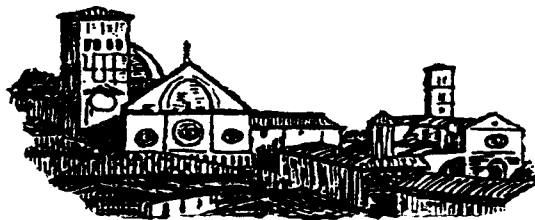
It should be acknowledged that Bonaventure's thought can be somewhat harsh, especially when it comes to the stigmata and the cross, saying that we should all aspire to death and martyrdom as a way to God (138, 149, 154). At times the book has a tendency to refer to ideas and readings without giving due explanation to their meaning. One wonders, for example, about the meaning of the following statements. Referring to the Son as the perfect image of the Father: "If the Father is poor, so is the Son" (46). And referring to Walter Kasper's work: "It takes omnipotence to be able to surrender oneself and give oneself away. . ." (117).

For the most part, *Simply Bonaventure* is straightforward about Bonaventure's thought and writing. However, the end of the book gives in to a temptation to preach. "Despite the efforts today to renew Christian life, there are still many Christians who live without conviction and without passion. They are more excited about football than they are about Easter. They chant 'Alleluia' while yawning and checking their watch" (163). And, "Some are ashamed of Christ and try to excuse the historicity of the Incarnation. . . . The central figure of faith is an obstacle to practicing the religion" (166). Perhaps this is an effort to relate Bonaventure's thought to modern problems, which the book generally does not attempt to do, but these statements can seem condescending and patronizing when they don't give enough clarity of meaning or examples.

Simply Bonaventure goes a long way toward making Bonaventure's thought accessible to a general audience, but it is not a book to be read quickly. Each chapter can be thought about, mulled over, and read again. Aside from the first chapter on Bonaventure's life, perhaps the best way to read it is to pick out a chapter that looks interesting and start there.

The book is a welcome addition to the literature on Bonaventure. It will make Bonaventure's thought and theology known to many more people than might have been able to understand and be inspired by it.

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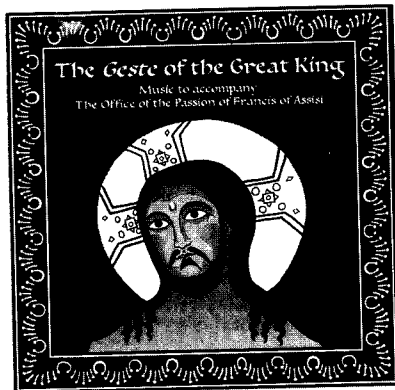


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For those who may wish to introduce groups, fraternities, or communities to this Little Office, the authors, Laurent Gallant, OFM, and André Cirino, OFM, are available for conferences or workshops.



Contact either at:

Laurent Gallant OFM
10850 St. Charles
Montreal, Quebec
Canada H2C2M3
514-389-0074
LAGallant@aol.com

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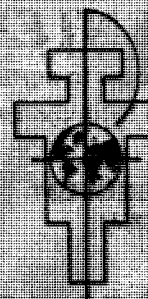
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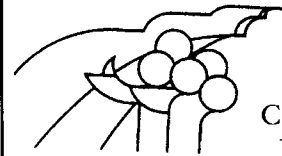
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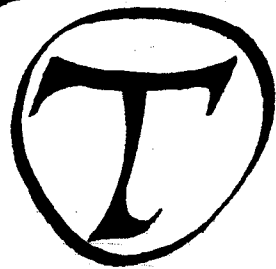
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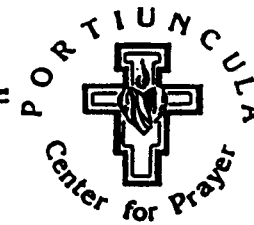
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Friday, February 1-Sunday, February 3, 2002

The Canticle of Conversion. At Berger Hall, St. Louis, MO. Sponsored by the Franciscan Federation. (See ad, p. 51.)

Saturday, February 2-Thursday, February 7, 2002

Franciscan Gathering. Becoming a Person of Prayer: The Legenda Minor as a Handbook of Franciscan Prayer. With Anthony Carrozzo, OFM, and Diane Jamison, OSF. Franciscan Center, Tampa, FL 33603; ph: 813-229-2695; email: francntr@aol.com

Saturday, February 9, 2002

Pre-Lenten Retreat. Jerry DuCharme, 9 am- 4 pm. Contact: Franciscan Center, 3010 Perry Ave., Tampa, FL 33603; ph: 813-229-2695; email: francntr@aol.com

Friday, February 15-Sunday, February 17, 2002

Spirituality in the Workplace Series. Bernard Tickerhoof, TOR, Daniel Stewart, and Susan Burke, SFO. Franciscan Spirit and Life Center, 3605 McRoberts Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15234-2340. Contact the Center at 412-881-9207 or FSLCCOM@aol.com.

Saturday, March 16, 2002

Transformation and the Quest to Spirit. Dr. David Cordisco. Franciscan Spirit and Life Center, 3605 McRoberts Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15234-2340. Contact the Center at 412-881-9207 or FSLCCOM@aol.com.

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40-Day Franciscan Hermitage Retreat. Format follows Rule for Hermitages. At Portiuncula Center for Prayer. Frankfort, IL. (See ad, p. 55.)

Friday, February 22-Sunday, February 24, 2002

Office of the Passion. With Andre Cirino, OFM. Scottsdale, AZ. (See ad, p. 46.)

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Writings of Saint Clare

1LAG	First Letter to Agnes of Prague
2LAG	Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAG	Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAG	Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
LEr	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
RCl	Rule of Clare
TestCl	Testament of Clare
BCl	Blessing of Clare

Franciscan Sources

1C	The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano
2C	The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul
3C	The Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
LCh	The Legend for Use in the Choir
Off	The Divine Office of St. Francis by Julian of Speyer
LJS	The Life of St. Francis by Julian of Speyer
VL	The Versified Life of St. Francis by Henri d'Avranches
1-3JT	The Praises by Jacopone da Todi
DCom	The Divine Comedy by Dante Aliegheri
TL	Tree of Life by Ubertino da Casale
1MP	The Mirror of Perfection, Smaller Version
2MP	The Mirror of Perfection, Larger Version
HTrb	The History of the Seven Tribulations by Angelo of Clareno
ScEx	The Sacred Exchange between St. Francis and Lady Poverty
AP	The Anonymous of Perugia
L3C	The Legend of the Three Companions
AC	The Assisi Compilation
1-4Srm	The Sermons of Bonaventure
LMj	The Major Legend by Bonaventure
LMn	The Minor Legend by Bonaventure
BPr	The Book of Praises by Bernard of Besse
ABF	The Deeds of St. Francis and His Companions
LFl	The Little Flowers of Saint Francis
KnSF	The Knowing of Saint Francis
ChrTE	The Chronicle of Thomas of Eccleston
ChrJG	The Chronicle of Jordan of Giano