# The Prophetic Originality of St. Francis FRANCISCO IGLESIAS, O.F.M.CAP.

Originalità profetica di san Francesco [This study was published in Italian as a booklet by CISPCAP (The Italian Conference of Capuchin Major Superiors) in October 1986, and again in November 1986. An up-dated version appeared in Spanish in February 1987. A revised version was published in L'Italia Francescana, 62 (1987):339–396. CISPCAP republished the entire issue of L'Italia Francescana separately as Vita e Attività Apostolica dei Cappuccini (Rome, 1987). This present English edition was specially revised by the author for Greyfriars Review in June 1987. – Editor]

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## Introduction

In the setting of the First Plenary Council of the Order there are two words which have a very special meaning: the word "prophetic" (profetisimo) and the word "Francis." They are two meaningful words that are rich in content and have obvious connotations. The words "prophesy," "prophet," and "prophetic" are used widely today and often with great freedom, their application going much further afield than the area of religion. Because of broad, analogically different shades of meaning, these words easily lead to lack of precision both in linguistic usage and in content. They are beautiful words which have been worn out by too much easy and indiscriminate usage. It is well known, on the other hand, that "Francis the prophet has been deeply betrayed and manipulated, more than once," even within the religious movement which he founded.

To speak then of prophets and of Francis requires great modesty and objectivity. It also requires time. The topic is too delicate and complex to be dealt with in proper seriousness within the limits laid down for this contribution. Faced with the impossibility of adequately developing the topic, I chose to limit myself to presenting certain notes which are of a methodological and introductory character, but which I consider important for a correct understanding of the prophetic originality of St. Francis, and consequently of the apostolic dimension of our life as Franciscans. In

developing this talk I have intentionally been very circumspect both in style and bibliographical references.

### Premises: Three Challenges of Originality

With regard to its outlook, objectives, demeanor, the methods which it adopts, and the location of its activity, the apostolic mission of the religious must be a visible and coherent expression of his vocational charism. In my opinion, a valid treatment of our apostolic dimension will be possible only when it starts from an awareness of the Christian ecclesial and existential characteristics which make up our religious identity as Franciscans.

### Christian Commitments

The supreme law and basis of life for all religious is the radical following of Christ as laid out in the Gospel.<sup>3</sup> The ethical religious innovation of Jesus, witnessed in the Gospel, is the essential point of reference for the Christian commitment which characterizes every religious vocation. However, the religious vocation does not exist in the abstract. What exists is people who have vocations. Concrete vocations exist, which are immersed in concrete circumstances and history and which are lived in a variety of charisms within the consecrated life and a variety of human needs. Therefore, it can be said that the Christian evangelical commitment of a religious vocation is identified on the basis of the individual, specific, limited characteristics which our human following and imitation of Christ imply.

Jesus is everything for everybody. However, He is not totally possessed by anybody in His totality. No religious vocation has a monopoly on the Gospel, even though all draw their inspiration from the Gospel, which is the source of every kind of Christian life. Above all else, every religious vocation is a Christian vocation. Its Christian authenticity consists in the way it represents and realizes a characteristic of Jesus; that is, in the way it absorbs and reflects the essential values of the Gospel, in a limited but radical and consistent manner. Thus reference to Jesus and the Gospel is the reason which justifies the existence of all religious life. This does not mean that all Christian or Gospel qualities are to be indiscriminately

regarded as the duty of each and every religious.

One conclusion appears to be evident: Different duties and life-styles correspond to different religious charisms; that is, there is one Christian commitment, but it has individual expressions. Thus we may, and indeed we must, always base any talk concerning our apostolic dimension on the enlightenment of the Gospel, "which is the Rule and life of the Friar Minor." Our discussion must never be ambiguous, or mix the contents and tendencies of other charisms. Our vision must rather be simply inspired by

the fact that our existence and our preferential choice must be contained under the general heading of "Gospel."

#### Ecclesial Commitments

We make up the church. However, whether as individuals or institutions, we are not the whole of the church. Thus not all of us are called to respond to all the needs and problems of the church. What is more, we are not called to commit ourselves to the service of the church in the way that other Christians and religious are called to do. We are all members of the People of God and of the secular city. Each of us will be truly committed to the church and to the world in a real Gospel manner insofar as he is faithful to himself, that is to God, in following his unique and very personal vocation without ambiguity or confusion. Paul says that the Lord gave each one his charism, his particular work within the church community through the action of the Spirit. It is only right that in the diversity and complementarity of the whole, the mystery of the fullness and of the body of Christ is realized.<sup>7</sup>

If the church, considered as a whole, has a comprehensive mission to the service of mankind, each of us shares in a part of this, through our life-style, our language and our specific example, without needing to become "two persons" by indiscriminately invading other fields of activity or methods of action or professions. Thus we must employ the necessary discernment when using the word "church" to ensure the authenticity of our choice and of our life-style when serving mankind. As members of the church, all of us have a direct responsibility toward her great common duty of evangelization and human development, but this responsibility is not to be exercised in the same areas nor in the same way by all. The service rendered by the hierarchy, the service rendered by the laity, the service rendered by priests and the service rendered by religious are not all the same, nor should they be the same. Indeed, there are almost unlimited projects, ways of operating, areas of work and approaches among religious which follow the different Gospel and functional avenues of the various charisms of consecrated life. "The brilliance of the sun differs from the brilliance of the moon and the brilliance of the stars," as Pope Paul put it.8

It is with good reason, then, that the Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi underlines the so-called "diversification of undertakings," that is, the diversity of works in the unity of the one evangelizing mission of the Church. Mutuae relationes insists upon the necessity of keeping the individual bent or identity of each institute absolutely safe, so that religious are not part of the church in some vague and ambiguous way, but with due

respect to their particular style of life and apostolate.10

In this respect we do well to remember here the bent of our order, which

in the document issued by the Third Plenary Council asked us "to be particularly alert not to succumb to equivocations or compromises which could mar the purity of our message and the specific aim of our activity." We have an example of this in "the risk of the confusion of roles when not respecting the diversity of works within the Church. Our contribution must always be stamped with strict fidelity to our character and to our typical activities, which are responsibly governed by a very definite mission in the midst of the People of God."

There is a conclusion which appears to be obvious. We can and should always focus discussion concerning our apostolic dimension under the light of the common mission of the church, without ever falling into ambiguity. The council says that religious institutes should participate in the life and activity of the church "according to their particular purpose." Thus this means that there must be ecclesial fidelity with the individual characteristics which are in agreement with our charism and life-style as

Franciscans.

### Existential Fidelity

Speaking of existential fidelity in the here and now is the same as speaking about fidelity to humanity – that humanity which is within each one of us and the humanity which we are called to serve. It is only through a serious understanding and deep respect for the reality of humanity that one can ensure the normal development of our vocation, and the effectiveness of our mission as servants of mankind. Thus when we speak about humanity here and now we mean to deal with an eminently concrete reality which is contextualized and historical.

In his recent message to the religious of Brazil, the pope underlined the "dynamic and vital" character of fidelity to the specifically religious charism.<sup>13</sup> Living our vocation faithfully means knowing how to receive the word of God by means of the variety of historical situations of our own existence, which are a providential challenge to our consecration to the Lord and to our commitment to mankind. When speaking of the renewal of religious life in all its aspects, the council rightly mentions the criterion of historicity, that is, the relevance of "reciprocal conditions of the times."<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, any worthwhile consideration of our apostolic dimension cannot stop at abstract formulae which have no flesh. It must evaluate the very concrete influence of the signs of the times, the needs of the real life of the church and of the world, differences of time and place within which the message of salvation becomes operative in the life of mankind. This is why existential fidelity to our apostolic life obliges us to be particularly sensitive to two things: the fact of novelty, and the fact of legitimate pluriformity.

It has been correctly said that existentially man is possibility: radical exposure to novelty; that the word of God is so rich that it can be taken in only in fragments and interpreted by means of the continuing events and novelties of passing history; that God comes into history in continually new ways and that mankind finds the daily surprise of the love of the eternal God in what is new. <sup>15</sup> This is how we understand that our service of humanity has to be vital, dynamic, creative, open to constantly renewing methods which were acceptable yesterday, and open to seeking new horizons and methods of working as credible responses to the inevitable challenges of the moment. Thus *Mutuae relationes* quite rightly challenges us: "In our day, religious in particular are required to have the same authentic, living and innovative style in their initiatives, which glowed so brightly in the founders, so that they may dedicate themselves with effectiveness and zeal to the apostolic work of the Church." <sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, a truly concrete and realistic service of the church and mankind necessarily flourishes when characterized by pluriformity. Since the council, our order rediscovered the criterion of the life and hope of pluriformity and placed it in the Constitutions to ensure fidelity to the Rule and to the intentions of St. Francis and to keep in step with early Franciscan experience. This decision was both correct and of major importance for our future. A few years later it was authoritatively confirmed by Paul VI.<sup>17</sup> The text of our Constitutions could not be more clear: "The major superiors should take care that ways of life be sought which are more suited to the life and apostolate of the brothers, according to differences of region, culture and needs of times and places: these ways

of living may take a variety of forms." According to the Constitutions, there is one eminently existential principle which is justified by a very definite objective and three conditions which must form an integrated whole. There is first of all the objective of allowing "a Gospel freedom of action, especially as regards renewing our life without destroying the spirit." This means providing room for the Spirit of the Lord, which always acts in a renovating and creative manner, which is diversified, and takes persons and circumstances into account on the basis of common fidelity to the essentials of the specific charism of a religious institute, for example.

Then we have to take into account three conditions which must be considered in a simultaneous and complementary manner: (a) Unity of the one authentic spirit, through which the underlying vocational identity, attained by a common experience of the religious values of the order, is safeguarded; (b) Unity of obedience, which is always actualized and worked out against the background of the characteristic formula of our profession according to St. Francis: "Promising obedience, living and walking in obedience;" and (c) Fraternal unity, which safeguards our

specific character of brotherhood with total coherence, so that we are consecrated brothers whose duty it is to develop their specific vocation

according to the dynamics of an authentic evangelical fraternity.

It is worth noting a practical conclusion. Each Plenary Council must be of service to the whole order. Taking into account our presence throughout the world and the complex and diversified reality of the human and ecclesial situations in which we are found, in my opinion we have to be careful to avoid two risks: the risk of an approach which is too generic and abstract (which would have very little impact or stimulation for anyone), and the risk of an approach which is too particularized and local (which would leave many friars untouched and indifferent). Both these risks can be overcome by adopting an existential approach which is true to humanity of which we are members and to humanity which we are called to serve in very different parts of the world.

