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• A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW •

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	322
ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS .....	323
<i>“Holding on to the words, the life, the teaching and the Holy Gospel” (ER 22:48). John’s Gospel as a Source for Franciscan Praxis</i> Michael W. Blastic, O.F.M. ....	325
<i>Becoming a Sacred Flame: Francis, Clare and John’s Gospel</i> Nancy Schreck, O.S.F. ....	348
<i>Renewing Family Spirituality Through Francis’s Devotion to the Incarnation</i> Christopher J. Stravitsch, M.A., L.P.C. ....	367
<i>Peter of John Olivi’s Commentary on Luke 2:42-51: Jesus’ Getting Himself Lost in the Temple</i> Robert J. Karris, O.F.M. ....	382
<i>Living What You Say</i> Karen Zielinski, O.S.F. ....	398
REVIEW .....	400
BOOK REVIEW .....	406
ANNOUNCEMENTS .....	410
INDEX .....	423
ON THE FRANCISCAN CIRCUIT .....	432

## FOREWORD

We are having unusually temperate autumnal weather here at St. Bonaventure and it calls forth praise and exultation in God's creation. An added spring to one's step, breathing more deeply the brisk air, and taking time to admire the vibrant colors in the changing landscape – all are joys of the season!

When you receive this issue, you will shortly receive your renewal notice for the 2012 *Cord*. Along with the subscription notice, a short survey is being included. We want your input on how *The Cord* can better serve the needs of our readers. And at this time I would normally be telling you of any rate increase that is anticipated. You may be happy to hear that our domestic subscription rates are keeping pace with production costs. Where we are not making ends meet is in the area of international subscriptions. And I don't have to tell you it is mailing costs that are the problem. So we are investigating the possibility of making *The Cord* available electronically to our readers. Details concerning the electronic version – whether to be available as a PDF from our website or in e-book format compatible with a variety of e-readers – which would have some additional file-conversion costs – have to be worked out before we can give a definitive subscription cost for 2012, so look for your subscription renewal for this information in the upcoming weeks.

The recent tenth anniversary observance of 9/11 was a sobering reminder of the trauma the country went through following those attacks. It will seem that we have learned nothing as a nation if the political discourse in the months to come continues in the same divisive vein as the past months. As Abraham Lincoln noted: "The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature." Lord grant us listening ears to hear those better angels.

*Daria R. Mitchell, O.S.F.*

## ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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Board for Build With Living Stones. This program, divided into fourteen units, offers users guidance for a Franciscan reflection around particular themes of life and work. Using an adult-education model, each unit offers both readings and suggested reflections that could be used for group or individual settings, for college/university curriculums, for parish education, for retreats or days of recollection, and/or for an orientation to Franciscan life and work.

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**“HOLDING ON TO THE WORDS, THE LIFE,  
THE TEACHING AND THE HOLY GOSPEL” (ER 22:48).  
JOHN’S GOSPEL  
AS A SOURCE FOR FRANCISCAN PRAXIS<sup>1</sup>**

**MICHAEL W. BLASTIC, O.F.M.**

In fourth century Egypt, in the desert of Scetis, a renowned ascetic,

Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, ‘Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?’ Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, ‘If you will, you can become all flame.’<sup>2</sup>

Abba Joseph helped Lot imagine that the goal of monastic ascetics was to be become totally consumed in prayer, that is, to become single-minded and devoted to God alone. Fire is a polyvalent symbol. In this story it images love for God, a focused intentionality of the person on God alone, a single-hearted dedication of life on purity of heart. This ideal of the Egyptian desert was later translated into the monastic life of Benedict of Nursia and in the many reforms of Benedictine monasticism in the middle ages: Carthusian, Camaldolese, Cluniac, and Cistercian. Each form of monasticism had the same purpose, for the monk to become totally fire through

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is one of the keynote presentations from the 2011 Annual Federation Conference held in late July in Milwaukee, WI.

<sup>2</sup> Abba Joseph of Panephrisis, saying 7, in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Studies Series, number 59 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 103.

practices of vocal and quiet prayer, fasting and mortification, reading and meditation, and some manual labor. Even though many medieval reforms of monasticism dealt with cenobitic or communitarian forms of monastic life, the focus remained on the monk or nun, the solitary one, in his or her quest to attain purity of heart.

Now, what does “becoming all fire” have to do with the Franciscan evangelical life, that is, with us brothers and sisters of Francis and Clare? As attractive as the monastic *otium* (leisure) might be, our life cannot be lived as a solitary search for God; our purpose is not to leave the world to seek God. Our form of life is not served well by isolation, individualism or even by forms of prayer that take hours out of our days which should rather be given over to encounter and service and exchange of the good news. So, then, how do we Franciscans become all fire?

I’m sure you remember the story from the *Deeds of Blessed Francis and his Companions*, about the meeting of Francis and Clare at the Portiuncola. Clare with her companions met Francis and his companions at the Portiuncola. As they sat down together on the ground, they began to converse among themselves, forgetting to eat because they “were enraptured by the abundance of the grace of the Most High which came over them.” As the people in Assisi looked down toward the Portiuncola at that moment, they saw the entire place engulfed in one huge consuming fire. To save the place, they ran down but having arrived there they saw that everything was unharmed, and

They found blessed Francis with blessed Clare and all those companions completely caught up to the Lord, all sitting at the very humble table, clothed in power from on high. Then they knew it was a divine fire which, because of the devotion of such holy men and holy women, inflamed that place with the abundant consolations of divine love.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The story is retold in the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*, chapter 15.



This story, recorded almost a hundred years after the death of Clare, reminds us that Franciscans become all fire through conversation, encounter, and simple sharing. Another Franciscan image of fire is that of the Seraph, associated with the stigmata of Francis. Seraphs are the highest choir of angels, burning with love for God and constantly in motion around the throne of God. This seraph's fire reflects the presence of God to the Israelites in the cloud of fire that led them by night. This image of fire, the Seraph, images love in motion, and not stillness or even silence as this is the kind of fire that you can definitely see, hear, and feel – it roars and crackles with life. Bonaventure commented that “The unconquerable enkindling of love in [Francis] for the good Jesus had grown into lamps and flames of fire, that many waters could not quench so powerful a love (Song 8:6-7)” (LMj 13:2). Francis became fire with the Stigmata, after which, Thomas of Celano remarked, Francis “made of his whole body a tongue” (1C 97), as he came down from LaVerna to take up again his life of conversation, encounter, and simple sharing with his brothers and sisters.

My point very simply is that we Franciscans have the goal, like that of monks from ages past, of becoming all fire. Francis and Clare show us how that is to be accomplished differently than monks and nuns. And the Gospel of John is the text which describes this dimension of Franciscan life in the Writings of Francis and Clare.

## **I. THE *REGULA NON BULLATA* 22 AND THE LONGER REDACTION OF THE *LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL***

In the testamentary exhortation of chapter 22 of the *Regula non bullata*, a pattern emerges that is quite similar to that found in the longer version of the Letter to the Faithful. Each text begins, after introductory comments, with a word – in ER 22:2-24 you find the word of the synopsis of the parable of the sower, and in the 2LtF 4-13 you find the word that summarizes salvation history as focused on incarnation,



eucharist and passion. After the proclamation of this word, there follow in each text exhortations to action that flow from the word – in the ER 22 (vv. 25-39) the action is presented in terms of serving, loving, honoring, and adoring God; in the 2Ltf (vv. 14-47) the action is presented in terms of the obligations of a life of penance. Finally, both texts (ER 22:41-55; 2Ltf 48-60) conclude with a collage of verses taken from the seventeenth chapter of John’s Gospel which focus on relationships (the Father and Jesus; Jesus and the Disciples; the Disciples and the Father; and the Disciples and those who will respond). Thus, you have the pattern in these two texts of Word followed by Action culminating in an experience of intimacy which is described with Johannine texts.

In both of these texts, the Johannine citations are arranged purposefully (i.e., rearranged by Francis) in order to take the reader (or listener) from hearing, to doing and ultimately into an experience within the Trinity. In the text of ER 22:41, the Johannine texts are introduced with this exhortation:

Let us, therefore, hold onto the words, the life, the teaching and the Holy Gospel of him who humbled himself to beg his Father for us and to manifest his name to us saying ...

This statement paraphrases the first verse of the ER which defined the rule and the life of the lesser brothers as, “to follow the teaching and footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ who says ...,” followed by a series of gospel texts, from the Synoptic (Matt 19:21; Matt 16:24; Luke 14:26; Matt 19:21 and parallels), that describe some of the fundamental commitments of gospel living. Thus, the ER 1 and ER 22:41 parallel each other and suggest this pattern:

ER 1:1:	teaching	footprints	Jesus calls others to follow
ER 22/2Ltf:	word	action	Jesus reveals God’s name

A difference here can be found in the end point of each pattern which changes from “Jesus calls others to follow” to “Jesus reveals God’s name.” There is a development then between the ER 1<sup>4</sup> and the ER 22, which moves from practices, commitments and behaviors, to a more intimate revelation, or rather, to a movement from an external experience to an inner experience.

The initial understanding of Franciscan life in terms of following footprints described in ER I (1209), gradually gave way to a deeper understanding, in the later years of Francis’s life (1224-1226), of a deeper and more interiorized meaning of following footprints. A similar development can be seen in Clare’s experience from her initial observance of “the Holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (CIF1 1:1), to her transformation into a mirror of the cross through her own embodiment of the humility and poverty of the incarnation, the humility, poverty and labor of Jesus’ life, and the charity of the passion which she describes in the her Fourth Letter to Agnes (4LAg 19-23).

Along the way for Francis and Clare – here I’m paraphrasing the Johannine texts in ER 22 – the Father had made known his name to Francis and his brothers, and to Clare

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<sup>4</sup> I have consulted the following texts in preparing these reflections: Optatus von Asseldonck, “Insegnamenti biblici ‘privilegiati’ negli scritti di san Francisco d’Assisi,” *Analecta O.F.M.* Cap. 95 (1979): 146-65; Idem, “san Giovanni evangelists negli scritti di s. Francesco,” *Laurentianum* 18 (1977): 225-55; Idem, “Altri aspetti giovannei negli scritti di s. Francesco,” *Antonianum* 54 (1979): 447-86. Walter Viviani, *L’ermenetica di Francesco d’Assisi: indagine alla luce di Gv 13-17 nei suoi scritti* (Rome: Edizioni Antonianum, 1983). Felice Accrocca and Antonio Ciceri, *Francesco e suoi frati: La regola non bollata – una regola in cammino* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 1998). Dino Dozzi, *Il Vangelo nella regola non bollata di Francesco d’Assisi*, Biblioteca Seraphico-capuccina, 36 (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1989). James P. Scullion, “A Love Supreme: the Writings of Francis of Assisi and the Gospel of John,” in *Franciscans and the Scriptures: Living the Word of God*, CFIT/ESC-OFM series, No. 5, ed. Elise Saggau (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2006), 19-32. Michael D. Guinan, *The Franciscan Vision and the Gospel of John*, Franciscan Heritage Series, 4 (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2006). Francesco Uribe, “Sequire il buon Pastore. L’Ammonizione VI di s. Francesco,” in *La grazia delle origini, Studi in occasione dell’VIII centenario dell’approvazione della prima regola di san Francesco d’Assisi (1209-2009)*, ed. Paolo Martinelli (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2009): 209-33.

and her sisters as well, a knowledge we can find expressed in their writings in terms of Johannine images: God the foot-washer; God the Good Shepherd; God the lamb, God the Word, God the Light, God as Lord and Teacher, God, beloved Son, Brother, the Way, Truth and Life. Each of these Johannine images is both evocative of action, as well as intimacy. For example, Jesus the Good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, and the good shepherd knows his sheep, “just as the Father knows me and I know the Father” (John 10:14-15). Jesus both gives himself to his sheep, but also invites them into the intimacy he shares with his Father, thus, action is related to intimacy.

What this overall pattern seems to suggest is that the Word (the footprint) gives rise to action (following footprints) from which flows a more intimate knowledge of God’s identity. This pattern that moves from hearing, to doing, to experiencing God’s name, moves at the same time from outer experience to inner experience, and Francis describes this inner experience primarily, though not exclusively, with the witness of John the Evangelist. Ultimately, what Francis and Clare learned, was that the brothers and sisters were sent to continue the incarnation, not just in terms of doing what Jesus did and said, but even more importantly, they were sent to experience interiorly at the same time, what Jesus experienced in his relationship with the Father and the Spirit. In citing John 17:13: “As You sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world” (ER 22:51), Francis makes this explicit. We are sent to follow and to do what Jesus did, but also to experience what Jesus experienced.

## **II. JOHANNINE CITATIONS IN THE WRITINGS**

This point that I wish to make regarding the presence of the Johannine texts in the Writings of Francis and Clare is not simply a matter of the number of citations or allusions, though even this is interesting. As Norbert Nguyen-van-Khanh demonstrated more than twenty-five years ago,

while at first glance it would seem that the Synoptics, and Matthew in particular, were the most cited scripture texts in Francis's writings, this is not really the case.<sup>5</sup> Actually, the largest number of Synoptic citations and allusions found in Francis's writings are contained in the *Regula non bullata*, which according to Jordan of Giano, was "adorned" with scripture by Cesar of Speyer at the request of Francis.<sup>6</sup> Thus, if you set aside the ER 1-21 you can count twenty-six citations from the gospel of John (as opposed to one from Mark, eleven from Luke, and twenty from Matthew), in addition to eleven citations from Revelation and two from 1 John in the remaining writings together, making John the most cited with thirty-nine citations. Among these are the substantial citations from John 17 which appear in ER 22 and in the longer version of the Letter to the Faithful, which, given their extensive length and repetition, were especially significant to Francis.

With the writings of Clare, the situation is very different. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke predominate in her writings (totaling fifty-eight citations) while the gospel of John is cited eight times, and the book of Revelation five times. What is most interesting is that in Clare's *Forma vitae* there are a total of eighteen citations from Matthew and Luke, and none from John. The citations from John and Revelation appear only in Clare's letters and Testament.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps this is due to the sources Clare was using in the composition of her rule. Recently however, the Poor Clare sisters Chiara Acquadro and Chiara Mondonico have pointed out that in chapter 10

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<sup>5</sup> Norbert Nguyen-van-Khanh, *The Teacher of His Heart: Jesus Christ in the Thought and Writings of St. Francis*, trans. Ed Hagman, Franciscan Pathways (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1994), 219-22.

<sup>6</sup> Jordan of Giano, Chronicle 15, *XIIIth Century Chronicles*, Placid Herman, trans. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1961), 30: "Blessed Francis, seeing that Brother Cesar was a man learned in the Sacred Scriptures, charged him to adorn with words from the Gospel the rule which he wrote in simple words. And he did."

<sup>7</sup> There is no systematic study of the use of Scripture in Clare's writings. My comments are based on *Clare d'Assise: Écrits*, Introduction, texte Latin, traduction notes et index, ed. and trans. Marie-France Becker, Jean-François Godet, Thaddée Matura, Sources Chrétiennes, 325 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985), 34, 206-08.

of Clare's *Forma vitae* you can find a citation of John 13:34-35 and John 15:12 where she writes that the sisters' should always be eager "to preserve among themselves the unity of mutual love which is the bond of perfection" (CIFl 10:7).<sup>8</sup> However, even despite this infrequent material citing of John, Clare does share Francis's Johannine vision of the life as I will try to demonstrate below.<sup>9</sup>

As we know, Francis placed the Scriptures on the same level of significance as the body and blood of the Lord in terms of providing the possibility of a concrete, tangible encounter with Christ in the world. He wrote to the clerics,

... Consider the great sin and ignorance some have toward the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and his most holy names and written words that consecrate his Body. We know It cannot be his Body and Blood without first being consecrated by word. For we have and see nothing bodily of the Most High in this world except his Body and Blood,

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<sup>8</sup> Chiara Agnese Acquardo and Chiara Cristiana Mondonico, "La Regola di Chiara di Assisi: il Vangelo come forma di vita," in *Clara, claris, praeclara*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale. L'esperienza cristiana e la memoria di Chiara d'Assisi in occasione del 750o anniversario della morte, Assisi 20-22 novembre 2003 (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2004), 169.

<sup>9</sup> The question concerning the actual version of the Vulgate used by Francis and Clare remains open. Antonio Ciceri has edited the "Evangelary" contained in the Breviary of Francis wherein Francis had copied the Gospel readings of the Mass for each day so that when he was not able to attend Mass he could have the Gospel read to him. Since this Breviary is one that reflects the prescriptions of the *Regula bullata* in late 1223, and given the advanced stage of Francis's illness which occasioned its writing, the texts in the Evangelary would probably not have influenced Francis's knowledge of the Gospels. Ciceri makes the point that Francis's approach to scripture was that of a contemplative reading in which the first movement was not that of "reading" but rather of "hearing" the Word in order to arrive at a sacramental encounter with Christ. Francis cited scripture primarily from memory, rather than copying from a text, a practice which explains the difficulty in identifying a written text as source. Antonio Ciceri, "La fonte evangelica degli Opuscula sancti Francisci Assisiensis," *Archivum Franciscan Historicum* 88 (1995): 161-268, provides a detailed study using known editions of the Vulgate, without concluding to any one in particular.

his names and words through which we have been made and redeemed from death to life (1LtCler 1-3).

For Francis and Clare, the materiality of the Word both in terms of sacred book as well as its performance and reception through speech and sound, served the purpose of encounter with Christ. While they heard the Word with their ears, and spoke it with their mouths, touched it with their hands and saw it with their eyes, more importantly they received the Word with and into their living, with their life experience, for the purpose of transforming that Word into flesh. Francis expressed this when he exhorted his brothers to beware of the malice of Satan who wants “to choke out the word and precepts of the Lord from our memory, and desiring a person’s heart he wants to blind it ...” (ER 22:20). Notice how Francis insists here that it is the entire person who must be on guard: memory, affection and sight! As Francis continues he urges the brothers to make a “home and dwelling place there for him who is the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (ER 22:27). The place that “there” refers to is the human person, and he then cites John to insist that one must “adore [God] in spirit and truth” (ER 31; John 4:24), that is, with one’s entire being. Further on Francis exhorts: “Let us have recourse to him as to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls, who says, ‘I am the Good Shepherd who feeds my sheep and I lay down my life for my sheep’” (ER 22:32; John 10:14-15). Notice here how Francis weaves these Johannine texts and images together to describe the process of the reception of the Word that goes well beyond following footsteps. Francis intends that our encounter with the Word take us, together with the actions and teaching of Jesus, into the experience of the love of the Father and the Spirit. He cites two more texts of John here to underline the nature of this encounter: “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (ER 22:39-40), followed by the exhortation to “hold onto the words, the life, the teaching and Holy Gospel of him who humbled himself to beg his Father for us and to make his name known to us ...”

