

Francis of Assisi's Christian Proposal

GIOVANNI MICCOLI

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Translated by Edward Hagman, O.F.M.Cap.

1. A Problem of Interpretation

In 1954, Arsenio Frugoni, in the introduction of his study of Arnold of Brescia, pointed out the futility of any attempt to reconcile the various testimonies which transmitted the record of Arnold's life.¹ Himself an exceptional person, Arnold was remembered by some exceptional persons. However, when Bernard of Clairvaux, Otto of Frisinga, John of Salisbury, Gerhoh of Reichersberg, Walter Map, and all the other witnesses speak of Arnold, they are obviously speaking from their own points of view. Moreover, they sometimes speak in a different context and from different motives carefully chosen to establish their testimony. Each fragment of Arnold's life which they transmit is irretrievably incorporated into their point of view, their particular context. Thus, each of these fragments has its own consistency and frequency of occurrence, so much so that it cannot be reduced to the others.

Frugoni's polemic target was the result of a whole tradition of positivist historiography. It is a tradition which tries to reconcile and combine the scattered bits of an event, knowable in only a few isolated moments, into some kind of impossible coherent objectivity. Thus, his study did not intend to offer a well-rounded portrait of Arnold – something impossible as well as implausible – but only the rich and isolated characteristics, necessarily incomplete, of a person and his experience. These alone can produce a genuine historical picture. Thanks to such patient work of restoration, we have something resembling "one of those fragments of ancient sculpture . . ., free from the forgeries of later additions."²

Arnold is no doubt a special case. But as such he exemplifies a larger problem. It is not simply a question of the distinction and irreducibility between history and historiography, between the exploits (*res gestae*) and the history of the exploits (*historia rerum gestarum*), something the positivist school of history was the first to affirm. The case of Arnold, in fact, shows how complicated is the relation between the real events of an individual's life-experience and the reading or interpretation of this experience by his contemporaries. By reason of the diversity of the

testimonies which transmit his memory, it underlines the great disparity between these two moments. The reasons for this disparity probably need to be spelled out, since they are the essential element of the history we are trying to reconstruct. The condition of the testimonies – irregular, highly personalized, and difficult to put in order – place definite limits on our knowledge. Yet these very limits can become the occasion for a richer, more articulated writing of history, one more aware of the forces and cultures at work.

Combining testimonies of diverse origins implicitly presupposes that the various facets of an experience have been precisely attested by the different witnesses, and thus that by juxtaposing or combining them we can see their development and obtain a comprehensive picture. The naive formulations of historiography involve not only gross errors in method but also serious interpretative misunderstandings.³ Historical reality is impoverished when it is reduced to our own limited ability to reconcile sources. When we do this, we can fail to perceive the features of a reality which is actually quite irregular and profound.

Though none of Arnold's writings have come down to us, important witnesses have written about him. In pointing out the state of the testimonies concerning Arnold, Frugoni was formulating a general problem when, through his research, he solved a particular case which serves as an example. Thus, he does not give up in his attempt to know Arnold or to get to the bottom of the fragmentary texts which somehow reflect Arnold's experience. There is no doubt or perplexity about the validity of history as an instrument of human intelligence, but instead there is a precise sense of its limits as a condition for human intelligence to be really valid and autonomous.

Analysis, criticism, comparison of testimonies, actual reconciling of various testimonies – these are all necessary components (I would say an almost irresistible tendency) of the historian's work, whether reconstructing an individual experience or coordinating the events of a larger period. In each individual testimony there is a superposition of elements: mental structures, longstanding cultures, personal factors (such as conscious wishes), and records which show the various reactions to external events. Only attentive analysis with its ensuing resolution permits us to select these elements. But such analyses and combinations cannot rest upon arbitrary criteria, nor depend solely upon the scholar's ability to get to the heart of the matter. At the beginning, the only thing certain is the existence of a piece of history. A clear perception of the nature, the frequency, along with the precise collation of individual testimonies in the broader context of this history, is critical in preventing their arbitrary use in the task of reconstruction. This is necessary, I would say, in order to pick out from the gray background of an event (which often lacks clear details) those vivid

points left from the complex experience of people of the past. The gray does not cease being gray, but without it even the points of color would lose their light and meaning. In the same way, thanks to those points of color, the gray itself acquires a greater depth, a different tonality.

Compared to the case of Arnold, the documentary situation regarding the religious experience of Francis and the origin and development of the order is radically different. It is a privileged situation owing to the number and quality of the testimonies, both Francis's own writings as well as the biographies and chronicles of the first decades of the order.⁴ However, we can actually reconstruct the nucleus of his message and the original experiences of the first Franciscan fraternity, and we can also track their transformation in subsequent history. Yet the dangers of a hasty process of reconciliation are also abundantly present here. There are implicit convictions and conventions, mistakes and sidetracks which are still at work in Franciscan historiography, causing considerable inconsistencies in interpretation. This outlook, which is very common, constantly imposes on the texts referring to the singular personality of Francis a unity of inspiration, an agreement and consistency, except where there has been explicit revision, repudiation, or denial. Francis left thirty or so writings. Needless to say, some are texts of very great importance, and the collection is certainly remarkable, especially compared to the situation of other historical documents. Yet measured against his entire life, there is really very little; there are only a few rays of light on a few brief moments, over a period of two decades which are not otherwise immediately attested. Only an incurable historiographic optimism can imagine that they satisfy our need for knowledge and interpretation. When they are reconstructing an "ideal" (to paraphrase the title of a famous book), they are all linked. They all clarify each other. Their expressions are all well considered and well grounded. They admit no disparities, changes, or moments of negligence that one finds in the unique situations of daily life. The curious pretense that some act of providence presides over the selection of materials figures too often among the unspoken assumptions made by historians. From this they derive criteria for simplifying and combining – criteria which cannot be merely overturned. But the difficulty in demonstrating the presence of contradiction, disparity, and re-thinking (all attested in some of Sabatier's forced readings), does not justify the use of criteria that are absurd.⁵ Rather we must reflect upon the experiences of daily life and pay some attention to the character of the testimonies themselves. After all, every relic of the past is an expression of something, just as every text and translation is a reflection of feelings, attitudes, and situations which must be determined from time to time. But not all of these "somethings" are equally meaningful in the economy of a religious experience. Therefore, if we are to elaborate criteria for organizing materials so that we will not have a mere juxtaposition or

summary of diverse statements assumed to be complementary, we must evaluate the possibility of establishing a hierarchy among the various texts which have come down to us. This means singling out those texts which more certainly present statements, judgments, attitudes, and proposals which, considering all the evidence, characterize not just one particular moment, but the essential nucleus of a total experience.

If such considerations are valid above all for the writings of a unique personality such as Francis, the risk of distortions is even clearer if we try to mechanically arrange and reconcile texts of greatly different origin. Such, in fact, are the various lives of Francis and most of the collections which preserve the memory of the events in his life. The selection and diverse presentations of his words and episodes from his life are an indisputable fact. Such a selection, the result of many interpretations of one single experience, prevents our recovery of that experience unless we first specify the criteria and particular needs which have determined the selection.

A few words will suffice on the general characteristics, so very different, of such testimonies. By now these things are firmly established and well known, though not always taken into account in the concrete use made of individual materials in reconstructing Francis's original religious experience and the history of the first decades of the order. Some points are very evident. The different biographies and collections of materials on the life of Francis arise from various situations in the order – from various commitments in response to various needs.⁶ This elementary point of departure already gives the facts a certain orientation; it arranges them according to complex patterns which tend to shape them in various ways. Thus Francis's penitential zeal for the reconstruction of churches gradually becomes a figure of a vaster work.⁷ This runs parallel to the growing awareness of the ever more important role played by the order in the reform of the ecclesiastical institution and in the organization of the religious life of the masses. It is an awareness that in turn produces episodes and declarations more and more explicit.⁸ In the total context of salvation history, the holiness of Francis and the development of the order gradually acquire a new depth. There is a unity of historical and theological interpretation which discovers and explains the deeper meaning of an event which may have remained largely obscure and incomprehensible to those who had been direct participants. God's plans are revealed only little by little, and His work is known by its fruits. And so it is perfectly obvious that the second and third generations of Franciscans, as well as those who followed, felt themselves capable of interpreting Francis's life and the meaning of his work much better than those who had lived with him. Furthermore, their claim to have been eyewitnesses and companions of Francis – "We who were with him" – no longer was sufficient to change those developments

whose providential character was becoming ever clearer in the life of the church. Unless we propose another reading of the sources, the privilege of direct contact with holiness does not shake their certitude that the growth had been positive. Indeed, the growth itself testifies to direct divine intervention. The depth and holiness of personal merits, which may have been more conspicuous in the poor and obscure origins of the order, do not deny or weaken the progress which has taken place and is shown in the number of members, the increase in pastoral activity, and the influence exerted by the order. The facts are there, common to all, one might say. But they remain such only in their crude materiality, for the variety of criteria with which they are interpreted profoundly changes their orientation and significance. The split is clear. In contrast to the privilege of origins (the touchstone for judging the present and reconstructing the past as its exact opposite), stands the providential law of development, whose authoritative model is found in the history of the church.⁹

But it is not only these consciously interpretive readings which play a part in the selection of the historical materials, and even in its more or less distorted transmission. Underneath the conscious interpretive schemas, which are products of historical-theological reflection and a particular religious vision of the church in history, other more implicit schemas and mental frames of reference are at work. These are the fruit of the slow accumulation of customs, cultural traditions, and ways of being and feeling which determine anthropological limits and shape the specific behavior of individuals and groups. The reading of events is passed through these schemas and mental frames of reference, and so there is a process of cutting them to fit these schemas. The facts, the judgments, the very words presented to the experience and memory of the witnesses, tend to be regarded as possible only in the manner and terms suggested by the images and stereotypes which are part of the culture of these particular spectators.

Here lies the crux. Here, paradoxically, I would say, is "*The Franciscan Question*." Francis's conscious desire was to live and propose an absolutely original religious experience in the context of contemporary religious and ecclesiastical tradition.¹⁰ But it is not simply a question of his subjective conscious desires. I think it can be said (I shall come back to this later) that Francis in effect lived a religious experience which, as far as its essential core is concerned, had no link or reference to the ecclesiastical tradition of his time. Even his contemporaries and those after recognized this more or less obscurely. Beyond the order's patriotism and the references demanded by a complex and sophisticated theology of history, they expressed this very clearly when they described him as the "new man" (*novus homo*), an expression which is prior to his identification as "another Christ" (*alter Christus*).¹¹ For this reason, the fundamental problem is to distinguish his

original religious experience from the interpretations with which it was received. This makes the problem more complicated.

Despite these limitations, the writings alone of Francis can provide a firm starting point for the correct solution to this otherwise inextricable maze. This is certainly no new discovery. Franciscan historiographers, beginning with Sabatier,¹² recognized this more or less clearly, even if they did not always pursue it to its logical conclusion with the rigor demanded by their premises. I obviously do not mean to suggest that the only trustworthy documents on Franciscan origins are the writings of Francis, nor that we must limit ourselves to them alone for an understanding of his life and the implications of his message. History tends to resist all interpretations. There is always the historical event which must be discovered beneath the various interpretations forced upon it by scholars. However, these distortions are always of a partial nature, since any particular episode has inevitably been constructed from pre-existing materials which have their own meaning. Now, however, they come to us embedded in a more or less fragmented network of relationships. All that remains is the "autonomy" of the few partial translations which must somehow be reconstructed. This is not an easy process, certainly not always possible. But we cannot give up before trying. What remains certain is that this task of recovery and restoration of the complex materials from Franciscan biographies must be begun, using in the first place the writings of Francis as both filter and touchstone. From them we derive the criteria and parameters for evaluating the interpretations – those major or minor distortions with which his proposal for religious life has been viewed by his contemporaries and followers.

2. The Testament: A Summary of Francis's Religious Experience

Among the writings of Francis, the Testament occupies a special place, if for no other reason than that its purpose is to summarize his entire religious experience, from his conversion until just before his death. This alone would be sufficient to justify using it as a point of departure for identifying Francis's own subjective awareness of his spiritual journey and his life's work. I believe an analysis of the text will offer additional convincing reasons to confirm the reasonableness of our choice.

As we know, Francis himself defined the term precisely; it became current in manuscript-tradition:¹³ "Let the brothers not say: This is another Rule, because this is a remembrance, an admonition, an exhortation, and my testament, which I, little Brother Francis, prepare for all of you, my blessed brothers, so that we may observe in a more Catholic manner the Rule which we have promised to the Lord."

And so it is a testament because that is what Francis called it. But in what

sense? One interesting interpretation emphasizes the biblical meaning. It is the covenant of the new pilgrim-people which Francis wishes to recall and emphasize; it is God's special close pact with Francis and all those brothers whom he now wishes to remember for the last time.¹⁴ This is one possible meaning. But frankly I would lean toward the much more obvious and pedestrian "last will and instructions" which Francis, with his authority as founder of the fraternity, believed he should leave to his brothers. The internal nature of the text suggests this. It is clearly a supreme reaffirmation of the choices he made for himself and the wish that he expressed for his fraternity. The verbs "wish" and "not wish" occur eleven times. Twice there is the expression "I strictly command through obedience," and there are many grammatical constructions expressing a wish or command. Finally, Francis himself says that he composed it so that the Rule might be observed "in a more Catholic manner." Other elements and external circumstances serve to confirm this interpretation.

A few months earlier, while at Siena in April and May 1226, Francis was struck by a severe stomach malady and vomited blood all night long. Thinking he was near death, his Companions asked him to give them his blessing and to leave "some memorial of your will" for all the friars. Then Francis dictated three wishes, briefly on account of his weakness, commanding all the friars "as a sign of remembrance of my blessing and my testament" to love one another, to love and respect poverty, and always to be faithful and submissive to the hierarchy of the church and the clergy.¹⁵ The agreement is exact and the meaning is unequivocal. To the request that he express his last wishes, he dictates three phrases which can be called a testament. However, in the Testament of Siena, it is not only the term and its meaning which are very clear. The Siena episode attests to an entire situation which is repeated in the following months. There is the request made by his Companions that he set down his final wishes, and there is Francis's condescension to be so persuaded. Francis's wish to re-affirm before all the special nature of his vocation and his faithfulness to the Gospel is dramatically revealed in the episodes preserved by his Companions. Burdened by his sickness, he sat up in his bed crying: "Who are these people who have snatched my order and that of my brothers out of my hands? If I go to the General Chapter, I will show them what my will is."¹⁶

The terminology and context are highly polemic with respect to later developments in the order. The episode clearly derives from a moment of grave crisis provoked by Elias during his second term as general. Thus, we cannot exclude the possibility that these Companions may have, with the passage of time, emphasized the actual tone and precision of the reference. But there is no doubt that Francis's final weeks and months were filled with an anxiety to communicate his wishes to the friars, to repeat and

summarize the basic outline of his vocational choice and the example of his own life-experience. He wrote of this to Clare, as she attests in her Rule: "He wrote to us his final wish." Here she transcribes a very short text, which deliberately uses the same basic outline as the Testament, namely, the affirmation of his own vocational choice and an invitation to the Poor Ladies to continue in it with perseverance.¹⁷ "I, brother Francis, the little one, wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy mother and to persevere in this until the end; and I ask and counsel you, my ladies, to live always in this most holy life and in poverty. And keep most careful watch that you never depart from this by reason of the teaching or advice of anyone."