There are three words - three realities - which will make up the constant points of reference during this Plenary Council: the Gospel (Jesus), the church, and mankind. In my opinion, they involve a great challenge, even from the methodological point of view, a challenge to linguistic expression, a challenge to developing an unambiguous approach. Both of these challenges must be faced with all the rigor and modesty of the inspiration

of the prophetic originality of St. Francis.

### I. Prophecy: Its Biblical and Theological Perspectives<sup>21</sup>

I may not delay here and now to deal with the words "prophetism," "prophet," and "prophetic," according to their informal, improper, analogical usage, which is common today in different fields of life and culture, including the profane environment. We are mainly interested in the proper, formal, technical usage which these words have acquired in the

history of religion.

Strictly speaking, prophecy is a characteristic aspect of all the great religions of the world, and even today it is not confined to merely ecclesial circles. It suffices to recall certain well-known non-Catholic personalities of our time. The gift of prophecy is intimately connected to the dynamism of the Spirit, and the Spirit always remains completely free, working where, when, and how it likes, even "outside the visible boundaries of the Mystical Body." However, we shall dwell upon the phenomenon of prophecy as an identifiable event in the realm of Jewish and Christian religion. This is not the place to go into a detailed exposition of the topic of biblical and ecclesial prophecy, which is very vast. I shall limit myself to proposing a schematic outline which underlines certain ideas which I believe are more significant and practical.

### A. Prophecy in the Old Testament

In the rich world of Old Testament prophecy, the so-called writing-prophets stand out, since they are well known through the texts officially collected in the Bible. Especially today, we cannot say that the message of the Old Testament comes mainly through these classical prophets.<sup>23</sup> However, it is true that their extraordinary personalities had a very special influence on the history of Israel. For this reason they have been regarded correctly in the tradition of the church as exemplary expressions of and the purest symbols par excellence of the prophetic charism. Because this interpretation has perhaps been too easily accepted even today by many, it needs reinterpreting, at least to avoid the risk of seeing validity exclusively in an excessively reductionist view of the dynamism of the Spirit and of the much richerr and more complex phenomenon of genuine Christian prophetism.

I wish to note the following among the most significant characteristics of the classical Old Testament prophets. Firstly, they are men who have been directly chosen, called by means of an extraordinary intervention and specific vocation from God. These men are called by God to speak on His behalf, who are sent by God to communicate His wishes, His truths, His requirements, and His promises to the people. Speaking through the prophets, God interprets and directs the situations and the events which His people are living. The prophet's outlook and message have an essentially religious character. In the final analysis, they always deal with

reading history in the light of faith.

It is worth stressing three propositions in the light of these traits of the prophetic personality: The prophet is a man of God, a man of faith, a man listening to God directly. The classical prophets of the Old Testament were

great men of prayer.24

The prophet is a religious interpreter of the times, a man who hears God even in the actual history of every day. Thus he is a man who is alert to his own concrete times and sensitive to the tensions and problems of the moment. He is a man with a bias toward the plans of God in human existence.<sup>25</sup> Historical facts become events of revelation of the one great plan of salvation.

Because of his message, the prophet is involved in the religious and social renewal of his people. However, by his vocation the prophet is not responsible for socio-political changes. "God Himself will bring justice and change the structures of oppression. The prophets denounced injustices against the poor. However, they never incited the poor to revolution to change the structures of society, by taking justice into their own hands, to gain their rights through violence. The prophets are not political reformers. Only God can create the new man and the new society with new just

relationships. The prophets always defend the primacy of the human person above all material goods. Their commitment to defend the liberty and the human rights of the poor and oppressed comes from their religious conscience. They wanted to lay the responsibility for civic order and justice upon the shoulders of those directly involved by means of their threats regarding the judgement of God."<sup>26</sup>

We may briefly define the central nucleus of the prophetic message as a passionate call to fidelity – fidelity to the values, ethics and religious commitment to the covenant, which was the basis for the existence of the chosen people. In this sense the prophets were the great defenders of both the rights of God and the rights of humanity; or, better still, they were

simply defenders of the rights of God.

They defended the rights of God as such when they used their extraordinary spiritual teaching authority to recover the original purity of the religious duties of the Israelites. They defended the rights of God as far as they are invested in humanity, when in justice, peace and love, they preached about the moral requirements for fully respecting individual and collective national dignity. These are the vertical and horizontal elements in a message which is concerned with salvation that is brought about always and above all by fidelity to the Lord. "The proclamations of the prophets always start from faith. They do not start from talk of humanity or society, but rather from talk about God and His plan for salvation. In this regard the prophets present a challenge to our way of thinking. The vertical dimension is predominant both in their conscience and their message. They were concerned with defending God's 'place' in the world. It was because of this that they were able to castigate the contradictions of mankind."<sup>27</sup>

In the light of the fundamental content of the prophetic message, it is worth underlining the following propositions: On the human level, so to speak, the chief strength of the prophetic message lies in the personal authenticity of the individual prophet. His oral and/or written interventions, as well as his gestures become authentic mainly through the fidelity of his own life, which was a living sign of the will of God for His people.

The concept of prophets as clairvoyants and fortune tellers (which all too often has had the upper hand in identifying prophecy) is in reality of very secondary importance. On the other hand the function of stimulation and renewal which is part of the work of prophecy obviously launches us toward development, toward fulfillment of the designs of God in the future by means of ever new fidelity.

The idea of prophets as innovators must be understood in the concrete. One of today's most outstanding specialists on the Old Testament has this to say: "The classic prophets (of the Old Testament) are not innovators, but rather defenders of the past. In the real sense of the word they are

conservatives. Such a position may not arouse our enthusiasm too much today because we are more attracted to revolutionaries. However, perhaps it is precisely from the prophets that we may learn the meaning of truly being revolutionaries. It was precisely their acceptance of and link with the old established order that enabled the prophets to attain their final and great status as men who introduced something completely new. It was in this way that they became spokesmen for a message upon which the future depended."<sup>28</sup> In their special intimacy of union with God they had the duty of maintaining fundamental religious values in their truth. Passionate fidelity to God and to the essential and definitive ethical and religious positions of the past made the conservatism of the prophets deeply innovative. "Precisely in order to retain the past, in their hands the past became totally new."<sup>29</sup>

The characteristic style of Old Testament classic prophecy is immediately recognizable in the provocative, controversial and accusatory tone of many prophetic messages. The prophets are intrepid, independent and free persons, and they act as the critical conscience of their time in the name of God. Therefore, the note of denunciation and judgment in confrontation with the religious and social reality of Israel, which is inconsistent with the requirements of the dignity of the Lord and the dignity of humanity, is clearly indicative of a special and difficult vocation. The prophets frequently contradict and upset the common mentality and the reigning powers because, as they are close to both God and humanity, they succeed in reading the religious meaning of history, which was forgotten and profaned by their contemporaries. Because they were either witnesses to or participants in specific very difficult historical events, and because they had nothing to lose, they felt that they were invested with a specific mission to denounce situations of injustice and sin and to call people back to penance by placing the life of individuals and institutions under the judgment of God.

From a formal point of view, so to speak, this type of prophetic vocation implies using a striking literary genre that is sometimes even dramatic and crudely realistic. From an existential point of view, it makes the prophet an annoying, awkward, misunderstood and persecuted person. Thus we may understand "why they were completely isolated and almost always silenced."<sup>30</sup>

The strong and violent style of the classic Old Testament prophets enjoyed particular sympathy especially among certain Christians and at certain times in the history of the church, to such an extent as to make it seem to be an absolute specific element for all authentic prophecy. Certainly the Spirit, which enlightens true prophets, tends to "make all things new," to purify, to promote changes in favor of fidelity, in the light of faith, in God and humanity. However, this is not always achieved by

means of the same tactics, in the same language, from the same point of view, with the same gestures or with the same style. It is enough to glance at the Bible as a whole and at many of the saints (many of whom were true prophets and reformers) in the history of the church. The Spirit breathes where, when, and how it will, without being limited to a standardized kind of prophecy, which belongs to people who are invested with a mission to launch themselves against everything by proclaiming, in a direct and explicit way, the judgment of God upon the defects of society and of the church and by promoting radical reforms at the cost of any kind of conflict.

### B. Prophecy in the New Testament

Essentially the New Testament when compared to the Old Testament does not imply a rupture but a progression. It is a progression, made up of recalling, fulfilling and developing the plan of God for Israel, which implies in fact a substantial qualitative leap. In spite of undeniable characteristics of continuity, the more serious students of prophecy presently recognize an appreciable difference between the classical prophetic activity of the Old Testament and that of the New with regard to prophecy.<sup>31</sup> In the New Testament there is prophecy and something more. It suffices to refer to the prophetic role of specialized persons and to the prophetic office which is typical of the whole People of God.

To understand the phenomonon of Christian prophecy based on the New Testament, I believe that we cannot overlook a mention of these three

essential points: Jesus, specific prophecy, and general prophecy.

Jesus. Jesus does not identify himself explicitly and directly as a prophet, nor do his Apostles and disciples (except the two from Emmaus) nor do the evangelists themselves attribute this title to Him. He is called a prophet, rather infrequently, by others, by the people.<sup>32</sup> We may call certain attitudes of Jesus prophetic. But His calls to conversion and penance and His proclamation of future judgment under the sign of punishment and salvation stand out.<sup>33</sup> In any case, the difference between Jesus and classical Old Testament prophecy is evident both as to the content of the message and style of behavior and literary forms used by Jesus. For example, it is obvious that He "places more emphasis on exhortation than He does on denunciation."<sup>34</sup>

In fact, Jesus' unique character essentially surpasses the charismatic figures and types of prophecy of all other times. He is the realization and fullness of all the prophecies of the Old Testament. Rather than being a prophet, a man who speaks to us in the name of God, He is "the prophet," God Himself, the incarnate Word, the total revelation of the Father. On the other hand, it is precisely because of this that His prophetic trait is a relative and partial aspect of his existence and mission. Beginning with

Jesus, a new era in ecclesial prophecy began. This was due to two things: the sending of the Spirit to dwell intensively in the people of the New Testament, and because Christ (in His person and His message) became the essential reference point for every authentic Christian prophet.