(ER 22:41). Following this is the collage of texts from John 17, which we will reflect on in more depth shortly.

Francis and Clare were not interested in the intellectual exegesis of a text but rather in the transposition of the text into action and inner experience. This practice and intention continued throughout the entire life of Francis and Clare, leading them always to a deeper internalization of that Word of God.<sup>10</sup> This process of the internalization of the Word is what ER 22 and the longer version of the Letter of the Faithful describe, where the texts from John 17 are used to describe how the brothers and sisters can be taken up into the dynamic Trinitarian relationships of God, and with this experience they are sent again into the world to continue the incarnation. Here again it is a Johannine text that Francis repeats: “As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world” (ER 22:51; John 17:18).

From this perspective, to say that the Franciscan Evangelical life is all about following the footprints of Jesus Christ is really inadequate. Following the Word is simply the means to the end. The end or purpose of the Franciscan evangelical life is to continue the Incarnation of Jesus by living a life that expresses in word and deed what it means to be taken up into an experience of the Trinitarian life of God.

This goal or ultimate purpose of Franciscan living is what Francis presents with his collage of texts from John 17 in ER 22:42-55 which follows here:<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> I have developed this dynamic in the Writings of Francis and Clare in more detail in “The Christology of the Writings of Francis and Clare,” *Franciscana* 75 (2009): 317-39.

<sup>11</sup> I have consulted the following texts in the preparation of these reflections on the gospel of John: Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). John R. Donahue, ed., *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005). John C. Thomas, *Footwashing and the Johannine Community* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004). Sherri Brown, *Gift Upon Gift: Covenant through Word in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010). Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Unity and Diversity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007). Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John* Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006). Je-



Father, I have made your name known to those whom you have given me (John 17:6).

The words you gave to me I have given to them, and they have accepted them and truly know that I came from you and they have believed that you sent me (John 17:8).

I pray for them, not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they are yours and everything of mine is yours (John 17:9).

Holy Father, preserve in your name those you have given me that they may be one as we are (John 17:11b).

I say this while in the world that they may have joy completely (John 17:13b).

I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world as I do not belong to the world (John 17:14).

I do not ask you to take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one (John 17:15).

Glorify<sup>12</sup> them in truth. Your word is truth (John 17:P 17).

As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world (John 17:18).

And I sanctify myself for them that they also may be sanctified in truth (John 17:19).

I ask not only for them but also for those who will believe in me through them (John 17:20),

that they may be brought to perfection as one, and the world may know that you have sent me and loved them as you loved me (John 17:23).

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rome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> The Vulgate reads “Sanctify them in truth” – *Sanctifica eos in veritate*.

I shall make known to them your name, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them (John 17:26b).

Father, I wish that those whom you have given me may be where I am that they may see Your glory (John 17:24a)

in Your kingdom (Matt 20:21).

You can notice how Francis constructs this collage with a definite structure. He began by having Jesus speak to his Father in thanksgiving for having faithfully completed his mission – he has “made known God’s name to those whom you have given me” (John 17:6), and who belong to God. Then, Jesus prays that his Father “keep in [His] name” and make his disciples one with them, the Father and the Son (John 17:11). This union with Father and Son will then become their source of joy in a world that hates them, and into which they are sent so that others can be brought into this intimate experience of God. The love of Father and Son will bring the disciples to the place where the Father and the son dwell. Thus, as Francis describes his experience by using the voice of John, it is by living the Word who is Jesus, that one is given access to knowledge of God from inside the Trinity, because the Word is and leads one into the experience of the truth who is God.

It is a truism to state that the Incarnation is at the center of Franciscan life. At first glance, one might conclude that the Gospel of John presents us with a very high Christology in contrast to the Synoptics which give us a low Christology. Francis and his early brothers discovered the Synoptic texts connected with the mission of the disciples, especially from the Gospel of Luke, as a description of what it means to follow in the footprints of Jesus. Francis and Clare also describe the dynamics of Franciscan living with John’s Gospel through the use of images such as Jesus the foot washer; Jesus the way, the truth and life; Jesus the shepherd who gives his life for his sheep; Jesus the sheepfold; Jesus who calls his disciples friends; Jesus the vine through whom we are

grafted to God, Jesus who in his humanity gives us access to God; Jesus who sends his disciples to continue the incarnation through their own life; Jesus the human who mirrors God. These Johannine images and the meanings they communicate are the link between Gospel and life for Francis and Clare; these images communicate the meanings and values embodied in Franciscan living and suggest a deeper more intimate knowledge of God. As suggested above, these images suggest a coincidence of action and intimacy.

Both of Francis's *Rules* and Clare's *Forma vitae* describe Minorite life with the image of the footprints of the Incarnate Jesus as we have seen. In both Rules, texts of the synoptic gospels predominate to present the incarnate life of Jesus as a model for the practices and commitments of the life: selling all and giving to the poor as condition for entrance; wearing cheap poor clothes that reflect that of the poor Jesus; being pilgrims and strangers in the world; working with one's hands; begging when necessary; not having anything that one can call their own; mission as determined by the sending of the disciples in Luke taking nothing for the journey; acting as agents of peace; becoming vulnerable like Jesus in terms of an acceptance of persecution and suffering; the patient acceptance of difficult experiences, etc. The emphasis of these practices accents the kenotic dimension of Christ's incarnation, experienced as an emptying of oneself, as becoming always lesser which gives the brothers and sisters a concrete and distinct physical, social, and ecclesial shape.<sup>13</sup> This kenotic shape of Franciscan life is spelled out in Francis's word which summarizes salvation history in the longer redaction of the LtF 4-13 that we spoke of above: the Word of the Father takes flesh and frailty in the womb of Mary and chooses poverty in the world; this frail, weak and vulnerable Jesus remains with us in his body and blood which is given and poured out for many; and this Jesus "whom [the Father] gave to us and who was born for us" accomplishes the

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<sup>13</sup> Certainly, the kenotic dimension of incarnation is influenced by the writings of Paul, which are also present in the Writings of Francis and Clare. However, the specific actions of Christ which allow Paul to conclude to a kenotic incarnation are made available only in the Synoptic Gospels.

Father's will by offering himself through his own blood as a sacrifice and oblation on the altar of the cross."

Against the backdrop of this kenotic dimension of the incarnation, John's gospel accents the Incarnation as a fullness:

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.... No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John 1:14, 16, 18).

These verses underline how the revelation of God in Jesus is to be understood – God is made known in the enfleshed life of the Word in the world, and that life is one of fullness and grace, and not primarily one of sacrifice and emptying. For John, the cross is the glorification of Jesus!

These two perspectives on the Incarnation – that of the Synoptics and that of John – are not contradictory. Rather, they are complementary in that both together reveal the full meaning of the Incarnation: the incarnation as emptying reveals at the same time the fullness of God's love in the flesh of Jesus Christ.

The Johannine incarnational perspective reaches its climax in the Gospel of John in chapter 17, where Jesus thanks God for having revealed God's name to the disciples which is "I am" (8:28, 58; 13:12; 18:5-6). Throughout the gospel, John presented Jesus' teaching and actions as the revelation of the name of God in a series of claims he makes about himself: "I am the Bread of Life" (6:35,48,51); "I am the Light of the World" (8:12; 1:4; 9:4); "I am the Gate, the Good Shepherd" (10:7,9,11,14); "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (11:25-26); "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (14:5, 6-7); "I am the Vine" (15:1). These titles demonstrate that Jesus is the "I am," the revelation and the mediator of God's love and care for the world. John's Jesus lived to make God's love known: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only

Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (3:16). Emphasizing the incarnation as he does, John presents the cross as the completion of the revelation of God’s glory in the human life of Jesus, because being human includes death. The scripture scholar Gail R. O’Day characterizes the incarnation in the gospel of John in this way:

When the Word becomes flesh, flesh is at that moment redeemed. Jesus’ death is not necessary to redeem humanity; he redeems flesh by becoming flesh. Flesh is now the habitation of the holy. Human flesh is now the embodiment of God in the world.... God can be seen and known in a human life and in the fullness of that life. The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. The intimacy of this theological moment cannot be overemphasized. God is known because the Word, who dwells near the Father’s heart, also dwells with human hearts. Indeed, the Word has a human heart. The incarnation places the most positive value on human life.”<sup>14</sup>

For John, flesh becomes the dwelling place of God as the good shepherd, the servant who washes feet, the Lamb, the Word of the Father, Light, Lord and Teacher, beloved Son, Brother, the Way, the Truth and the Life. God is revealed, or better God is present in human actions that represent God in the world, and these actions provide the context for experiencing God while engaging in conversation, service, and simple sharing. These descriptive names of God taken from John’s gospel make up more than a half of the names and titles of Jesus that appear in the Writings of Francis and Clare.<sup>15</sup> Looking now at just two of these can help see how

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<sup>14</sup> Gail R. O’Day, “The Love of God Incarnate: the Life of Jesus in the Gospel of John,” in *Life in Abundance: studies of John’s Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown*, ed. John R. Donahue (College, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 160.

<sup>15</sup> Van-Khanh, *The Teacher of His Heart*, 223-24.

the Johannine dynamic I have presented functions in Franciscan life.

### **III. GOD THE FOOT-WASHER, THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE**

#### ***John 13:1-17 – The Foot Washing***

John's account of the washing of the feet (John 13:1-17), which replaces the Synoptic account of the institution of the Eucharist in his Gospel, suggests that for his community Jesus was remembered and continued to be really present to the community in acts of service and care for one another. Peter's initial refusal to allow Jesus to wash his feet was met with the strong reproach from Jesus that then Peter would "have no share with me." It seems that Peter was fine with a God who was Lord and Teacher, but he could not accept a God that washed feet. Peter could not accept that Jesus should reach so low – he could not accept the shape which God took in the incarnation, and as a result, he could have no real part in Jesus' revelation of God. The washing of the feet challenged Peter, as it challenges us, to recognize that in the human the divine is to be encountered.

In John's Gospel the washing of the feet is the prolegomena to the Passion and Death of Jesus, and it serves as a prophetic word which interprets the meaning of everything he has recorded about Jesus up to this point as well as what is about to follow in the glorification of Jesus, inviting the reader to experience the fullness of God in the humble human gesture of foot-washing and in the most common experience of human death. By refusing to allow Jesus to wash his feet, and by implication to refuse to wash the feet of others, the consequence of "having no share with Jesus" implied that Peter would not be able to share in the revelation of God's name, nor be able to experience that relationship within the Trinity that Jesus was opening up for his disciples.

Celano tells us that Francis asked that the Gospel of John be read to him as he lay dying at the Portiuncola, beginning from chapter 13 (1C 110). While not explicitly stated by the hagiographer, it is assumed that the Gospel of John was read from the washing of feet to the end of the text, including chapter 17. In addition, we know that the image of foot-washing was also employed by Francis to define the meaning of “Friar Minor” as, “Let the one wash the feet of the other” (ER VI:4).<sup>16</sup> Clare was remembered by her sisters for “washing the feet of the serving sisters” (Process II:3; III:9, etc.). The sisters described this practice as characterizing her relationship with them in terms of humility, and they underline that Clare “kissed the sole of the foot of the servant.” The witnesses of the Process of Canonization described this gesture of washing and kissing the serving sisters’ feet as a contemplative gesture on the part of Clare: in her simple act of service, she encountered, recognized and revered the presence of God.

Francis and Clare learned that in the washing of feet God was revealed as one who always becomes lower, lesser, smaller, and humbler, bending down in attentive care before the other. At the same time, it was more than a simple act of service, washing feet became the revelation of God’s name as described in John 17.

### ***John 14:6-7 “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”***

For Francis, the Body and Blood of the Lord was the only the concrete material means available for the encounter of the human Jesus in this world, and Francis focuses our attention on how in the celebration of the Body and Blood of the Lord we experience the incarnation of God with us! Francis explains this experience of God in Admonition 1, where he begins by quoting this text of John:

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<sup>16</sup> Admonition IV:2 – “Let those who are placed over others boast about that position as much as they would if they were assigned the duty of washing the feet of their brothers.”



I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him (John 14:6-7).

Philip, who did not understand Jesus as the revelation of God, balked at this and asked Jesus to show them the Father. Francis then cites Jesus' response to Nicodemus, "The Father dwells in inaccessible light and God is Spirit" (John 4:24), and "no one has ever seen God" (John 1:18), except the Son, who revealed the Father in and through his human life – to see Jesus is to see the Father.

Francis understood that in this passage Jesus was responding to Thomas and Philip's discomfort with the fact that he would be leaving them his "life" as the "map or the way" to follow him into the truth. They seemed to prefer something more ethereal and transcendent than the life of the human Jesus as the way that gave access to God – they did not want to follow a vulnerable, weak and limited human whose way to God was through suffering and death! Their reaction was the same as that of Peter to Christ the foot-washer.

In Admonition 1, Francis goes on to argue that because God is spirit, it is only with, in and through, the Spirit Paraclete that one can see God, and then develops a parallel between the disciples' historical experience of Jesus, and his own as well as our historical experience of the Body and Blood of the Lord. As the disciples only saw the human Jesus with their bodily eyes, so with our bodily eyes we only see bread and wine on the altar. Francis wrote,

And as they saw only his flesh by an insight of their flesh, yet believed that he was God as they contemplated him with their bodily eyes, let us, as we see bread and wine with our bodily eyes, see and firmly believe that they are his most holy Body and Blood living and true (Adm I:20-21).

Francis's thought developed here from the discomfort of Thomas and Philip with Jesus pointing to his own human

experience as the true revelation and way to God, to the affirmation that the Body and Blood of the Lord is the sign that reveals and makes present the mystery of the Incarnation – God is revealed in and through his humanity. The action of breaking bread reveals God. This Admonition expresses the great desire of Francis to see God, and at the same time affirms his experience that Christ who leads him to God is the revelation of God, which is the basis for Francis’s understanding of the prayer of Christ in John 17, and reflects the description of Franciscan life which he articulates in ER 22 and the longer redaction the Letter to the Faithful.

Clare articulates a similar conviction in her Testament where she wrote:

The Son of God has become for us the Way that our blessed father Francis, his true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example (CITest 5).

Clare affirms this with these significant words of introduction to the statement: “Therefore the Apostle [writes]: Recognize your vocation (1Tim 4:12)” (CITest 4). Clare defines the vocation of the Poor Sisters as the Way of Christ. More than a simple flourish, Clare here affirms that “the Son of God become the way for them” is their true identity. Jesus as the Way (because he is the truth and life) is more than an example to be followed. He is the Way to be followed, the footprint, because he reveals God and is the life of the Poor Sisters. Clare’s use of the mirror image in her letters to Agnes and her Testament is thus rooted in the mystery of personal identity and vocation. To follow the example of Christ becomes the means for experiencing oneself as taken up into the unity of the Trinity, to become a spouse of the Holy Spirit, as Clare describes this to Agnes of Prague in her letters.

After describing Agnes as “the spouse and mother and the sister of my Lord Jesus Christ” (1LtAg 12) and encouraging her in her pursuit of poverty, Clare wrote to Agnes a few years later to describe the dynamics of espousal to the poor crucified Christ:

Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the brilliance of glory! Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance and through contemplation, transform your entire being into the image of the Godhead itself, so that you too may feel what friends feel in tasting the hidden sweetness that, from the beginning, God Himself has reserved for his lovers.... May you totally love him who gave himself totally for your love, at whose beauty the sun and moon marvel, whose reward and their uniqueness and grandeur have no limits. I am speaking of him, the Son of the Most High, Whom the virgin brought to birth and remained a virgin after his birth (3LAg 12-17).

The experience Clare describes here is not that of a Platonic relationship, but rather one that engages the entire person in a contemplative encounter with the human Jesus Christ which results in a transformation that is effected through love. This, too, reflects the meaning of John 17, which Clare never cites in her writings, though no doubt she learned this from Francis, whom she cited in chapter six of her *Forma vitae*:

Because by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and handmaids of the most High, most Exalted King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have the same loving care and special solicitude for you as for them (C1FL VI: 3-4).

Francis's words here affirm that both he and his brothers and Clare and her sisters were on the same path and striving for the same goal, the goal that Francis articulated in chapter twenty-two of the *Regula non bullata*, as I have attempted to explain.

There are certainly other images and texts that could be developed, but I hope that this suffices to suggest how significant the Gospel of John was for Francis and Clare's experience of the evangelical life.

## CONCLUSION

While it is impossible to demonstrate a linear development in Francis's deepening understanding of the implications of the Incarnation from his conversion until his death (many of his texts contain no indication as to the date of composition), one can, however, notice a growing understanding and experience of the Evangelical Life after 1221. The presence of the Johannine perspective on the Incarnation in the Writings after the completion of chapters 1-21 of the *Regula non bullata*, which were finished by 1220/1221, is a sign of this development.

Beginning early in their fraternal experience of Franciscan living, the brothers privileged the footsteps of Christ, found largely in the Synoptic Gospels, as examples to be reproduced in their life and ministry (ER 1-21). Quite literally, the brothers began "doing" the Gospel. Their activity and ministry, their way of "doing" the Gospel, gradually led them to a deeper experience of the footprints of Christ which led them to an experience of what might be described as "Jesus the footprint of Trinitarian life." Francis described this movement into God by using chapter 17 of John's Gospel. Thus, the Franciscan way of life which took the brothers and sisters into the world through engagement, conversation and simple sharing with others, especially with the poor, the sick and the beggars on the way, led them at the same time into an experience of shared life within the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit. Thus the purpose or goal of the Evangelical life is service and care for each other and others in need, but at the same time it desires and facilitates an inner experience of God as Trinity.