This teaching, I would say, is exemplary in the sense that Francis proposes himself – his own choices and actions – as a living model for all who have chosen to follow him. This same way of acting is implicit at the very end of his life, in the blessing given to Brother Bernard. After Francis's death, the ministers and friars should give to Bernard (the first of his companions to embrace evangelical perfection by giving all his goods to the poor) the position and role which had belonged to Francis.¹⁸ There is a passage transmitted by the Companions which suggests that this was Francis's explicit choice. It dates from the time when his hold on the direct government of the order was beginning to involve interventions of an authoritarian nature.¹⁹ It is unimportant to discuss here the precise historicity of this last passage. In reality it represents a specific aspect of Francis's vocation, where life and action are always the first and most efficacious kind of teaching, and where mutual love is the first response to wrongs and offenses.²⁰ Furthermore, there are many signs that this type of behavior characterized with special urgency the last period of Francis's life. The Testament, as a total response to all this, re-evokes and summarizes in its first part Francis's own individual conversion.

The Testament must have been dictated some time after April or May 1226, which is the date of the so-called Testament Written in Siena.²¹ Witnesses all agree that the Testament belongs to the last days of Francis's life and is closely linked to the time of his death.²² We find clear indications of this, such as "around his death," "almost near death," and "near the end of his life," even though they do not allow greater precision. However, determining the chronology of the Testament really tells us nothing about how it matured.

The tradition of the Companions, with good reasons partly attributed to Brother Leo, would seem to attest that there had been moments of discussion about the Testament, even as there had been in the definitive drawing up of the Rule.²³ Francis had wanted written in his Testament that all the houses of the friars should be made of mud and wood "as a sign of holy poverty and humility," and that the churches built for them should be

small. He decided that the Portiuncula, the cradle and model for the order, should be the first to follow this norm. But some friars pointed out to him that in many provinces wood was more expensive than stone. Francis did not want to discuss the question, since he was very sick and already close to death. "And so he wrote in his testament" (what we now call The Testament) the warning not to accept churches and dwellings not in harmony with that holy poverty promised in the Rule.

The account is not very clear. Esser interprets it as a witness to an Assisi "pre-testament," written in the bishop's palace, which would be something different from the final Testament probably written at the Portiuncula. There would be no other way to interpret formulas such as these: "Thus Blessed Francis then had it written in his testament," and "Thus it was afterwards written in his Testament." The first phrase introduces the prescription that the houses of the friars should be constructed of wood and mud. The second is a literal quote from the passage in the Testament which has come down to us. Thus, there would be two testaments, as demanded by the unequivocal references in the Leonine account.²⁴

However, so categorical a solution leaves several doubts and perplexities. The *Intentio regulae*, like all the materials from the Companions in which this passage is inserted, is dedicated to showing the hidden struggle against evangelical perfection going on within the Order. In addition, it points out the changes and mitigations that Francis was persuaded to make in the Rule and other writings owing to pressures and hostility on the part of the friars and superiors, and to avoid scandal and quarreling.²⁵ The *Intentio regulae* begins with an explicit declaration along these lines, repeated in the course of the text, recalling that Francis had composed three rules. In the last of these, confirmed by Honorius III, "many things were taken out by the ministers against the will of Blessed Francis, as contained below."²⁶ Using almost the same words, the two passages also refer to this work of correction and deletion. The first passage makes reference only to the Rule.²⁷ The second, which immediately follows the section on the Testament, more or less repeats the tendency to generalize an episode just narrated, making reference to the Rule and "his other writings."²⁸ But the only explicit example cited (in material, which with certainty goes back to the Companions), is the elimination of Luke 9:3 from the Rule.²⁹ In other cases it is only a question of clarification or more precise details that Francis would have liked inserted in the Rule, but were not considered opportune by the ministers.³⁰

The prescription that the houses be built of mud and wood might be among these latter, despite the ambiguous formula with which it is introduced, a formula which recalls Francis's custom of dictating his writings, especially when he was ill. Nor is it necessary to imagine two drafts. After all, it would be strange if there were no other more explicit

testimony to a "pretestament" dictated in the bishop's palace, especially if we remember the number of details with which Francis's Companions gradually enriched and colored the traditions regarding the last weeks of his life.³¹ Thus, a passage like this would seem to attest to a prolonged process of drafting, subject to corrections and changes, rather than two drafts, in itself rather implausible, and in any case not otherwise attested. But in either case it would be the unmistakable sign of a text which was reflected on and discussed, even though the only trace left of this process of inner maturing is the text's own vigorous and inimitable style.

The circumstances in which it was written – the final weeks or even days of Francis's life – bear witness to the solemnity of the occasion. According to the testimony of Angelus of Clareno, it was John of Parma who emphasized this aspect, with a clear understanding of its importance in evaluating the text.³² Angelus tries to affirm the necessity of full observance of the Testament as a guarantee of full observance of the Rule, in the wake of a discussion which the mitigating provisions of *Quo elongati* had evidently been unable to settle.³³ But this does not deny the validity of his remark. These then, are important words, decisive for clarifying the mind of Francis, because they were uttered when he was at the point of death. But not even this fact can really clarify for us the inner development of those thoughts.

In his basic study of the Testament, Kajetan Esser has carefully insisted upon its occasional character.³⁴ Here Francis is speaking of problems troubling him at that moment, and he forgets about the three points mentioned at Siena, save for the final one. These, after all, had been essential parts of his program.³⁵ The Testament is constructed according to a kind of back and forth process, where one word, by the process of association, suggests another point.³⁶ Thus it is impossible to speak of the Testament as if its structure were thought out carefully.³⁷ Still less can we describe it, in the words of Sabatier, as "one of the most solemn manifestations of the saint's original ideal."³⁸ Besides, at that time, Francis was being influenced by a group of idealistic friars who were out of touch with reality. In both them and him, besides the real dangers threatening the life of the order, there was an inner failure to understand the problems and needs which were the result of its evolution.³⁹ Francis had the heart of a poet. Like a child, he looked with amazement on the machinery he had set in motion but which he was unable to guide, since his own abilities were not up to the task of organizing and heading such a vast movement.⁴⁰

Behind Esser's apparently aseptic scientific approach lie the urgent echoes of ancient disputes, which go well beyond his explicit reference to Sabatier. His individual points, accurate though they be, are insufficient to make a persuasive whole. His effort is vitiated by certain presuppositions which he mistakenly turns into unquestioned historical truths. The

existence of the Bull *Quo elongati*, with all that preceded and followed from it regarding the order's attitude toward the Testament, implicitly forces us to judge it as limited and one-sided. Thus, judgments and impressions are presented as points of departure, whereas they are representative of only one of the parties in the controversies which were tearing the order apart during the thirteenth century. Francis becomes a kind of poetic figure, incapable of understanding the demands of life, reminding us of Hugolino's "Brother Simpleton."⁴¹ Francis, then, would have been incapable of realizing that the type of life chosen by him – that which corresponded to his totally individual vocation – could not be transplanted and still maintain its internal purity; still less could it become "the common good and principle of life for an entire order."⁴² What is more, Francis was seriously weakened physically and under the influence, if not domination, of a group of friars who wanted to forge from the Testament new weapons for the battle. Even the obvious and very innocent statement: "to which we might have recourse after your death," which accompanied his Companions' request for a memorial of his wishes, is turned by Esser into a threatening allusion to a group of adversaries who would have to be fought in the future.⁴³

These presuppositions lead Esser to forced interpretations and even misinterpretations. For example, when attesting to the occasional nature of the Testament, he points out that the first two points recorded in the Testament Written in Siena are missing, namely, mutual charity and the observance of poverty – both essential points in Francis's program. He fails to notice that they are implicitly present in the whole detailed illustration of Gospel life which makes up the first part of the Testament. I believe the reason they are spelled out much more concretely is because they are being presented out of a lived-experience rather than in formulas of command, which was impossible in the brief Siena Testament. The same law of association which Boehmer had already noticed at work in the composition of the Admonitions, and which Esser, using sound reasoning, sees at work in the Testament,⁴⁴ shows the important intellectual and formal principles at work in the construction of the discourse. But this certainly does not mean that we can come to no conclusions about the degree of importance of the various things mentioned, their more or less accidental occurrence, or indeed why these particular things were said and not some others, as Esser seems to want to suggest.

There is a kind of logical jump in his conclusions about the character of the Testament which is very significant. As we have seen, for him it is an incontestable fact that we have here a "spontaneous occasional piece of writing." Its importance consists in this, that it represents the final expression of the wishes of a great man, but not in every case the solemn manifestation of the saint's original idea.⁴⁵ His prejudice, in the strict

sense of the word, is evident. Whatever the case regarding the external requests or hidden motives which provoked its dictation, for Esser it is irrelevant that the entire first part of the Testament is a history, the sacred story of a conversion and a vocation. This is stressed by the constant use of the phrases: "The Lord gave me ..." and "The Lord revealed to me. ..."

This should be our point of departure to be analyzed before we ask ourselves if and to what extent it is a complete and faithful history. Moreover, such a question is dubious if we recall that solemn moment when the Testament was dictated. Its explicit purpose was that the Rule be observed in "a more Catholic manner." Furthermore, it is absurd to emphasize its presumed onesidedness - its failure to mention certain prescriptions which are important in the Rule.⁴⁶ The point is not whether it is faithful in the individual details, but rather in truly pointing out the essential nucleus and the motivation which was the foundation of Francis's life. If this be the case, as I believe it is, and as a comparison with Francis's other writings will amply show, then there is no distinction between the expression of his final wishes and the solemn manifestation of his original ideal, as Esser claims. Thus the Testament remains in effect the basic text, which can never be overrated. The Testament must be the point of departure for studying and understanding the motives from which Francis lived out the religious experience of his conversion. We must not try to abstract it from the moment when it was written by trying to pick out the precise historicity of the material and the underlying preoccupations. Neither must we lose sight of the primary fact of its reason for existence, namely, to illustrate and summarize a religious choice, and to support, specify and clarify what was already expressed in the Rule.

Numerous attempts have been made to characterize the internal structure of the Testament. Without going into the merits of the various proposed solutions, for the most part analyzed by Esser,⁴⁷ one preliminary observation seems necessary. The Testament's simplicity of style, unlike the usual elaboration and organization of the more important texts, is a proof that the Testament, as we have it, is substantially the text as it came from Francis's own lips. It was not necessarily a continuous flow, nor perhaps without corrections and further reflections, but on the whole it is the language, or almost the language, in which he thought and spoke. More than likely it was immediately translated and adapted into Latin, retaining heavy traces of the vernacular. It was, in other words, an exquisitely personal work which was not subsequently polished or reorganized.⁴⁸

Obviously this does not preclude our looking for a structure or an internal principle of organization, but such a search is extremely relative. It is hazardous, if not impossible, to pretend to find a single key which would explain why we find certain things in the text but not others, why they are

said in this way or in that order. In every text, more so in a text so personal, many imponderable elements come into play, which have been obliterated right from the moment it was definitively written. I refer not simply to those areas unknowable to the historian, areas which indeed do exist. Rather, I wish to point out the importance of not pretending that we have found exhaustive and definitive interpretations, when in fact it is only when we realize their limits, their incomplete nature, that they become useful tools of exegesis.

There is, however, one aspect that is conspicuous even at a first summary reading of the Testament. The whole first part, the historical-narrative part, consists of a series of statements introduced by the formula: "The Lord gave me . . ." or "The Lord revealed to me. . . ." All the basic convictions which follow one after the other, from the moment of his conversion to the establishment of the fraternity with its particular type of life, are the result of divine grace. Being the fruit of grace, they are like different stages – particular moments in the development of something, which later become a single unified religious proposal. Its unity is thus confirmed and supported by a precise mark of identification, which places it in the realm of intangible choices.

Following the historical-narrative part is a series of special prescriptions. The brothers are forbidden to accept churches and dwellings not in accord with the vow of poverty, living in them as pilgrims and strangers.⁴⁹ They are prohibited from asking any kind of privilege from the Roman curia, whether directly or through intermediaries, whether for churches and other places occupied by the brothers, whether for faculties to preach, or for protection in case of possible persecution. When someone refuses to welcome them, the brothers are to flee elsewhere to do penance with the blessing of God.⁵⁰ Finally, there is the urgent exhortation to complete and steadfast obedience to the minister general and the guardians of the order. This is introduced in Francis's usual way of first presenting his own personal decision: "And I firmly wish to obey. . . ." Then the other brothers are called to follow his example: "And all the other brothers are bound to obey. . . ." There is particular concern for the observance of the Rule and for Catholic orthodoxy. The order is to guard carefully the possible transgressor "as a prisoner day and night and to deliver him to the cardinal of Ostia, who is the master, protector, and corrector of the entire fraternity." The Testament concludes with a statement of what it is, some warnings about adding or subtracting from it, about its observance, and then the farewell blessing.

If the second part of the Testament raises questions as to why these prohibitions and prescriptions are mentioned and not others, it is nevertheless clear that it is the first part above all which presents some of the essential characteristics of Francis's religious experience. Schematically

and following the sequence in the text, these seem to be the essential characteristics:

(a) Francis's conversion, expressed in the Gospel phrase "to do penance," is described as a reversal of values and judgments, illustrated by the pair of contrasting terms: bitter-sweet. His conversion began precisely when that which at first seemed bitter was changed into sweetness of soul and body.⁵¹ This complete reversal led logically to his leaving the world, that is, his assuming a habit and a status as a voluntary penitent.⁵² The presuppositions underlying this complete reversal, as well as its practical application, are to be found in his acts of mercy toward lepers. His merciful encounter with a presence which, in that culture and society, was completely alien, beyond help, repugnant,⁵³ became the concrete occasion for this reversal of values. Its radical nature, the complete change of feelings and behavior that accompanied his conversion, was shown precisely in the fact that he was dealing with lepers. For Francis, this was a whole existential experience, one with no leftovers, so to speak, an experience which went contrary to both intellect and feelings. And when it was concretely realized, it expressed a new set of values – new criteria of judgment and behavior opposed to the current ones. Leaving the world, which was the result of all this, sanctioned and summarized this new point of view: "And afterward I lingered a little and left the world." This new perspective gives the term "leaving the world" a pregnant meaning. Thus, discussions about technical matters or the traditions implied in the use of this formula seem somewhat sterile and abstract.⁵⁴ The continuous use of the same words should not hide the shifts in meaning which are shown by the consistent and frequent references to the events themselves. For Francis, leaving the world was, first of all, a visual material sign of his radical renouncement of its values, criteria and logic.