Specific prophecy. In the early Christian communities there were some faithful who were invested with a charismatic function of a prophetic character.35 We are dealing with special vocations, which soon were to become institutionalized and enjoyed particular prestige and fulfilled a spiritual role within the community. Because they were complex, the responsibilities of these Christians who were regarded as specifically prophetic are not clear. For example, we know that when they were moved by the Spirit, they uttered edifying, exhortative and comforting speeches and communicated revelations and divine knowledge, especially during the sacred services. Along with the Apostles, teachers and other faithful who were endowed with special charismatic gifts, they exercised considerable influence in building up the local churches. Their fundamental mission was to illumine and discern the plan of God in the history of each community by interpreting and even guiding the conduct of their brethren in the faith in the light of the Jesus event and his doctrine.36 Against the background of the Gospel, it is possible to imagine certain critical attitudes on the part of these charismatics, and not only on their part, in the face of unjust situations which certainly arose within the Christian community itself.<sup>37</sup>

When the day of the Spirit (Acts) was over, this type of prophecy gradually disappeared as an individual and institutional office. This does not imply that the presence of the Spirit, expressed through the witness and activity of the faithful by means of a prophetic charism (reforming saints and movements of renewal), was not subsequently recognizable although in a very different way during the history of the church.<sup>38</sup>

General prophecy. One important novelty following the glorification of Christ is the fact that the whole church assumed the characteristics of prophecy. The universality of prophecy as a gift which is received by all the faithful without distinction of persons is one of the great and special signs of the messianic era, which coincides with the presence of the church on earth. If we rely on the solemn affirmation of Peter on the day of Pentecost, prophecy appears to be a completely normal fact, which is an essential component of the new People of God. "I shall pour out my Spirit on each one . . ., on my servants and handmaids . . ., and they shall prophesy." This prophetism, which exists throughout both the individual believers and the whole Christian community, displays a marked difference from the prophetic activity in the Old Testament.

In a manner which had never been seen before, the Second Vatican Council emphasized this thesis of ecclesiology by fully recovering the facts concerning the apostolic church. "The holy People of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office: it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise ... Christ the great prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father both by the testimony of His life and by the power of His word. Until the full manifestation of His glory, He fulfills this prophetic office, not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and through His power, but also through the laity. Accordingly He both establishes them as witnesses and provides them with the appreciation of the faith and the grace of the word (cf. Acts 2:17–18; Rev. 19:10), so that the power of the

Gospel may shine out in daily and social life."40

However, in a true sense, every believer is also a prophet. Thus not only the People of God in its totality is a prophetic people, but each and every believer, like Christ, is invested with the office of prophet. This means that each believer is called and constituted by Christ to be a spokesperson, messenger, announcer, witness, and prophet of the kingdom in fidelity to his individual Christian vocation. Quite correctly the Vatican Council chose the biblical word "witness" to indicate the meaning of prophecy. The Council did so deliberately, reaffirming certain explicit sayings of the New Testament. "Witness to Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). Thus the prophetic charism continues in the individual believer as well as in the entire People of God, joined to the absolute prophecy of Christ, to defend the purity of the Christian message, to proclaim it with consistency and commitment to its ultimate consequences, and to renew it and make it effective in the changed circumstances of the time.

The essence of the believer's prophetic character has its roots and strength in the dynamism of the Spirit, who is Lord and gives life. However, in the final analysis, the substance of prophetic efficacy is explained by the ability to be a messenger, to be a sign, to have credibility which accompanies the Christian life that is the apostolic presence and activity of the believer. "You shall have the strength of the Spirit, who shall come down upon you and shall be my witnesses." So the prophet, as the man of the word, according to the etymological meaning of the word, is one who speaks in the name of God by way of the authenticity of his life and teaching. This mediating quality will be valid and effective according to the degree in which the fervor and quality of God, of the Spirit of the Lord

and His action, are evident in the person of the prophet.

Understood in this way a very practical consequence becomes evident: The prophetic duty and obligation of every believer depend upon the capacity for renewal in their own lives, that is, upon the ability to live continual personal conversion. The dynamism of the Spirit, which gives strength, vitality, and meaning to the Christian message, implies essentially a constant effort toward personal renewal. "To be a witness to Christ does not mean condemning others in the name of faith: it means to live the

faith."<sup>42</sup> Living the faith, that is, living in an authentic state of personal conversion, involves being faithful to the values of our own Christian vocation. It is precisely by means of this personal fidelity that the prophetic character, as all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, gains its communal function. Here we may apply the Pauline text concerning charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes to each person for the common good. This common good means above all else a special responsibility for building up the People of God, which is the church. It also implies a positive help toward the building up of the city and the civilization of mankind subject to the Gospel law of love.

### C. Further Refinements

In order to have a complete and objective idea of prophecy, I maintain that it is very important to stress three further details, namely: the fact of existential pluriformity in the phenomenon of prophecy, the practical criteria of its credibility, and its place in relationship to the supreme value of Christian love.

The Second Vatican Council stressed the New Testament thesis of communal prophecy within the church. However, there are different states or ways of life within the church: laity, priesthood, and religious life. Each one of these expresses the basic Christian and prophetic reality in its own way. This means that there are existential forms of prophecy which are diversified and complementary to each other within the People of God according to the different states of life. The council did not develop this aspect of the topic and contented itself with making a few explicit direct references to the characteristic prophetic function of the laity. However, it must be said that the opinion of the council concerning priestly and religious prophecy is obvious. Beginning from the one baptism and the common call to sanctity of all the members of the People of God, there is a plurality of ways of witnessing to Christ according to the existential areas of the various complementary vocations within the church.

In this sense it is fair to say that religious have a subsidiary prophetic role within the church, that is, the religious vocation stands as a specialized prophetic complement with respect to the total ecclesial communion.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the prophetic effectiveness of the religious consists, above all, in the sign value of his life, which is lived consistently with requirements common to all Christians and with the Gospel emphasis of the individual charism, which recognizes the signs of the times, as did Jesus, to be of better service to man. In a manner which is prophetically different, yet not historically extraneous, the religious gives witness to Jesus by showing "in a splendid and singular manner, within his state, that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God apart from the spirit of the beatitudes."<sup>45</sup>

Faithful to the primacy of genuine sanctity by means of living the Gospel radically in his own vocation, the religious fulfills his prophetic role by illuminating and establishing the domain of God in the life of the church and the future of mankind.<sup>46</sup>

Permit me to mention a specific conclusion. To tell the truth, it would be a groundless appropriation to speak of a monopoly or privilege in relation to the prophetic function with regard to the consecrated life in respect of the rest of the People of God. It would be even more groundless to claim that the prophetic office was a specific determining charism of religious. Among other things this would run the risk of equivocation, for example, by speaking of a fraternity of prophets, or a fraternity of professional prophets, and so forth, or, with respect to ourselves, it would involve blatant inconsistency with our charism of minority as Franciscans. No founder or religious institute that I know of defines itself, even as a formality, by specially stressing the terminology of prophecy.

With regard to individual religious who may be endowed with the extraordinary charism of prophecy, the classical biblical and theological criteria still stand to evaluate if they are genuine. In any case it is well to recall two important facts. Firstly, there is the concept of Paul which excludes from the idea of charism any notion of aristocracy or elitism.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, there is the following criterion of the council: "Extraordinary gifts are not to be rashly desired, nor is it from them that the fruits of

apostolic labors are to be presumptuously expected."48

The ambiguity of prophecy is apparent from more than one fact in the Bible and church history. When St. Irenaeus was combating false gnosticism, he recognized brothers within the church who were very outstanding who enjoyed the charism of prophecy.<sup>49</sup> True prophets must not be driven from the church because of fear of false prophets. This is so true. However, it is even more important to be able to distinguish between true and false prophets. Although they are not always distinct and easily recognizable, the criteria of true prophecy are many.<sup>50</sup> I shall list only a few of the clearer ones.

First of all, the principle of Jesus - the agreement of life and doctrine - "By their fruits you shall know them." In this case the fruits refer to the part that what is preached plays in in the life of the prophet himself.<sup>51</sup> The *Didache* (or *Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles*), which is a real pearl of primitive Christian literature, has this to say: "He is not a prophet who speaks only as one who is inspired, but only he who follows the conduct of the Lord." Thus true and false prophets are known by their actions. Every prophet who teaches the truth but does not put into practice what he preaches is a false prophet.<sup>52</sup>

At the level of the existential witness of the prophet, there are two significant qualities: disinterestedness and humility. The *Didache* has

already referred to this characteristic of the true prophet: a man who is not attached to money, to position and to his own comfort, and who does not trade on human credulity. On the other hand, the authentic prophet, since he is really a man of God, is not obsessive, and does not put forth his own ideas with immovable intransigence or blind radicalism. After the manner of the Gospel, he is a minor. To the degree that he is secure in God, he is more deeply conscious of his nothingness and complete unworthiness in himself. It is precisely because of this that the true prophet is a man who is totally committed, free and intrepid in defending the dignity of God and of mankind.<sup>53</sup>

In the light of the thought of Paul and John, the prophetic message is genuine and contributes positively to the edification of the church by assuring true unity with the Gospel of Jesus, with apostolic faith, and among the members of the People of God. In this sense, as Paul says, the prophet's openness to be judged by the community is important. There can be no contradiction between the community understood as the bearer of the Spirit and the individual bearers of the Spirit.<sup>54</sup> The existence of tension between prophecy and certain situations within the institution may be a sign of vitality. We need courage to accept this law. In any case, true prophecy must not have "an outlook which is in open conflict with the church that it wishes to reform in the name of Christ. The drama of certain prophets, whose inspiration was originally legitimate and holy, consists in the fact of not having had the necessary patience to observe this law of life."55

One sign of authenticity, which was particularly evident in classical prophecy, is "the internal evidence of the call and obligation, which is often contrary to the personal desire and ability of the subject but which is imposed as a burden and necessity to speak and act in the name of God." 56

Another criterion is that "the false prophet always has an answer for everything, while a prophet with a vocation sometimes remains silent because he cannot freely dispose of the word of God, but must wait for the time of Revelation." <sup>57</sup>

It is beautiful to be a true prophet, but on the condition that one is not only a prophet. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to complete and supersede them.<sup>58</sup> That is, Jesus came to fulfill the whole of the revelation of the Old Testament, emphasizing the spirit, the heart of His law, which is the precept of love, and therefore, also the primacy of the supreme gift of charity in respect of the prophetic charism itself. In relation to charity, all other values are relative and passing. It gives the rest of them meaning.<sup>59</sup> Fittingly the best of the Law and the Prophets, that is, the divine will which was revealed in the Old Testament, was taken up by Jesus in the golden rule of love: "Whatever you wish that men should do to you, do also to them: indeed, this is the Law and the Prophets." This exhortation is an

anticipation of another more concrete announcement which Jesus made:

"Love your neighbor as yourself."61

Christian love is more than simple comprehension or benevolence toward our neighbor who is specially needy or weak. It implies looking at the other person as one's own brother, as a part of oneself, an integral part of one's very being. By means of prophecy one person reveals to another God's plan for him. By means of love, which is the ultimate and supreme perfection of the New Testament, a person gives himself to his brothers, in God and for God. Therefore, we can say that to love one's neighbor as oneself, simultaneously to and on condition of loving God, is the ethical and religious center of all that the New Testament involves, whether laws or charisms and including the gift of prophecy. This is the fulfillment and realization of the Old Testament in the Jesus event and in the message of the Gospel.