What the gospel of John held out as a possibility for Francis and Clare was not simply the pattern of a life of action punctuated by moments of contemplation off the road, but rather the experience of contemplation in action while on the road. While monks and nuns sought to become totally fire through their withdrawal from the world with practices of continuous prayer and asceticism, Franciscans seek to become totally fire in the world, while they are engaged in conversation and service of each other and those others they meet along the way.

Francis and Clare show us the way to a synthesis of contemplation and action, and as I have attempted to show, it is the Johannine perspective on the Incarnation as the revelation of God in human form and action that encourages them to seek this in their lives. The Writings of Francis and Clare show us a pattern for spiritual integration in our lives that overcomes the ecclesial schizophrenia (of both Francis and Clare's and our own times) between the sacred and the secular, between ministry and social service, between prayer and ministry, and ultimately between man and woman.

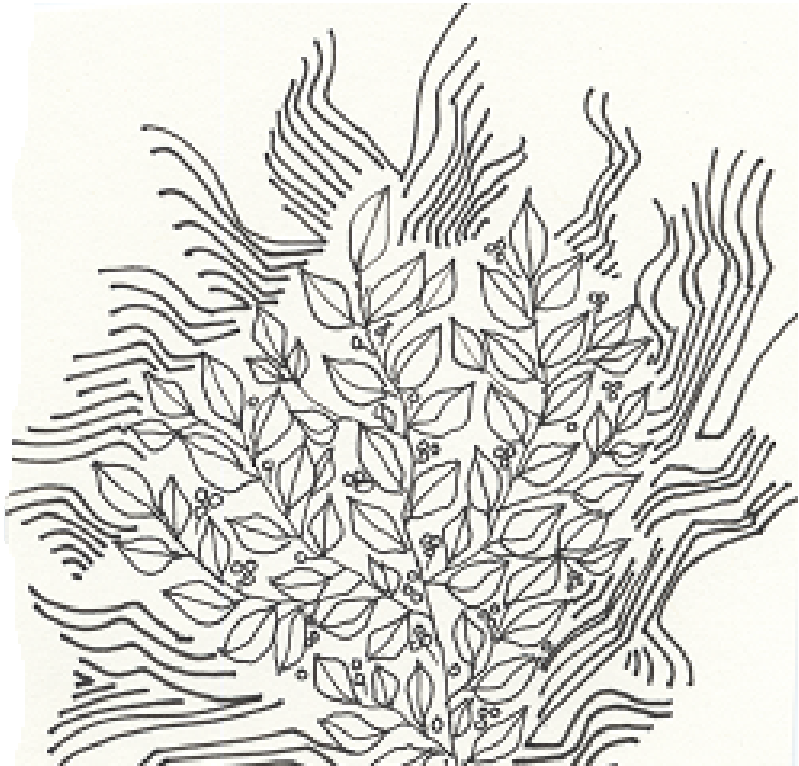
Francis and Clare remind us that as Jesus said, "Servants are not greater than their masters. If they persecuted me they will persecute you; if they keep my word, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20). Like Francis and Clare, Franciscans must make themselves vulnerable as Jesus made himself vulnerable. For the Word to become flesh in Jesus was God's biggest risk in that God risked God's very life because God is love. Being vulnerable, especially as we experience diminishment today, does not mean that we cannot or should not risk finding new ways to be God's love in our world, as Francis and Clare did in their world.

One of the most familiar Johannine images for Francis is found among his liturgical prayers in the *Praises to be Said at all the Hours*, which was prayed before each liturgical hour during the day. It is made up primarily of texts from the book of Revelation from which is derived this affirmation: "The lamb who was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and praise" (Rev 5:12). The risen Lord, as this text makes clear, contin-

Michael Blastic

ues to carry the wounds of the passion in his glorified body, and to this wounded Lamb of God praise is due. Imagine the power of this image to shape one's outlook on life! Francis placed himself before the Lamb who was slain seven times a day in preparation to join in the liturgical praise where earth is joined to heaven, where humans are joined to God in giving worship to the Risen Christ! The glory of God is revealed in Jesus' wounds, in pain embraced and endured and lifted up in order to give oneself utterly and totally as gift, as love, as God's very life.

And, to each one of us is addressed the words of Jesus spoken to his Father in his prayer at the last meal with his disciples: these brothers and sisters are yours; keep them in your name that they may be one as We are; as you sent me into the world, so I send them into the world; may the love with which you loved me be in them and I in them! And, may they become totally fire!



**BECOMING A SACRED FLAME:  
FRANCIS, CLARE AND JOHN'S GOSPEL**

**NANCY SCHRECK, O.S.F.**

**INTRODUCTION**

Last year when Ramona called to ask if I would be a presenter at this year's conference<sup>1</sup> the first thing I reminded her of is that I am not a scholar of the Franciscan tradition. What I am is a Franciscan educated in Biblical Studies so this is the perspective I will use to look at our topic. My focus will be on the ways the gospel of John can assist us in living our Franciscan life today.

From Michael's excellent presentation yesterday we see more clearly the significance of John's Gospel in the life of Francis and Clare. What his presentation does is to give the historical impetus for asking ourselves how we experience John's Gospel and whether or not it causes us to become a sacred flame. So we will draw on some biblical scholarship of our own time to explore the ways this gospel has the potential to turn today's Franciscans into flames of fire.

Returning to one's origins is not simply an abstract archaeological operation but is something vital to do. It is a means of connecting ourselves as far as possible and in a living manner to the experience of our founders. It is in this experience that the institute's proper charism is incarnated by way of example. But knowing and appreciating that fact, we cannot remain there. Our work is a matter of attempting to relive the original charismatic experience rather than

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<sup>1</sup> This is the text of Nancy Schreck's keynote presentation at the 2011 Annual Federation Conference in Milwaukee, July 27-30.



to simply study it. This attempt is neither illusory nor presumptuous, for the same Spirit who once gave the charism to the founders, today gives the identical charism to the followers. This means that grappling with the spiritual understanding today makes possible a living interpretation of the original experience. It is all about the spiritual energy it takes to make the charism live in a new time.<sup>2</sup>

Michael Guinan in his book *The Franciscan Vision and the Gospel of John*, gives several instances of the preference Francis had for the gospel of John. He uses the *Early Rule* Chapter XXIII to give us hints that Francis had a special relationship with the Gospel of John in this way. He looks to the prayer beginning with verse six:

Because of your love, we humbly beg, the glorious Mother, the most blessed, ever virgin Mary, Blessed Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, and all the choirs of the blessed seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominations principalities, powers, virtues, angels archangels, Blessed John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Peter, Paul the blessed patriarchs and prophets, the innocents, apostles, evangelists, disciples, the martyrs, confessors and virgins, the blessed Elijah and Henoah, all the saints who were, who will be and who are, to give you thanks for these things ... etc.<sup>3</sup>

Guinan suggests that the surprise in the list is not only that John the evangelist is included, but that John comes before the great apostles Peter and Paul. Guinan also makes a case for Francis's preference for the Gospel of John by reminding us that when Francis is dying he requests the Gospel of John be read to him, especially John 12 which is the story of Jesus' anointing before the Passover, and John 13

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<sup>2</sup> Jean François Godet, "A New Look at Clare's Gospel Plan of Life," in *Greyfriars Review* Vol. 5 (1991) Supplement (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1991): 1-81.

<sup>3</sup> Michael D. Guinan, *The Franciscan Vision and the Gospel of John*, The Franciscan Heritage Series Volume 4 (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2006).

perhaps to chapter 17 which includes the foot washing and the great priestly prayer of Jesus. Though it is not always clear as to what actual references Francis made to the gospel and what adornments were added by others, what is significant is that when he was sick he wished to listen to it, and in what was almost his last breath, he asked for this gospel.

So certainly our work is to know about the place of John's Gospel in the lives of Francis and Clare, but we can't leave it there. We can't stop with being inspired, moved, illumined, and enriched by the Franciscan-Johannine vision. That is just not enough. Rather, we must be transformed by it so that others may also come to see and enjoy this vision as well. For better or worse, the lens they have is the witness of our Franciscan lives in this time and in this place. So my question is: what is there about the Franciscan embrace of John's Gospel that could be really transformative for us today? What turns us into fire?

As we know well, the life of the followers of Francis and Clare was formed, organized, pervaded and completed by "the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." The words of the Gospel held the highest place above all other precepts and admonitions and Francis and Clare frequently placed them at the beginning of and within their prescriptions. So what does this mean for us? I say that in the measure we know and live the Gospel, in that measure, we are truly Franciscans. We must follow the example of Francis and Clare listening carefully to hear what God is saying to us in the words of the Gospel heard in an entirely new time.

With this in mind, I have read and re-read two things in preparation for this assembly: The Third Order Regular Rule and the Gospel of John. In doing so there are some conclusions I have drawn or perhaps I should say questions I have raised. The Volterra Document setting the context for the Rule is filled with intimacy and love talk.

- Paragraph one: "All who love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul, and mind, and with their whole strength and love their neighbor as themselves ... (1LtF 1).

Nancy Schreck

- Paragraph two: The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and God will make a home and dwelling place with them (John 14:27).
- Paragraph three: We are spouses when the faithful soul is united by the Holy Spirit with our Lord Jesus Christ (1LtF 8).

These themes repeat throughout the Rule – just a few examples:

- In regard to new members – let them only be concerned to serve, love, honor and adore God as best they can (TOR 7).
- Let them always make a home and dwelling for the one who is Lord God ... (TOR 8).
- The brothers and sisters are to be totally conformed to the Holy Gospel (TOR 11).
- The brothers and sisters are to love God with their whole heart, whole soul, mind, and with all their strength and to love their neighbor as themselves (TOR 29).
- Love one another as I have loved you (TOR 23).

And so I can't help but wonder, how does one fall in love like that with God. How does one engage one's whole heart? How does one make a home for God? How do we become spouses of the Lord Jesus Christ? How do we become so one with God that we can be sent into the whole world by God to give witness by word and work to God's voice as we heal the wounded, bind up the bruised, and give ourselves up completely (TOR 29-30)? How do we get from word to action? How do we do the gospel?

Does the Gospel of John offer any help? Is there something in it as meaningful for us today as for Francis and Clare in their time? What images or stories from our family's favored Gospel could help us? I know and you already know that passages related to the servant who washes the feet, the Lamb, the Good Shepherd, the Word of Father, the Beloved were images that drew Francis and Clare.

But how we get to them in the Gospel of John is important. Unless we understand the whole movement of the Gospel it is difficult to make sense of the passages pulled from their context. So for a few minutes let us look to some important background information. This is a Gospel that is a pristine theological creation flowing from a genius theologian using the oral traditions in the community in which she/he lived. It is a gospel of great and tender intimacy with God and of radical equality in community. The primary disciple is named “beloved” and the multitude of poetic images and stories come from the heart of someone passionately committed to Jesus Christ. Can you see why this gospel would be so attractive to Francis?

Though by the time of Francis and Clare this Gospel is clearly part of the canon of the New Testament, it wasn’t always that way and debates abound regarding its inclusion which occurred quite late in the canon creating process. What made this Gospel so dangerous? The focus on the community of equals, and the role of the beloved disciple seemed to be especially problematic.

In understanding this Gospel few things are more helpful than an appreciation of the literary techniques the writer uses. These are the techniques of a dramatist – use of stories, dialogs, monologs, words with double meanings, irony, and foreshadowing – to set the stage for profound teaching. All this is for the purpose of calling forth a definitive decision for Christ from those straddling the fence. There were then, as now, many reasons for being on the fence. Perhaps because the people feared excommunication from the synagogue, or because of issues around the Eucharist, a loyalty pull from other leaders like John the Baptist, or due to the hard sayings of Jesus. So John has a strong emphasis on witnessing to Jesus and on faith in Jesus providing a powerful appeal for a definitive decision concerning Christ and the Christian community. You know as well as I that this would be very attractive to Francis.

Scholars are not really sure who the original audience was but it seems the writing of this Gospel had some purpose

of warning against synagogue leaders and fortifying the faith of the people by providing them with theological arguments to meet Jewish objections to Christ and Christianity. It also seems to have a purpose of encouraging and strengthening people in a time of persecution and hardship brought upon them by the opposition of the synagogue leaders. (By the way, I assume you know that “the Jews” is not a reference to those who are ethnically Jewish, but rather a reference to those passionately committed to the belief that Jesus is not the Messiah.)

Who would need such a gospel? Jewish Christians whose faith was wavering, who were under attack for believing in Christ and who, because of persecution, were tending to either remain in or return to the synagogue and thereby abandon their faith in Jesus. In brief: Christian Jews who were straddling the fence between the Christian community – a radical discipleship of equals – and the institutions of which they were or had been a part. Is it any wonder John would have Jesus say in 20:31: “These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that believing you may have life in his name.” And in 16:1: “I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling ... to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues ...” Or in 10:16: “I have other sheep that are not of this fold, I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice, so there will be one flock and one shepherd.” (Does this sound like a familiar struggle?)

This is a Gospel for those who live in ambiguity, who are trying to sort through difficulties, whose faith and institutional life do not always agree, who desire light and clarity and find in reality a lot of murkiness. What Francis found in this Gospel were some things to hold on to. Grounding things like: “the Word did become flesh,” and “Jesus is a Shepherd who will lay down life for the flock,” that “there is a way and truth and life,” and that no matter what we must keep “washing each other’s feet.”

So back to the question of how we get to this place of intimacy with God, become spouses of our Lord Jesus Christ,

and develop a commitment to an inclusive community that seem to be hallmarks of what I believe was articulated in the Gospel of John and found so attractive by Francis. Is there a path that John gives us? I believe the way revolves around something not often given attention and, as far as I can tell, is not referenced in the Franciscan tradition. However it holds great significance in the gospel of John.

### **THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL**

Several reasons make me choose this portion of John's Gospel. It is the best example of a spousal relationship I can find in the New Testament. Secondly, with the TOR charism of conversion it is a significant wisdom story regarding this process. This is a pivotal story of the spiritual journey. Thirdly, I am also led here because of an important line in John 17 – this is what Jesus prays for and Francis quotes: “for those who believe in me through their word.” This is a story of the revelation of the word of God.

By entering a Samaritan village and speaking with this woman, Jesus has crossed ethnic, religious and gender boundaries. The Samaritans were seen as ethnically impure, having intermarried with colonizers after the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC. They were religiously suspect, worshiping in a different manner and having their own version of the Torah. That “the Jews use nothing in common with the Samaritans” is an understatement, for there was strong animosity between the two groups. “Jews do not associate with Samaritans.” The story was at least partially included in the Gospel to establish the full equality in the community between Samaritan Christians and Jewish Christians. We can't get to an understanding of the inclusive community of foot washing, Francis's movement toward the Sultan, his embrace of the leper without the boundary crossing wisdom of this story. And finally this is a story full of intimacy images, of marriage, and eros. We are helped in our journey to intimacy with God in its telling.

In exploring the context of this story we see a movement from disbelief through inadequate belief to more adequate belief. Early in chapter two the people in the temple are openly skeptical about the signs Jesus performs. Later in the chapter Nicodemus believes because of Jesus' signs but this is not an adequate concept of Jesus. By chapter four we have this example of someone coming to know Jesus as the Christ in ever deepening stages of intimacy. As I talk about this your job is twofold: to think about what you know about the conversion journeys of Francis or Clare, and to be in touch with your own movements toward intimacy with God and how revelation happens for you.

With all the stories we have heard about this woman we are not conditioned to think of her as a model for the spiritual journey. In interpretations of this story the image of the woman is trivialized, marginalized and sexually demonized. And because of the misinformation about her so-called husbands we tend to think of her more as the converted sinner rather than as a mystic in search of an ever-deepening oneness with God. This is not to say that it is unimportant to have repentant sinners model conversion, but in this case the type of conversion modeled is from good to better, conversion as growth that comes from a long and arduous spiritual search.

In reality this woman is one of the most sharply drawn characters in the gospels. The intense symbolism surrounding her should warn the reader against sexual literalism and focus our attention on issues of intimacy with Christ. The struggle for clarity in knowing what we believe is one of life's great sacred works. The process is deep and long. It is about knowing ourselves well enough to know our hunger and thirst and what satisfies us. This Gospel passage is a reflection on that journey to true worship – deep relationship with God. This is what should be apparent to us as soon as we see the setting at the well.

So let us look at the encounter of this woman with Jesus. From the outset the conversation is theological and religious. She begins by questioning Jesus' break with Jewish tradi-



tion. He is speaking publicly to a woman and asking to share utensils with a Samaritan.

## **THE STAGES OF THE STORY**

### ***Setting: at a well***

This is a type story. A story recounting the meeting of future spouses who then play a central role in salvation history: Abraham's servant finding Rebecca the future wife of Isaac at the well of Nahor, Jacob meeting Rachel at the well in Haran, Moses receiving Zipporah as his wife at the well in Midia. In this story Jesus meets the woman at the most famous well of all, Jacob's well in Samaria, that is in ancient Israel. Jesus has already been identified at Cana (chapter 2) as the true bridegroom, and by John the Baptist as the "true bridegroom to whom God has given the New Israel as bride" (John 3:27-30). Now the new bridegroom who assumes the role of God the bridegroom of ancient Israel, comes to claim Samaria as an integral part of the Christian community. The marital theme is underscored by the male female dynamic of the scene and the conversation between the woman and Jesus about marriage, as well as the abundant fertility symbolism of the story: well, water, vessel, fruitful fields, sowing and reaping. So we do well to understand the image of the Samaritan as the spouse/bride of Christ, following the allusions to the wells of betrothal of the Old Testament.