(b) Next there is Francis's faith in churches. Faith implies acceptance, reception, recognition and subjection. Churches are here taken in the material sense, as places where we pray to Christ. The content of this prayer is shown in Francis's paraphrase of the antiphon from the Good Friday liturgy: Thanks be to Christ who through His cross has redeemed the world. Adoration to Christ, who is present in all the churches throughout the world.⁵⁵ This is an occasion for reflection, as it were, for seeing a kind of continuity between the redeeming act of the sacrifice of the cross and the churches which preserve its sign and presence. This continuing presence is manifested in a privileged way in the Eucharist. It is the basic reason for Francis's second profession of faith, parallel to the first, a faith in priests who live "according to the manner of the holy Roman church."⁵⁶ He strongly insists that no sin, no ignorance, no human misery, could be a valid reason for exceptions to this complete submission to all priests: "And I act in this way since I see nothing corporally of the most

high Son of God in this world except His most holy Body and Blood which they receive and which they alone administer to others." Other acts of veneration related to this pivotal act are mentioned immediately after, namely, those directed to objects and texts used in worship, and to theologians and preachers.

Thus we have two very clear and explicit professions of faith, which are first of all a solemn declaration of obedience to the clergy and ecclesiastical hierarchy established by the church of Rome. Consequently, these professions of faith are also a clear profession of orthodoxy. Viewed in this way, they are a clear and positive response to the attitudes which characterized the heretical movements of the age.⁵⁷ But once again, following a trend peculiar to all the testimony concerning Francis's religious life, there is no explicit polemic reference or condemnation of them.⁵⁸ His own unequivocal orthodoxy, in contrast to current practice, is never expressed in controversies or anathemas. I shall return later to this point, because it is essential to his vocation and his message.

(c) Finally, there is Francis's explicit vindication of the originality of his vocation, for himself and for his companions: "After the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the most high Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the lord pope confirmed it for me."⁵⁹

With no attempt to proselytize on his part, companions joined him, the fruit of divine grace, just as his own choice of a life modeled on that of the Gospel had taken place with no human intermediaries. The intervention of the pope was a simple confirmation of his choice as he had expressed it in writing. This confirmation is clearly important, for Francis clearly intends to recall it, but at the same time he defines its precise limits. Neither his basic vocation itself nor its contents come into play in the papal confirmation. It was only a public way of emphasizing his submission to the clergy and hierarchy, something which he had already proposed as a constitutive element of the vocation he intended to follow.

The next sentences give a brief indication of the characteristics of his Gospel choice.⁶⁰ They are the renunciation of one's goods in favor of the poor, one tunic for the use of each brother, patched inside and out, with a cord and a pair of trousers: "We had no desire for anything more." The clerics used to recite the Office like other clerics; the lay brothers would say the Our Father. "And we were simple and subject to all." All worked with their hands, but Francis, wishing once more to teach by his example, says: "I used to work with my hands, and I [still] desire to work; and I firmly wish that all my brothers give themselves to honest work . . ., not from desire of receiving wages for their work but as an example and in order to avoid idleness." This is the normal means of subsistence. Only

when the wages of their work are denied should they have recourse to the table of the Lord, seeking alms from door to door.

In this summary, which is also the restatement of a model, the choice of the Gospel clearly shapes the choice of their field of activity and of their place in society. They are to be at the very bottom of a society which was extremely hierarchical. Such a choice is in accord with that reversal of values and ways of behavior which was part of Francis's conversion. The connection between these two moments appears very close, in the sense that the form of the Gospel, as expressed by Francis, is not only the model but also the translation of his individual choice into everyday general terms. The part of the Testament which is a historical recollection closes with the greeting of peace, also a gift from the Lord.⁶¹ It is a simple greeting but pregnant with meaning in the light of the experience just described. I shall also return to this later.

This part of the Testament merits a final observation. In addition to the Gospel model, which obviously refers back to the announcement of Christ and the theme of following Christ – both being marks of the Franciscan vocation⁶² – there are two other explicit references to Christ. One is to the redeeming cross, the other to the Eucharist, which continues the Incarnation. I believe these two points of reference are essential in Francis's religious experience. Their central position in understanding the motives for his choice is very evident when we look at his other writings.

3. Reflection on the Incarnation

The "Words of Admonition" are a collection of teachings which go back with all probability to what is called the heroic period of the fraternity, that is, approximately 1209 to 1221.⁶³ They begin with the admonition of Christ: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6), with the following verses, together with some others introduced or paraphrased by way of comment or explanation (1 Tim. 6:16; John 4:24; 1:18; 6:64).⁶⁴ These serve to introduce the central theme of this Admonition, which affirms that the first means, the first act, which leads to Christ is our recognition of Him. For those who saw Him in His earthly life, this meant to recognize the Son of God behind the veil of His humanity. For those who now see Him on the altar, this means to recognize the Body and Blood of Christ behind the signs of bread and wine. This recognition and acceptance are the work and sign that God's Spirit is present in us today, as once in the Apostles.

Once again there is a strong emphasis on the continuity between the Incarnation and the Eucharist. It is the Eucharist which guarantees the abiding character of Christ's presence, while at the same time it calls us to the same kind of recognition. It is no accident that the Admonition's final

words recall Matthew 28:20: "Behold I am with you even to the end of the world." The Eucharist is the continuation of the Christ-event, of Christ's own life-choice, of Christ's own attitudes. Therefore, Francis continually proposes Christ in the Eucharist as model and example: "See, daily He humbles Himself as when He came from the royal throne into the womb of the Virgin; daily He comes to us in a humble form; daily He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of the priest."⁶⁵

The theme of the Incarnation is dealt with expressly in the first paragraph of the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful.⁶⁶ Francis begins his reflection with the annunciation of the Word through the Archangel Gabriel. From the womb of Mary He receives "the flesh of humanity and our frailty." His Incarnation is accompanied by (indeed it requires), the choice of poverty: "Though He was rich beyond all other things (2 Cor. 8:9), in this world He, together with the most blessed Virgin, His mother, willed to choose poverty."⁶⁷

The Incarnation is fulfilled in the Paschal mystery, that is, in the Last Supper, with the offering of bread and wine by which it is continued until the end of time, in the Passion and death, which express the Son's complete submission to the Father's will: "Father, let your will be done, not as I will, but as you will." The sacrifice of the cross is the symbol of this complete submission, the final point to which the logic of the Incarnation leads. In a word, the Incarnation precedes the cross not only temporally but also logically, while it is the cross which reveals the true meaning of the Incarnation.

The sacrifice and death of Christ take place for our sins, while leaving us an example that we should follow in His footprints. This reference to 1 Peter 2:12 is found frequently in the writings of Francis.⁶⁸ The traditional interpretation of Christ's sacrifice as a ransom, a re-establishing of order following an injury to divine justice,⁶⁹ is thus joined to the interpretation of its value as an example which reveals the logic and significance of the Incarnation, the Eucharist, the Passion and death.

The next phrase, "And [the Father] wills that all should be saved through Him," thus takes on a very particular concrete meaning demanded by the following of Christ. In other words, the phrase "through Him" refers not only to His Incarnation and death, not only to participation in the Eucharistic banquet, essential though these are. It goes further in emphasizing the invitation to all to walk the same path Christ walked. This is the reason for the constant insistence in the Admonitions on the primary importance of our life and works, since it is through these that our following of Christ becomes real.⁷⁰

This emphasis on the exemplary value of the important moments of Christ's earthly life forms the central core on which Francis based his own choice of religious life. But I would hasten to add that he always measured

them against circumstances and mores of his own society. Such behavior is completely in accord with the same historical concreteness which the logic of the Incarnation demands.

Obedience and poverty are the two means used by Francis to express his choice to "be subject." They are the terms he uses to emphasize the profound meaning of the Incarnation, of a way of being and a logic different from those of the world. It was a way and a logic that went well beyond the boundaries of his era, though they were beginning to crumble.

4. Obedience and Poverty as Essential Features in the Following of Christ

The word "obedience" appears forty-eight times in the writings of Francis.⁷¹ With such frequent use, there are certainly many cases in which the word has the juridic and normative meaning used by religious orders. In this case, obedience means to renunciation of one's own will, that is, "to walk according to the judgment and command of another."⁷² But even the traditional understanding of obedience also symbolizes placing our will into the hands of God. Standing in direct opposition to the rebellion of Adam, it is an action which has salvific value. This is the interpretation set forth in Francis's second Admonition.⁷³ Along this same line and going well beyond the juridicnormative picture, obedience acquires a deeper and more concrete meaning, having interior as well as social significance. If obedience is to be selfconsistent, it must imply a choice of one's place in society. Moreover, it involves its own system of logic, able to be independently tested against the events of life.

This choice to be the "lesser ones and subject to all,"⁷⁴ to remain on the lowest step of the hierarchy of power, and so to live by the work of one's hands, is the meaning of the desire to follow "the humility and the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁷⁵ This is the choice necessary if one is to incarnate Christ's basic attitude in the decisive moments of His life, now continued in the mystery of the Eucharist. For this reason, the friars must rejoice "when they live among people [who are considered to be] of little worth and who are looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside."⁷⁶

Obedience, subjection, and service are the result of a voluntary choice. But to remain consistent, they require the same mutual love, the same respect, the same tender and patient mutual support we would have for ourselves. Love, which is a mark of God, is shown to be real when we adopt a logic and way of life opposed to the values of society. This was the path pointed out by Christ. "Nor should any brother do evil or say evil to another; on the contrary, through the charity of the Spirit, they should voluntarily serve and obey one another. And this is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁷⁷

A specific reaction is implied if one is to remain consistent with this choice. Francis's admonition to his brothers is universal and without exception: Let them not judge or condemn, nor consider the sins of others, but only their own.⁷⁸ This is not an invitation to be indifferent, but rather to consider ourselves and others according to a logic in which the key to human relationships is love: "Let all the brothers, both the ministers and servants as well as the others, take care not to be disturbed or angered at the sin or the evil of another, because the devil wishes to destroy many through the fault of one; but they should spiritually help [the brother] who has sinned as best they can, because it is not the healthy who are in need of the physician, but those who are sick."⁷⁹

These concerns are expressed even more decisively in this passage from the Letter to a Minister:⁸⁰ "By this I wish to know if you love the Lord God and me, His servant and yours – if you have acted in this manner: that is, there should not be any brother in the world who has sinned, however much he may have possibly sinned, who, after he has looked into your eyes, would go away without having received your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not to seek mercy, you should ask him if he wants mercy. And if he should sin thereafter a thousand times before your very eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him back to the Lord. Always be merciful to [brothers] such as these. And announce this to the guardians, as you can, that on your part you are resolved to act in this way."

Admonitions such as these occur again and again with new implications, each one like a variation on a single basic attitude. For one thing, mercy toward sinners and love of enemies are based on the refusal of all exercise of violence, power, or domination over others. Furthermore, they are based on the invitation to return to a logic which is the complete reversal, totally at odds with that which dominates ordinary relationships among people.⁸¹

Situated within the context of these exhortations, we find the characteristic Franciscan greeting: "The Lord give you peace." Here we discover its true meaning, for it is not simply a wish for the lessening of conflicts. More importantly, it is a wish to be freed from the logic of the world, of possessions, of power, of self-assertion. Such freedom is necessary if peace is to be realized. The same spirit and wish are the inspiration behind the verse in the Canticle of Brother Sun, which Francis composed on the occasion of a bitter quarrel which existed between the mayor and bishop of Assisi. The bishop had excommunicated the mayor, and the mayor had forbidden all the citizens from doing any kind of business with the bishop. It was under those circumstances that Francis added a new verse to the Canticle which he had composed some months before. Then he sent two of the brothers to sing it in the presence of the bishop, the mayor, and the citizens, all of whom had been invited to gather in the cloister of the bishop's house. These were the lines: "Praised be you, my Lord, through

those who give pardon for your love and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by you, Most High, they shall be crowned."⁸² The purpose of the intervention was not to settle the quarrel, nor to discern the motives and wrongs of either party, nor even to suggest compromise or offer to mediate. Instead, Francis proposed a different way to act with respect to others. This way had no power beyond itself. It was justified only by its reference to the way of Christ.

Another consequence of obedience is the rejection of current standards of success or proselytism in judging the spread of the faith. In the Letter to a Minister, there is a passage which is very clear in its statements, which are both paradoxical and urgent:⁸³ "I speak to you, as I can, concerning the state of your soul. You should accept as a grace all those things which deter you from loving the Lord God and whoever has become an impediment to you, whether [they are] brothers or others, even if they lay hands on you. And you should desire that things be this way and not otherwise. And let this be [an expression] of true obedience to the Lord God and to me, for I know full well that this is true obedience. And love those who do these things to you. And do not expect anything different from them, unless it is something which the Lord shall have given to you. And love them in this and do not wish that they be better Christians. And let this be more [valuable] to you than a hermitage"

These words go well beyond an invitation to love and mercy. They are the radical consequence of the logic of the cross. All of life's hardships, all the evils we may suffer in this world, are graces – opportunities for a relationship which is possible and fruitful only if we adopt this outlook. There is nothing which ought to be desired above and beyond such hardships, even if they seem to be a persecution or an obstacle to the love of God. True obedience is the rejection of any attempt to go beyond the events of life, to control them, to modify them or to correct them. Thus, in our relationships with others we reject everything except our simple attitude of acceptance and gratuitous love.

If we would understand the motive behind such statements, we cannot simply say that, for Francis, "only by subjecting oneself to evil is one able ... to demonstrate the power of love and obedience."⁸⁴ By renouncing the desire that others be better Christians, we affirm that Christ's activity in history is realized through the work of other people in society. However, this takes place only when ordinary logic and common sense are overturned. Instead, we must deny ourselves every expectation that is not in harmony with Christ's own renunciation and love. The Incarnation and cross provide the perfect example of absolute gratuitousness – no expectations, no complaints, no special agenda – in our relationships with other people and with history.