Paul spells out clearly this insight of Jesus. Love is more important than any charismatic experience. This is the royal road along which believers must travel – indeed the only way and not just one way among many: "If you have the gift of prophecy but have not charity, it counts for nothing." Christian love is the criterion of all charisms, even the most extraordinary. Without charity, the believer does not exist nor does anything he has have any value. Every Christian value is relative and provisional when compared

to the law of the love of Jesus.

Our prophetic dimension as believers and radically Gospel people has a characteristic function both within the People of God and in the world. As the council says, this function implies that the believer be "by the testimony of his life and the power of his word" (the order must not be reversed) an instrument of "the charity with which God has loved the world." They must be a stimulating and renewing presence for the wellbeing of the community and the individual. However, this must occur at the cost of submitting everything to Christian charity, or, as Paul says, of searching for and discovering the way of charity which is preferable to every other way and above every other gift of the Spirit.<sup>64</sup>

"Even in terms of an essentially charismatic concept of the church one may not allow the uncontrollable whims of the individual to have the last word. In between, on the one hand, the risk of legalism and a juridical attitude, and a church of fanatics on the other, we should set ourselves "to follow the difficult road of the order of charity." Francis was a true prophetic model of this second difficult road. He was a man who succeeded in overcoming charismatic individualism and legalistic structures by

choosing the safe and strong requisites of Christian love.

Prophecy is a rich and complex reality. Therefore, treatment of our prophetic presence in the world today requires, as I have said, great objectivity and modesty. In the first place, let us avoid thinking of "one

status" prophecy. All of us are true prophets, and so we must be. This does not apply to us alone. It includes the laity. The fact of being a bishop or priest gives no guarantee or monopoly on something specifically prophetic. Nor does the fact of making religious profession. What is of real importance is that each of us, by being dedicatedly faithful to his own Christian vocation, and speaking within his own sphere, clarifies the will of God for others and thus acts as a prophet.

Then we must not fall into the trap of seeking prophetic inspiration indiscriminately and at any price in situations, which, even if they are outstanding, cannot exhibit the plurality of prophecy. Because we belong to the new covenant, we must see prophecy as it is in the Christ from whom above all it takes its dynamism, its style and its most original content.

Finally, in order to identify the specific characteristics which pertain to our charism as Franciscans, in contrast to common Christian prophecy, we have to maintain consistence with our nature as Christians, as members of the church and as deeply human. Certainly this is paying a price. It means reliving the prophetic originality of Francis.

### II. Francis: Dimensions of His Prophetic Originality

The other key word for the Plenary Council is the word "Francis," or as Brother Elias called him, "our brother and father Francis." Obviously this is a most accurate expression. Francis is a prophet. He is an authentic man of God. Therefore, he is a messenger of God, a man who speaks to us in God's place even today. This is how the church understood it immediately following his death. The famous P.B. Häring said: "One of the most authentic and well known prophetic figures in the Church is St. Francis of Assisi." During the fifty-third general congregation of the council (22 October 1963), the Belgian Cardinal Leo J. Suenens asked: "What would the Church be without the charism of prophets, that is, men who are inspired by the Holy Spirit to impel the Church not to obscure the Gospel in practice? Even today the Church needs prophets as St. Francis of Assisi was in his time, for its ordinary, daily life." 69

The obvious question is: What is original in the prophecy of St. Francis? The topic requires a long erudite treatment. However, I must limit myself to giving a few hints for a solution, mentioning certain ideas which appear specially valid to me as coming close to the prophetic reality that characterized St. Francis.

#### A. General Characteristics

There is something which needs to be said firstly and which is not just a formality. It is with regard to vocabulary. The use of the term "prophet" and its derivatives in the writings of St. Francis is both quantitatively and qualitatively irrelevant.70 Francis never used the word "prophet," "prophetic" or "prophecy" in reference to either himself or his friars. In what emerges in the other Franciscan sources it cannot be said that the terminology is used with any special consistency. In line with the hagiographical literary genre of the time, which made free reference to the Bible and to analogies, there are very few references to classical prophets. The sources refer to the prophetic gifts of St. Francis in the traditional way, which is not related to the Bible or theology, but emphasizes a capacity to predict the future.<sup>71</sup>

When we compare Francis with classical biblical prophecy, we see another point clearly which may be summarized as follows: The image of Francis is not captured by the figure of Old Testament prophecy. It is not here that the image of Francis finds its direct inspiration or model of life. Therefore, I feel that the key to understanding the prophetic originality of

Francis is not to be found here.

In this regard it is well to recall a very eloquent fact: "While he was ill with an eye complaint, he was so tormented by his sufferings that a minister suggested to him one day: 'Brother, why don't you have your companion read a passage from the prophets to you ...' He knew that Francis became happy when Scripture was read to him. However, the saint answered: 'Brother, every day I find great sweetness and consolation recalling and meditating upon the humility of the Son of God, so that if I were to live to the end of the world it would not be necessary for me to listen to or meditate on other passages of Scripture. ... I have need of

nothing more: I know the poor and crucified Christ."72

An accurate understanding of the prophecy of St. Francis is possible only if we begin with the New Testament and the person of Jesus. It is only in an atmosphere of fervent fidelity to Christ, the prophet, and to the central logic of the Gospel message that the whole of Francis's life and his prophetic service to mankind and the church finds direct and substantial inspiration. Within the People of God, there are a great variety of saints and ways of being a prophet according to the individual way the Word of God is understood. To try and understand Francis from the point of view of a specific Old Testament context, even though it were spiritually the same and inspiring, would, in my opinion, undermine the most beautiful and authentic characteristics of his prophetic originality. A consistent and complete understanding of Francis is possible only in the light of faith. His apostolic trait, his prophecy, for example, are a spontaneous expression of his religious sentiments. The original element and the constant criterion of Francis's religious sentiments are to be found in the concept that he had of God and of himself, of mankind and all creatures from the point of view of God.

In order to grasp this, we must not neglect to consider the very complex first religious steps taken by Francis. The Lord came to meet him and transformed him by means of the experience of the cross and of His Word. He experienced the cross chiefly through the three great shining wounds (the illness in Assisi, being a prisoner in Perugia, and being persecuted by his family). He experienced the Word of God, which he brought to life chiefly through contemplative discernment (prayer in the Church of St. Damiano), through the reading of the Gospel (in the small Church of St. Mary of the Angels), and in mercy to his fellowmen (meeting with the leper).

Through this series of complex and complementary experiences, Francis discovered God and placed God at the center of his life with typical depth and intensity. In a very beautiful study, Father Yves Congar, O.P., defined St. Francis as "the Gospel absolute in Christianity," a person with "a vertical relationship to God in all its purity and intensity," a person "with absolute religious faith, who looked for no support apart from God. His prayer 'My God and my all' describes the new dominating motive of his existence."<sup>73</sup>

For Francis, God is everything, but above all He is good – the highest good – that is love and which draws people to imitate Him simply in love. "Be good and merciful as your Father in heaven is all good and merciful."<sup>74</sup> This is the transcendent goodness, mercy and love of the Father, which was incarnate in a special way in Jesus, who was humble, poor and crucified, and by way of contrast was highlighted against our smallness and poverty as creatures.

Seeing that God and life are intermingled, we understand why the religious sensitivity of Francis permeated his life and project as a Friar Minor. He was known as a brother to represent directly the love and goodness of God. He was known as minor to recognize indirectly the greatness and the quality of the absolute in God, and to make room, through humility, poverty, and freedom of heart, for loving the common Father of heaven, as well as all brothers and creatures on earth. Without taking into account this theological platform, this religious sensitivity, this quality of faith as it was lived by Francis, there is no way to justify or understand his apostolic vocation whether we call it prophetic or not.

I wish to underline two consequences in this context. Francis's concrete preoccupation with mankind was born and can be understood only when we start from his preoccupation with God, and not the other way around. As a real prophet, Francis, while constantly listening to God, constantly

listens to mankind, dialogues with mankind and serves mankind. Father Yves Congar puts it like this: "When a man genuinely achieves this purely vertical relationship with God which we have observed in Francis, he changes or creates something in the sphere of horizontal relationships. . . . It would seem that by finding perfect coincidence with God, a man of prayer and faith also finds perfect coincidence with men and human needs. He rediscovers men and human relations, but this time from God's angle. He again takes part in human affairs, but he now approaches them from above and reveals a fresh possibility in them." The God of St. Francis is not detached from life, nor does he lead to a formally contemplative or eremitical life. It is completely the reverse. He brings one to a better recognition, from the point of view of God, of the grace and concrete requisites of Gospel brotherhood.

A second consequence of this – Our options for serving mankind must offer the greatest possible opportunity to express our goodness as brothers and our poverty and joyful simplicity as minors. There are brothers in need on all sides. Nevertheless, it remains true that, precisely because of this, there is an area – the area of the poor, which draws us particularly. There is no need to fall into facile simplifications or onesidedness. In St. Francis, the option for the poor as a social situation and environment is not an exclusive or partisan choice of class, so to speak. It is a Gospel option that is an eminently Christian option. By choosing poverty, Francis did not become someone set apart, but rather a man of the Gospel. Since we are instruments of the love of God, who is the Father of all, and instruments of the saving action of Jesus, we should stress our charism as pioneers of universal fraternity, especially among the most needy, whoever they are, preferably the spiritually needy, who are the most poor.

By starting from the choice of minority, poverty, simplicity and a totally free heart, Francis came close to everyone fraternally, without any kind of discrimination. The problem lies in the method of encounter, fulfilling the pastoral duty of going to both the poor and the rich and, in fact, in the long run, of not forgetting that "the central moment of the conversion of St. Francis was not poverty, but love, piety, mercy and comprehension. When he kissed the leper, Francis took a plunge into the security of Christian

love."76

Here we touch on an extremely important and decisive point for indicating certain more significant traits of the prophetic originality of St. Francis. In the long run, the main preoccupation of the true Friar Minor should not be choosing whether or not to be servants of mankind or rebuilders of the church of God, but rather the problem of the manner, the style, the attitude, the human strategies and Gospel characteristics for living, as Francis did, one's own vocation by means of the immense plurality of options which are open to a Franciscan.