### ***The conversation with Jesus***

It is important to note that from the very first moment the discussion is religious and even theological. The woman does not introduce extraneous theological issues as a smokescreen to distract Jesus from probing into her shameful sex life as some contend. She begins by questioning Jesus' breaking with Jewish tradition, first by speaking in public to a woman and asking to share utensils with a Samaritan, and second

by his implication, in the offer of living water that he is on par with the patriarch Jacob. (A characteristic of Samaritan theology was its Mosaic-patriarchal tradition as opposed to the Davidic monarchical tradition of the Jews.) Thus, for the woman, Jesus' implicit claim to be on par with the patriarch Jacob has enormous theological implications which she will explore. So the journey to the well is a theological necessity, and the great revelation happens at noon, which in John's passion is the time of the revelation of Jesus to all at the hour of his death. Immediately after the exchange on the five husbands, to which we will return in a moment, the woman recognizes Jesus, whom she had at first identified as merely a man, and a Jew, and now as a prophet, and she asks him where true worship is to take place. To paraphrase we could ask: How does one get to real intimacy with God – how are we able to say “my God and my all.” According to Samaritan theology true worship was to take place on Mt. Gerizim not in Jerusalem as the Jews believed. In addition the Messiah would not be a descendant of David but a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:18-19) who upon his return would **reveal all things** (remember this) and would restore true worship, not in the temple of Jerusalem, but in Israel. (Northern Kingdom) So the woman is exploring carefully the identity of Jesus who has indicated his affinity with the patriarchs and his prophetic capacity to “tell her all things.” She wants to know where he stands on true worship, meeting God. Jesus then transcends both the Jewish claim and the Samaritan claim in favor of worship in spirit and in truth. And the connection is made. Jesus confirms her intuition and reveals himself to her as the messiah. “*Ego eimi*” – that is using the Samaritan's preference for God. So we have the superabundant fulfillment of expectations.

### ***Five Husbands***

The woman has questioned Jesus on virtually every significant tenet of Samaritan theology and then the exchange about the husbands occurs. It is not a prelude to the discus-

sion or a distraction from it, but in the midst of it. If we follow the story as one about desire for true worship and intimacy with God, understand the type scene, and know that in prophetic literature adultery/idolatry symbolism is prevalent for speaking of Israel's infidelity to God, then conversation about "husbands" would be appropriate. The people's infidelity to the Mosaic covenant was symbolized by its acceptance of the worship of the false gods of five foreign tribes. The five conquering tribes referred to in 2 Kings 17:13-34; Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, Sepharvaim. Samaria's belief was tainted by false worship and therefore even the "husband" she now has is not the completion of the relationship. The five prepared the way. This image of five husbands also provides a sense that conversion and growth happen in stages and over time. As we move through and grow with what happens in our lives we are able to move from what is "false" to that which is more and more true, from darkness to dawning light, from that which is immature to more mature relationship, always on a journey into God. So the question is do you know your five husbands. Can you name your stages of growth in intimacy with God, in understanding of your beliefs etc.

The entire dialogue between Jesus and the woman is the "wooing" of Samaria and us to full covenant fidelity by Jesus, the new bridegroom. It has nothing to do with the woman's private moral life but with the covenant life of the community. Nowhere in the fourth gospel is there a dialog of such theological depth and intensity. It teaches us about the process of gradually experiencing Jesus' self revelation even as she and we reveal ourselves to him. The whole thing could not have been more artistically constructed.

In the final scene the woman leaves her water jar, which is a symbol of the abandonment of her ordinary life to follow Jesus and become an apostle. This is just as the fishermen left their nets, and the tax collectors their tables, only somehow we see it with them and miss it with her. Don't you wonder why! She goes into town and first says to the people "Come and see the one who told me everything I have ever

done.” We mistakenly think this is about her secret sex life, and miss the fact that the Samaritans believed that when the Messiah came the Messiah would be the one to “reveal” all things.

The story concludes with the line: “Many Samaritans believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” Or a better translation is “Many Samaritans believed through the word of the woman bearing witness.” Remember the connection I made earlier to John 17 “for those who believe in me through their word.” The effectiveness of her ministry is that townspeople “came to Jesus” which is John’s expression for “beginning to believe.” And then they entreat Jesus to “remain with them” which, in John, is a term for union with Jesus. These new believers are presented as coming to full faith. The pattern is the same, they are brought on the word of another, and come to believe because of Jesus’ own words. This is what Francis desired in the life of the community, that the members would be the word of the one who was the Word. That the brothers and the sisters would bear witness to the word made flesh. By the way, this is profoundly unsettling to the male disciples who see themselves as privileged associates of Jesus but we won’t take time to explore that reality.

### **OTHER STORIES IN JOHN’S GOSPEL**

Now we will turn to some other stories in John. It is no surprise to me that Francis would be attracted to the Good Shepherd story, the foot washing and the passion. These stories capture his astounding insight into the depth, and height, the width and length of the incarnation. They do so by giving expression to what Francis experienced in living among those who were poor. I believe an appreciation of these Johannine passages comes right from his experience of being a good shepherd and washing the sore and broken bodies of those with leprosy, and from experiencing the pain and suffering of those who were poor – who were attracted to the passion because it gave expression and meaning to their lives. Where you stand determines what you see! We know

that among people living in poverty today there is often an emphasis on the passion of Jesus with much less attention paid to the resurrection. In wealthier places there is often great stress on the resurrection with discomfort around and less attention to the passion.

Joel Osteen with his preaching and books such as *Your Best Life Now*, *It's your Time*, and *Become a Better You* is a typical example of this perspective. Resurrection without death is a falsehood; one without the other is a denial of Christ. Those who are poor need to be evangelized with a word of hope but resurrection has to come out of death and is most credible on the lips and from the hearts of those who have paid the price and gone through the suffering to another place. Those who are rich need to be evangelized with honesty about the reality of suffering.

### ***The Foot-washing***

So with this in mind let us briefly touch on two stories: First the foot washing. The context and pervading spirit of this story is love. The word appears thirty one times in chapters 13-17, and just six times in chapters 1-12. In the foot washing Jesus shows the great extent of his love. No doubt for Francis this was a story not only about Jesus' love for the disciples but that of Francis for the brothers, and beyond them for the brothers and sisters, the little poor ones, who filled his days. The story articulates Francis's desire to love completely; meaning "fully" and "to the end of his life" just as Jesus did.

In the story Jesus "takes off" his outer garment. The word "tithemi" is used here which is not the usual word for this action. Used elsewhere it has the sense of "laying down of life," not laying down an item of clothing. This is the same word used in the story of the Good Shepherd who "lays down his life for the sheep." Then Jesus washes feet, and we note that he washes the feet of the one that will betray him. Jesus has no illusions about the fragility of his disciples. One is obstinate; the other will strike him down. This heightens the

impact of Jesus' gesture and almost defies human understanding. An amazing expression of limitless love! Sharing in the divine essence is what leads Jesus to wash feet because as Jesus says in John 5:19 Jesus does what he sees God doing. What I think Francis sees in this action is incarnation, the poor humble God bending low in service. It is the desire of Francis's own heart.

With the outer garment removed Jesus is left with his tunic. Now the image is that of the clothing of a slave ready to serve. Obviously this is not an image of the master and teacher that many are comfortable with. There is a Jewish text that says that washing feet is something a Gentile slave could be required to do, but not a Jewish slave. It was considered too menial for a Jewish slave and was usually reserved for the lowliest slaves of the household. Might we say the Friars Minor? On the other hand foot washing was also something that wives did for husbands, children did for parents, and disciples did for teachers. A level of intimacy is involved here. The one into whose hands God had given all, now takes the disciples' feet into his hands to wash them. So we have images of an unimaginable reversal of roles, and real intimate love.

The story ends with the call to wash each other's feet. The community is to manifest the love of God revealed through serving one another with no vestige of pride or position. Not only has Jesus chosen fragile and failing disciples but he also sends them out as his representatives. Isn't this the desire that burns in Francis and Clare's heart? They, as well as the original disciples, are to repeat in their lives what Christ has done, not as a moral performance but in imitation of the self-gift offered by Christ. Once again knowledge flows into action. This is a most profound revelation of the heart of God. God is revealed in a love that surpasses all imaginable ways of loving.

### ***The Good Shepherd***

Even more briefly, I want to offer a word about the Good Shepherd. Again perspective is important. Think of the life

of the Franciscans among those who are most pushed to the margins of society, those with no one to care for them. Can't you image that an image of God as a shepherd would move the hearts of those standing and serving people with leprosy, and every other sort of malady that pushed them from the care of others. This is a shepherd willing to lay down his life for such people, who will protect them, and will provide what is needed for life. This shepherd will make a way for them, walking ahead of them. And when this shepherd speaks the people will hear the kindness in "his" voice and will respond. This is a shepherd who knows the human condition of wanting to separate the flock into the good and bad, the deserving and undeserving, the valued and not valued, and this shepherd claims that there is really only one flock, one people of God. This is a shepherd in the tradition of Micah:

And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great, ... and he shall be the one of peace (5:3-5). ... and that of Ezekiel and he (the shepherd) shall feed them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd (34:23).

Wouldn't that image of God be music to the ear and sustenance for the soul of ones living among those who were cast aside?

Just as truly as the woman encountered Jesus at the well, Francis, Clare and the generations of brothers and sisters who came after them encountered Jesus in the Gospel. So in the prologue we don't just hear about the Word, we encounter the Word who is God. That is what our tradition says to us. Imagine that! We meet God. When we hear the story of the Good Shepherd we encounter the one who lays down life for us, whose voice we know, whose care we feel. When we meet the humble foot washer we literally meet Christ who invites us to generous service. For Franciscans the truth of the gospel is not a thing to be known but a living person to be followed, a life to be lived with this person Christ.



## CONCLUSION

Francis was a person of the Gospel par excellence, a living symbol of the incarnation of the Word of God. His life, and that of Clare and so many of our Franciscan ancestors, allows us to glimpse believers in direct contact with the gospels. “Francis,” Marcel Daval says, “hears, ponders, and chews over the Gospel. He receives it within himself as a presence that moves him interiorly and leads him along new paths.”<sup>4</sup>

Francis received the word he heard in the liturgy, he savored it, for days, months, years. Finally it dwelt in him as a presence, a companion on his journey, constantly inviting him to bring his life into harmony and conformity with the demands of the Gospel. Thomas of Celano tells us that:

He (Francis) sometimes read the Sacred Books, and whatever he once put into his mind he wrote indelibly in his heart ... his heart would mull over it with constant devotion (2C 102).<sup>5</sup>

Truly, Celano says “he was no deaf hearer of the gospel” (1C 22). Théophile Desbonnet notes that:

After blessed Francis read the gospel or listened to it he always kissed the gospel out of the greatest reverence for the Lord. (*Assise et las ermitages*.)<sup>6</sup>

So this was not an empty word, and as a result Francis, and again so many of our family ancestors, becomes a word given for the world.

This is the grace of our origins.

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<sup>4</sup> Marcel Daval, “Stroll to the heart of the Gospel. The incarnation of the Word of God,” in *Selections of Franciscanismo* n. 90 (2001): 455-62.

<sup>5</sup> *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, The Saint*, ed. Regis Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, William Short (New York: New City Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Théophile Desbonnet, *Assise et las ermitages*, in *François d'Assise, Écrits*, ed. Kajetan Esser, introduction, trans. Theophile Desbonnet, Thad-dée Matura, Jean-François Godet, Damien Vorreux, Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1981); English translation in *FA:ED* 1, 61-62.

Now what about for us. The Mirror of Perfection says:

Blessed is that religious who has no pleasure and delight except in the most holy words and deeds of the Lord, and with these leads people to God with joy and gladness (1 MP 96).<sup>7</sup>

Isn't that what the Samaritan woman did?

Our task is to discover how we, too, become persons of the gospels, but one of our challenges is that it is difficult to remain in regular contact with scripture. It is difficult not just to be acquainted with the gospel but to become through it a person in love with God. The work is to sit, not before a mere text, but before the mystery of a living presence. Real encounter with Christ in the gospel must lead to loving awareness of God. It is to be an entering into communion with the one who desires to enter into communion with us. It is to participate in the exchange as did the woman at the well with Jesus. And to be ready because such a loving encounter always demands a response. Bonaventure uses the word *redamare* (to return love for love).

A caution: Unbelief can exist in the presence of great religious knowledge. We must be about surrendering ourselves into the mystery; about giving our hearts, living for, belonging to, becoming one with. So we must ask ourselves honestly: what efforts am I making in my life to understand the Christ mystery. Am I anxious to encounter Christ? Do I read scripture merely to carry out something prescribed or it is about experiencing God. This is what happened to Francis when he pondered the gospel: He was – we are – gradually enlivened with its power, its light.

Really opening ourselves to the scripture is about letting God lead us into a landscape where we don't know everything, don't have to know everything, indeed may be emptied of nearly everything we think we know. But it is also about giving ourselves to that place that frees us to receive

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<sup>7</sup> *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. 3 *The Prophet*, ed. Regis Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, William Short (New York: New City Press, 2001).

Nancy Schreck

the word, the wisdom, the clarity about who we are and what God is calling us to do, thus we are drenched with discernment.

I want to close with a dangerous prayer for you:

May the love of the word that inhabited Francis and Clare dwell also in you, drawing you into its mysteries and inspiring your actions for the life of the world.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

What are some of your reasons for straddling the fence when it comes to following Jesus?

Who/what are your five husbands? What are the stages of growth in your ability to receive the revelation of Jesus and to be intimate with God?

What is the water jar you leave behind as a symbol of your willingness to be a disciple of Jesus?

How does your living among people who are poor change your perspective when reading the gospel?

How do you become a person of the gospels? What efforts are you making in your life to understand the Christ mystery? Are you anxious to encounter Christ?

Do you read scripture to merely carry out something prescribed for you or it is about seeing/experiencing God? What is this experience like for you?

If you were to list a string of quotes from John's Gospel that shape your life what would they be?

Francis was immersed in and indebted to John. Are you? How is John's Gospel transformative for you?

Below is a list of resources used in preparing this talk. It is included for the benefit of those who wish to continue reflecting on the topic of this year's Conference theme.

**GENERAL RESOURCES:**

*The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, Raymond E. Brown (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

*Evidence Poems*, Mary Oliver (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).

*Francis and Clare a Gospel Story*, Helen Julian, C.S.F. (Ijamsville, MD: The Word Among Us, 2005).

*Franciscan Prayer*, Ilia Delio (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2004).

*The Genius of John A Composition-Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel*, Peter F. Ellis (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1984).

*An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, Raymond E. Brown (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

*The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament As Sacred Scripture*, Sandra M. Schneiders (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011).

*Sacra Pagina The Gospel of John*, Daniel Harrington, ed. Michael Glazier (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998).

*Saint Francis A Model for Human Liberation*, Leonardo Boff (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

*The Testament of Jesus According to John, A study of the Gospel of John in Light of Chapter 17*, Ernst Kasemann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968).

*Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, Sandra M. Schneiders (New York: Crossroad, 2003).

**RENEWING FAMILY SPIRITUALITY  
THROUGH FRANCIS'S DEVOTION TO THE INCARNATION**

**CHRISTOPHER J. STRAVITSCH, M.A., L.P.C.**

Catholic families today endure a surfeit of demands that limit their time and challenge their spiritual life. Those spouses who once enjoyed a vibrant prayer life before marriage can especially feel spiritually defeated by the poverty of prayer time they experience in family life. Our faith celebrates children as a gift from God, but it is no secret that raising them requires a plethora of patience, self-sacrifice, time, and resources. Marriage and family therapists inform us that couples experience a significant increase in stress after the birth of their first child. This tiny new family member needs constant attentive care. Over the years as the family continues to welcome new life and tend to the needs of toddlers, adolescents, and teenagers, a multitude of tasks are heaped upon the family "to do" list: prepare meals, clean the house, do the laundry, run errands, play with and teach children, go to work, and so on. To add humor to the frenzy, this is usually a multi-tasking kind of doing, such as holding a crying child while stirring pasta at the stove and attempting to discipline another child in the living room! Actively serving the family's needs spans from sunrise to sunset and often continues through tiresome nights. It is no wonder parents struggle to find time for quiet prayer. Unfortunately they often feel guilty and become discouraged by this limitation, ostensibly believing God is hidden and can only be found in silent contemplation. The deleterious conclusion is that they fall short of their Christian mission because they simply do not spend enough time with Christ.

This paper examines how the Franciscan tradition, with its emphasis on the Incarnation, offers an alternative view of spirituality that is relevant for family life and can assist families in fulfilling part of their Christian mission—to become a community of life and love. After discussing the poverty of the Incarnation that so profoundly inspired the Poverello, the paper then explores how family spirituality is enriched when a simple lifestyle is integrated with the virtues of humility and faith. Furthermore, when seeing with the eyes of Francis, parents can discover Christ’s presence in each member of the family, thereby awakening them to the invaluable spiritual significance of their service in the home.

### THE CHRISTIAN MISSION OF FAMILY LIFE

Blessed John Paul II emphasizes that family discovers “its *mission*, what it can and should *do*” in the plan of God, who has established the family as “a community of life and love.”<sup>1</sup> Christian marriage, like other sacraments, has the purpose of sanctifying, building up the body of Christ, and giving worship to God.<sup>2</sup> While many parents perceive the constant activity of family life as a distraction or hindrance to their Christian mission, the truth is that family spirituality must find its significance in the very acts of family life.

Turning to the life of St. Francis, we recognize Christ did not call him to retreat into the austerity of monastic life in order to prayerfully pursue the riches of God. Rather, he cultivated within Francis a new spirituality for his time; one through which he discovered and welcomed the blessings of God in each person he encountered and, indeed, in the whole of creation. This “new Evangelist” who was given a “new spirit,” as Thomas of Celano lauded (1C 89), remains a great source of wisdom today and should be discovered

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1981), no. 17.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, no. 56.

anew for families in our time.<sup>3</sup> Celano, and other biographers after him, present the Incarnation of Christ as one of the hallmarks of Francis's spirituality. Drawn into the mystery of God, the Incarnation became for him "the supreme manifestation of [God's] goodness and love and glory."<sup>4</sup> Julian of Speyer tells us,

Truly, he was so overcome by sweet devotion toward the infancy of that King, that whenever he had to say the name of Jesus Christ, he would, as if stuttering, call him 'the babe of Bethlehem,' with even more sweetness and tenderness (LJS 54).

Francis understood that the crib of the Christ child points "to the 'down-to-earth-ness' of the experience of God."<sup>5</sup> He is always in our midst, in each one of us and in our neighbor.

Through the eyes of Francis families can uncover their Christian mission, which may be lying dormant beneath or, more precisely, *within* the *doings* of family life. The personal encounters in the home and the accompanying acts of service should build communion between each other and with God, so that a community of life and love may abound.

Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, *become* what you *are*.<sup>6</sup>

A spirituality of the Incarnation invites families to see a beautiful truth in family spirituality: time spent together is time spent communing with and serving Christ. Family spirituality will thrive when it "enflesh[es] a countercultural under-

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<sup>3</sup> Franciscan sources are cited from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Saint Louis University, Center for Digital Theology, <http://faed.no-ip.org/FAED/toc.jsp>.