Here lies the difficult task of joining two apparently contradictory

elements. On the one hand, there is a way of being which is radically at odds with the standards of the world. Yet at the same time, only by completely inserting ourselves into the world and accepting its many facets can we present a radically different alternative. The apparent contradiction can be overcome through a deeper understanding of Christ's Incarnation, which makes no sense except in the world where it takes place. The following of Christ is a response to the same situation, and it becomes real only when we assume the basic attitude which is part of the Incarnation. But we must do this in terms which can be measured against the problems of our time. Francis was fully aware of the import of his statement: "Let this be more [valuable] to you than a hermitage." His urgent invitation shows how clearly he realized the changes that were taking place in the traditional spirituality of western Christianity. But Francis was also aware of the rather extreme nature of his statement, which expressed linguistically "with many demonstratives signifying this and not that; or with words that mean all, such as 'whoever', 'even if', 'however much', 'and if a thousand times' ..."⁸⁵

Francis's whole religious quest was guided by rigorous fidelity, historically aware of the conditions of his time. From this point of view, the exact prescriptions in the Testament which follow the historical account of his conversion and the formation of the fraternity are not there by chance. Rather, they are a response to the new problems which the order was facing as it tried to remain totally faithful to the meaning of the Incarnation and the following of Christ. The expansion of the order and the support given it by Rome were raising many urgent questions just at that time, for example, the refusal to accept any privileges, even if given for the sake of preaching or pastoral work, along with the prohibition against accepting churches and dwellings which were not poor, humble, and temporary. These are restatements of a fundamental principle. The logic of the Gospel is essentially opposed to human standards when it bears witness to its own life-giving presence in human history. In the same way, the validity of a Christian presence in history cannot be evaluated by human standards of judgment, such as success, prestige, or power.

This same spirit animates the story of the Dictate on True and Perfect Joy, especially in its primitive version.⁸⁶ Even if all the masters of Paris enter the order, or the prelates beyond the mountains, or the kings of France and England, none of these is reason for true joy. If the friars go to the unbelievers and convert them all to the faith, if Francis should receive such grace from God to heal the sick and perform many miracles, not even in this is true joy to be found. What, then, is true joy?

I return from Perugia and arrive here in the dead of night; and it is winter time, muddy and so cold that icicles have formed on the edges of my habit and keep striking my legs,

and blood flows from such wounds. And all covered with mud and cold, I come to the gate and after I have knocked and called for some time, a brother comes and asks: "Who are you?" I answer: "Brother Francis." And he says: "Go away; it is not the proper hour for going about; you may not come in." And when I insist, he answers: "Go away; you are a simple and a stupid person; we are so many and we have no need of you. You are certainly not coming to us at this hour!" And I stand again at the door and say: "For the love of God, take me in tonight." And he answers: "I will not. Go to the Crosiers' place and ask there." I tell you this: If I had patience and did not become upset, there would be true joy in this and true virtue and the salvation of the soul.

This incident is meant to be an example. It dramatizes the Admonition in which Francis had set down the necessary conditions if his brothers were truly to follow the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ: "[The friars] must rejoice when they live among people [who are considered to be] of little worth and who are looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside."⁸⁷ Here Francis demands that their actual life and the way they feel are to be in complete accord. In other words, the reality of their submission, their insecurity, their absolute poverty, must be authenticated by their attitude of serene acceptance of these things. Conversely, this attitude of acceptance requires those conditions as a true measure of its genuineness. Once again, this is the path walked by Christ, along which alone we find true joy. Moreover, it is a path opposite to one which would lead to any kind of success in the name of Christ. It is significant that the entire first part of the text on true joy is closely structured around examples which recall situations of this kind. The texts of the Acts and the Little Flowers are quite different. We might say that they have been more reworked, and they pay less attention to the conclusion. The theme of simplicity runs through them, and so they present a series of situations where the friars in various ways succeed either because they are holy or educated, or have the gifts of prophecy, eloquence, and so forth.⁸⁸

In the context of these experiences, the chapter in the Earlier Rule that deals with going among unbelievers acquires its true significance. In the first place, it presents an alternative to the practices of the Crusades. At the same time, it is a privileged opportunity witnessing again to the Gospel experience in its authenticity and original wholeness. In fact, it is not by accident that the first way for the brothers to live the Gospel among unbelievers is to exercise a Christian presence there, with no attempts at making converts: "[They are] not to engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake and to acknowledge that they are Christians."⁸⁹ Only when they see that it pleases the Lord should they attempt the work of preaching and conversion. In this same context, we find clarification of a statement attributed to Francis by Thomas of Celano. The fact that it is reproduced

word for word in the *Mirror of Perfection* leads us to think that we are dealing with one of the many "flowers" transmitted by Celano along with the material from the *Companions*:⁹⁰ "But that obedience he [Francis] thought was the highest and was without anything of flesh and blood by which one goes by divine inspiration among the infidels, either for the sake of profit for one's neighbor or out of a desire for martyrdom. To ask for this obedience he thought was highly acceptable to God."

Clearly we are not dealing with the written report of one of Francis's sayings. The biographer simply wishes to attest to the opinion of Francis, in the context of presenting his attitude on obedience. In fact, these thoughts come at the close of a famous long discourse of Francis, in which he compares the attitude of a truly obedient person to that of a corpse. This discourse prompted the writer to add some further details, including the mention that Francis maintained that the highest obedience consisted in going among unbelievers: "The highest obedience in which flesh and blood plays no part."⁹¹ I believe that the important term is the description of such obedience as being the highest. I would say it is the highest obedience because it contains no trace of prudence or human calculation. There is an allusion to that prudence of the flesh warned against in the *Earlier Rule*,⁹² which stands in contrast to those who endure every sort of anguish of soul and body or ordeals – in short, those who choose the substance of religious life rather than its appearances.

But the essential element of the statement is its characterizing of the height of obedience as going among unbelievers. This is the special element which justifies its being remembered. This is what struck the writer and induced him to record it, since it is not something obvious or usual. The rest of the discourse is much more what one would expect, since it is obvious that a friar would go among unbelievers under divine inspiration, as prescribed in the *Rule*.⁹³ Likewise the two reasons given – "for the sake of profit for one's neighbor or out of a desire for martyrdom"⁹⁴ – recur in the tradition. And so I think that rather than paraphrasing a saying of Francis, this part reflects the writer's interpretation of Francis's opinion. It is an interpretation which took up certain elements of Francis's discourse on the missions (conversion and martyrdom were both part of his view)⁹⁵ but left out at least one other important element, that of simple Christian presence, being humble and submissive to all. Moreover, from this point of view, the choice to live among unbelievers is clearly seen as an act of highest obedience. That complete submission which constitutes obedience can be realized fully and authentically only when we are completely outside any type of Christian environment, where we might find protection, security, recognition, and defense. This viewpoint also clarifies the connection between obedience and poverty, together with motives for choosing

poverty, along with the characteristics of voluntary poverty lived in one's particular historical situation.

In the hierarchized political and social context of a society which was still largely feudal, or which at least continued to refer to the values of chivalry, the *obedientes* were, by definition, the poor. Obedience and submission were a required condition, an integral part of their life-style. Nor was this situation changed by periodic rebellions which shook but failed to crack the foundations of a structure that was considered natural. The medieval vocabulary of poverty contains many terms which express material misery: starved, hungry, begging, ragged, indigent, poor, needy. Yet it is no accident that it contains many more terms reminiscent of weakness, or physical, cultural and legal helplessness; lack of social status and power; stranger, weak, lowly, orphan, widow, exile, captive, aged, sick, leper, infirm, unlettered, simple, and so forth.⁹⁶ The varied and complex ways in which these terms were used is proof of the kind of outlook used to characterize the world of the poor. Theirs was, first of all, a world which lacked those guarantees and instruments of power available to the military and religious social hierarchies and other groups associated with them.⁹⁷

The culture and spirituality of earlier centuries, the age of monasticism, had worked out an interpretation in which evangelical poverty was considered a model. The tendency was to see it as a virtue or habit to which there *might* possibly correspond, in a manner to be defined, a condition of individual or collective material poverty. In fact, discussion of monastic reform between the eleventh and twelfth centuries revolved largely around this question.⁹⁸ Thus, material poverty remained a kind of consequence, a manifestation through external acts of an internal attitude, a means of one's own sanctification, an occasion for the edification of others. But in no way did it involve a change in one's position on the hierarchical ladder, which in fact clearly distinguished the various groups who practiced voluntary poverty from the lower and subordinate classes who found themselves in a condition of misery, weakness, or insecurity.⁹⁹

Through his own manner of living, Francis rejoined two elements which had become separated in real life and in the traditions of other religious communities. Thus his choice of poverty was also his choice of his place in society. Through his own experience he wished to show the full reality of what it meant to be poor in the Italian society of the thirteenth century. The phrase "like other poor" and similar expressions scattered throughout Francis's prescriptions for the life of the fraternity are clear evidence of his desire for such identification.¹⁰⁰ Just as the Incarnation takes place in history and has no need of history, so too the following of Christ does not take place outside of time but in concrete and specific situations. The logic of the Incarnation and the cross overthrows society's standards of value, judgment, and behavior. Poverty, as it is concretely lived in a particular age,

is the necessary expression of this. Francis's own choice flowed from his understanding of what is required to show the exemplary meaning of the Incarnation in terms that are historically valid. But this understanding is not a once-and-for-all affair, nor does it rest secure in the satisfaction that everything necessary has been done. This understanding always needs concrete expression, and so it must be constantly measured against new situations indicated by the events of history. Again and again it must find suitable responses which remain faithful to the choice to follow Christ, a choice freely made at the invitation of grace.¹⁰¹ The final partial provisions in the Testament regarding the friars' dwellings and privileges from the Roman curia are a response to this need. Using the criteria which had been adopted regarding the friars' presence in the world, they attempt to resolve the new problems raised by the order's expansion and success within the church. To reduce these prescriptions to a question of good relationships with the bishops and local clergy¹⁰² would be to evade and misrepresent both their literal meaning and the spirit which animates them. They are not reaffirming the need for diplomatic caution. Rather, they are reaffirming the basic reality in the life of the fraternity: insecurity and submission, with no guarantees or special recognition.

In the example of Francis's life and teaching, being poor involves a number of things which are gradually discovered and accepted as being part of the historically real features of poverty. Therefore, being poor means to be a manual laborer, lacking possessions and money, having only a temporary and insecure dwelling. Being poor means to be without guarantees and privileges; without the possibility of recourse to force, pressure or restraint; without importance or social prestige; without plans for tomorrow; with neither recognition nor the means for imposing on society one's own presence, point of view or direction.¹⁰³

Each of these is amply documented in the writings of Francis. Each of these aspects is a particular implication of the one single following of Christ. Each of these aspects is expressed through a way opened up by some original intuition or experience. But the adequate expression of these intuitions is found only in concrete historical situations. This is particularly evident in the prohibition to use money in any form or for any reason whatsoever.¹⁰⁴ This is one of the more abstract and paradoxical rejections to be found in Francis's teaching; but in reality and from this point of view it assumes a precise historical significance.

Gratien of Paris, the greatest and too-often forgotten historian of early Franciscanism, has noted that such statements as "Do not possess gold or silver," or "Do not be solicitous about tomorrow," are certainly to be found in the Gospel. But Francis could also have found in the Gospel the Christ who paid tribute to Caesar as well as Judas who kept the common purse for the Apostles.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, this refusal of money must not be read as an

example of strict biblical literalism. Father Gratien characterizes Francis's choice of absolute despoilment as the wish to specifically imitate Christ abandoned and crucified.¹⁰⁶

Although this explanation is exact and persuasive regarding the basic reason for the refusal of money, it seems to require deeper study. Such a radical rejection of money needs to be examined more precisely.

The refusal of money is not only the renunciation of an instrument and sign of power, deriving from Francis's awareness of having been a merchant and the son of a merchant. All of this has been pointed out many times by scholars. His refusal must also be viewed in light of his attitude toward begging alms. Recourse may be had to begging if one's work does not provide adequate means of sustenance. With this limitation, a limitation proper to all poor beggars, the friar may then have recourse to alms and to the table of the Lord.¹⁰⁷ A statement attributed to Francis in the tradition of the Companions is significant in this regard:¹⁰⁸ "I was never a robber. By that I mean that for the alms which are the inheritance of the poor, I have always accepted less than I needed so that I would not defraud the other poor. To act otherwise would be to steal."

No doubt an affirmation of this kind could assume a polemic significance for Brother Leo and the second and third generations of friars. But this neither denies nor weakens its perfect consistency with the authentic experience of Francis. He himself was deeply convinced of the necessity of situating the following of Christ within the concrete life-conditions of paupers, so that it would be clear to the people of his time. His drastic exclusion of money from alms involves a consideration of the danger of accumulation, a danger closely tied to the new system involving the greater circulation of money, which was taking place in the cities. This danger was emphasized because it seemed more threatening at that time, when alms as a means of sustenance could become, as in monastic tradition, a means of recognizing the sanctity of those who had undertaken religious life.¹⁰⁹ Francis excluded all possessions from his fraternity, and thus the more traditional elements of donations.¹¹⁰ He imposed specific limitations on the acceptance of offerings and excluded money therefrom.¹¹¹ In short, Francis singled out and rejected the occasions and means which historically had transformed the monastic orders. They had, in fact, become great complexes endowed with goods and income, and thus powerful institutions standing at the apex of the social hierarchy. For Francis, the prohibition to accept or handle money whether directly or indirectly meant, in the context of a Christian society, avoiding some of the more pious consequences of his choice of poverty. Otherwise, in the context of the Italian cities, he might have ended up abandoning poverty and his choice to live as a truly poor person.

The *Sacrum commercium*, in a fresh and lively manner, gives us the first

complete theological reflection on Francis's original experience. It is not by accident, I think, that it characterizes the system of donations and offerings practiced by the monastic orders as a path which would lead to the gradual betrayal and abandoning of the order's original vocation.¹¹² The image of poverty as the "privileged mediatrix of our insertion into the history of salvation"¹¹³ is centered on a reflection on the Incarnation. This same idea is also found in the *Sacrum Commercium*. In its logic and modes of expression the Incarnation is opposed to the viewpoints which predominate throughout history, irremediably marked as it is by the fall of Adam.¹¹⁴ From this point of view the choice of poverty is a choice radically opposed to the movements at work in history. The prohibitions, warnings, and admonitions, as well as the example of many of Francis's gestures and attitudes, can be explained by his wish to defend the significance and living out of his choice. The rejection of money is a response to Francis's full awareness of the values at work in his society and of the features which the various forms of religious life had assumed. But in this way he affirmed and defended the special nature of his own vocation and witness.

5. Gospel Fidelity and Obedience to Rome: Overcoming a Possible Dilemma

Francis's affirmation of the special character of his vocation is evident in his dealings with the church of Rome and with ecclesiastical tradition. These concerns are the main subject of his relationships.

Francis's submission to Rome was total. It was a specific act of submission with specific motives, but it was part of the more general attitude of submissiveness implied by his choice to be a minor. This means, in the first place, that submission to the church of Rome and to clerics who live according to the manner of the holy Roman Church is based upon Christ and His Eucharistic presence. In a wider sense, this submission is situated within the context of the attitudes demanded by the following of Christ. It is a following characterized by poverty, obedience, subjection, service, acceptance of others with their weaknesses and faults, and the rejection of all forms of self-affirmation and rebellion. But these things by no means exclude the suffering which resulted from Francis's constant concern to reaffirm the special nature of his vocation.