Francis was completely convinced of the unique value of example. As Mahatma Gandhi said: "I have no message. My message is my life." Francis's apostolic criterion was: *Plus exemplo quam verbo* ("More by example than by word"). As a consequence, he wished above all that "all the friars preach by their actions." He said that the Friars Minor were sent by the Lord to offer examples of light to those who are wrapped in the darkness of sin. So

Francis understood perfectly the biblical foundation of general Christian prophecy, which, as we have seen, has been highlighted by the Second Vatican Council. This means first of all "that the message of the prophet gives living witness by means of a life of faith and charity,"81 and that it is an existential sign, which is credible in terms of religious values, which is verified primarily in itself, by living example. It was only right that Francis proposed to his friars this method of "proclaiming themselves to be Christians,"82 that is, authenticating by their own lives as the fundamental method of missionary pastoral activity. By basing his religious charism on this Franciscan strategy of a preference for a proclamation of the message by action rather than word, Charles de Foucauld (d. 1916), who was an authentic prophet of our own day, was able to say: "One does good not to the degree that one speaks or to the degree of what one does, but to the degree of what one is."83 Francis, who was a charismatic but deeply realistic person, knew that real pastoral activity which was pragmatic and useful, in the most positive sense of the words, was based upon the primacy of being rather than on the primacy of doing or having.

We know well that the fraternity, both as an evangelical reality and in the existential context, is the theological place par excellence of our consecration. Even further, it is the word which describes the experience of religious life which is typical of the Franciscan, in the most complete and eloquent manner. Thus the first authentic challenge of the Friar Minor, who is called to live in the world of men, 84 is to witness to a coherent prophecy as a universal brother. I do not think that it is necessary to dwell on this point, which is well known to all of us, and which has afforded throughout the centuries the most beautiful, fascinating and effective image of Francis the prophet. However, allow me to stress two observations concerning this

matter.

The first observation concerns the method, the strategy of the prophecy of Francis as a brother par excellence, which combines, in the most positive and evangelical sense of the word, the best plan of Christian non-violence. (Personally I would prefer to speak of the "violence of Gospel love"). This plan and style of activity has been consecrated with extraordinary success by certain famous well-known prophets of our time. Martin Luther King used to say: "Christ gave us the Spirit, Gandhi showed us how to use it." Gandhi and Martin Luther King were two exceptional men who based their

prophecy on the total conviction, in the light of the Gospel, that "all men are brothers, ... that love is the most powerful force that the world possesses, and yet the humblest that one can imagine ..., that love is the most effective weapon which humanity possesses to transform the individual and society." 86

Events have proven the realism of this Gospel thesis. This implies that this is a third way which is not utopian, between passivity or non-conformity, and rebellion and protest. Among the ten famous commandments of Martin Luther King, which are contained in the Document of Commitment for the movement of non-violence, we find this: "Maintain an attitude of love in conduct and speech, because God is love. Keep the common rules of courtesy before both your enemies and your friends. Avoid violence, whether expressed through aggression, speech or in the heart. Pursue reconciliation, justice and not victory. Each day meditate on the preaching and the life of Jesus." Because like St. Francis he was inspired in Christian prophecy by the life and message of Jesus, which was a daily lesson in charity and courage, he was able to say: "Even if all the blacks in the United States went over to violence, I would prefer to be the only voice to preach that it was the wrong way." 87

These expressions prove that even today there are Christians for whom poverty of spirit, non-violence and strength of evangelical love, far from alienating humanity, consecrate it in respect of the most noble enterprises.<sup>88</sup> These expressions prove that even today prophecy is valid and

effective as based on the evangelical strength of fraternal love.

The second observation which I wish to make is this: Francis's fraternal love places his prophecy beyond any classicist opinion, beyond any gratuitous limits, even implicit, with regard to the persons for whom it is intended. None are exempt from his service. "My dear brothers, let us consider our vocation; God has called us not only for our own salvation. . . . Let us therefore go through the world exhorting everyone." Francis opted for a very precise social position, in order to reach all more easily, freely and humbly, not to discourage anyone. Using the Gospel method of charity, courtesy, mercy toward all kinds of lepers of the world, without any fear of discrimination, Francis reached the hearts of all, because he came from outside, from the absolute of the common Father, where he had understood that "wherever there is a person, there is an altar of the love of God."

Among other things, this explains a significant detail. The classical biblical prophets appeared usually as discomforting, irritating, sometimes caustic. They ended up being isolated, misunderstood, persecuted, paying with their own lives for their commitment to the service of truth. Instead, Francis by his life and his words preached of vices and virtues, punishment and glory, the requirements of the Christian life, converted people, was

accepted and followed, and created everywhere an atmosphere of warm devotion and affection. Francis told the truth to everyone without fear or compromise. He was not killed by anyone. It was just the opposite. Gilbert K. Chesterton, with his characteristic style, could say: "Francis walked the world like the Pardon of God.... He was better than other men; he was a benefactor of other men; and yet he was not hated." The prophet Francis was a martyr, not through the violence of the recipients of his message (as was the case with the ancient classical prophets) even though he was sacrificed for love which was given without any recompense for himself, in the disinterested service of others. "He who wants to sacrifice his life for others does not have the time to find a place in the sun for himself."

Conscious of his nothingness before the most high, omnipotent and good Lord, and wishing to follow the footsteps of the humble, poor and crucified Jesus, Francis lived completely as an authentic minor. Starting from a radically religious self-concept, as little and poor, he spontaneously became the prototype of the man of God who is evangelically simple at the ecclesial and social level, a servant of all in courtesy and understanding. It was not enough to love others; they must be approached with a humble heart in peace, without resorting to facile condemnations, protests and vocal diatribes.

There are various prophetic vocations in the church of God. Francis is the model of the prophet-reformer who operates through holiness of life as an *ad hominem* argument and one which takes priority over everything; something which is completely the opposite to the prophet-reformer who operates through a method of criticism. Francis is the prophet-reformer of existential contestation par excellence, of contestation by means of life, through his life as a brother and a minor, and not by vocal or written contestation full of abuse, condemnation and protest. Francis denounces by being a witness, with courage and the freedom of fraternal love. He does so by means of a consistent life and a heart that is sensitive and warm.

Francis's prophetic evangelizing method in being a brother to all, humble and poor in spirit, was not the method of classic prophecy, which was vehement, passionate, full of fire and zeal. Nor was it the method of the great reformers such as St. Peter Damian (d. 1419), St. Joan of Arc (d. 1431), Savonarola (d. 1498), and so forth. "St. Peter Damian had such violent formulae that we cannot find their equal in Luther." The Sicilian Episcopal Conference, in a beautiful message on the occasion of the national celebration of St. Francis as patron of Italy, correctly speaks of him as a man with "an unarmed heart."

It is worth noting the expert opinion of recognized specialists in Franciscanism:

A man on the edge of society, a poor man among the poor, a leper among lepers, such as Francis considered himself, could not criticize anyone or anything. Furthermore, anyone who felt as he did that the peace of Christ was the highest requisite and end would have acknowledged the opportunity, not to say necessity, of silence, the renunciation of all criticism whatever it might be and the humility of regarding everyone as his superior. He did not even raise his voice against the rich who were devoid of love of their neighbour and of charity.... In him the attitude of contempt of those who protest or argue (such as Peter Waldo, for example) cannot be found. We find rather a desire to be a man among men, to be poor with the poor, without being concerned if others were rich, without forcing others to do this or that to follow Christ. He only gives example, being convinced that only example prevails. And because he is like this, his concept of existential reality and the suffering of mankind becomes a primary and basic factor. 96

"Because he is little and the servant of all, he imposes himself on no one, opposes no one and argues with no one. . . . "" While "other contemporary evangelical movements publicly remonstrate with people using severe censures especially in the case of those who hold public office and try to influence behaviour by the use of force, Francis tries to reintroduce the peaceful gentleness and benevolence of Christ." "Francis played an important part in the reform of the Church. He made absolutely no claim to reform. There is not a single word of criticism in his sayings or writings. He did not attack the system to reform it. But he showed such an example, a spirit so manifestly from elsewhere, that some element of it was bound to

pass into the system itself."99

One could extend the references. However, I wish to conclude by stressing that this premeditated attitude in Francis with relation to the method of criticism, of denunciation, of verbal or written protest, did not correspond to merely temperamental or tactical requirements. Above all, it corresponded to conviction and criteria, which are the fruits of his simple and literal reading of the Gospel. For example, it suffices to recall the insistence with which he required that his brothers have the spirit of peace, of respect and of understanding while living in the world and in contact with people. "I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ, that when they go through the world they neither fight nor argue in words, nor judge others. Rather let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle and humble, speaking honestly to everyone, as is fitting. . . . Let all the friars dress in poor clothes. . . . However, I admonish and exhort them not to despise and judge men whom they see dressed in soft and fine clothes and who use fine food and drink. Rather let each one judge and despise himself."100 In conclusion, Francis chose deliberately the Christian method of a positive response, which consists in good works rather than argumentation, condemnation or direct denunciation. "Good is close to evil." "When we hear someone curse or do wrong or blaspheme God, let us pronounce a blessing and do good, and praise the Lord who is blessed for

In this regard, I conclude by recalling an event which perfectly illustrates

the prophetic originality of St. Francis. The Waldensian preachers, as well as the Dominicans, denounced vices publicly, inspired by the criteria and the style of the Old Testament prophets. For them it involved an obvious pastoral method, which the Lord had already expressly desired. Among other things, it depended on the saying of Exekiel: "If I say to a wicked man: You are to die, and you do not warn him; if you do not speak and warn him to renounce his evil ways and so live, then he shall die for his sins, but I will hold you responsible for his death." <sup>102</sup>

One day a Dominican, who was a spiritual man and a doctor of sacred theology, asked Francis about this saying of Ezekiel. Francis replied: "I understand this saying thus: "The servant of God must have such holiness of life himself that it is a reproach to all the evildoers because of the light of his example and the eloquence of his behavior. Thus the splendor and the good fragrance of his reputation make their iniquity evident to all." <sup>103</sup> Thus in contrast to strong methods, which are verbally hard and critical in classical biblical prophecy, Francis translates the words of God into other terms and is the prophet of the Gospel, the prophet of Him who is rich in mercy, of brotherly love, of patience and of minority. In summary, he is the prophet of Christian love who, without any weakness or simulation, reaches everyone through the language of facts and truth.

Every true prophet is an innovator in some way. When attempting to identify the essential novelty of the prophet Francis, both in the context of the Middle Ages and in comparison to the man of the church in any age, I have no hesitation in placing the following quality in the first place. I refer to the clarity, the humility and the zealous courage of having shown in his life the need for a pure, simple radical, joyful Gospel which is to be lived among people, in the marketplace. It is to be lived by all, from the pope to the people. The biblical prophets were innovators precisely because they were authentic conservatives, that is, because they highlighted in a providential manner the essential contrast between the old alliance and the decadent reality of their times. Francis never called himself a prophet nor regarded himself as a prophet. Much less did he see himself as a reformer. However, he was in fact an authentic prophet-reformer, a real innovator. This was true because with a healthy conservative spirit he recovered what was essential in the Gospel and contrasted it with what was best in the message and person of Jesus and with the needs of his time.