<sup>4</sup> Capuchin Educational Conference, Washington, DC, quoted in *American Catholic*, "St. Lawrence of Brindisi," <http://www.americancatholic.org/features/saints/saint.aspx?id=1451>.

<sup>5</sup> William J. Short, *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 129.

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, no. 17.



standing of what it means to experience the Christ incarnate and thereby give[s] this transformative reality a tangible, embraceable face.”<sup>7</sup> In the words of St. Francis, “Let us love the Babe of Bethlehem.”<sup>8</sup>

## A SPIRITUALITY FOR THE MARRIED STATE

The Franciscan tradition, with its Gospel simplicity and emphasis on seeing Christ in daily life, has been vibrantly adapted to various states of life over the centuries. The Servant of God Philippa of Lorraine serves as a good example for parents who feel overwhelmed by their state of life. Blessed Philippa, who had twelve children with her husband, René II, duke of Lorraine and governor of Sicily, was no stranger to the everyday demands of family life and social responsibilities. As a faithful wife with spiritual acuity, she had a wholesome influence over her husband and urged him to many good works. As a dedicated mother, she ensured her children were carefully educated and learned the faith. When René II died, Philippa spent the next eleven years governing the duchy, all while rearing her children. Shortly after her eldest son became of age, she entered the convent of the Poor Clares Colettine at Pont à Mousson, where “she submitted to all the austerities of the order with great zeal, and became a mirror of obedience and humility to everyone.”<sup>9</sup>

Philippa is revered by the Church for living her entire life in innocence and purity, while possessing an ardent love for God. Although she excelled in prayer within the cloister, her growth in holiness clearly preceded this period of life. Her humble service to her family and obedience to her state of life was as significant to her Christian vocation as was her time with the Poor Clares.

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<sup>7</sup> Gabriele Uhlein, “Facing the Christ Incarnate: an Experience in Living Christology,” *The Cord*, 48.2 (1998): 51.

<sup>8</sup> Marion A. Habig, *The Franciscan Book of Saints* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1959), 911.

<sup>9</sup> Habig, *The Franciscan Book of Saints*, 148.

A fruitful spiritual life requires docility to the grace of Christ infused into our souls. Philippa's life demonstrates this is an attainable virtue even for those devout souls whose state of life limits their availability to encounter Christ in silent contemplation. The universal call to holiness invites families to embrace their vocation with charity and fidelity. Every circumstance of family life may be considered as part of the plan that God has chosen for them as the road to sanctity. As the Second Vatican Council teaches,

[spouses are] fortified and ... consecrated for the duties and dignity of their state by a special sacrament; fulfilling their conjugal and family role by virtue of this sacrament, spouses are penetrated with the spirit of Christ and their whole life is suffused by faith, hope, and charity; thus they increasingly further their own perfection and their mutual sanctification, and together they render glory to God.<sup>10</sup>

In the footsteps of Francis, families are charged with the task of harmonizing their Christian faith with the ordinary duties of their vocation. The whole lives of husbands and wives are to be transformed into a "spiritual sacrifice." When activities in the home are performed in this spirit, family life becomes "a liturgical action glorifying God."<sup>11</sup>

### **INSPIRED BY THE POVERTY OF THE INCARNATION**

William Short tells us, "If the incarnation ... can be summed up in a word within the Franciscan School, that word would be 'poverty.'"<sup>12</sup> Francis burned with love for "the poor king" born "in the poor city of Bethlehem" (1C 84). His

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<sup>10</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 48, in *Vatican Council II*, Volume 1: *The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flanery, O.P., new rev. ed. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1992).

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, no. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Short, 43.

memorable reenactment of the nativity at Greccio was the fruit of his devotion.

[Francis longed] to see as much as is possible with [his] own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay (1C 84).

Although Christ “had all the good things in the world at his disposal ... he preferred to be born in poverty, to live in poverty and privation, and to die in poverty.”<sup>13</sup> Francis discerned that following this greatest of virtues was a sure path to God because it was the very path God chose for himself. The Son of God, “enamored of [the] beauty” of poverty, clung to this virtue and proved its fidelity (ScEx 19). Those who wish to follow Christ, who are willing to leave behind a life of comfort and wealth, will discover poverty provides “an excellent and unencumbered path of going to and arriving before Him” (ScEx 1). Unlike the other virtues, which “receive the kingdom of heaven only by way of a promise from him, poverty is invested with it by him without delay. *Blessed*, he said, *are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs*” (ScEx 2).

Francis’s pursuit of poverty was conveyed most simply by doffing the clothes that marked his social status and donning the tonsure and habit of consecrated life. This involved nurturing a right ordering of temporal goods in his life and allowing the Word of God to be his daily bread. In the *Earlier Rule*, Francis instructs,

Let all the brothers strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ and let them remember that we should have nothing else in the whole world except, as the Apostle says: *having food and clothing, we are content with these* (ER IX, 1).

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<sup>13</sup> Habig, 874.

The Poverello became satisfied more “by the glory of ... want than by an abundance of all things” (ScEx 63). In sum, Christ’s poverty inspired Francis to completely empty himself so that he could be filled with the grace of God and receive the kingdom.

## **A SIMPLE AND POOR LIFESTYLE**

Most would likely agree that foregoing access to material resources in order to make one’s family a community of mendicants would be impractical and even irresponsible for parents. Penury is, in fact, the negative side of poverty that Franciscans actively work against in their apostolates to the poor. This does not mean, however, that families are incapable of embracing an Incarnation-centered spirituality of poverty. As Raniero Cantalamessa notes,

[there are] ordinary Christian families who, having chosen Jesus as their Lord, decide to adopt a simple and poor lifestyle and refuse to sacrifice everything to their work and careers. These small shoots, sprouting from a centuries-old trunk, herald a new springtime of poverty in the Church.<sup>14</sup>

Family spirituality is cultivated by the “‘spirit of poverty’ [which] is the attitude of being free, not enslaved by money and what money can buy.”<sup>15</sup> Mothers and fathers understand the spirit of poverty intuitively, because “children are a constant reason to go without things, to give up something, to make savings—in a word, to be poor.”<sup>16</sup> They are accustomed to sacrificing personal desires for the welfare of their offspring and to meet the multifarious needs of the family.

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<sup>14</sup> Raniero Cantalamessa, *Poverty*, trans. Charles Sérignat (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1997), 58.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard Foley and others, *To Live as Francis Lived: A Guide for Secular Franciscans* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000), 66.

<sup>16</sup> Cantalamessa, 56.

Childrearing responsibilities constantly remind them of the demands of poverty.

Unfortunately, any number of pernicious attachments may hinder freedom and prevent families from adopting a simple and poor lifestyle. Excessive motivation for power, prestige, or affluence detracts from the “down-to-earthness” of family life. Especially when fortune comes readily families become vulnerable to acquiring unlimited material possessions, thereby disordering their priorities.

At the other end of the spectrum are circumstantial challenges, such as economic woes, which may potentially be a distraction from simplicity in family life. For those who are blessed to be employed, the struggling economy and lower wages may require them to work extended hours or manage two jobs, in order to meet pressing financial needs. Inadvertently this takes away from time spent together as a family and compounds stress in the home.

Simplicity is also complicated by the emphasis in our culture on discretionary spending. Consumer electronics promise to make life more enjoyable and efficient. Today’s business professionals and youth alike sing the accolades of technology’s ability to keep us “plugged in.” However, constant text-messaging and cell phone usage, the clamoring din of televisions, endless streams of music channeled through earphones, and the pressing need to remain connected to the internet can all distract families from cultivating more meaningful connectedness between parents, children, and siblings—and with God.<sup>17</sup>

Poverty, the “queen and bride” of the Franciscan tradition, is an antidote to these family maladies, because it helps preserve Christian values in the home.<sup>18</sup> Fostering simplic-

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<sup>17</sup> The instantaneous communication of new media offers numerous benefits, including avenues for forming new relationships and the capacity to remain connected over long distances. Pope Benedict XVI, in his “Message for the 43<sup>rd</sup> World Communications Day,” posits our desire for connectedness and communication, which manifests itself in our attraction to new media, is rooted in our nature as human beings. Families simply need to be careful not to let technology replace authentic connection and communication in the home.

<sup>18</sup> Habig, 875.

ity of life, which “calls for a *sparing* use of things, both as ascetical practice and as a means of sharing our goods with others,”<sup>19</sup> liberates caregivers from the anxiety of providing for tomorrow. Fewer sacrifices made to the false gods of power and prestige, along with less emphasis on acquiring non-essential possessions, may reduce the demand for extended hours of work. More importantly, it may remedy a detrimental habit of workaholicism that has deceptively reigned under the banner of providing for the good of the family.

The Franciscan tradition invites families to examine whether their attachments or acceptance of social mores have, over time, disordered their priorities and hindered their Christian freedom in everyday life. Parents and their children will quickly realize the value of such an ascetical practice. Spirituality in the home will have room to thrive as family members intentionally remain “unplugged” from time to time. The quieting of noise and the diminishment of superficial distractions will allow them to truly be heard by each other, while also increasing their attentiveness to the voice of Christ in their midst. With the poverty of time that naturally comes with family life, it is essential to deliberately prioritize the family’s time and focus on storing up everlasting treasure, lest so many precious moments be lost. A simple and poor lifestyle values time spent with each other, facilitates the family’s attachment to Christ, and forms them into a community of life and love. The purpose of material simplicity, as it relates to parenting, is clear:

Children must grow up with a correct attitude of freedom with regard to material goods, by adopting a simple and austere life style and being fully convinced that ‘*man is more precious for what he is than for what he has.*’<sup>20</sup>

Just as Francis never wanted to write a rule for his brothers other than “to live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel” (Test 14), it would be futile to create a set of rules for

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<sup>19</sup> Foley, 63.

<sup>20</sup> John Paul II, no. 37 (emphasis added).

simplicity of life that would be valid for each family. Through prayer and discernment parents can discover what Christ is specifically asking of them.

## HUMILITY AND FAITH IN GOD

St. Francis offers families additional inspiration for a spirit of poverty when he writes, “I beg you out of great love, to use with discernment the alms the Lord gives you” (CtExh 4). Although caretakers work hard to earn their income, families will grow spiritually from viewing their resources as alms received from the Lord; for by possessing nothing they will more readily enjoy everything. Adopting this Franciscan perspective fortifies their detachment from temporal goods and leads to a harvest of gratitude for God’s abundant blessings. Embracing poverty with the conviction and spirit of Francis involves profound humility and faith in God. It “recognizes the great truth: Everything is from God.”<sup>21</sup>

The “humility of the Incarnation” thoroughly occupied Francis’s memory and attention, as he sought to emulate it (1C 84). Christ’s absolute poverty in the Incarnation is an aspect of His *kenosis* and self-abasement.<sup>22</sup> For although “he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God something to be grasped,” rather, “he emptied himself ... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6,7-8 *NAB*). Jesus abandoned himself into the loving hands of his Father and “for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9).

Humbled by this great truth, Francis recognized his own emptiness before the Creator and placed himself in the constant care of God, whom he knew would fill his every need. His testament to childlike faith in God was exemplified at the Chapter of Mats, where he said,

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<sup>21</sup> Foley, 73.

<sup>22</sup> Cantalamessa, 36.



I recommend to you above all, nay, I strictly command you, not to be anxious about what concerns your food, clothing, or lodging; for Jesus Christ has bound Himself to provide both you and me with all that is necessary, if on our part we devote ourselves faithfully to His love and service.

At this same meeting St. Dominic expressed concerns about Francis's charge and doubted that God would simply provide for all of their needs. A short while later they were flooded with people from Umbria bringing enough food to feed the five thousand lesser brothers who were gathered together.<sup>23</sup> By his example and prayers, the seraphic father bequeathed to his spiritual progeny an abiding trust in divine providence.

Parents are invited to embrace the spiritual virtues of poverty with comparable humility and faith. "What God appreciates in the poor is not so much what they have, but rather what they do not have: the pride of the self-sufficient who are closed in on themselves."<sup>24</sup> Once liberated from the illusions of self-sufficiency, caretakers will prayerfully entrust God with providing for the material and spiritual needs of their family. All the moments of family life "should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven."<sup>25</sup> By expressing childlike confidence in God's providence during family prayers, by remaining detached from earthly possessions, and by actively re-ordering the family's time and priorities, the children will hear a prophetic proclamation in the home: God is a faithful Father, we are his children, and the riches of God are far greater than the wealth of the world. This school of humility, led by the example of parents, will also teach the youth to deny themselves and to bear poverty and want with patience. Over-time they will develop "the necessary strength to brave the storms of life, and ... be prepared to endure cheerfully all la-

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<sup>23</sup> Habig, 304.

<sup>24</sup> Cantalamessa, 98.

<sup>25</sup> John Paul II, no. 59.

bor and sacrifice for the good of our neighbor and the honor of God.”<sup>26</sup>

## SERVING CHRIST IN OTHERS

Serving others was an essential practice in Francis’s incarnational approach to Christian life. Devoted to the Christ child he became “his holy servant” (1C 86). With vigilance and zeal, his daily life consisted of “an ongoing search for the ‘lepers’ and ‘enemies’ of life and, having found them, to go among them, to show mercy to them, to see them as friends, and to offer one’s very being to them.”<sup>27</sup> Francis expressed that these encounters offered him such an intense “sweetness of soul and body” (Test 3) that even in his final days he still possessed a “desire to work,” and he “earnestly desire[d]” the same for his brothers (Test 20).

By serving others Francis imitated Christ’s service. He tells the ministers and servants, “remember what the Lord says: I have *not come to be served, but to serve*” (ER IX, 6). This message is reiterated later in the Rule: “Let them love one another, as the Lord says: *This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you*” (ER XI, 5). In contrast to the monastic tradition that preceded him, Francis’s spirituality directed his followers to engage in a very active form of loving, expressed “*by their deeds*” (ER XI, 5). He admonishes his community, “We must ... deny ourselves and place our bodies under the yoke of servitude” (2LtF 40). Leading by example, he was a “servant” to them all (Test 41).

Indebted to the Incarnation, servitude possessed invaluable spiritual significance for Francis. Whether serving brothers, enemies, or lepers—in sum, “every human creature”—it was done “for God’s sake” (2LtF 47). He saw Christ in every person he encountered and sought to “serve him with great

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<sup>26</sup> Habig, 44.

<sup>27</sup> Regis J. Armstrong, “If My Words Remain in You ...’ Foundations of the Evangelical Life,” in *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents*, ed. J.M. Hammond (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 71.

humility” (Ctc 14). The words of Christ, which the Church now summarizes as the corporal works of mercy, remained in the forefront of his mind:

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me...whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me (Matt 25:35-40).

Francis’s commitment to service invites families to discover a rich spiritual significance resonating within the constant activity of family life. Appropriately,

The Gospel life is to love people—not ‘people’ in general, but *these* people, the ones we meet, the ones we live with or work with, the ones who may cause us difficulty or pain, as well as the ones who bring us joy.<sup>28</sup>

Placing themselves at the service of life, spouses become the embodiment of Christ’s love—the *imago Dei*—for each other and for their children. The corporal works of mercy are the quotidian routines of family life: preparing meals; welcoming each other’s presence at any moment; working in society in order to provide clothing and shelter for those at home; caring for children in illness and repeatedly assuaging their bumps and bruises; preserving each other from the prison of isolation through an intimate communion of familial love. With a Franciscan spirit children can be uniquely cared for as “these least ... of mine” that Jesus mentions. Borrowing from Bonaventure’s statement, “Every creature is a word of God, because it speaks of God,”<sup>29</sup> we can infer children are each a word of God, because in their own way they share the Good News and radiate the joy of the Lord. Children are the

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<sup>28</sup> Foley, 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, in *Opera Omnia* (Quaracchi: Patres Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882-1902), VI, 16, quoted in Short, 118.

very presence of the Babe of Bethlehem waiting to be embraced, nurtured, and adored.

The spiritual significance of parental responsibilities cannot be understated when we recognize the Lord entrusts to parents “the growth of a child, a brother or sister of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, a member of the Church.”<sup>30</sup> In God’s plan for family life parents are the first educators of their children. They bear the responsibility of cultivating virtue in their offspring and, through the witness of their lives, they become “the first heralds of the Gospel for their children.”<sup>31</sup> Becoming overwhelmed by all the demands and personal sacrifice that children require is commonplace—and maybe there are few opportunities to remedy the exhaustion of family life—but the honest work of childrearing becomes a “sweetness of soul and body” when carried out “for God’s sake.”

The Franciscan School, which has for centuries gleaned wisdom from the Incarnation, offers a profound invitation and challenge to Christian families today. Family spirituality does not have to feel stagnant or suffer from a poverty of prayer time and a multitude of demands. Instead, families can place themselves under the tutelage of St. Francis, and journey the well-trodden footsteps of a saint who embraced the poverty of Christ and encountered him in all moments of life. The example of parents who adopt a simple and poor lifestyle will help “recapture the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values,”<sup>32</sup> while cultivating foundational virtues of humility and childlike faith in God. Regularly spending time together as a family—while learning to adore, listen to, and serve Christ in each other—will lead to a vibrant family spirituality. When family members truly encounter Christ in each other, they will no longer grow discouraged by the physical exhaustion that comes with family life; instead they will rejoice as they become spiritually energized through their mutual service to each other. Busy families will discover that Christ is not hiding from them in the contemplative

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<sup>30</sup> John Paul II, no. 39.

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, no. 39.

<sup>32</sup> John Paul II, no. 8.

Christopher Stravitsch

ambience of silent adoration; rather, He permeates the very structure of family life—they remain always in His presence. As families pray to love the Incarnation with the same zeal as Francis, Christ will help them to fulfill their Christian mission of being formed into a community of life and love.