The reticent silence of the biographies and early narratives hangs like a pall over the terms of this drama, which though real enough, is hard to decipher. These writers tend to be reluctant to speak about the tensions which polluted the rather mythical atmosphere surrounding the origins of the order. But there is another dilemma badly stated and even more badly resolved by modern historiography.

The official tradition adopts the attitude that things were just fine. It

seldom admits, and then only with vague hints, that there may indeed have been a few problems.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, during the thirteenth century we find the picture presented by the Spirituals. It portrays an attempt within the order by the ministers and leaders at a systematic betrayal and deterioration of the original ideals.¹¹⁶ This view is based on the notes, stories, and other bits of information which were handed on within the circle of the Companions.¹¹⁷ But they never dealt, either at first or later except in passing, with the question of Francis's relations with Rome.¹¹⁸ The Spirituals' line of defense was that the Later Rule of 1226 was the exclusive work of Francis, and therefore untouchable.¹¹⁹

In their attempts to explain this opposition, historiographers in the last ninety years have ended up with an unresolved debate. Some, such as Sabatier, see in this "betrayal" the clever monopolizing tendency of Rome, committed from the very beginning of the growth of the Franciscan movement to seize it systematically and empty it of its meaning.¹²⁰ To this attempt, Francis, who was tired and sick, could offer only weak and unsuccessful opposition. Other scholars, emphasizing the orthodoxy and obedience of Francis, see the order's vicissitudes and development as a normal thing. Certainly there were tensions and differences of opinion, but they were not such as to damage the order's continuity and substantial fidelity to its original ideals.¹²¹ Instead of the rebel who was unsuccessful because he was exhausted or the reformer who failed because he was personally defeated – in either case the victim of an underhanded conspiracy – there is substituted the picture of Francis the idealistic poet, a very great man and a very great saint, certainly, but a bit naive. While he was personally quite orthodox, he had only a poor understanding of the new problems connected with the growth of the order and the demands of pastoral activity. For this reason he felt extremely out of his element during the final years of his life.¹²²

It is not easy to avoid these dilemmas and divergent points of view. Both are expressed persuasively in the sources, and both are so deeply a part of Franciscan historiography that for a while one of them will almost inadvertently dominate scholarly research and interpretation. Thus the split tends to take place once again and to be continued, even though the slow task of positive research should by now allow these questions to be posed in different terms, less oversimplified and more historically cautious.

I would like to begin with a solidly established fact. There is no doubt that the order went through a number of severe crises, even while Francis was alive. One was while he was in the East, at the Crusaders' camp.¹²³ Another was after his return and his resignation as general, during the months (perhaps even years) when the definitive text of the Rule was being discussed.¹²⁴ The biographies and other accounts say very little about all of this, but the traces, though brief and written almost as if by mistake, remain

unequivocal. There is a common basic element to all these crises, namely, the tendency to translate the Franciscan experience into terms borrowed from the tradition of the monks or canons regular. Although the Order of Preachers contained many elements that were new and original in the life of the church, it is no accident that it was forced to adopt the Rule of St. Augustine, as previously the canons regular had done.¹²⁵ Both inside and outside the Franciscan Order, there seems to have been a great attraction for the model offered by the earlier orders, either the monks or the canons regular. The sources contain many indications of this.¹²⁶ Undoubtedly the most symbolic and explicit episode is that which took place during the General Chapter of Mats, in the presence of Cardinal Hugolino.

The episode is found (with a number of variations which do not substantially change its content) in the Words of St. Francis attributed to Brother Leo and in the Assisi Compilation (Legend of Perugia).¹²⁷ It is taken up later by Ubertino of Casale and Angelus of Clareno¹²⁸ and still later by Bartholomew of Pisa.¹²⁹ Once again, its origin seems to lie in those precious materials of Franciscan biography gathered and elaborated in the circle of the Companions, although the Words as such were probably compiled sometime after the great appeal made by Crescentius of Jesi.¹³⁰

According to this episode, at the Chapter of Mats many wise and learned friars had urged the cardinal to persuade Francis to heed their advice, appealing to the prescriptions found in the rules of St. Benedict, St. Augustine, and St. Bernard. As we know, the date of this chapter is a matter of controversy, although the Chapter of Pentecost in 1222 seems most probable.¹³¹ Suggestions and requests of this kind lead us to believe that the discussion revolved more than ever around the definitive text of the Rule. This additional information adds credence to our suggested date. Francis's reply, delivered in dramatic fashion before the entire chapter, is presented as a direct quotation: "My brothers, my brothers, God called me through the way of simplicity and has showed me the way of simplicity. I do not want to hear any mention of the Rule of St. Augustine, of St. Bernard, or of St. Benedict. The Lord has told me that He wanted to make a new fool of me in the world, and God does not want to lead us by any other knowledge than that. God will use your personal knowledge and your wisdom to confound you; He has policemen to punish you, and I put my trust in Him. Then to your shame you will return to your first state, whether you like it or not!"¹³²

Among the many sayings of Francis preserved in the material which comes from the Companions, this one contains particularly strong internal evidence arguing to its authenticity. For one thing, there is its remarkable agreement in language and concepts with a number of the fundamental themes found in Francis's proposal. In addition, these themes are expressed with extraordinary incisiveness and effectiveness. The central theme of the

passage is its strong vindication of the originality and special character of Francis's vocation. The Lord has called me "through the way of simplicity" and has shown me the "way of simplicity." The Lord has told me "that He wanted to make a new fool of me in the world." These two affirmations serve to clarify one another, and both express the same reality. The simplicity of Francis's teaching is opposed to the wisdom of the world: "Pure holy Simplicity destroys all the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of the body."¹³³ This is a key word in Francis's experience and teaching. Francis describes himself as simple.¹³⁴ He understands and writes the words of the Lord simply.¹³⁵ The brothers must be simple, because in their standards of judgment they are strangers to that wisdom and prudence which are proper to life in this world and which make use of the means it offers.¹³⁶ But to assume totally an inner attitude so opposed to common sense must appear in the eyes of the world madness and foolishness: "The Lord has told me that He wanted to make a new fool of me in the world." Clearly this phrase is intended to complete and explain the meaning of his fundamental vocational choice. Francis is a new fool, because if he is to remain consistent with that choice, he can act only in a manner beyond the usual rules of behavior. The phrase used, *novellus pazzus*, is an Italianism, which would seem to be a sure indication of its authenticity. What is more, there seems to be no awareness of the Pauline allusions which run through this passage, or at least no concern to mention them. The first allusion is to 1 Corinthians 1:18ff, where the message of the cross seems foolishness to those who are being lost, and it seems foolishness to the wisdom of the world because it is opposed to it. There is also an allusion to 1 Corinthians 4:10: "We are fools for Christ's sake," which is a sanction for the radical choice on which the apostolic life is based.¹³⁷ It is clear that if the writer had explicitly wished to establish a connection with St. Paul, he should have used the term used by the Vulgate - *stultus*. Instead, he used the term *pazzus*. However, what evidently mattered to him was to refer the expression to Francis, just as he remembered it with all its paradoxical incisiveness.

I do not know whether Francis was thinking explicitly of St. Paul, although it is possible, perhaps probable. But what matters is that the entire discourse is centered around the basic theme of the following of Christ, as described and analyzed in Francis's own reflection. And so he is a fool because he overthrows the ordinary standards for a human intervention in history. But the text reads "a new fool." The word "new" (*novellus*) is also clearly a vernacularism. To translate it by Bigaroni's *nuovo*, or Vorreux's *nouveau*¹³⁸ seems to trivialize it. To translate it by Brooke's "new-born,"¹³⁹ seems to distort its meaning. Her phrase "a new-born simpleton" would appear to suggest a kind of unconscious childishness and simple-mindedness. This betrays the depth of the image which is otherwise self-explanatory. To

translate it by *jeune* as proposed by Desbonnets¹⁴⁰ does not seem completely justified nor fully convincing on the lips of a man who was about forty years old. I would prefer to understand the term "new" in the sense of "never seen before," capable of making an enormous impression. But we should not forget that "new" is also used to describe a person or thing which resembles some other person or thing.¹⁴¹ In this sense, "new" could be another allusion to the theme of following Christ. Francis is a "new fool" because he shows the foolishness of Christ and the Apostles, the logic of the cross.

These are the premises which underlie Francis's rejection of the rules followed by the monks or canons, no matter how ancient or venerable they may be. In any case, we do not need to depend upon this passage from the Words for explicit documentation of his rejection.¹⁴² Therefore, it makes no sense to oppose Francis's constant obedience and desire to remain obedient to the church of Rome to declarations such as this. This is an indisputable fact, as indisputable as the suffering he underwent to safeguard the originality and special character of his vocation. The only foundation, the only rule which he has and wishes to have is the Gospel. Besides, as he often said, this is a "life," an unusual use of the term used in the text of the "rule" for the fraternity, when he introduces instructions for its behavior.¹⁴³

Affirmation of the originality of his vocation along with obedience to Rome are the two attitudes which refer to a single choice founded in Christ and in the decision to follow Him with complete fidelity. But this does not mean that the two attitudes are allowed to oppose each other. That kind of opposition was to appear soon enough in the historical experiences of the evangelical and pauperist movements which were arising at that same time.

I do not think the problem can be resolved by a mere appeal to Francis's desire to remain orthodox, as if this were a kind of safeguard to be set up alongside his Gospel experience. I think we need to emphasize the insufficiency of language in expressing certain realities. A "desire" for something does not imply the certainty or the possibility of its being attained. Francis's experience is realized with such intensity and is situated at such a deep level that there is a much closer and more coherent connection between these two attitudes than implied by simply speaking of Francis's desire to remain orthodox.

Here I think lies the crux of the interpretation of the Francis-event which makes it absolutely different from those evangelical movements which gradually went beyond the limits into rebellion and heresy. Any heretical or heterodox rebellion involves a radical denial of the choice to follow Christ as understood by Francis.¹⁴⁴ This is not simply because Rome is Rome, but first of all because a rebellion implies the reappropriation of means, desires, perspectives, presumptions, and rights. It implies plans for intervention and the exercise of power. Thus, rebellion is radically

contradictory to the very Gospel choice which it claims to be defending in this way.

The Gospel choice only seems paradoxical. If it is to remain such, it must renounce those very things that would ensure its continued existence as a lived experience and as a sign radically opposed to the world. And so it must reject defenses and debates – all recourse to outside means of guaranteeing its existence.

This is the real drama of Francis's relationship with Rome. The contradictions are only apparent. This is also the reason why he had difficulties being accepted and really understood. While his religious experience was deeply involved in society, at the same time it was in a way completely enclosed on itself. It looked only to itself for its reason for existence and its activity in history. It had no other expectation except to rely on what was freely given and to reject absolutely any means offered by human logic. Inevitably it clashed with those traditions and rigid practices which aimed at guiding people along the path of history toward salvation by appeal to models of organization provided by experience. Such a rejection portended the conflicts that were to come, the easy shifts of direction taken by the fraternity, and the unconscious misunderstandings.

However paradoxical it may seem, there is no more subtle distortion of Francis's religious experience than to interpret it as a plan for the reform of the church and thus the renewal of pastoral activity and Christian life in society. This was the line taken by some of the better elements in the church and in the order.¹⁴⁵ Preaching and proclaiming Christ as the way to salvation, the call to follow His precepts as summarized in the laws of the church, are no doubt one element of Franciscanism. Significant traces and indications of this are found in Francis's own writings.¹⁴⁶ But such preaching is completely rooted in the early fraternity's life of subjection and service. It is a natural outgrowth. And so, such preaching cannot expect or demand tangible results without at the same time contradicting the very meaning of the fraternity's original choice.¹⁴⁷ This proclamation depends upon grace for its fruitfulness. It is for people to accept according to their ability. Of itself it does not directly challenge people or structures. It contains no programs beyond the definition of the way it has chosen for itself. This is the way along which Francis and his followers have been called by the grace of God alone.¹⁴⁸ To him and his fraternity belongs the task of making alive again in history the life of Christ. They are His spouses, brothers and mothers to the extent they follow His example: "We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. We are brothers when we do the will of His Father who is in heaven. [We are] mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to Him through [His] holy manner of working, which should shine before others as an example."¹⁴⁹

This viewpoint concretely expresses one of the traditional themes of patristic and medieval spirituality.¹⁵⁰ It is the result of Francis's own lived experience within society, his identification with the least of its members. But it is precisely this identification, with its reference to Christ and to the poor in imitation of Him, which prevents any attempt to go outside of itself. As a result of this kind of identification, Francis had no projects to propose for the church or for society. Consequently it is useless and arbitrary from the viewpoint of historiography to ask what Francis thought about the future of the church or society. Such a question lies beyond the boundaries within which he had consciously chosen to operate.

The strength of Francis's Christian proposal, reaffirmed in so many ways, lies in itself alone. Its unique strength consists in its being truly present in history, yet expecting no success that can be concretely measured in terms of historical results. Such an attitude certainly implies an effort to abandon oneself completely to God. Left to themselves, humans are capable only of misery and sin.¹⁵¹ A person can produce good fruits only by becoming totally an instrument in the hands of God. But this is possible only if we are able to walk again the path of the man-Christ, who left us an example of life. Poverty is the essential element of this path, and the cross lies at its end. Human activity, if it is to be an instrument of divine activity in history after the example of Christ, cannot have recourse to ordinary human ways of acting.

This perception, I believe, is basic to Francis's religious experience. Therefore, in its expression this experience cannot have recourse to the wisdom which comes from the historical experience of people. The two realities coexist in history, but there is a rift between them which cannot be healed within the framework of historical time. The life of Christ contains in itself "new signs of heaven and earth, which are great and extraordinary in the sight of God and yet are regarded as of little importance by many religious and other people."¹⁵² These are the signs which Francis recovered and presented in a social context. But he accepted them in their basic reality as signs, which are to remain such until the end of time. Francis was perfectly aware of the serious defects in the Christian life of the church and society of his time. There are many indications of this. But his only proposal was to reestablish through his life and that of his followers a sign and reference point. Any other project would have involved becoming entrapped again by forms of logic foreign to the logic of the cross.¹⁵³

Nevertheless, I do not think formulas and rational arguments alone can explain the very close connection between Francis's experience of the Gospel and his obedience to Rome. The dilemma between these two fidelities, a dilemma which grew in intensity during the last six or seven years of Francis's life because of events within the order, could not be

solved on an intellectual level. What was demanded was a re-living of the experience of the Incarnation and the cross.

We really know very little about Francis's last years, and I do not think it is possible to do more than hazard some interpretive hypotheses. But those "facts" which, so speak, escape from the sources in spite of everything are too important to leave aside. There are three such facts to consider: Francis fled from the sight of the friars;¹⁵⁴ for two years he suffered from a grave temptation;¹⁵⁵ then on La Verna he received the stigmata.¹⁵⁶ The sources do not place these events in their historical context, in the context of the experiences which made up the real drama of Francis's last years. It was a drama involving the order and the directions Rome was imposing on it, discretely but with growing insistence. When not dealing with completely incidental matters, the context of the events of Francis's last years remains exclusively edifying. They shed deeper light on the greatness of Francis's holiness, but not upon its historical, existential, human roots. Thus any attempt at their recovery can be only hypothetical.