Speaking on the subject of the "new," St. Bernard says: "Novelty is the mother of temerity, the sister of superstition, the daughter of levity." <sup>104</sup> The famous scholar Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., recently wrote:

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, periodically the Church is invaded by the evangelical charism which "makes all things new" (Rev. 21), purifying it of excess weight. The typical example is that of the reawakening which freed the Church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of its power and Feudal riches, by means of the announcing of the good

news to the poor. Francis of Assisi (whom his biographer calls a "new man" and who made the Franciscan enterprise a holy novelty) was the prototype of this operation. It is not false optimism which allows me to equate this language with the evangelism of the Second Vatican Council. In fact, the word renewal is used in many contexts, and it is often used in strong contexts in the course of the principal documents. <sup>105</sup>

The first great biographers of St. Francis correctly call him "a new man, given to the earth by heaven," "the new evangelist of the last age," who was sent providentially by God "in the midst of the decadence in which the Gospel teaching had fallen away" so that the world, especially some of the church hierarchy, might rediscover "through the waters of the Gospel a new youth and an unbelievable exaltation," his "radical Gospel novelty." <sup>106</sup>

Francis, whose sense of the church is perhaps without equal, was preoccupied with reinserting the witness of the evangelical counsels into a new and changed society, which was characterized by greater mobility, profound structural changes, by pluralism and growing autonomy, in comparison to the monolithic and authoritarian feudal world, and by great social poverty and a progressive class distinction. Francis simply wanted to realize an authentic return to the source of all Christian life, with awareness of the changed conditions of the times.

Francis, who was a man in touch with God and in touch with the requirements of his day, was aware of and accepted the responsibility to evangelize, to live his faith and to rebuild the church among people and their problems. He was sensitive to the phenomenon of loss of a sense of the sacred, sensitive to the needs of a society which had broken away from official, feudal (so to speak) Christianity, from hierarchy, from cathedrals, from canons regular and from monasteries. He was sensitive to the political and social instability of a world in a state of transition toward a new era.

How could Francis, with his prophecy, his ecclesiastical consecration, while being a religious, help man and the society of his day? How could Francis evangelize? How could he prophetically proclaim and achieve the reform of the church? Though Francis had drawn apart from the world, he remained a part of the world of his time, in a completely natural manner, in contrast to the classical, traditional stance of religious. Taken as prophecy, and as an invitation and message from God to reform the church and society, what did Francis's life as a hermit on the road imply as he saw himself and his brothers?107 No one was closer to people than he and his brothers were to the noise of so many calls and needs of the world of his day. This world was seen and experienced by Francis preferably by living "among people of little status who were despised, among the poor and the weak, among the sick and lepers and among beggars in the street."108 What did he find in the people and the world of his day, and how did he respond, in a Gospel and prophetic manner, "through the witness of his life and the strength of his word"?109 Francis was not conscious of having a specific

vocation to be a prophet, nor of being directly called by God to reform the church and society. He understood the will of God, the impact of the Gospel, and he lived the social and ecclesiastical reality of his day closely. With simplicity and coherence he tried to be an implicit lesson and stimulating innovator by means of the positive and eloquent challenge of his own life.

To conclude this point I would like briefly to stress a fact and a challenge. The statement which is frequently made that Francis was a real social reformer is not held today by any serious scholar. <sup>110</sup> Further, any such thesis would distort the prophecy of Francis. Objectively there are no grounds for reading a sociological interpretation into his life.

For Francis the inequalities between people appeared to be founded more upon religious criteria than upon social. His own activity followed a model more suited to transforming an earthly society into a society of spiritual salvation than to provoking a social revolution or even promoting abstract principles. It was not social inequality that touched his heart, but inequality on the spiritual salvation level. He was concerned more with the conversion from earthly disorders than with opposition to social order or systems. The Gospel, not social ideology, was the basis of everything. The Franciscan social novelty is the Gospel. However, it is not the Gospel of the Cathari or the Spirituals, which was more asocial, more unrealistic than anything and more hostile to the world, but the Gospel of Christ. . . . By substantially responding to religious problems, early Franciscanism was able in every circumstance to transform the social problems of its day into evangelical necessities. 111

"He lived completely disengaged from earthly goods, and from everything which might be described as a 'possession', and yet he never said a word against the organization of society or of property." By embracing the ideal of the Gospel in all its completeness he in fact challenged indirectly, with the stimulating and renewing force of moral leven, the conscience of people of the new society which emerged following the fall of feudalism.

Finally, I would like to indicate a challenge. The Rule and life of the Friar Minor is the Gospel. It is the Gospel in its radical purity and simplicity, out in the open and among people. Francis was fully aware of his precise vocation, this "revelation from the Most High"<sup>113</sup> which was in complete contrast to the old traditional formulae of consecrated life. "I do not want you to mention other rules to me, neither that of St. Augustine, nor that of St. Bernard, nor that of St. Benedict . . . nor any other ideal or way of life apart from that which the Lord in his mercy revealed and gave to me."<sup>114</sup> Out of faithfulness to the Lord, Francis did not want to insert his charism in a vague and ambiguous way into the church. After all, Francis hoped that there were different concrete realities under the general name of consecrated life. Indeed today we admit that within the common prophecy of the religious life there are different prophetic modalities. Understandably Francis wanted to guarantee his personal vocation. He thus saved for the church and for us his special charism of being a radically Gospel man. This

is the essential novelty of Francis the prophet, and, therefore, the sacred heritage which has come to each of us. We know that even in the early days, many educated and learned friars thought that the evangelical utopia of Francis was impossible. Yet, when defending his vocation he solemnly reaffirmed the novelty of his way of life. "The Lord revealed to me that I should become a new madman in the world." 115

The first challenge to us is this. Do we transform the Gospel as did the "fool" Francis, or do we do like the learned and clever brothers and go to the Cardinal of Ostia to ask for relaxations in keeping with ancient prudence to avoid the requirements of Franciscan novelty? "Utopia" and "foolishness" are words. But facts are facts. I think that as brothers, it might be a providential challenge to us to throw down a challenge to ourselves, for example, in the face of the statement made regarding the Missionaries of Charity of Mother Theresa of Calcutta: "There is perhaps no other religious institute today that follows the Gospel more rigorously or literally, according to the words of Jesus. In fact, none appears to be more faithful to his invitation to live in trust, in poverty, in love of the brothers whom we find in need. The Gospel is being lived today in its freshness and in its fragrance in a way which has only rarely happened in the past."116 When he was general of the Friars Minor, Father Constantine Koser wrote these words: "Speaking with brutal sincerity, the world believes that Francis was a man with a modern mentality, and that, instead, the friars are men who are out of date.117

The prophetic originality of St. Francis is a pressing invitation to recover the essential priority of his religious novelty by taking the Gospel absolutely seriously, if we wish to offer a modern image which is credible to the world of today.

## B. Concrete Experiences

By way of example, I would now like to list a few concrete facts in the life of Francis which indicate in factual language his prophetic originality. Obviously the list is very limited and sketchy. Yet I think that it will do as a complementary suggestion to the above treatment and that it might offer an understanding of the practical way in which the prophet Francis served people and the church in his time. However, I think that it is important to make a preliminary observation. We are not dealing with reproducing the actions, the events and the words of a man from the Middle Ages. We are dealing only with certain concrete examples to assimilate and to imbibe his Gospel attitudes in depth, his pastoral methodology, the characteristic traits of his life and apostolic activity as a restorer of the church and a servant of people.

Francis knew well the situation of the church and of ecclesiastics of his day. He sensed that a rich church did not have the ability to evangelize

anyone, not even the rich. Yet he "did not go through the squares denouncing the avarice and pride of the ecclesiastics, the wealth and worldly spirit of certain men of the church, as some reformers had done in the name of the Gospel... Francis was a reformer; yet with all this we do not find a single word of criticism of the church or of the clergy in his writings." What is more, Francis was content to let the light of his life shine as an example of a simple and honest man, who was poor after the manner of the Gospel, who was respectful and filled with faith in the presence of ecclesiastics. Indeed, he was unwilling to think about sin in clerics, even in the case of public weaknesses, because he saw the Son of God in them and they were his masters. This is also what he wished his followers to do.<sup>119</sup>

As the council says, <sup>120</sup> by the will of Christ, the church needs continual reform along the lines of growing fidelity to her vocation. Obviously, the saints fulfilled a special function in regard to the evangelical self-correction of the People of God. But there are saints and there are saints, and there are prophets and there are prophets within the church. For example, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who was the voice of twelfth century Europe, and a Cistercian monk with the aspect of an angel and a dove, turned the conscience of Europe by means of a sometimes-cutting style that was hard, stringent and accusatory. Using tracts, letters and sermons, he brought the Gospel in the radical implications of its demands to all social classes of his era. Yet it is clear that he dedicated special attention to the reform of the clergy and the church hierarchy, who had been contaminated with the vices of a society and church which left a lot to be desired morally. He often gave forth against corrupt bishops and harshly criticized the Roman administration itself.

Love of vanity, opulence, pride, lust and avarice, quite evident in the papal curia and in the church of Rome, provoked the reforming activity of that powerful personality, St. Bernard, calling forth at times his most bitter denunciations. In his famous tract *De consideratione*, which he intended to be the moral code of the popes, in which he addressed Pope Eugene III, who had been a Cistercian monk and his pupil, he launched a cry of scandal against Rome because it had elected and ordained a bishop in a manner in which one would not even select a plowman or chimney sweep, and he called the Roman curia a den of thieves and ambitious, avaricious, simoniac, sacrilegious men. "The church is full of ambitious people; . . . It is no longer only a pirate's cave where the spoils of wayfarers are hoarded." This is the thinking of the saints and their prophetic style.

Francis's heart loves and reproves in a different way. When confronted with the moral misery of clerics, he gave this golden rule to his followers: "Cover their defects, make up for their defects, and when you have done this, be even more humble." Lead by example more than by word! After

all, we are confronted by a concrete application of the general pastoral principle of Francis, which was first mentioned when confronting sin and human weakness. When we know or feel that God has been offended, we

should respond by blessing and praising the Lord.