**PETER OF JOHN OLIVI'S  
COMMENTARY ON LUKE 2:42-51:  
JESUS' GETTING HIMSELF LOST IN THE TEMPLE**

**ROBERT J. KARRIS, O.F.M.**

**INTRODUCTION**

Peter of John Olivi (1248-1298) wrote his commentary on Luke between 1280 and 1295. His comments were probably addressed to friar students in one of the Order's study houses. If readers have at hand St. Bonaventure's commentary on this same passage, they will note how different Peter of John Olivi's commentary is from that of his master.<sup>1</sup> In his interpretation of what has been traditionally called "The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple," Peter of John Olivi employs an argumentative style. First he proposes that Christ did not act in a fitting and decent way and gives arguments for this proposition. Second he proposes that Christ's mother acted in an unfitting and unwise manner and gives arguments for this proposition. In what follows Peter of John Olivi refutes first the arguments that Christ acted irreverently, and then second he torpedoes the arguments that Christ's mother acted irresponsibly. For this publication I have eliminated many of the expansive paragraphs that Peter of John Olivi devotes to demolishing the argument that Christ acted in an unfitting manner.

While I was translating and mulling over Peter of John Olivi's commentary on what I would call in contemporary English "Christ's Getting Himself Lost," I was reading Mary

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<sup>1</sup> See *St. Bonaventure's Commentary on the Gospel of Luke Chapters 1-8*, Introduction, Translation and Notes by Robert J. Karris, WSB VIII/1 (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2001), 209-20.

Dzon's "Boys Will Be Boys: The Physiology of Childhood and the Apocryphal Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages."<sup>2</sup> She reminds us that the apocryphal infancy gospels were very popular during the Middle Ages. Some of these apocryphal gospels presented the Christ Child as a little God who performed miracles of playfulness and of revenge. In medieval culture there was also a movement to evaluate children's conduct by means of children's physiology and not in moral terms. As Dzon writes: "Rather than call attention to children's virtues and negative tendencies in a moralistic way, as clerics had been doing for centuries, the scientific writers of the high and later Middle Ages fostered a neutral valuation of children's behavior by their expositions of children's physiology."<sup>3</sup> As I read Peter of John Olivi's comments on the behavior of the twelve-year Christ Child, I see him vacillating between calling the twelve-year Jesus divine and emphasizing his development as a child. Peter of John Olivi's unique commentary on Luke 2:42-51 seems to me to have been influenced by the apocryphal infancy gospels as he, too, wants to figure out why the child Jesus and his mother acted the way they did and provides motivations and reasons for their actions.

Those who are looking for meditation guides for the Feast of the Holy Family will find Peter of John Olivi's comments on the Holy Family provocative and inspiring. I especially appreciated his interpretation of Luke 2:51: Mary ponders everything that Jesus, the boy and man, does and says.

#### **LUKE 2:42-51: CHRIST'S WITHDRAWAL FROM HIS PARENTS<sup>4</sup>**

1) Two questions must be raised in order to arrive at a clear understanding of this passage. The first is whether

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<sup>2</sup> See *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Volume 42, No. 1 (2011), 179-226.

<sup>3</sup> See *Viator*, 218.

<sup>4</sup> See *Lectura super Lucam et Lectura super Marcum*, ed. Fortunato Iozzelli, *Collectio Oliviana V* (Grottaferrata [Rome]: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 2010), 275-93.



Christ acted in a fitting and decent way, for it seems that he did not. First of all, consider these observations. He absented himself from his mother who had no way of anticipating such action. Further he knew that she would never say No to any good work or endeavor he engaged in. Moreover, he knew that his action would cause her the greatest sorrow and suffering. Taking all these considerations into account, it seems that he treated her with disrespect and even irreverence. Also he gave other boys the example of doing many things capriciously and without consultation with their parents. Second of all, one would expect that at least until one was fourteen years of age one was under the power of one's father. This was the common expectation and is reflected in the practice that solemn promises made by boys under fourteen were invalid without their father's consent. Third, he abandoned a holier association for one that was less holy. Such an action is neither wise nor perfect. Fourth, he seems to have answered his mother irreverently and unwisely. He was irreverent when he said: "How is it that you were searching for me?" He answered unwisely because he seemed to have given greater weight to the material Temple, the teachers, and the priests therein as "the things that pertain to God the Father" than to his mother, Joseph, and Nazareth, where he was conceived, and to the simple people of his hometown. Otherwise why had it been said that he had remained in the Temple "because he had to be about his Father's business"? Furthermore, how does he reasonably satisfy the complaint of his mother, namely, why had he remained behind without her knowledge and caused her sorrow when he could have remained behind with her knowledge and consent? Wherefore, it seems that his answer is imprudent or irrational.

2) The second question to be raised is whether the mother of Christ did what she did and said what she said with the fitting and abundant wisdom that is supposed and must be supposed in the mother of God. Now it seems that she did not. First of all, she was negligent, lacking in dedication, and let down her guard in caring for Christ and making sure that she always had him in her sight. Second, her first search

for him was conducted among earthly relatives and even acquaintances rather than among spiritual people and in the most sacred places in this life. Third, she was sorrowful over his absence. Yet she knew that this absence was beneficial to Christ, and she had to believe and know that Christ could in no way be harmed against his will. Fourth, she spoke so boldly and complained to him when she said: "Son, why have you acted in such a way to us?" Fifth, in a very open manner and in front of the teachers of the law she called Joseph the father of Jesus: "Behold, your father." By doing this she seems to have given a reason or the occasion for the erroneous view that Christ was truly a son of Joseph's flesh and also that the Virgin was violated by him. Sixth, she did not understand Christ when he said: "Did you not know?" etc. as if she did not know that God was his Father and that "he had to be about his Father's business." But no believer would be ignorant of this. Seventh, she dared to command Christ to do something or to rear him as submissive to her.

### ***Answers to objections that Christ acted irreverently***

3) With regard to the initial complaint against Christ, we are bound to believe without a doubt that Christ did everything with the utmost reverence and prudence. This is especially true concerning those things which according to external appearances seem wrong. The reason is that in such matters we have very strongly brought our mind and understanding into captivity to him.<sup>5</sup> In these matters we believe that he acted for the best and acted most wisely even though such actions seem to be evil or irreverent or indiscreet. A person may bring himself more easily to believe this concerning things where the deeds cry out most clearly that they were performed for the best and in the most wise way. Furthermore, in those matters which appear in a contrary light Christ's profound wisdom lies hidden. This wisdom cannot be found unless this most profound wisdom is acknowledged

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<sup>5</sup> Peter of John Olivi seems to have in mind 2 Cor 10:5: "Yes, of every lofty thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every mind into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

as hidden, for this is the first door for finding it, inquiring after it, and desiring to search for it ...

4) From what has been mentioned so far there is a sufficient answer to the other objections.<sup>6</sup> With regard to the objection that he gave an example to children to do many things without consulting their parents, it has to be said instead that he gave them the example of approaching divine matters in a very deliberate and careful manner. In this way he avoided the counsel of carnal friends and listened docilely and with an inquisitive mind to the advice of the spiritual teachers and principally sought counsel from God in his Temple by means of devout prayers. Again, the certain counsels or precepts solemnly given by God and acknowledged by the people of God are not to be regarded as uncertain and to require some counsel as if they were doubtful. Of course, recourse to the erudition of the spiritual teachers is to be sought for their individual and explicit interpretation. Christ taught all this in the aforementioned example.

5) To the next objection it has to be said that although according to common law one should wait until one's fourteenth year to make permanent solemn promises, this is not the practice with other beginnings of divine service.<sup>7</sup> Nor is it the case when constancy and discretion supplement age, and someone is led by the private law of the Holy Spirit. Take the example of John, who while still a boy was led into the desert to enthusiastically proclaim and to irrevocably observe the evangelical state.<sup>8</sup> Although children's solemn promises that pertain to domestic service and the discipline connected with it can be broken by their fathers, this is not the case with the solemn promise to enter the religious state at the proper time. That is, unless there were present such great levity and immaturity that would make such a promise invalid or null and void. At other times although the father might impede the making of a solemn promise for a time, he cannot stop it

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<sup>6</sup> See n. 1 above.

<sup>7</sup> See Gratian, *Decretum*, pars II, causa 26, q. 5, c. 15 (ed. Friedberg, *Corpus*, I, 887).

<sup>8</sup> See Luke 1:80.

in an absolute sense. According to some he may be unable to impede the making of a solemn promise made according to a law that is solely divine, that is, where through clear signs it is evident that the boy has sufficient constancy and prudence to make such promises.

6) Relative to the next objection that maintains that although the company of the Virgin was actually holier than that of the teachers, that was not so evident to all, at least with regard to the company she provided for him, which was easily believed to come from natural and carnal affection. Besides, he was not associating with the teachers in their daily lives, but was only with them to listen to them and to learn from them.

7) With respect to the objection about the material place of the Temple, it has to be said that “my Father’s business” refers principally to the spiritual worship of the Father. At that time and in that Temple and in its concrete worship the Father seemed to be more sensibly and generally present than in living in another place together with his mother, no matter how holy. With regard to his response to his mother, it has to be said that his response was excellent in every way. If you ask why he did what he did without his mother’s knowledge, he, on the contrary, answers that she never had to be unknowing nor to presume otherwise than “he had to be about his Father’s business.” He teaches her in the same answer that his remaining in the Temple, without her knowledge, pertains to “his Father’s business,” since he plainly wants to intimate that everything that he did and his way of doing it was for the glory and honor of his Father.

***Answers to objections that Christ’s mother acted in an unfitting manner***

8) Relative to the second question that Christ’s mother did not respond with fitting and abundant wisdom, it is easy to answer those objections. In their resolution it will be shown that the mother of Christ conducted herself in a most fitting way. So with regard to the first objection it

has to be said that although mentally it should always be possible to be supported by a presence in Christ, this was not always possible according to sense perception. There are two reasons. First it was to avoid the evil judgments of others. Second sense perceptions of this kind are not of so great an excellence, especially in this life, that one should always find leisure for them. Thus, even Christ, speaking of the withdrawal of his bodily presence, said to the Apostles: "It is expedient for you that I depart."<sup>9</sup> According to Augustine the reason for this is that the Apostles' material and sensible holding on to the corporal presence of Christ would from that time onward impede their independence of the senses and their upward withdrawal to the spiritual majesty of Christ.<sup>10</sup> Thus he laid down the norm: "For if I do not depart, the Paraclete will not come to you."<sup>11</sup> The reason for this was that in this life it is necessary that external senses often move from one object to another and often withdraw from actions. This might happen because of sleep that is necessary for this life or because of various types of meditation and contemplation or because of conformity to the customs and fitting societal practices of peoples and regions. So the Glossa observes: "It was a custom for the Jews in going to the festivals and also in returning from them that the men were by themselves and the women journeyed by themselves. Children could journey with either parent, and so Mary and Joseph thought that

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<sup>9</sup> See John 16:7a.

<sup>10</sup> See Tractate 94 n. 4 on John's Gospel in *Sancti Aurelii Augustini In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus CXXIV*, ed. Radbodys Willems, CCSL xxxvi (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 563. See also *St. Augustine Tractates on the Gospel of John 55-111*, trans. John W. Rettig, FC 90 (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1994), 183: "For indeed, not yet seeing internally the spiritual comfort that they were going to possess through the Holy Spirit, they were afraid of losing that which they saw externally in Christ.... He knew what was more expedient for them because the internal vision is itself, of course, better, whereby the Holy Spirit was going to comfort them, not by thrusting a human body before the bodies of those who were looking, but by infusing himself into the hearts of those who were believing."

<sup>11</sup> See John 16:7b.

the boy Jesus, whom each knew was not with them, was returning with the other parent.”<sup>12</sup>

9) Besides, it was fitting for Jesus, who heretofore had traveled together with his parents, to travel freely without either parent, as and when it pleased him. Otherwise, if the boy Jesus always had to be accompanied as he traveled, that could sometimes smack as an immoderate restraint on him, especially on the part of his mother. Therefore, the words “thinking that he was in the caravan” can be understood in a general sense of the entire caravan of those returning from Jerusalem, since given that Joseph and Mary were traveling together, they could think that Jesus was somewhere among the people returning from Jerusalem.

10) Secondly, it has to be said that it was reasonable for his mother to first search for him among their relatives and acquaintances. There are various reasons for her action. His parents supposed that Jesus had returned and was in the caravan and would most probably, out of familiarity, have turned to his relatives and acquaintances rather than to others. He was first to be sought in places close by because they could get there quickly and more easily. If he was not found there, they had to return to find him in places they had earlier omitted to search. Relatives and acquaintances were earlier asked if they knew where he was and whether they had seen him returning and going to another location. Thus it was more credible that they would know this than others since others at that time did not know Jesus nor was Jesus at that time accustomed to talk with others as he was with his relatives and acquaintances. Also it must not be that Jesus’ and his parents’ acquaintances were less spiritual than the rest. Rather it is to be believed that they would only have developed great familiarity with holy and simple people and that these people through their familiarity with Christ and his parents would have developed some spiritual relationship. So the outcome of all this is that the Virgin followed the general order of reason which in its investigations

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<sup>12</sup> See Glossa on Luke 2:43 (ed. Princeps, IV, 148), taken from Bede, CCSL 120, 72.

proceeds orderly from the known to the unknown, from prior things to later things, from things that are near to those that are faraway, from connatural things to supernatural things, from the senses to the intellect, and from inferior things to supreme things.

11) Thirdly, it should be said that the Virgin was not sorrowful about Christ's absence as if she were doubting whether his humanity was always best controlled by his deity and the entire Trinity. Nevertheless, three reasons caused her to grieve deeply. First it was reasonable that she should be astonished that, with her not knowing a thing, he had absented himself from her in this manner. As she searched out the reasons for this she could perhaps question whether Christ had done this because of some fault or failure on her part. Although she was not conscious of any sin on her part and although, from the time she had conceived Christ, she had been made entirely sinless, it was not necessary that this would have been certainly revealed to her before this time. Rather it could have been hidden from her for her greater merit and for her greater humbling and proving. While many things are certain to the mind, nevertheless they are not so indubitable to a person that some unusual event could not cause momentary alarm.

12) The second reason for her grief is that as she continued in her search for the alarming causes of his absence, she could be perplexed and wonder whether he, like Elijah, had disappeared from them until a time that pleased him and was unknown to his mother.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps, he was going to die for us in his adolescent state and in the absence of his mother and among peoples unknown to his mother. Perhaps, there were many other doubts similar to these that increased the grief of his mother.

13) The third reason for her grief is that the power of profound love more often follows from the experience of the senses than from the cold judgment of reason. It is certain

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<sup>13</sup> See 2 Kings 2:11-12 and its account of Elijah being taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot.



that she experienced in her senses the destitution caused by the loss of the comfort of her son. Again on a sense level she knew that Christ according to the flesh and in his infant stage could suffer many needs and bodily discomforts. For this reason both she and Joseph feared that he would be persecuted and killed by Herod and Archelaus, Herod's son, as is clear in what Matthew says.<sup>14</sup> Love sensed experientially in the mother's inner being was transfigured by heartfelt grief in two ways. First it was as if she were suffering with her son. Second she was suffering more with her most beloved child now that he was far away.

14) With regard to the fourth objection it has to be said that just as she knew without any presumption that he was her son, so she could also say that the language of the heart is stronger than mere words. Indeed, words have no meaning unless they stem from the heart. Her complaint and what followed were not made out of indignation and were not a rebuke of Christ's reprehensible behavior. Rather they came from astonishment and from the bold search for the secret reason behind this great event which she had heretofore not experienced. It also has to be understood that his mother, according to external appearances, had not said this in an arrogant or impatient manner, but rather in a most sorrowful, grieving, and compassionate manner. Note here the authority and faithful care of the mother towards Christ, for it seems that Joseph did not dare to address Christ in this way. Only his mother did.

15) With regard to the fifth objection it should be said that the Virgin acted most reverently towards Joseph by calling him the father of Christ. This was especially true in this case since Joseph truly loved him and brought him up as a father would. Also he endured many labors and fears to guard the one he loved. Further he had suffered great sorrow on his account and for him, especially in this instance. In addition Christ had been born by way of a sign during Joseph's marriage in such a way that, although he was not born from his carnal seed, he had truly accepted him from his wife and

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<sup>14</sup> See Matt 2:13-23.



into his home as a son given to him from God and subject to his paternal care. Because of these same reasons, for which God wanted him from the beginning to be always believed to be the father of Christ, the Virgin had to firmly and unabashedly affirm this before Joseph and the teachers of the people of God and do so solemnly in God's Temple. There was no reason for error from this, as God did not cause Christ to be born of a married woman as an afterthought. God did this as beneficial for Christ's elect and his honor and for faith in the virginal conception and birth which faith was to be revealed under fitting conditions and at the proper time. Nevertheless, this occurred justly and fittingly for the blinding of the reprobates and of those who were going to perish.<sup>15</sup>

16) And note how fittingly and respectfully Christ's mother says Joseph's name first, thereby teaching that husbands should be honored by wives and fathers by mothers and that it was the Virgin's general practice to humbly submit herself to all and would prefer everyone, no matter how lowly, to herself.

17) Relative to the sixth objection it must be said that the clause, "and they did not understand," can be understood to refer solely to Joseph, as it is the custom of Scripture to use the plural for the singular. It might be understood of either Joseph or Mary. They would not have had the best grasp that God was Christ's Father and that necessarily and consubstantially he was always in his Father and that even he, in as far as was human, could not in any way offend God his Father or even for a moment cease from the supreme worship and service of God the Father.

18) Or in as far as this can be understood also for the Virgin, a triple explanation is possible. First is that she was astonished and amazed and did not understand, that is, at that time she did not really comprehend what Christ meant to signify by "his Father's business." But later on when she

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<sup>15</sup> Peter of John Olivi seems to have in mind 2 Cor 4:4: "In their case the god of this world has blinded their unbelieving minds so that they should not see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

came to herself, she more fully comprehended his meaning. That is why the text adds that “she kept all these words carefully in her heart.”<sup>16</sup>

19) Second it can be understood that she did not have a deep understanding at that time why he called remaining in that material Temple to be “about his Father’s business” rather than to return home with her. Also she did not understand why what he had done pertained to “being about his Father’s business” and was done in her absence and without her knowledge rather than with her knowing about it and accompanying him and remaining with him in the Temple. For it was not against the Father to have said to his mother: let us remain here in the Temple together or you return home and I will remain for a time or always. So it could be that at that time she did not understand how at that moment, without her knowledge, he had to remain in the Temple for the instruction of others and to present a new trial for his mother and her elevation to a certain measure of divine love. He also remained so that he might more visibly show through external actions that he was a worshipper of God the Father and that now, more so than when he was an infant, he had to demonstrate externally through manifest works the dedication he had to the worship and Temple of God the Father. Thus when he said: “I must be,” it can also be understood to mean “now.” And “the business of my Father” can be understood as the place specially dedicated to divine worship and the study of spiritual wisdom. Exterior worship and discipline are most solemnly and most communally celebrated in God’s Temple or in the synagogues.