Francis's grave temptation lasted a good two years, not a short period in a religious life which was about twenty years in all. It is hard not to suppose that it took place during the last years of his life, amid the tensions which accompanied the final drafting of the Rule. His grave temptation, then, would have been to rebel – to reaffirm his original ideals in terms directly opposed to the line of development Rome and the ministers were imposing on the order. This interpretation, risky though it may be, seems to me unavoidable. We must remember that the stigmata, which took place about the same time, were signs of terrible spiritual and physical suffering. At the same time they were a seal of approval of Francis's Christian proposal and the way he had gradually come to live it. The real alternative to conflict and rebellion is the cross, the condition of the authentic following of Christ.

After receiving the stigmata, Francis wrote with his own hand the Praises of God.¹⁵⁷ It is the only commentary, if we may call it that, the only words of Francis directly connected to this event. The text is completely biblical and liturgical. It is an invocation, an act of praise, and at the same time an act of faith in the infinite greatness, power, and saving will of God. In the Blessing for Brother Leo, written by Francis on the other side of the same piece of parchment, we find reproduced the blessing which Aaron and his sons had been enjoined to use for the children of Israel (Numbers 6:24–26): "May the Lord bless you and keep you; may He show His face to you and be merciful to you. May He turn His countenance to you and give you peace. May the Lord bless you, Brother Leo."¹⁵⁸

The blessing closes with the Franciscan greeting of peace. It is a greeting which summarizes the relationship to be established between humanity and history. This relationship is explicitly said to flow from the full manifestation of the mystery of divine grace. Peace is the consequence of

this manifestation. This connection proves, I believe, that the stigmata represent the real solution of the dilemmas, doubts and difficulties which had tormented Francis in the preceding years. It is the final point on a line which leads from the Incarnation, an Incarnation which takes place within human history. And yet to be effective within history, it cannot avail itself of human means. The stigmata were a unique experience, which could not really be shared or perpetuated. Francis was animated by the single desire to live in this same way. He had no further desires or expectations. The historical problem of Francis and of the order which appeals to his teaching – the problem of the traditions which preserve his memory – lies precisely here. The episodes of his life and teaching as gathered and interpreted by his biographers, must be re-read, recaptured and verified through this minute sifting of evidence. In this way we recover as much as we can the full meaning of those words and events which had been preserved from a point of view which was now being challenged by other pressing needs and established traditions. At the same time we can specify the schemas, the mental frames of reference, and the various kinds of deformation which this way of life underwent in order to become part of the heritage of the church, which already for centuries had been an integrating force in society.¹⁵⁹

Notes

1. See A. Frugoni, *Arnaldo da Brescia nelle fonti del secolo XII* (Rome, 1954), fasc. 8–9, pp. VII – X.
2. Ibid., p. IX.
3. Ibid., passim. See also A. Frugoni, "La fortuna di Arnaldo da Brescia," in *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, series 2, 24 (1955):146ff, 156ff. See also "Filii Arnaldi" (Per l'interpretazione di un passo di Ottone Morena), in *Bollettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il Medio evo e Archivio Muratoriano*, 70 (1958):521–24.
4. For the writings of Francis, see K. Esser, *Die Opuscula des hl. Franziskus von Assisi*. Neue textkritische Edition (Rome, 1976). However, in this study, unless otherwise noted, I shall ordinarily refer to the minor edition: *Opuscula sancti patris Francisci Assisiensis*, denuo edidit iuxta cod. mss. C. Esser (Rome, 1978). For the major biographies and collections of writings, see Thomas of Celano, "Vita prima S. Francisci," in *Analecta Franciscana* 10 (1926–41):3–117; "Vita secunda," idem, pp. 129–268; "Tractatus de miraculis," idem, pp. 271–330. Hereafter they are cited as 1Cel, 2Cel, 3Cel. See St. Bonaventure, *LMaior*, idem, pp. 557–652. See Théophile Desbonnets, "Legenda trium sociorum," edition critique, in *Archivum Franciscanum historicum*, 67 (1974):38–114, hereafter cited 3Cel. See *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli sociorum S. Francisci*, edited and translated by Rosalind B. Brooke (Oxford, 1970), hereafter cited as *Scripta*. For the material from the Companions, see also 'Compilatio Assisiensis' dagli scritti di fr. Leone e compagni su S. Francesco d'Assisi, first complete edition from Perugia MS 1046, with a parallel Italian version, introduction and notes by M. Bigaroni, O.F.M. (Assisi, 1975), hereafter cited as *Compilatio*. Regarding this edition, which is deficient in some aspects, see the additions made by A. Gattucci, "Dalla 'Legenda antiqua S. Francisci' alla 'Compilatio Assisiensis', storia di un testo

- più prezioso che fortunato," in *Studi Medievali*, series 3, 20 (1979):789-870. See also *Le Speculum perfectionis*, vols. 1 and 2, edd. P. Sabatier and A.G. Little (Manchester, 1928-31), hereafter cited as *SpPer*. See also Lorenzo Di Fonzo, O.F.M.Conv., "L'anonimo perugino tra le fonti francescane del sec. XIII. Rapporti letterari e testo critico," in *Miscellanea Francescana*, 72 (1972):117-465. From pp. 435 to 465 this text should be compared with Pierre B. Beguin, *L'Anonyme de Pérouse. Un témoin de la fraternité franciscaine primitive confronté aux autres sources contemporaines* (Paris, 1979). This text reproduces Di Fonzo's edition from pp. 26 to 105. Also useful is Théophile Desbonnets, O.F.M. and Damien Vorreux, *Saint François d'Assise. Documents, écrits et premières biographies* (Paris, 1968). See also *Fonti francescane. Scritti e biografie di san Francesco d'Assisi. Cronache e altre testimonianze del primo secolo francescano. Scritti e biografie di santa Chiara d'Assisi* (Padua, 1980). The introduction to the first part is contained in Stanislao da Campagnola, O.F.M.Cap., *Francesco d'Assisi nel suoi scritti e nelle sue biografie dei secoli XIII-XIV* (Assisi, 1977). The most recent collection of texts with a very good introduction is edited by C. Gennaro, *Francesco d'Assisi* (Brescia, 1982). Indispensable for any Franciscan research are the concordances of the writings of Francis, the biographies, and later collections, published by Jean-François Godet and G. Mailleux in five volumes of the *Corpus des sources franciscaines* (Louvain, 1974-87).
5. See for example Paul Sabatier, *Vie de S. François d'Assise*, 22d ed. (Paris, 1898), p. 298, where certain of Francis's statements concerning obedience are wrongly understood as indications of a grave crisis, as if he were trying to persuade himself of the necessity of following a different kind of religious life - obedient and submissive - with respect to the original Gospel freedom.
 6. See the introductions of Desbonnets and Vorreux, *Saint François d'Assise*, prefaced to their translation of the various biographies. See Stanislao da Campagnola, O.F.M.Cap., *Le origini francescane come problema storiografico* (Perugia, 1974), pp. 17ff, and his *Francesco d'Assisi*, pp. 67ff.
 7. See *1Cel* 9, 18, 21; *2Cel* 10, 11, 13, 14; *L3S* 13, 21, 24, 60; *LMaior* II 1, 7, 8. For the tradition of penitent builders in the twelfth century, see P. Alphandéry, *La Chrétienté et l'idée de croisade, II. Recommencements nécessaires (XII^e - XIII^e siècles)* (Paris, 1959), pp. 136ff.
 8. See for example *1Cel* 37 and 62, and *L3S* 60, which summarize the success of Francis's preaching in terms of triumph for the church and for orthodoxy. See also *2Cel* 17; *L3S* 51; *LMaior* III 10 (the dream of Innocent III). Regarding this see "La storia religiosa," in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 1, *Dalla caduta dell'Impero romano al secolo XVIII* (Turin, 1974), p. 743; *Scripta*, 103, p. 270; *2Cel* 141 (the judgment of the bishop of Terni on the role of Francis in the church). Despite his obvious attempts at concordance and combining of texts, many other references to this are to be found in Kajetan Esser, "Sancta mater ecclesia romana. Die Kirchenfrömmigkeit des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," in *Sentire ecclesiam. Das Bewusstsein von der Kirche als gestaltende Kraft der Frömmigkeit*. Edd. J. Danielou and H. Vorgrimler (Freiburg - Basel - Vienna, 1961), esp. pp. 237ff. Italian translation Rome, 1964, vol. 1, pp. 365-413.
 9. Giovanni Miccoli, "Di alcuni passi di san Bonaventura sullo sviluppo dell'ordine francescano," in *Studi Medievali*, series 3, 11 (1970):381-95. Regarding the *Epistola de tribus quaestionibus*, of which I speak in the second part of my study, see also Kajetan Esser, "Zu der 'Epistola de tribus quaestionibus' des hl. Bonaventura," in *Franziskanische Studien*, 27 (1940):149-59; Ferdinand Delorme, O.F.M., "Textes franciscaines, III. Lettre de S. Bonaventure innominato magistro," in *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà*, 1 (1951):209-18; Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., "The Writings of Saint Bonaventure regarding the Franciscan Order," in *Miscellanea francescana*, 75 (1975):96.

10. See especially the Testament, no. 14: "After the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the holy Gospel." See also what follows. For the importance of Francis's conviction that he was living his way of life as a free gift from God, with no other mediation, see D.V. Lapsanski, *Perfectio evangelica. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung im frühfranziskanischen Schrifttum* (Munich - Paderborn - Vienna, 1974), pp. 46-47.
11. See the many references in Stanislaw da Campagnola, *L'angelo del sesto sigillo e l'alter Christus* (Rome, 1971), pp. 127ff, 186ff, 199ff. See also Kajetan Esser, "Homo alterius saeculi. Endzeitliche Heilswirklichkeit im Leben des hl. Franziskus," in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 20 (1957), esp. pp. 186ff.
12. See Engelbert Grau, O.F.M., "Die neue Bewertung der Schriften des hl. Franziskus von Assisi seit den letzten 80 Jahren," in *San Francesco nella ricerca storica degli ultimi ottanta anni* (Todi, 1971), pp. 35ff, and Raoul Manselli, "Paul Sabatier e la 'questione francescana'," in *La 'questione francescana' del Sabatier ad oggi* (Assisi, 1974), pp. 64ff.
13. *Test* 315.
14. A. Van Corstanje, *Un peuple de pèlerins. Essai d'interprétation biblique du testament de saint François* (Paris, 1964), pp. 13ff. Regarding this line of interpretation, see for example Vorreux, in Desbonnets and Vorreux, *Saint François d'Assise*, p. 104, no. 1.
15. *Scripta*, 17, pp. 116ff; *Compilatio* 59, pp. 150ff; *LP* 17.
16. *2Cel* 188; *Compilatio* 44, p. 96; *SpPer* 41.
17. Armstrong and Brady, "Blessing Sent to St. Clare and Her Sisters," p. 46.
18. Armstrong and Brady, "Blessing for Brother Bernard," p. 159. See *Scripta*, 107, pp. 274ff; *Compilatio* 12, pp. 32ff. For this episode, see Raoul Manselli, "L'ultima decisione di S. Francesco. Bernardo di Quintavalle e la benedizione di S. Francesco morente," in *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il Medio evo e Archivio Muratoriano*, 78 (1967):137-53.
19. *Scripta*, 76, p. 220. See also 87, p. 238; *Compilatio* 106, p. 322; 112, p. 350. For Francis as the "form and example for all the brothers" in the various accounts coming from the tradition of the Companions, see also *Scripta* 2, p. 90; 41, p. 160; 85, p. 236; 92, p. 250ff; *Compilatio* 50, p. 112; 82, p. 228; 111, pp. 344ff; 117, p. 370. For those passages which contain the distinctive formula "We who were with him," see Raoul Manselli, *Nos qui cum eo fuimus. Contributo alla questione francescana* (Rome, 1980), pp. 83ff; 113ff; 148ff; 192ff; 204ff.
20. See *RegNB* XVII; *Adm* IX, XIV; *ExpPat*. But see also *Adm* VI, VII, XX, XXI; *1EpFid*; *2EpFid*; *EpOrd*; *Fragm* I.
21. See Kajetan Esser, *Das Testament des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi. Eine Untersuchung über seine Echtheit und seine Bedeutung* (Münster - Westphalia, 1949), pp. 108-9.
22. See *ibid.*, pp. 107-15.
23. *IntReg* 14-15, in Lemmens, *Documenta antiqua franciscana*, vol. 1 (Quaracchi ad Claras Aquas, 1901), pp. 97-98; *Scripta* 77, pp. 220ff; *Compilatio* 106, pp. 322ff. Regarding the question of the (generally accepted) Leonine paternity of this text and whether or not it belongs to the materials sent by the Companions to Crescentius of Jesi in 1246 (much more controversial), see a survey of the various positions in Edith Pásztor, "Gli scritti leonini," in *La 'questione francescana'*, pp. 201-12. Regarding this episode see Manselli, *Nos qui cum eo fuimus*, pp. 192ff.
24. See Esser, *Das Testament*, pp. 11ff, 109-10. Manselli agrees with this interpretation, but basing himself on the *Compilatio*, 56 (*Scripta* 9, p. 102), he hypothesizes the existence of another "testament" dictated at the Portiuncula. See Manselli, "Dal Testamento ai testamenti di san Francesco," in *CF* 46 (1976), pp. 121-29. [*Greyfriars*