Without having recourse to facile critical denunciations, we have here an eloquent example of the evangelical re-evaluation of man (who is always a brother whoever he may be, especially if he is spiritually destitute), and thus of society and the church itself. This is a new society and a new church, which discovered stimulating and refreshing Christian projects in the example of the way that Francis lived. In the light of these facts and following this logic, we understand the general attitude of Francis in respect of the institutional church. He did not reject the juridical aspects of the life of the church even when they were occasionally obstacles to his religious plans. They were overcome by faith, obedience and charity. "Francis accepted what was proposed and imposed by the Church, even what could obstruct his plan of action within the Church (we note the prohibition to ask privileges from the Roman Church, or the prohibition of preaching without the permission of the competent authority, whether pastor or bishop), because all this juridical apparatus was superseded by charity." 123

Francis lived at a time when Christianity was under general mobilization and involved, at the pope's command, "in waging the war of the Lord to avenge the insult offered to Jesus Christ," as Innocent III said when launching the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). Christ had been expelled from his home by the Saracens "who were bad people, who thirsted after the blood of the Christians". 124 Francis understood the great anxiety of the pope and wanted his subjects to be "always subject and submissive at the feet of the holy church and steadfast in the Catholic faith."125 Francis was a witness to the zeal of so many monks, clerics and noble Christians who were occupied in the pastoral work of the violence of the Crusades to recapture the Holy Land by force of arms. Francis knew that the church legitimized the Crusades at the doctrinal level. Liberating the Holy Sepulcher and the struggle against the infidel are a holy work. They are the spiritual equivalent of a pilgrimage, or a jubilee, an exceptional occasion for salvation, and represent a form of reliving the adventures of the Hebrew people, or even a form of fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. 126

It is probable that Francis remembered the almost legendary figure of St. Bernard, who was the great inspiration of the European masses, the apostle of medieval militant and unified consciousness to break the Muhammadan power by force, since they were "perfidious, and the greatest enemies of the cross of Christ." It was because of this that St. Bernard came to say: "When the soldier of Christ kills an evildoer (a pagan or Saracen) this is not the killing of a man but the killing of evil. . . . Let the soldier of Christ kill

confidently and die even more confidently." Perhaps Francis had thought of something like that himself, but he certainly heard of the papal legate, who, followed by the clergy, carried the cross and the spear in front of the Christian army, or of the military orders. The Knights Templar say they should not advance in battle "with noise and impetuously," but in

ranks, silently and reciting prayers. 128

What did Francis do in the midst of this atmosphere of warlike and offensive feelings, which were regarded as the authentic prophetic shout of the will of God? He replied with his life – more by example than by word – using the impressionable gesture of another type of prophecy. Francis did not directly or explicitly contest the official attitude of the church and of medieval Christianity in his preaching or writings. Francis read the Gospel with simplicity and seriously and believed in the word of Jesus: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." Francis did not understand the intolerance and aggression which transgressed the central precept of the Gospel in the name of the faith. Though Francis had dreamed of chivalry from his youth, he could not accept the meaning of the soldier of Christ, of Christianized militia and cavalry, who were called upon to be parties to a fratricidal struggle in the name of Jesus.

Passing himself off as a madman and going against the stream, he sought and realized a simple gesture of love, of reconciliation and of respect in approaching the Sultan as a brother – the symbol of Antichrist in the church at that time. Cardinal Jacques de Vitry, who was an eyewitness, says that the Sultan had Francis taken back to the Christian camp with esteem and protection. As he took his leave, he asked him to "pray for me, so that God will show me which law and faith is more pleasing to him." It has been said truthfully: God sent him just to finish the Crusades. The world, including Islam, will be conquered by the Gospel only by means of charity, suffering and humility. This is the eloquent example of Francis as an authentic prophet, concerning the way to defend the church and extend her influence through the witness of life as a sign and through fraternal

dialogue backed by tolerance and love.

In line with this Christian mentality, Francis proposed to his missionary friars the method of courtesy and concrete example from life." Among the pagans let them not quarrel nor dispute; rather let them be subject to every creature for the love of God and profess being Christians." Above all, Francis recommended living prophecy, credible presence, as a method of evangelization and service to mankind, rather than argumentation, critical attack or condemnation. In the light of Francis's ecumenical, comprehensive and fraternal attitude, it is worth recalling, by way of contrast, the following statement of the noted historian Jacques de Vitry: "All the Saracens stood and listened to the above-mentioned Friars Minor while they freely announced faith in Christ and evangelical doctrine, but only to

heretical movements at close range, chiefly the Cathari and the Waldensians. Because he was extremely sensitive to orthodoxy, to being Catholic, and to being always submissive to the holy Roman church, the following fact becomes interesting. In his writings he does not directly decry the errors which were in vogue and which were often propagated by evangelical and poor groups which had a certain resemblance to the fraternity that he founded.

Francis prefers a positive pastoral method, the direct affirmation of Catholic truth, without falling into argument and explicit condemnation. Today we know that there are certain anti-heretical statements in his writings. For example, the *Canticle of Brother Sun* is of special importance as a statement against the Cathari. "It is enough to say that the whole universe, which is viewed as good because it was created by God, becomes one great reality of love and a hymn of good, against the evil universe and hell postulated by the Cathari." He gave a silent denunciation which was effective and which became a splendid poem and prayer!

Many of the simple events of his life, for example his devotion to the Eucharist and his respect for priests, are very eloquent implicit sermons in Christology, sacramental theology, Christian ascetics, and so forth. After all, Francis's tactics are always coherent. He claimed that "the conversion of the heretic came about through persuasion and Gospel example." 138

At the time of Francis, society exhibited an openly discriminatory and class structure outlook. During his time there were poor people, injustice, violations of human rights, hostility, and finally war waged by the church to regain a piece of land that was regarded as sacred. Yet, in his preaching and writings, Francis did not directly and explicitly contest the social situation of his day. He did not provoke class struggle. Francis preferred prophecy in action. This was action which was basically inspired by the example of Jesus. Still he responded to the socio-political reality of the time by combining, along with his brothers, two fundamentally Gospel activities: the activity of minority and the activity of fraternity.

Further, in line with minority, he chose the last place in society, the place of being poor among the poor. This was in imitation of the supreme *kenosis* of Jesus, who for our sake, though He was rich, became poor. He did this to follow the way Jesus developed His mission by taking in hand as a messianic liberator the fate of the needy and outcasts. <sup>139</sup> By means of this human and Gospel platform, which was outside the system, so to speak, Francis was able to reach all, great and small, powerful and humble, learned and simple, with complete simplicity and coherence and a free heart.

Francis did not aspire to a poor society, nor to a maximum leveling. He mediated between people and offered a typical example of fraternity as it was lived in his religious movement. Francis had a fraternal social model in mind – one which was concretely based upon the family in which social

differences are dictated by age, sex, responsibility, not by riches, power and knowledge. Rather than being the protagonist of a social system, Francis was a peacemaker to all,<sup>140</sup> bringing everyone together without discrimination, without excluding anyone, under the heading of dignity and common brotherhood.

The feudal, hierarchic and class systems, which were honored traditionally, had left their mark upon all sections of Christianity, even to the point of influencing religious life. By the use of biblical and theological reasons, the classical monastic form of consecrated life was based on pyramidal and stratified systems going from the abbot and prior down. An example of this, even if extreme, may be seen in the well-known Benedictine abbess St. Hildegarde of Bingen (d. 1179). When explaining why only noblewomen were accepted in her monastery, she said: "Who would herd all his animals into one flock, or into one stable without separation between oxen, donkeys, sheep and goats? We too must maintain a strict distinction. . . . God has established these distinctions himself among his people, not only on earth but also in heaven." <sup>141</sup>

Francis did not resort to theories or to critical denunciations. By taking the Gospel to its ultimate, he responded prophetically through the witness of a new style of life. Within the heart of society and of the church of his day, he created a Gospel model of a family fraternity, of disciples of Jesus, in perfect equality and sharing of life, learned and illiterate, poor and wealthy, without title or precedence among themselves, under the name of brothers and minors who were gathered under the common law of the

Spirit of life who is Jesus Christ.

There are two concrete sectors of social outcasts who well illustrate the original prophetic method of Francis: delinquents and lepers. Francis was aware of the penal legislation of his day. He did not forbid the public authorities to carry out justice, nor did he, in his writings or preaching, directly and explicitly contest the arbitrary way in which they punished certain citizens. Rather he had recourse to the pedagogy of action - more by example than by word. Francis met thieves, delinquents, offering them bread, so that they would not find it necessary to rob, and offering them love so that they would not feel totally blocked and rejected by society. He succeeded in converting them, even sometimes making them friars, through the example of his goodness and through his Gospel word as a brother. Mahatma Gandhi said that "it is better to put up with thieves than to punish them."142 Long before that, Francis had said something more when he gave this golden advice to his brothers: "Whoever comes to you, friend or enemy, thief or assassin, let him be received with kindness." The expression "received with kindness" is the same expression that he uses in his Rule when speaking of how those who seek to enter the fraternity are to be received. 143

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In line with this Christian mentality, Francis proposed to his missionary friars the method of courtesy and concrete example from life." Among the pagans let them not quarrel nor dispute; rather let them be subject to every creature for the love of God and profess being Christians."132 Above all, Francis recommended living prophecy, credible presence, as a method of evangelization and service to mankind, rather than argumentation, critical attack or condemnation. In the light of Francis's ecumenical, comprehensive and fraternal attitude, it is worth recalling, by way of contrast, the following statement of the noted historian Jacques de Vitry: "All the Saracens stood and listened to the above-mentioned Friars Minor while they freely announced faith in Christ and evangelical doctrine, but only to

the point in their presentation at which they began openly to contradict Muhammad as distrustful and perfidious. The pagans then rose up against them, beat them and threw them out of their city, and they would have killed them, had God not protected them." This method of prophecy is quite different from that which Francis wanted and envisioned. He advocated a method without quarrels, without provocation, without

criticism or violent speech.