20) Third the sense can be that although she understood all these things in a complete way in proportion to her perfection, she did not understand their total, immense, and complete wisdom as Christ did. But if you respond that by the same token this could be said of any word of Christ, it is certain that she, even now blessed, did not comprehend the total infinity of the meaning which Christ had in his least

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<sup>16</sup> This citation is actually from Luke 2:19, a passage parallel to Luke 2:51.

word or deed. It has to be said that this can be maintained especially about those words that clearly show that they include the profound and arcane wisdom of Christ. Whence, the Evangelist, in saying that Joseph and his mother “did not understand the word,” wanted to intimate that this word contained the ineffable mysteries of divine wisdom. It referred especially to that separate and incomprehensible existence of the Son in the Father, according to which he lives in inaccessible light<sup>17</sup> and draws up every contemplative mind in an ecstatic manner. This cannot be seen by them except in that mystical darkness that Moses experienced on the top of the mountain, that is, through privation of all finitude and through superabundance.<sup>18</sup> Thus the parents of Christ and especially his mother are meant to have been led through the aforementioned trial and the subsequent words of Christ to a certain height of contemplation of which they had heretofore no experience. I do not intend by this that their contemplative life now grew in an intense manner, but only that their contemplative life now grew in an explicit or specific and experiential manner as I showed earlier.<sup>19</sup>

21) Fourth, in line with this third meaning a fourth can be provided, that is, they did not understand because of their limited ability as Proverbs 30:1-2 states: “The vision of which the man spoke, a man who was with God, and was comforted by God who was abiding with him. He said: I am the most stupid of men,” etc. Job 42:3 says: “Therefore, I have spoken unwisely and said things that were exceedingly beyond my knowledge.” About this passage Gregory in the last chapter of his *Moralia in Job* observes:

All human wisdom ... compared to divine wisdom, is stupidity.... Therefore, Blessed Job ... believed that he was speaking wisely until he heard the words of

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<sup>17</sup> See 1 Tim 6:16.

<sup>18</sup> See Ex 19:20; 24:12-18; 34:1-4. See also Peter of John Olivi’s commentary on Cant 3:6 in *Expositio in Canticum*, 180. See also Peter of John Olivi’s *Commentary on Acts* 1:9 in Flood, 29.

<sup>19</sup> See Peter of John Olivi’s comments on Luke 2:40 above in *Lectura super Lucam*, 273-74.

superior wisdom. In comparison with that all our knowledge is stupid.... And so in this matter he most wisely knew that he was unwise. That is why Abram, in speaking with the Lord, said that he ... 'was dust and ashes.'<sup>20</sup> And Moses, although he was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and from that background heard the Lord speaking, said ... 'I have the greatest impediment and slowness of tongue.'<sup>21</sup> And Isaiah, after he had seen God 'seated upon a high ... throne' and had heard 'the seraphim' near him crying out: 'Holy, holy, holy' said: 'Woe is me, because I have been silent, because I am a man of unclean lips...'<sup>22</sup> And when Jeremiah heard the divine words, he spoke words that he did not know he was capable of: 'Ah, ah, ah, Lord God. Behold, I don't know how to speak.'<sup>23</sup> And Ezekiel said about the four animals that 'when a voice came from above the firmament ... they stood and let down their wings'<sup>24</sup> since a wing is the contemplations of the saints who are designated by the four animals. When [the saints] hear the internal voice of supernal wisdom as if putting down the wings used for flying, they know that they are less able to contemplate the very depth of truth.... And the more they make progress in hearing and contemplating the utterances of God, the more they despise the things that are or are nothing and know that they are next to nothing.<sup>25</sup>

22) Relative to the seventh objection it should be said that his mother in looking after and directing Christ was obedient to him and to his Father. And so there was no presumption

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<sup>20</sup> See Gen 18:27 and Abraham's bargaining with God over the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrha.

<sup>21</sup> See Ex 4:10.

<sup>22</sup> See Isa 6:1-3, 5.

<sup>23</sup> See Jer 1:6.

<sup>24</sup> See Ez 1:25.

<sup>25</sup> See Book 35, ch. 42, 3 of *S. Gregorii Magni Moralia in Iob Libri XXIII-XXXV*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CCSL cxliiib (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), 1774-76. Peter of John Olivi's abbreviation of Gregory is faithful.

there, but rather humble obedience and conformity of will to Christ. It was fitting that her maternal authority was accepted by God the Father and his Only-Begotten. Thus, just as Christ wanted to be born from her, he subjected himself to her as his mother and gave her authority to take care of and direct him.

23) This is said in a special way here for two reasons. First because Christ was beginning to use his reason more in governing his external sense actions, for during his infancy he had virtually not used it to govern his external senses and actions. So Christ's actions of being obediently subject to and obeying his mother at that time are not to be ascribed to his virtue or use of reason. The second reason is to show that both his mother and Joseph, through the aforementioned trial of grieving and searching, had a new reason for gaining further merit and merited that Christ obey and be subject to them as a son to his mother and father. And again, from this it should be taught that the more we endure the greatest difficulties for the love of God or another one of God's virtues, the more after our triumph we will possess God and his virtues under the control of our faculties and do so in a more victorious and full way.

24) Luke 2:51: "And his mother kept," etc. The questions are: Why does Luke narrate this twice<sup>26</sup> and why in only these two places and why doesn't he mention it later when he deals with the solemn words of Christ's preaching? It should be said that it was sufficient for him to recall this twice to intimate that she always and everywhere attended most carefully to all the words and deeds of Christ, retained them, pondered their meaning, and most penetratingly considered all their intellectual and divine aspects. But this was especially mentioned with regard to Christ's infancy and boyhood to show that if she pondered his words then, how much more did she ponder them when he was fully grown and began to teach the world in a magisterial way and to establish and publicly proclaim the laws of the Christian state of life. Further and

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<sup>26</sup> See also Luke 2:19: "But Mary kept in mind all these things, pondering them in her heart."

seen from another aspect, how much more miraculous are the wise words and deeds of an infant than those of a man of high rank or an elder.

25) Again, keep two things in mind: first with regard to infancy; second with respect to boyhood and adolescence. First with regard to the words spoken by the infant Christ. Second with respect to the words that he spoke when he was already a boy of twelve years of age. Now “word” means not only words, but also every deed that embodies a word or message. From these considerations it is clear why Luke does not use this expression later when he treats the solemn and magisterial teaching of Christ. The reason is that from what has already been said such an action on the part of Christ’s mother is entirely credible and has to be presupposed. Moreover it would be trivial and also almost ridiculous to insert in those places that the mother of Christ kept those solemn and magisterial words of Christ and pondered their meaning, for it would be amazing if she were not already doing this.

## LIVING WHAT YOU SAY

**KAREN ZIELINSKI, O.S.F.**

The day before her total knee replacement surgery, one of my sisters, Sister Rosalma, ran the popcorn machine for our Sisters/Associates' film festival. I told her she didn't have to since her surgery was the following day, but she was there because she said she would do it. Another Sister, Sharon Havelak, always puts up our outdoor Peace Prayer signs. Sister Maria Pacelli attends *everything!* These faithful women live the integrity of their word. If they say they will attend or help somewhere, they will. They are an example to me of being faithful to their words. And they sign up and give their word right away.

Many times, people do not commit to attending a lecture or helping at a fundraiser for various reasons. A friend of mine says, "I do not know how I will feel that day, so I do not put my name on a sign-up sheet."

Others indirectly say they wait until the last minute to sign up because they might get a "better event" to attend!

I recall some pre-meeting materials that my Congregation passed out before our Chapter this summer. One of the articles explained that the best preparation for a meeting was to "do your homework and to show up." At first I chuckled at that statement, but gradually, I saw it as very profound.

It made me examine my own participation at events. I try to attend and participate in social and religious events as much as I can, but I often do not sign up or give my word that I will help until the week or day before the event. I know this can be difficult for those who are planning the event and

need to know how many chairs to set up, programs to run off, or cookies to bake for the social.

It is a gift of self to plan, help at or attend an event. It calls us to be generous and give, and it is a commitment of self and time.

So, because of the faithful words of Sisters Rosalma, Sharon Havelak and Maria Pacelli, I am trying to live out my word as they do: committing to an invitation as soon as I can, and “showing up” for it.

I also have the example of Francis of Assisi to inspire me, too.

(Francis) found it easier to do what is perfect than to talk about it; so he was constantly active in showing his zeal and dedication in deeds, not in words, because words do not do what is good, they only point to it (1C 93).

You have my word on it.





## REVIEW

German scholars interested in Franciscan history and in particular the history of Clare of Assisi have come up big for the years 2011 and 2012. In 2011 they have republished a large collection of recent studies on Clare of Assisi and added thereto several new ones, including a fresh, novel, and surprisingly successful approach to Clare's history. And for 2012, they promise a collection of source material on the history, newly translated and annotated.

Martina Kreidler-Kos took on the task of translating the Canonization Protocol (PC) into German for the 2012 publication. As she did so, she gathered information as well as faced questions that went beyond what fit into the introduction and footnotes of her translation. For, while translating, she had fifteen women, finely contextualized, speaking about their daily lives with the woman to be canonized. In sum, she opened herself to the meaning and implications of their accounts. Kreidler-Kos ended up with a monograph that could justly have borne the title "My Forty Years with Clare and Her Sisters." Instead she entitled it *Von eigenem Wohlklang*. I would have given it the title "The Solace of Her Voice." Whatever the title, it was my first encounter with Clare of Assisi, whom I have always looked on, with proper reverence and not much enthusiasm, from a scholarly distance. I was surprised by the success of Dr. Kreidler-Kos's novel approach. I propose we look at her monograph more in detail, after familiarizing ourselves with the whole book, of which the monograph is one substantial (439-505) chapter.

The book is edited by Bernd Schmies for the Fachstelle Franziskanische Forschung in Muenster, Germany. The center coordinates study on Franciscan history in Germany and

especially for the German O.F.M.s and Capuchins. One may google the Fachstelle for further information. The book bears the title *Klara von Assisi* with a longer subtitle that evokes Clare's poverty and relational ease. It is a large book of 588 pages, Volume 51 in the series *Franziskanische Forschungen*. The series arose around the review *Franziskanische Studien* (begun in 1915) and has brought out volumes good and, well, no longer very useful. As Volume 34 (1989), the series published Schlageter's edition of Peter of John Olivi's treatise on Franciscan poverty, a book that has not yet received the attention it deserves; and as Volume 50 (2009) Bieger's study on the Duns Scotus Academy in Moenchengladbach, a close and critical look at Franciscan study in recent times, a book too big and seemingly too local to circulate widely. *Klara von Assisi* brings the series new luster.

The book *Klara von Assisi* recommends itself both by the studies themselves, old (15) and new (6), as well as by the many references to the latest literature on Clare of Assisi's history and that of San Damiano. It's drenched in interest and knowledge about Clare and her sisters. The republished articles are not that old, for they first appeared between 2000 and 2008; they belong to the present scholarly scene. Of special interest and usefulness is Kreidler-Kos and Kuster's summary of the chronology of Clare's life (287-326) as implicit and explicit in what we presently know about her history. The authors start with Hardick's chronology in 1953, which reigned for a good spell, and explain how then Boccali's proposals of 2003, incidental to his work on the PC, shred Hardick's authority on the question. (Giovanni Boccali is also singled out later in the book, in the review of new work on Clare and San Damiano in Italy.) The new chronology, first published in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* in 2006, has already been translated into Spanish and Flemish. The historian has to work with some sense of sequence when examining Clare's course and the fate of San Damiano, and this is the chronology at present up for discussion.

As for Martina Kreidler-Kos's abundant notes to her translation of the initial protocol to Clare of Assisi's canonization, the author explains why then a new translation (E. Grau

translated it in 1989) and what the exercise taught her about its historical quality. She treads carefully and respectfully as she leaves Grau's translation behind, but she has new data to work with and will translate into the religious language of today. As for the text to translate, it has a story that raises a basic question about its worth. For the text entered the world of communication in Latin. A few months after the death of Clare in August, 1253, in November of that year, Bishop Accorombani of Spoleto arrived at San Damiano with his staff to hear fifteen of the sisters there answer his catalog of questions. He was initiating the canonization process. His clerk took down the answers. And how did the women fare in the Latin of some clerical clerk? 250 years later his report was translated into an Umbrian Italian by a learned woman of Perugia, Sister Battista Alfani. Her return of the accounts given by the sisters in November 1253 into what was, for her c. 1500, Italian was brought to light in the late 1920s. That is the text which Kreidler-Kos translates into German. (For an English translation, see *The Lady*, 2006, the fourth volume in the *Early Documents* series.) Do the individual witnesses to Clare's life survive bouncing about the centuries in different languages? Yes, declares Kreidler-Kos, and she offers the proof in her monograph. She has made a solid case. It convinces me. She has swept aside the suspicion that the protocol is not what it says it is.

After she explains that the fifteen sisters chosen to answer know what is transpiring, know that they are talking about Clare as candidate for canonization, Kreidler-Kos sorts the responses out in a way that allows her to speak to four questions of her own. One, how do the sisters want people to see their community? Two, what do their words tell us about what is going on within the community? Three, can we individualize the respondents? Kreidler-Kos etches the profile of a few of the sisters, and offers her words as a first effort to answer the question and answer it positively. Four, what words of Clare do they bring into play? It is well worth looking at the words closely. Kreidler-Kos combs the text for her answers to her four questions. She ends up with an eloquent pile of details.

There is a clear difference between producing the edition of a medieval text and translating the text into English, or German. Gedeon Gál was bothered by the difficulty people seemed to have distinguishing between the critical edition of a text and the translation of a medieval text. The two operations are very different. The former scrutinizes the manuscript evidence that has come down to us and uses it, as it allows itself to be used, in order to reestablish the text as originally written. The latter puts the medieval text into an English that flashes the same communication on a present mind as cast by the Latin text on the mind of a medieval reader. But the effort to edit or to translate obliges the editor or translator to sound out the many meanings of the text before her. At the end, each has given the text a highly searching reading. And Kreidler-Kos shares with us what she has found while translating.

As for the first question, the sisters are identified by name and not by function, in a life that is not at all monastic. Obedience was their commitment to their way of living. In offering details for the second question, Kreidler-Kos reports on sickness as an almost constant problem. She suggests that tuberculosis was rife. Clare's sickness rose and ebbed; she was not bedridden from 1224 on. When up and about, Clare ministered to the sick and had a touch and way that often healed. As for the profiles of the sisters, the author explains how she will go about it. She says the differences are there, as undoubtedly they were, but the point we are to grasp is that they do come across; the differences were not ironed out by the clerk's Latin nor by Sister Battista's return to Italian. That in itself speaks for the authenticity of the text as truly the protocol of November 1253. Kreidler-Kos will find her details more listening to one sister than to another. She sketches out what she has learned about five of those who were heard. At the end, she adds a few further details of various sisters. In her few words, for example, Sister Angeluccia recalls clearly Clare's theological wisdom and her natural happiness. As for her fourth question, Kreidler-Kos reports that eight of the fifteen sisters cited words of Clare. The words arose at special moments in their history, as in

1240 facing the Saracens, or in the daily life of San Damiano, and there were as well a few words of affection for the cat. Clare's spoken words, it seems, had something of the exact and involved (umstaendlich) diction of her written texts.

As she proceeds with the many details she found within the PC, Kreidler-Kos lets Clare appear almost uncannily in her words and ways. Repeatedly in the process of taking protocol, the sisters said there was something special about Clare that they could not get into words (501-502). When she came from prayer, she brought joy and brightness to the sisters, and in her words there lay both deep meaning as well as "una certa dolcezza" (444). That is the expression that Kreidler-Kos turns into the title to her monograph: Clare had "her own well-sounding words." (*Wortklang* is the term I translate as well-sounding words. The term means harmony, but *Wortklang* is concrete whereas harmony abstract.) Meaning soothes the mind and brightness warms the heart, and so my title to this report.

The book ends with a survey of recent study on Clare of Assisi. Niklaus Kuster, a Bavarian Capuchin, sums up important studies on Clare since 2005 in German, English, Spanish, Italian, French, Polish, and Maltese (559-575). As for the publications in English, he makes several critical points, which I shall not repeat, save for the remark that they do not take account of non-English literature on Clare. About French research Kuster regrets how little now gets done, where Sabatier and Desbonnets contributed so much, then stresses the importance of Jacques Dalarun's study of Thomas of Celano's texts and of Franciscan sources generally for study of Clare and San Damiano. Although Kuster is going through more recent literature, he does observe that Dalarun's treatment of Clare in the 1990s needs revision (wäre...revisionsbedürftig).

Much has been done in Italy, including a few solid surprises (566-572). A team has laid bare the archeology of San Damiano; and in 1212 Clare found there a chapel about the size of the Portiuncula. Some major publications have presented the history from Clare down through the following decades (the *iter storico*) as less bumpy than M. P. Alberzoni

has shown it to have been. Chiara Frugoni got her dustup by writing off Clare's flight to Francis and his brothers as pure hagiography and was duly (and at length) corrected. The Franciscan Marco Guida argues that 1 Celano VIII 18-20, an exuberant celebration of the San Damiano community (which S. Brufani calls "a legend in a nutshell"), was inserted into the text later, by Thomas of Celano, yes, but against his will. Guida has also completed (2008) a thorough study of Clare's *vita* and solidified the authorship of Thomas of Celano. This is not all that Kuster surveys, but it does show the vigor of research on Clare and San Damiano in Italy, in a way that now makes it necessary to include the San Damiano story when speaking about the early Franciscan years (571).