- Review translated and published Manselli's article in vol. 2, no. 2 (June 1988):91-99-Editor.]
25. *IntReg* 4 and 16, pp. 86 and 98-99; *Scripta* 68, p. 206; 77, p. 220ff; *Compilatio* 101, pp. 300ff; 106, p. 324.
 26. *IntReg*, p. 83.
 27. *IntReg* 4, p. 86; *Scripta*, 68, p. 206; *Compilatio* 101, pp. 300ff.
 28. *IntReg* 16, pp. 98-99; *Scripta* 77, pp. 220ff; *Compilatio* 106, p. 324.
 29. *IntReg* 6, p. 88; *Scripta* 69, p. 208; *Compilatio* 102, p. 304.
 30. *Scripta* 80, pp. 226-27; *Compilatio* 108, pp. 332ff. See also 2*Cel* 193, where the failure to insert one of Francis's admonitions into the Rule is due to the fact that it had already been approved.
 31. See *Scripta* 9-10, p. 102; 14, p. 112; 59, p. 199ff; 64-67, pp. 198ff; 75-77, p. 216ff; 98-101, pp. 260ff; 107-10, pp. 274ff; 117, p. 290; *Compilatio* 4-8, pp. 6ff; 12-14, pp. 32ff; 22, pp. 62ff; 42-44, pp. 90ff; 56, pp. 130ff; 57, p. 142; 96, pp. 278ff; 99-101, pp. 290ff; 106, pp. 319ff.
 32. Angelus a Clarino, *Chronicon seu historia septem tribulationum ordinis minorum*. Ed. Alberto Ghinato, O.F.M. (Rome, 1959), pp. 112ff. See also F. Ehrle, "Die 'historia tribulationum ordinis minorum' des fr. Angelus de Clarino," in *Archiv für Literatur und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters*, 11 (1886):274ff.
 33. See Hubert Grundmann, "Die Bulle 'Quo elongati' Papst Gregors IX," in *AFH*, 54 (1961):3-25. Still a basic source for the development of the order and the ensuing disputes is the work of P. Gratien, *Histoire de la fondation et de l'évolution de l'ordre des Frères Mineurs au XIII^e siècle* (Paris - Gembloux, 1928), pp. 111ff.
 34. *Das Testament*, pp. 129-30. But see also p. 115.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
 36. *Ibid.*, pp. 125ff.
 37. *Ibid.*, pp. 125 and 128.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
 39. *Ibid.*, pp. 120ff.
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
 41. *Scripta* 61, p. 194; *Compilatio* 97, p. 284.
 42. Esser, *Das Testament*, p. 120.
 43. *Ibid.*, p. 122. See pp. 117; 10, no. 7.
 44. See H. Boehmer, *Analekten zur Geschichte des Franziskus von Assisi* (Tübingen - Leipzig, 1904), pp. 42-43; Esser, *Das Testament*, pp. 125ff.
 45. Esser, *Das Testament*, pp. 129-30.
 46. See *ibid.*, pp. 124-25. He wishes above all to challenge the thesis of A. Stroick, which established a close connection between the structure of the Approved Rule and the Testament. The non-existence of such a connection is shown by the fact that several basic points of the Rule are missing from the Testament. However, from this fact Esser wrongly concludes that the Testament is lacking an authentic thought-structure. In reality, the question of the relationship between the Rule and the Testament is badly posed when it is stated in terms of the presence or absence of prescriptions, because the Testament was never intended to replace the Rule in any way. It was to be read and observed along with the Rule; it was a means for observing the Rule more faithfully.
 47. *Das Testament*, pp. 123ff. For other references, see pp. 1ff.
 48. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
 49. *Test* 24: "Let the brothers beware that they by no means receive churches or poor dwellings or anything which is built for them, unless it is in harmony with [that] holy poverty which we have promised in the Rule, [and] let them always be guests there as pilgrims and strangers."

50. Ibid., nos. 25–26: "I firmly command all of the brothers through obedience that, wherever they are, they should not be so bold as to seek any letter from the Roman curia either personally or through an intermediary, neither for a church or for some other place or under the guise of preaching or even for the persecution of their bodies; but wherever they have not been received, let them flee into another country to do penance with the blessing of God."
51. Ibid., nos. 1–3: "The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them, that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world." For another reference to the opposed terms "bitter-sweet," see *2EpFid* 68: "For it is sweet to the body to commit sin, and bitter to it to serve God" (also *1EpFid* 11). See the analogy made by Vorreux, *Saint François d'Assise*, p. 104, no. 5, with the sermon of Montefeltro: "So great the good I have in sight, that every pain is my delight" ("Delle sacre istimate di santo Francesco e delle loro considerazioni," I, in *Fonti francescane*, p. 1578). This seems neither apt nor persuasive to me, because it emphasizes the ascetical element, that of self-denial with a view to the joys of heaven. In the passage from the Testament, this element remains entirely implicit or in the background.
52. See G.G. Meersseman, O.P., *Dossier de l'ordre de la pénitence au XIII^e siècle* (Friburg, 1961), pp. 1ff.
53. For further information see M.L. Mazzi, *Salute e società nel Medioevo* (Florence, 1978), pp. 52ff and 88. See also the remarks of J. LeGoff, *La civiltà dell'Occidente medioevale*. Italian translation (Florence, 1969), pp. 372ff.
54. For a survey of the various interpretations, see *Das Weltverständnis des hl. Franziskus von Assisi*. Eine Untersuchung über das 'Exivi de saeculo' (Werl in Westphalia, 1959), pp. 9–13. Despite certain attempts to combine and systematize, see also pp. 83ff regarding Francis's faith, and pp. 110ff for his concept of life in the world.
55. *Test* 4–5: "The Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would simply pray and speak in this way: 'We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, in all your churches throughout the world, and we bless you, for through your holy cross you have redeemed the world.'" For the presence of this prayer in the teaching of Francis, see *1Cel* 45. He speaks of an antiphon from the Good Friday liturgy, already attested by Gregory the Great *Liber responsalis*, "In exaltatione sanctae crucis" (PL 78, col. 804b). For Francis's devotion to the cross, see O. Von Rieden (Schmucki), "Das Leiden Christi im Leben des hl. Franziskus von Assisi. Eine Quellenvergleichende Untersuchung im Lichte der zeitgenössischen Passionsfrömmigkeit," in *CF* 30 (1960), pp. 14ff.
56. *Test*, 8–13: "Afterward the Lord gave me and still gives me such faith in priests who live according to the manner of the holy Roman Church because of their order, that if they were to persecute me, I would [still] have recourse to them. And if I possessed as much wisdom as Solomon had and I came upon pitiful priests of this world, I would not preach contrary to their will in the parishes in which they live. And I desire to fear, love, and honor them and all others as my masters. And I do not wish to consider sin in them, because I discern the Son of God in them and they are my masters. And I act in this way since I see nothing corporally of the most high Son of God in this world except His most holy Body and Blood, which they receive and which they alone administer to others. And these most holy mysteries I wish to have honored above all things and to be revered and to have them reserved in precious places. Wherever I come upon His most holy written words in unbecoming places, I desire to gether them up, and I ask that they be collected and placed in a suitable place. And we should honor and respect all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words

- as those who minister spirit and life to us." These thoughts are common in the writings of Francis. See also *Adm* XXVI; *EpCler*; *1EpCust*; *2EpCust*; *2EpFid*; *EpOrd*. For Francis's devotion to the Eucharist, see Kajetan Esser, "Missarum sacramenta. Die Eucharistielehrer des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 23 (1960):81-108.
57. See Esser, *Das Testament*, pp. 149ff. As Esser emphasizes, it is not only the recognition of sinful priests which is in contrast to contemporary heretical movements. His acceptance of and faith in churches in their materiality takes on the same character precisely because of their rejection by those same movements. For example, see I. von Döllinger, *Beiträge zur Mittelalters*, vol. 2 (Darmstadt, 1968), p. 168: "As he said, a person's heart is God's church; the physical church counts for naught." See G. Gonnet, *Enchiridion fontium Valdensium*, vol. 1 (Torre Pellice, 1958), pp. 86ff.
 58. See Kajetan Esser, "Der hl. Franziskus und die religiösen Bewegungen seiner Zeit," in *San Francesco nella ricerca storica*, pp. 122-23.
 59. *Test* 13-15: "After the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me."
 60. *Ibid.*, 16-22: "Those who came to receive life gave to the poor everything which they were capable of possessing, and they were content with one tunic, patched inside and out, with a cord and short trousers. And we had no desire for anything more. We [who were] clerics used to say the Office as other clerics did; the lay brothers said the Our Father; and we quite willingly stayed in churches. And we were simple and subject to all. And I used to work with my hands, and I [still] desire to work; and I firmly wish that all my brothers give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how [to work] learn, not from desire of receiving wages for their work but as an example and in order to avoid idleness. And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, seeking alms from door to door."
 61. *Ibid.*, 23: "The Lord revealed to me a greeting, as we used to say: 'May the Lord give you peace.'" See *RegNB* XIV; *RegB* III. For the many witnesses in the biographies and other Franciscan sources, see Esser, *Das Testament*, pp. 67-68, 171-72.
 62. The theme appears as a calque, quotation or allusion to 1 Pet. 2:21. For this, see Optatus van Asseldonk, "Le lettere di san Pietro negli scritti di san Francesco," in *CF*, 48 (1978):67-76. For themes related to the "following of Christ," see Lothar Hardick, O.F.M. and Engelbert Grau, O.F.M., "Die Nachfolge Christi," in *Die Schriften des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi*. Einführung, Übersetzung, Erläuterungen. German ed. (Werl in Westphalia, 1980), pp. 249ff.
 63. See the pertinent observations of Vorreux, in Desbonnets and Vorreux, *Saint François d'Assise*, p. 35.
 64. *Adm* I, pp. 59ff. Regarding its authenticity and its strong resemblance to the "Tractatus de corpore Domini" (PL 182, col. 1150), see Engelbert Grau, O.F.M., "Zur Authentizität der ersten Admonitio des heiligen Franziskus," in *FSien*, 52 (1970):120-36.
 65. *Adm* I. An analogous idea is found in *EpOrd*: "Let the whole of mankind tremble, the whole world shake, and the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is [present] on the altar in the hands of a priest. O admirable heights and sublime lowliness! O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! That the Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself that for our salvation He hides Himself under the little form of bread! Look, brothers, at the humility of God. . . . Therefore, hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, so that He who gives Himself totally

- to you may receive you totally." For Francis's devotion to the Eucharist, see n. 56 above.
66. *2EpFid*. For the theme of the Incarnation in Francis, see esp. W. Busenbender, "Der Heilige der Inkarnation. Zur Frömmigkeit des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 15 (1952):1-15, and W. Dettloff, "Die Geistigkeit des hl. Franziskus in der Theologie der Franziskaner," *idem*, 19 (1956), esp. pp. 208-9.
 67. *2EpFid*.
 68. See n. 62 above.
 69. See, for example, the arguments of Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, bk. 3, dist. 18, cap. 5, 2, and dist. 20, cap. 5, 1 (Grottaferrata, 1981), pp. 116-17, 128. For the patristic development of this interpretation, see A. Michel, in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, s.v. "Incarnation".
 70. See, for example, *Adm* VI; IX; *RegNB* VII; XI; XVII. See also below. On the theme of Christ as the way to the Father, with special reference to the passages from *Adm* I and *2EpFid*, see Lapsanski, *Perfectio evangelica*, pp. 49ff.
 71. See Godet and Mailleux, *Opuscula sancti Francisci*. Scripta sanctae Clarae (Louvain, 1976), pp. 8, 165. Regarding the concept of obedience in Francis, see esp. Esser, "Bindung zur Freiheit. Die Gehorsamauffassung des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 15 (1952):161-73; Hardick and Grau, "Der Gehorsam," in *Die Schriften*, pp. 271-86. Page 271, no. 1, contains references to Esser's other studies on this topic.
 72. See St. Benedict, *Regula*, chap. 5, ed. G. Penco (Florence, 1958), p. 46. For the Benedictine concept of obedience, see A. De Vogüé, *La communauté et l'abbé dans la règle de saint Benoît* (Bruges, 1961), pp. 207-88.
 73. *Adm* II.
 74. *RegNB* VII.
 75. *Ibid.*, IX.
 76. *Ibid.*
 77. *Ibid.*, V.
 78. *Ibid.*, XI. See also *RegB* II: "I admonish and exhort [the brothers] not to look down or pass judgment on those people whom they see wearing soft and colorful clothing and enjoying the choicest food and drink. Instead, each must criticize and despise himself." See the admonitions attributed to Francis in *L3S* 58: "Since you speak of peace, all the more so must you have it in your hearts. Let none be provoked to anger or scandal by you, but rather may they be drawn to peace and good will, to benignity and concord through your gentleness. We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way. Many who may seem to us to be children of the devil will still become Christ's disciples."
 79. *RegNB* V. For the calque made up of Matt. 9:12 and Mark 2:17, see also *EpMin* and *Fragm* II.
 80. *EpMin* 9-12. For an exegesis of the entire first part of this letter, see E. Auerbach, *Mimesis. Il realismo nella letteratura occidentale*. Italian transl., 9th ed. (Turin, 1981), pp. 181ff.
 81. This theme is developed from various points of view. Regarding the internal relationships within the order, see especially all the passages concerning the service of the minister: *RegNB* IV, V, VI. Regarding external relationships, for example love toward one's enemies, see for example *Adm* IX; *2EpFid*, *ExpPat*; *Fragm* I; *RegNB* XXII; *RegB* X.
 82. *CantSol*. For the circumstances surrounding its composition, see *Scripta* 44, pp. 166ff; *Compilatio* 84, pp. 238ff. See also the observations of E. Leclerc, *Le cantique des créatures ou les symboles de l'union*. Une analyse de Saint François d'Assise (Paris, 1970),

- pp. 192ff. For the proclamation of peace, see O. Schmucki, "San Francesco messaggero di pace nel suo tempo," in *Studi e ricerche francescane*, 5 (1976):215-32.
83. *EpMin* 2-8. There is a difficulty in interpreting and thus in accepting this passage. Even Desbonnets and Vorreux (*Saint François d'Assise*, p. 138) follow the incorrect reading of the Lemmens edition (Quaracchi ad Claras Aquas, 1904; 3d ed., Quaracchi, 1949, p. 108). The reading "that you may wish that they be better Christians" is untenable in light of the manuscript tradition.
84. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 183.
85. *Ibid.*
86. This edition was originally found in B. Bughetti, "Analecta de S. Francisco Assisiensi saeculo XIV ante medium collecta (e cod. Florentino C. 9. 2878)," in *AFH*, 20 (1927), pp. 107-8. Now it is included in Esser's edition, pp. 324ff.
87. *RegNB* IX 2.
88. See *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius*. Ed. Paul Sabatier (Paris, 1902), chap. 7, pp. 24ff; "I Fioretti di san Francesco," chap. 8, in *Fonti francescane*, pp. 1471ff. C. Gennaro ("Francesco uomo di preghiera," in *Servitium*, nov. - dic. 1980, pp. 99-100) does not follow the customary ascetical reading of the passage. Instead, he emphasizes the discovery, in radical poverty and renunciation, of the roots of a genuine relationship with Christ.
89. *RegNB* XVI 6. For the citation from 1 Pet. 2:13, see van Asseldonk, *Le lettere di san Pietro*, pp. 70ff. I have emphasized the Franciscan proposal as an alternative to the ideas and practices of the Crusades in "Dal pellegrinaggio alla conquista: povertà e ricchezza nelle prime crociate," in *Povertà e ricchezza nella spiritualità dei secoli XI e XII* (Todi, 1969), pp. 77ff. But see also the excellent study by F. Cardini, "Nella presenza del Soldan superba. Bernardo, Francesco, Bonaventura e il superamento dell'idea di crociata," in *Studi francescani*, 71 (1974):199-250. On the other hand, the connection between the Chapter on the missions in *RegNB* and Lateran IV seems doubtful to me, though it is suggested by D.E. Flood, *Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder* (Werl in Westphalia, 1967), p. 129.
90. *2Cel* 152; *SpPer* 48.
91. The reference is to Matt. 16:17, which is found with the same meaning in *2Cel* 157.
92. *RegNB* XVII 10. See also *Fragm* I.
93. *RegB* XII 1.
94. For other references see I.H. Dalmais, "Évangélisation et mission jusqu'au 15^e siècle," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, s.v. "Mission et missions," and my *Chiesa gregoriana* (Florence, 1966), pp. 246-47 and no. 53. For the connection between the following of Christ and the mission-martyrdom-reform, see W. Berges, "Reform und Ostmission im 12. Jahrhundert," in *Heidenmission und Kreuzzugsgedanke in der deutschen Ostpolitik des Mittelalters*, ed. H. Beumann (Darmstadt, 1963), pp. 321ff.
95. See *1Cel* 56; *2Cel* 30; *LMaior* IX 5. See also Giordano di Giano, "Chronica," 8, in *Analecta Franciscana*, 1 (1885):3: "Let each person glory in his own suffering and not in someone else's."
96. See esp. M. Mollat, "En guise de préface: les problèmes de la pauvreté," in *Études sur l'histoire de la pauvreté (Moyen Age - XVI^e siècle)*, ed. M. Mollat, vol. 1 (Paris, 1974), pp. 11ff. See also *Les pauvres au Moyen Age. Étude sociale* (Paris, 1978), pp. 11ff.
97. This complexity is obviously present even in Francis's terminology. For example, see *RegNB* IX.
98. See J. Leclercq, "La crise du monachisme aux XI^e et XII^e siècles," in *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo e Archivio Muratoriano*, 70 (1958):19-42; R. Manselli, "Evangelismo e povertà," in *Povertà e ricchezza*, pp. 31ff; B. Bagny, "Monachisme et pauvreté au XII^e siècle," in *La povertà del secolo XII e Francesco d'Assisi*.

- Atti del II Convegno internazionale (Assisi (1975), esp. pp. 105ff. For other references see also my *Chiesa gregoriana*, pp. 285ff.
99. The monastic tradition, although containing a variety of nuances, is very clear in this regard. For the development and articulation of this theme, see esp. G. Duby, *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme* (Paris, 1978).
 100. See *RegEr*; *RegNB* II, VII, IX. For the Christological foundation for such identification with the poor, see in addition to the texts cited above, *Fragm* I and II. Indicative of a deep understanding, expressed with difficulty in the revelation of an apparently contradictory reality, is the judgment of *ICel* 83: "The more holy amongst the holy, among sinners he was as one of them." In this same Gospel vein (Luke 10:8) and in accordance with his choice of social condition, I think we must interpret Francis's prescription to eat whatever was set before them, limiting the periods of fasting to Friday, Advent, and Lent, except in case of necessity. See *RegNB* III, IX. For a significant episode in this regard, see Giordano di Giano, *Chronica* 12, pp. 4-5.
 101. The statement attributed to Francis in *ICel* 103 must be understood in this sense of an ever new growth and adaptation: "Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up to now we have made little or no progress."
 102. See the reference in Esser, *Das Testament*, pp. 175ff.
 103. For the various aspects and manifestations of Francis's concept of poverty, see Kajetan Esser, "Mysterium paupertatis. Die Armutsauffassung des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 14 (1951), pp. 177-89; and "Die Armutsauffassung des hl. Franziskus," in *Poverty in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. Flood (Werl in Westphalia, 1975), pp. 60-70. For a good summary see Hardick and Grau, "Die Armut," in *Die Schriften*, pp. 257-71. Although he adopts a completely different point of view, for some suggestions regarding money and work, see J. LeGoff, *Franciscanisme et modèles culturels du XIIIe siècle*, Atti dell'VIII Convegno internazionale (Assisi, 1981), pp. 95ff.
 104. See esp. *RegNB* VIII, and *RegB* V. For this aspect of Francis's teaching, although he is not always persuasive, see L. Hardick, "'Pecunia et denarii'. Untersuchungen zum Geldverbot in den Regeln der Minderbrüder," in *FSien* 40 (1958):193ff.
 105. P. Gratien, *Saint François d'Assise. Sa personnalité, sa spiritualité*, 3d ed. (Paris, 1944), pp. 60-61.
 106. *Ibid.*
 107. *RegNB* VII; *Test* 22.
 108. *Scripta* 111, p. 284; *Compilatio* 15, p. 48; *SpPer* 12. For the Leonine authorship of the *Verba S. P. Francisci*, in which these statements are found, see n. 130 below.
 109. The basis of this trend is to be found in the application of Paul's command to care for the community of the saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-27) to the monastic communities which looked to the Jerusalem community as their model. See for example Augustine "De opere monachorum," chap. 16, PL 40, col. 562-63. For this very widespread arrangement see Pseudo-Isidore, *Chiesa gregoriana*, pp. 241ff.
 110. See *RegNB* VII; *RegB* VI; *Test*.
 111. For Francis's insistence that wages and alms received be modest, see *RegNB* IX; *RegB* V.
 112. *Sacrum commercium Sancti Francisci cum domina paupertate*, nn. 42ff (Florence - Quaracchi Ad Claras Aquas, 1929), pp. 58ff.
 113. Thus Desbonnets, in Desbonnets and Vorreux, *Saint François d'Assise*, p. 1397.
 114. *Sacrum commercium*, nn. 25-31, pp. 48ff.
 115. See the references and considerations in my *Di alcuni passi di san Bonaventura*, pp. 381-95; "Bonaventura e Francesco," in *S. Bonaventura francescano* (Todi, 1974), pp. 49-73; *La storia religiosa*, pp. 745ff.
 116. See *Di alcuni passi di san Bonaventura*, pp. 395ff, no. 40. See also the papers contained

- in the volume *Chi erano gli spirituali*, Atti del III convegno internazionale (Assisi, 1976). See also A. Gattucci, "Per una rilettura dello spiritualismo francescano." Note introduttive, in *Picenum seraphicum*, 11 (1974):76-189.
117. From this point of view, a very useful collection and analysis of material can be found in Manselli, *Nos qui cum eo fuimus*, passim. To see how this question is reflected in *2Cel*, see *Di alcuni passi di san Bonaventura*, pp. 386ff.
 118. The only case of the direct intervention of Rome in modifying the Rule is that recorded by Angelus of Clareno, *Expositio regulae fratrum minorum*, ed. L. Oliger (Quaracchi ad Claras Aquas, 1912), pp. 204. In general, with regard to the period of the order's origins, Rome is presented as being poorly informed or deceived by the intrigues of the ministers.
 119. The most important text is found in *Scripta* 113; pp. 284ff; *Compilatio* 17, pp. 50ff. It is also found in the *Verba S.P. Francisci* 4, in Lemmens, *Documenta antiqua franciscana*, vol. 1 (Quaracchi ad Claras Aquas, 1901), pp. 101ff. Regarding the *Verba*, see n. 130 below.
 120. See esp. Sabatier, *Vie de S. François d'Assise*, pp. 225ff, 275ff, and passim. See also da Campagnola, *Le origini francescane*, pp. 173ff.
 121. For this see the observations of da Campagnola, *Le origini francescane*, pp. 186ff and 219ff.
 122. See for example Esser, *Das Testament*, pp. 120 and passim; S.J. Piat, *Saint François d'Assise à la découverte du Christ pauvre et crucifié* (Paris, 1968), pp. 238ff. See also the remarks of Gattucci, *Per una rilettura dello spiritualismo francescano*, p. 79, no. 12.
 123. See Giordano di Giano, *Chronica* 11-15, pp. 4ff.
 124. The allusions are sporadic but important. See *2Cel* 209; *Scripta* 112, 113, 115; *Compilatio* 16, 17, 20. See Gratien, *Histoire de la fondation*, pp. 96ff, and *La vita religiosa*, pp. 751ff.
 125. See M.H. Vicaire, *Histoire de saint Dominique*, vol. 2, *Au coeur de l'Eglise* (Paris, 1957), pp. 33ff. See esp. p. 40 for the important testimony of Humbert of Romans.
 126. For Rome's tendency in this regard, see K.V. Selge, "Franz von Assisi und Hugolino von Ostia," in *San Francesco nella ricerca storica*, pp. 175ff; 183ff. The question is well summarized by J. Gribomont, "L'Expositio d'Ange Clareno sur la règle des frères mineurs et la tradition monastique primitive," in *Lettura delle fonti francescane attraverso i secoli: il 1400* (Rome, 1981), pp. 389ff.
 127. See *Verba* 5; *Scripta* 114; *Compilatio* 18; *SpPer* 68.
 128. *Arbor vitae crucifixae Iesu*, 1, V, chap. 7, copy of the Venetian edition of 1485, edited by Ch. T. Davis (Turin, 1961), p. 450, with some important changes. See also *Expositio regulae fratrum minorum*, pp. 128ff, 209ff, and with greater reworking in *Chronicon seu historia septem tribulationum*, pp. 39ff.
 129. *De conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam domini Iesu*, bk. 1, fructus 12, part 2, in *AF* 4 (1906):585-86.
 130. For the *Verba*, see the sensible observations of Brooke in *Introduction a Scripta*, pp. 57-66, and those of Edith Pásztor, "Frate Leone testimone di san Francesco," in *CF*, 50 (1980): esp. pp. 41ff.
 131. See Rosalind B. Brooke, *Early Franciscan Government*. Elias to Bonaventure (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 286ff.
 132. *Scripta* 114; *Compilatio* 18.
 133. *SalVirt* 10.
 134. *Test* 29; *VPLaet*.
 135. *Test* 39.
 136. *2EpFid*; *EpOrd*; *RegNB* XVI.
 137. The Pauline inspiration of this passage is mentioned by Sabatier, *Le Speculum*

- perfectionis*, vol. 1, p. 197, no. d. The passage is not considered from this point of view by Pásztor, "San Francesco e il cardinale Ugolino nella 'questione francescana'," in *CF*, 46 (1976):234-35, and *Frate Leone testimone*, pp. 61-62. For the history of this theme in the tradition, see T. Spidlik and F. Vandenbroucke, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, s.v. "Fous pour le Christ". Vandenbroucke mentions Francis but not this saying from the *Verba*.
138. See *Compilatio*, p. 57 ("new foolishness"), and *Saint François d'Assise*, p. 987.
 139. *Scripta*, p. 289.
 140. "François contesté," in *Evangile aujourd'hui*. Revue de spiritualité franciscaine, 108 (Dec. 1980):46-47, and no. 2.
 141. N. Tommaseo and B. Bellini, *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, vol. 13, p. 66. See also S. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, vol. 11, p. 608: "*Novello* refers to that which reproduces in itself the traits and characteristics, especially moral, psychological, intellectual, physical, of some important historical personage . . . someone who behaves in a similar way, someone who takes on these attitudes."
 142. See for example *1Cel* 33; *2Cel* 188.
 143. See *RegNB*, prol.: "This is the life and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which Brother Francis asked the Lord Pope to be granted and confirmed for him." The concrete nature of Francis's experience is rightly emphasized by Lapsanski, *Perfectio evangelica*, pp. 57-58; 240.
 144. It is precisely in the context of concern for orthodoxy and submission that I think we find an explanation for the Testament's strong provisions - unusual for Francis - regarding those brothers who might stray from regular observance or from orthodoxy.
 145. See Gratien, *Histoire de la fondation*, pp. 109ff, and *La storia religiosa*, pp. 761ff.
 146. *1EpCust*; *2EpCust*; *1EpFid*; *2EpFid*; *EpOrd*. Of course there are also the precise norms regarding preaching found in the Rules: *RegNB* XVII, XXI; *RegB* IX.
 147. The group of discourses attributed to Francis by the Companions concerning the relationship between preaching, prayer, work, and service shows evidence of his original intention mixed with later interpretations resulting from the changed situation in the order's life and experience. See esp. *Scripta* 71, pp. 210ff; *Compilatio* 103.
 148. Along with the classic passages from the Testament, the theme of God's grace as the only source of all our good works occurs often and is very important in the writings of Francis. See for example *Adm* VII, XII, XVII; *EpOrd* 15 ("Let every wish be directed to God inasmuch as grace will help."); 43 ("For I promise to observe these things strictly as God may give me grace"); 50-52 (The entire final prayer centers around this theme). See also *RegNB* XVII, XXIII.
 149. *2EpFid* 51-53.
 150. For the patristic and medieval use of this theme, see the bibliography in Vorreux, *Saint François d'Assise*, p. 119, no. 12.
 151. See for example *RegNB* XXII. This theme is closely connected with that of grace, for which see no. 148.
 152. *1EpCust* 1.
 153. The recommendations that the brothers not consider the sins and faults of others, especially priests, not to become disturbed by them, to pardon and so forth, are all important indications of an awareness in this regard. See *Adm* XXVI; *2EpFid*; *EpMin*; *Fragm* I; *Fragm* II; *RegB* VII; *RegNB* V, XI, XXI; *Test*. See also n. 78 above.
 154. *2Cel* 157.
 155. *Scripta* 21, p. 124; *Compilatio* 63. See also *2Cel* 155. Although he gives a different interpretation from that proposed here, see also O. Englebert, *Vie de Saint François d'Assise* (Paris, 1956), pp. 324ff.

156. Regarding the stigmata and the sources which speak of it, see Sabatier, *La vie de S. François*, pp. 330ff, and pp. 401ff for their authenticity. See also O. Schmucki, "De sancti Francisci Assisiensis stigmatum susceptione. Disquisitio historico-critica luce testimoniorum saeculi XIII," in *CF*, 33 (1963):210-66, 392-422; 34 (1964):5-63, 241-338.
157. Ed. cit., pp. 90-91. See also D. Lapsanski, "The Autographs on the 'Chartula' of St. Francis of Assisi," in *AFH*, 67 (1974):18-33.
158. Ed. cit., pp. 91-92. See Lapsanski, *The Autographs*, pp. 33-37. For its liturgical origins, see J. P. van Dijk, "Saint Francis' Blessing," in *AFH*, 47 (1954):199-201.
159. This article was already written when several important articles appeared in connection with the eighth centenary of Francis's birth in 1982. I regret that I was unable to take them into account in the text and footnotes. However, I would like to mention the following, which provide many points of agreement as well as disagreement: P. Zerbi, "San Francesco d'Assisi e la Chiesa Romana," and G. Cracco, "Francesco e i laici. Il desiderio di Dio nella 'civitas' medievale," in *Francesco d'Assisi nell'ottavo centenario della nascita* (Milan, 1983), pp. 75-103, and also pp. 104-26. Of special interest are the volumes produced by the Franciscan exhibitors. See especially *Francesco d'Assisi, Storia e Arte* (Milan, 1982), particularly the interventions by F. Cardini, R. Rusconi, and Stanislaw da Campagnola. See also C. Leonardi, "L'eredità di Francesco d'Assisi," in *Francesco d'Assisi. Documenti e Archivi - Codici e Biblioteche - Miniature* (Milan, 1983), pp. 111-15.