As for the recent German literature, the book under review introduces us to the critical attention focused on Clare and San Damiano in middle Europe. We can expect soon the publication of the sources in German, with introductions and footnotes, now being completed by a team of ten brother scholars, three women scholars, and three Poor Clares. Kuster mentions as well a study that comes *sozusagen* from outside, well worth mentioning, for Franciscan history does belong to a larger history. Otfried Krafft, the Marburg specialist in papal papers, published a comprehensive tome on Rome's medieval canonization processes. He explains the politics of canonization as well as the way and the what of the process itself. Clare was the only woman besides Elizabeth of Hungary to be canonized between 1200 and 1260.

In an issue of *The Cord* in the coming year, one article will report on the new chronology and another look at Thomas of Celano's "legend in a nutshell."

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## BOOK REVIEW

Delio, Ilia. *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2011. 208 pp. \$14.96.

I begin this review of Ilia Delio's newest work, *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe*, with the author's last two sentences:

The God of evolution is the God of adventure, a God who loves to do new things and is always new. We are invited into this adventure of love to find our freedom in love and to love without measure.

With those words, Delio challenges us to throw off our static concept of the cosmos, God, and Christianity, and encourages us, instead, to enter into the liberating consciousness of a dynamic God, evolving in an evolving world.

Evolution is key as the author, welding science and theology, takes us through the history of the cosmos, argues for a changing God — which makes sense if God *is* love and if Christ *is* God — and explores the meaning of Jesus, the emergent Christ, for today's Christians who constitute the evolving Christ. In the book's well-developed nine chapters Ilia Delio incorporates the writings of known theologians, past and present, such as St. Bonaventure, Meister Eckhart, John Haught and John Haughey, as well as the work of renowned philosophers, quantum physicists and system analysts, but draws most heavily on the thought of scientist and mystic, Teilhard de Chardin.



Like Chardin's Omega Point, Delio envisions the cosmos as a complex web of relationships, building up and bringing together all in God who is love. For this, she uses the term "whole-making." Like Jesus, whose life, death, and resurrection was a de-fragmenting, a making whole of the world, we, too, are called to make whole what was divided: matter and spirit, the risen body of Christ and heaven. If we move toward cosmic wholeness with Christ as the new being, Christian life is reborn. Delio quotes Pope Benedict XVI's description of the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus in relation to evolution to be, "a qualitative leap in the history of 'evolution' and of life in general toward a new future life."

The author weaves technology and the challenge to be whole-makers into her discussion of transhumanism, a new paradigm arising out of science and technology, and positing an alterable, transformable human condition through advances of technology. Delio rejects that notion of transhumanism which projects a disconnected, though technically advanced world. On the other hand, she acknowledges a Christian transhumanism, which views technology as a means to build relationships based on the core value of love and provides meaning to the human spiritual center and to the cosmos.

Whole-making also requires a journey to the inner universe, a journey of contemplation, inner wisdom, and a new birth of Christ within. Just as the death of Jesus brought new life to Christianity, we are challenged to poverty, to let go of the desire to control and to move toward cosmic wholeness, open to the gift of evolution, which is an expression of a dynamic love of God. Delio refers to the writings of St. Bonaventure and Meister Eckhart on the relationship of the Trinity to understand of the dynamic love of God. This relationship is ever changing and "the evolution of God is the God of ever newness in love."

Jesus is the center of this union in the Trinity and unites the human story with evolution. Through Jesus' lived experience we are called as *catholics* to journey to become whole and undivided, loved and loving, mending what is broken and reconciling divisions in our lives and in the world. De-



lio underscores the point that if we are open to “self-gift,” this new catholicity of wholeness we seek in an evolutionary creation can become a reality. This consciousness of whole-making and a consequent holistic lifestyle is possible when the heart’s desire transforms life into a journey with God, human beings, and the earth community.

While in Bethlehem, Uganda, this past June, I shared *The Emergent Christ* with Balimuye Fred, headmaster at the Bethlehem Parent’s School and Orphanage, and a minister in his church, a Ugandan Christian faith community. Mr. Fred was most excited about the book’s description of the creative union of evolution and incarnation, which is very much part of his own lived experience and which he sees as God’s creative aim.

The author wrote *The Emergent Christ* out of a concern about the meaning of Christian life today. Can the Church evolve? What is the participatory role that Catholic Christians have in evolution, today and in the future? Will Catholicism continue to exist in a closed system, stagnant, resisting the natural tendency to evolve and change? Or are we willing to live in openness to the Creator Spirit and to new ways of giving birth to Christ? Delio suggests that an acceptance of evolution provides the opportunity to pour the new wine of our time into new wineskins.

I conclude this review with a reflection on one Christian included in Ilia Delio’s book, Francis of Assisi, a man whose life spoke eloquently of whole-making within a medieval world in which boundaries, both cosmic and human, were rigid. Two pieces of writing are relevant here: Francis’s *Canticle of the Creatures* and his *Testament*. In the first, he names the elements of the cosmos as sister and brother, delights in their beauty and service, and expresses his gratitude to their Source, to whom belong “the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.” In his *Testament*, Francis recalls his conversion when he recognizes the leper, previously someone alienated and untouchable, as his brother. He says that not long after that realization of intrinsic relationship, he left the world.

In *The Emergent Christ*, Ilia Delio invites us also to leave the world as did Francis, the static world of disjointed, pre-determined parts, for the evolving world of graced relationship in God.

Paula J. Scraba, Ph.D.  
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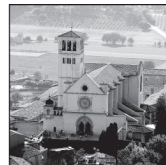
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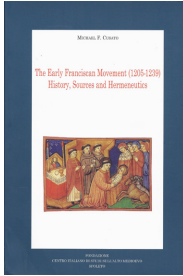
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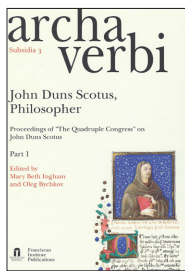
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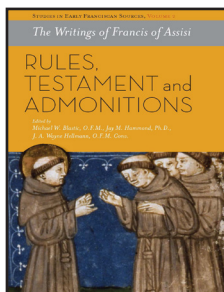
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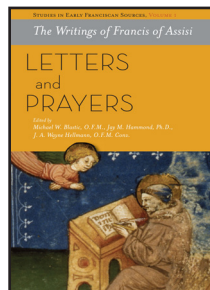
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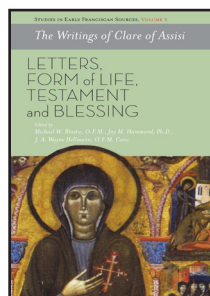
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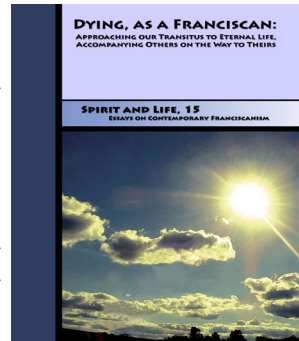
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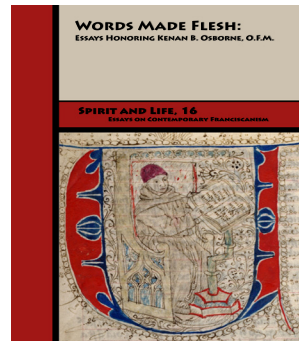
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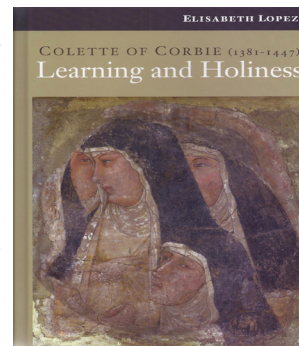
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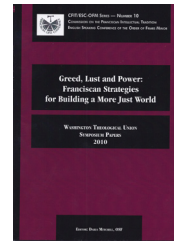


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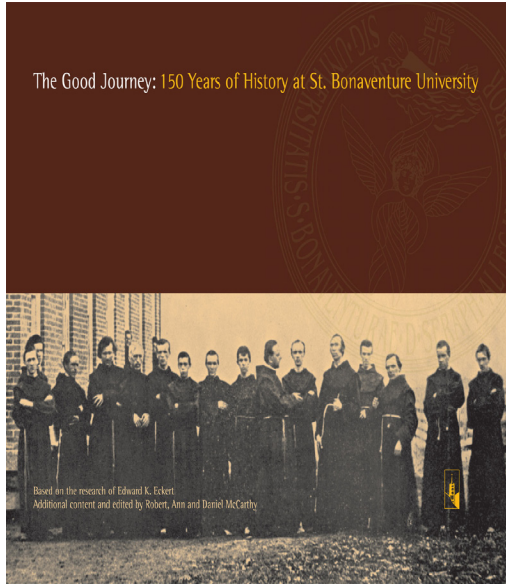
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## INDEX TO THE CORD – 2011

### ARTICLES BY AUTHOR

- Barone, Andrea, F., *Franciscan Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation ... and the Invisibility of Animals*, July/September, 229-51.
- Benfatti, Solanus, M., *Franciscan Priesthood Today*, April/June, 117-28.
- Blastic, Michael, W., "Holding on to the words, the life, the teaching of the Holy Gospel" (ER 22-48) *John's Gospel as a Source for Franciscan Praxis*, October/December, 328-47.
- Cellini, Gregory, *Christ's Journey to Calvary: Parallels with Religious Life*, January/March, 57-62.
- Cummings, Juniper, *Our Holy Mother Clare*, July/September, 289-91.
- DeBiase, William, *Some More of the Story*, January/March, 63-70.
- DeBiase, William, *Losing a Step with St. Clare*, July/September, 287-88.
- Flood, David, *Franciscan Poverty Once Again*, January/March, 51-56.
- Flood, David, *Haymo and Gregory in Consultation The Rule and the Gospel*, April/June, 149-55.
- Flood, David, *Francis of Assisi Reads John 17*, July/September, 265-72.
- Hartmann, Maureen, *Eco-penance, St. Francis of Assisi and Lent*, January/March, 46-50.
- Horan, Daniel P., *A Franciscan Theological Grammar of Creation*, January/March, 5-20.
- Hughes, Barnabas, *Lay Contemplatives Suggestions from Saint Anthony of Padua*, April/June, 129-48.
- Isenor, Billy, *Franciscan Hospitality: A Chef's*



THE CORD, 61.4 (2011)

- Theological Perspective*,  
January/March, 71-81.
- Isenor, Billy, *The Theological Contours on Francis's Thought on "Doing Penance,"* July/September, 252-64.
- Karris, Robert J., *Peter of John Olivi's Commentary on Luke 2:42-51: Jesus' Getting Himself Lost in the Temple*, October/December, 382-97.
- Kelly, Eoin, *Clare's Way of Prayer An Option for our Contemporary World*, July/September, 277-86.
- Kennedy, Francis Assisi, *A Collaboration Made by Heaven*, January/March, 82-84.
- Mulholland, Seamus, *The Foundations for a Franciscan Theology and Spirituality of the Environment*, January/March, 21-30.
- Rumsey, Patricia M., *All praise be yours, my Lord, for all Creation Francis and Clare and Ecology*, January/March, 32-45.
- Saggau, Elise, *The Franciscan Third Order and the Penitential Tradition*, April/June, 169-86.
- Schneider, Johannes, *The Bull "Quo elongati" Pope Gregory IX*, April/June, 156-65.
- Schreck, Nancy, *Becoming a Sacred Flame: Francis, Clare and John's Gospel*, October/December, 348-66.
- Stravitsch, Christopher, J., *Renewing Family Spirituality Through Francis's Devotion to the Incarnation*, October/December, 367-81.
- Thom, Frances Ann, *And Saint Francis Laughed*, July/September, 273-76.
- Warner, Keith Douglass, *Bernardino de Sahagún and the Global Reach of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition*, April/June, 189-200.
- Zielinski, Karen, *Francis was Politically Correct*, April/June, 166-68.

Zielinski, Karen, *Being There*, July/September, 292-95.

Zielinski, Karen, *Living What You Say*, October/December, 398-99.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *Defense of the Mendicants*, introduction and notes by Robert J. Karris, April/June, 202-03.

Cunningham, Lawrence, *Things Seen and Unseen: A Catholic Theologian's Notebook*, January/March, 85-88.

Delio, Ilia, *The Emergent Christ, Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe*, October/December, 406-09.

Kreidler-Kos, Martina, "Von eigenem Wohlkland," in *Klara von Assisi*, ed. Bernd Schmies, not yet translated into English, October/December, 400-05.

Kugel, James L. *In the Valley of the Shadow*, July/September, 296-98.

Poust, Mary DeTurris, *Walking Together: Discovering the Catholic Tradition of Spiritual Friendship*, July/September, 299-302.

## POETRY

Bodo, Murray, *The Poppies of Assisi*, January/March, 31.

Herkness, Martha, *God's Holy Name*, April/June, 187.

Herkness, Martha, *The Gift of Sight*, April/June, 188.

Herkness, Martha, *Now and Forever*, April/June, 201.

## SUBJECT INDEX

### **Admonition 1**

October/December, 342-43.

### **Agnes of Prague**

And the letters from Clare, July/September, 277-84.

### **Bernard of Quintevalle**

January/March, 65-66.

### **Bernardino de Sahagún**

And the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition, April/June, 189-200.

### **Bonaventure of Bagnoregio**

And the Trinity, January/March, 25-26.

### **Carmelites of Oldenburg, Indiana**

January/March, 82-84.

### **Clare of Assisi**

A brief summary of her life, July/September, 289-91.

And contemplation, July/September, 277-86.

And creation, January/March, 43-44.

And hope, July/September, 287-88.

And the Incarnation, January/March, 43-44.

And her letters to Agnes of Prague, July/September, 277-84.

And her writings, October/December, 331-34.

And John's Gospel, October/December, 348-50.

And Scripture, October/December, 333-34.

### **Contemplation**

Anthony of Padua on, April/June, 129-48.

For today, July/September, 284-86.

### **Creation**

January/March, 5-20.

Eric Doyle and, January/March, 15-16.

Franciscan view of, January/March, 14-20.

From Stewardship to kinship, January/March, 10-14.

Keith Warner and, January/March, 17-18.

Language of, January/March, 5-14.

Leonardo Boff and, January/March, 18-19.

### **Christology**

October/December, 336-39.

***Deeds of Blessed Francis  
and his Companions***

October/December, 326.

**Elias, Brother**

January/March, 68-69.

**Family Life**

Mission of, October/December 368-70.

**Family Spirituality**

October/December, 367-81.

**Foot-washing**

In John 13:1-17, October/December, 340-41.

The story of, October/December, 360-61.

**Francis of Assisi**

And animals, July/September, 232-39.

And his Canticle of the Sun, January/March, 48-50.

And creation, January/March, 35-37.

And eco-penance, January/March, 46-50.

And the Environment, January/March, 21-31.

And the Eucharist, January/March, 40-43.

And the Incarnation, January/March, 37-40.

And John 17, July/September, 265-72.

And John's Gospel, October/December, 348-50.

And Johannine citations in the writings, October/December, 330-31.

And Lent, January/March, 49-50.

As a penitent, April/June, 173-79.

His Devotion to the Incarnation, October/December, 367-81.

Patron of ecology, January/March, 32-35.

And priesthood, April/June, 120-21.

And Scripture, October/December, 333-36.

And story-telling, January/March, 32-35.

**Franciscan Fraternity**

Clericalization of, April/June, 118-19.

Historical foundations of, April/June, 117-18.

**Franciscan Hospitality**

January/March, 71-81.

**Franciscan Intellectual Tradition**

The global reach of, April/June, 189-200.

**Franciscan Poverty**

January/March, 51-56.  
Of the Incarnation, October/December, 371-73.

**Franciscan Praxis**

John's Gospel and, October/December, 325-47.

**Franciscan Spirituality**

Contemplation and action, in synthesis, October/December, 346-47.

Following the footsteps of Christ, October/December, 345-46.

Of the environment, January/March, 21-31.

**Franciscan Theology**

Francis's Devotion to the Incarnation, October/December, 367-81.

Incarnational, January/March, 24-25.

Of the Environment, January/March, 21-31.

**Franciscan View of Creation**

January/March, 14-20.  
And Scotus, January/March, 26.

**Giles, Brother**

January/March, 67.

**The Good Shepherd**

October/December, 361-62.

**Gospel of John**

Development of, October/December, 352-53.

The Samaritan Woman at the Well, October/December, 354-59.

**Gregory IX (Pope)**

And the Franciscan Rule, April/June, 149-55.

And *Quo elongati*, April/June, 156-65.

**Guido, Bishop**

January/March, 64-65.

**Haymo of Faversham**

April/June, 149-55.

**Humility**

October/December, 376-78.

**"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"**

In Clare's writings, October/December, 343-44.

In John 14:6-7, October/December, 341-42.

**Innocent III**

January/March, 69.

**Jacoba de Settesoli**

Brother, January/March,  
69-70.

**Jesus, Lost in the Temple**

Olivi on, October/December,  
382-97.

**John Duns Scotus**

And the Incarnation, January/March,  
27-28.

**Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation**

A model, July/September,  
248-51.

Complexity of moral issues surrounding animals,  
July/September,  
243-45.

**Leo, Brother**

January/March, 67-68.

**Letter to the Faithful (Longer Redaction)**

October/December, 327-30.

**Penitential Life**

Francis's thought on doing penance,  
July/September, 252-55.

In the time of Francis,  
April/June, 171-75.

Theological underpinnings of,  
July/September, 259-64.

**Peter of John Olivi**

Commentary on Luke 2:42-51,  
October/December, 382-97.

**Pietro Bernardone**

January/March, 63-64.

**Priesthood**

Theological foundations of,  
April/June, 121-25.

**Quo elongati**

April/June, 156-65.

**Regula non bullata 22**

October/December 327-30.

**Religious Life**

Parallels with Christ's journey to Calvary,  
January/March, 57-62.

**Sacrament of Penance**

In the early fraternity,  
July/September, 255-58.

**Samaritan Woman at the Well**

In John's Gospel, October/December,  
354-59.

**Simplicity**

In family life, 373-76.

*THE CORD*, 61.4 (2011)

**Spirituality for the Married State**

October/December, 370-71.

**Third Order of St. Francis**

Beginnings of a rule of life, April/June, 179-82.

Biblical grounding of, April/June, 169-86.

Contemporary Third Order Secular charism, April/June, 183-86.

**Third Order Regular Rule**

Themes of, October/December, 350-51.



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