Thus we have a few examples of the prophetic message of Francis, the rebuilder of the church of God. It is a form of prophecy which is valid in every day. Francis was profoundly an innovator and he became the bearer of a message, in silence but incisively. The future depended on this because he was a defender of what was old (like the classical prophets), precisely because he succeeded in presenting the Gospel in all its purity, without gloss or manipulation. Francis was not persecuted as the classical prophets were. He was simply thought to be mad. Yet his attitude which was full of humility, spontaneous joy and love, commanded respect, even if generations had to pass before it was understood. It is only right that the church of the Second Vatican Council fully agrees with Francis as the "new fool" of the Middle Ages who silently challenged the official tenets of Christianity. "In the life of the people of God every now and then we see behavior which is wanting in conformity to the spirit of the Gospel, or indeed contrary to it. If, in the course of the ages, many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims, the council now pleads with all to forget the past, urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding."134 Without forgetting this, history must be the teacher of life. In the present case, especially for us, history should be a splendid lesson on the extraordinary and original prophecy of Francis. "We do not measure the real stature of a man according to the number of generations which follow him, when all appear to think the same as he thought; rather it is to be judged according to the criteria of his day, when he thought differently from the way others thought."135

The prophecy of Francis is correct, and he has the proper attitude. Man is not a leper who is to be avoided, nor is he a Muslim to be killed. Whoever he be, man is simply a man and a brother. Francis loved him with his greatness and his misery, because Francis was an authentic Christian, a member of the society of love. All triumphalism apart, it is worth recalling the famous statement of Ernst Renan, because it still stimulates us: "We must admit, after Jesus, Francis was the only perfect Christian. His real originality was in having the courage to be just that, since he was motivated

by a limitless faith and courage."136

A very important aspect of the prophecy of Francis, the rebuilder of the church, was his habitual attitude when confronted by heresy. I shall touch on it only briefly. Francis knew some of the more important medieval

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In his preaching and writing, Francis did not directly and explicitly contest the social order which ostracized the lepers, practically condemning them to death in the human degradation of the leprosaria of his time. He adapted his prophecy to the denunciation of witness. After he had been touched by grace, he approached lepers, "his Christian brothers," 144 and showed mercy toward them. Without having recourse to speeches and public campaigns, but by the strong force of his own example, Francis called the attention of society to the important duty of communication and solidarity. With one heroic gesture, in the name of the Gospel, he destroyed the egoism and coldness of social systems which appeared to be unshakable.

Before his conversion, Francis knew of and indeed had experienced at firsthand the belligerent conditions in Italy in his day. Following his conversion, he saw at firsthand continual dramas of social tension and civil strife. Yet in his preaching and writing, for example, he did not contest directly and explicitly the general use of arms, which were morally necessary in those times of civil disorder and insufficient public defense. Essentially Francis was a peaceful man, a splendid incarnation of the Gospel beatitude. Because he was a man of peace himself, he took it everywhere spontaneously.

At the mere sight of Francis, all, whether noble or servant, cleric or lay, forgot their dissension. He knew how to go along the street peacefully, greeting everyone he met, humbly asking permission to go on, as if asking pardon, from those who blocked his path. He asked pardon of the thieves! He was able to understand why the wolf of Gubbio ate people and animals, and so there was no reason to treat him with discourtesy. No wonder that the Italian bishops were able to say in the beautiful message which they sent on the occasion of the latest centenary of St. Francis: "It is not only the word, but the whole of the Gospel life of St. Francis which is the clear echo of the greeting of the risen Christ: 'Peace be to you!' "145 This Franciscan pastoral activity for peace is the expression of the prophecy of a man who possesses a heart which is free and humble after the manner of the Gospel, of a man who lives near God, in most profound serenity, and so is able to offer mankind the comforting message of Peace and Good. 146

"One evening, quite late, it was almost night. Francis was going along the street of San Verccondo with a companion, mounted on a donkey with his shoulders poorly covered by a rough mantle. As soon as the farmers saw him they started to call out to him, saying: 'Brother Francis, stay with us and do not go any further, because there are ferocious wolves in the district and they will eat your donkey and cover you with wounds, too.' Blessed Francis answered: 'I have never done any wrong to Brother Wolf. Why should he want to eat our Brother Donkey? Keep well, my children, and remain in the fear of the Lord.' And so Brother Francis continued his

journey without being afraid." I have never done evil to anyone; why should I be afraid of anyone! This shows the serenity and optimism, the joy and security that ran through the life and the presence of the Franciscan, who was the prophet of goodness, of peace and of hope. Stories aside, what really counts is the attitude, the method of prophecy by means of faith, of love and example. For this reason it is worth recalling two historical events that demonstrate how the originality of a charism, of the prophetism of a saint, can be spoiled even by the intervention of the church hierarchy and by his own spiritual children.

The old Rule of the Secular Franciscans (*Memoriale propositi* of the brothers and sisters of penance, 1221), which was inspired by St. Francis, even though it was sensitive to the mind of penitential movements in general, strictly prescribed for the Franciscan laity who lived in their homes that they "not take up lethal weapons against anyone nor carry them." This is what Francis wanted. He wanted to see brothers and sisters filled with trust, placing themselves in the hand of God's providence – people who were peaceful according to the Gospel and who were peacemakers, at rest before everyone and without fear, because they believed in the goodness of the Father and they loved all as brothers – friends, enemies, thieves or brigands – and as those who had done no ill to anyone.

About sixty years later (18 August 1289), Pope Nicholas IV, who was a Franciscan from Ascoli and the successor to St. Bonaventure as general of the Friars Minor, prepared a new "Rule of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance," in which he wrote the following: "The brothers shall not carry offensive arms, unless it be for the defense of the Roman church and the Christian faith, and even their homeland, or with the permission of their ministers." These are significant additions, which are far from the ideal and practice of Francis who was the Christian fool with a disarmed heart, who took issue with the Christianity of the Crusades by means of a simple

gesture!

The other historical event which I wish to recall is the following. In his famous *Laude*, the renowned Franciscan Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306), who was a witness to and an immediate heir to the spiritual patrimony of Francis, says that Francis, wishing to conquer the world of the heretics, exclaimed: "I would set up an inquisition and imprison any heretics whom I found." It is difficult to imagine that Francis thought like this; and this is a further sign of the originality of his prophecy. Above all, however, the statement of Jacopone da Todi is the indication of the mentality, very probably already common within the church, that was incapable of understanding the evangelical style of Francis's "ecclesiology." We find ourselves at a moment within the very century of Francis, a moment (which, though very powerful, is spiritually incomprehensible), in which the ecclesiastical hierarchy, for the sake of defending the faith, modified

and compromized one of the most beautiful traits of the prophetic charism of Francis. This was the moment in which many Friars Minor accepted inquisitional duties from the Holy See and bishops, collaborating with the Dominicans in the "sacred duty" of rebuilding the church and safeguarding the faith by condemning heretics.<sup>152</sup>

These signs and lessons are a challenge to us all as we reflect upon our prophetic presence in the world of today if we wish to be faithful to the ideal model of the church, of building the church, of collaborating in the consecration and construction of the world and the promotion of the whole of man, our brother, after the style and following the method and outlook of Francis. This is simply to correspond to the model of an authentic Friar Minor. As we seek an identity for our apostolic activity which will be effective and modern (with respect to where it is exercised, the content and the ways of presence and activity), the word of Francis is a basic key to understanding and a concrete future project. However, there is a price. The price is that we accept it without manipulation, with all the force of the pure Gospel and the radical commitment and Utopia which is implied.

It has been said that "the only possibility for survival for the church in the secularized world in which we live is the prophetic charism." The only possibility through which we can still be effective in the world and in the church with honesty and coherence is fidelity to the original prophecy of St. Francis. In this regard, I believe that this statement by a contemporary medievalist is important: "We cannot forget how the life of Francis represented one of those events which overturn the course of history." This may be the case because it is still a clear proof of the effectiveness that the unarmed force of the spiritual in the world can have. 155

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Francis did not call himself a prophet. We may doubt if he ever recognized that he was an authentic prophet. Francis did not call his brothers prophets nor describe their mission as prophetic. This word is also absent from the traditional vocabulary of us Capuchins. However, prophecy has become the order of the day for us recently. Words do have their meaning. It is because of this that I wanted to have something to say about the key words of our Plenary Council: the word "prophecy" and the word "Francis."

In conclusion, this is the purpose of this intervention: to proclaim fraternally by way of the challenge of conversing about our prophetic dimension today. In my opinion this is a challenge which holds priority and cannot be overlooked methodologically. It can be summed up in two words: "precision" and "coherence."

The prophetic originality of St. Francis should be the soul, the form and the model of our prophecy. Our prophetic presence in the world should reflect the identity of our charism. What is common to all our brothers in the faith and to other religious, as Christians, members of the church and as servants of mankind, does not permit us to use the term indiscriminately, or to show ambiguity in our attitudes or choices. A serious dialogue on our prophetic responsibility, that is, on the specific witness of our life in the midst of men and within the people of God, becomes possible only when we have clear ideas on the constitutive evangelical values of our reason for existence within the church. Any discussion on the challenges or on apostolic priorities, on methods and criteria of renewal of our presence in today's world, will be valid in the proportion to which it takes into account precise reference to our identity as Franciscan Capuchins together with the

charisms of the People of God.

The incomparable lesson of Francis is clear. It consists of very precise words and values in relationship to life. Above all, our challenge is the challenge to personal fidelity to the evangelical basis of our vocation, to what is essential in our life as Franciscans. The secret of our real prophecy lies in this existential coherence. Reflections, programs and documents will not provide evangelical vitality for our life or prophetic presence. What will provide life is the strength of the life of each one, which brings out the absolute of God in the history of our own day, with the unmistakable style of brothers and minors. "We cannot fulfill our mission if we do not continually renew ourselves in fidelity to our own vocation," as our Constitutions remind us. 157 Dynamic and creative fidelity to what is essential does not imply evasion. It is the total opposite. Francis does not live a disincarnate prophecy. He does not close his eyes to the signs of the times. He takes the joyful message of the Gospel seriously. He discovers God as goodness and incarnate humility in Christ, and he takes God and the Gospel which he discovered to everyone by means of service and living under the banner of fraternity and minority.

The apostolic horizon of the Franciscan is vast. It is not so much a matter of discussing the things which we might do or not do, but rather of discussing the way in which we can be prophetic rebuilders of the church and servants of mankind in order truly to translate the attitude, the original style, of the prophecy of Francis. What is required is precision in the word and content to understand and put into practice a serious discernment and coherence in life in order to be convincing. With modesty and sobriety, we must adopt certain words and terminology which are more in line with our

The order is ready to take stock concerning its prophetic capability today. The renewal of our apostolic dimension will begin when someone tries to become a new man. It is enough to revive our brother and father St. Francis, without manipulating him, since he is a prophet without peer even in our times.

## Notes Notes

- See Yves Congar, O.P., "Vera e falsa riforma nella Chiesa," Teologia, vol. 13, 1972,
   p. 161; Bernard Häring, C.SS,R., in Nuovo Dizionario di Spiritualità, s.v. "Profeti";
   Angel González, Norbert Lohfink, S.J., Gerhard von Rad, Profetas verdaderos, profetas falsos (Salamanca, 1976), p. 9.
- Raniero Cantalamessa, O.F.M.Cap., "Francesco, l'uomo del Tau sulla fronte," Francesco profeta per noi (Milan, 1982), p. 10.
- See Perfectae caritatis, no. 2a; John Paul II, "Messaggio alla XIV Assemblea Generale della Conferenza dei Religiosi del Brasile," 11 July 1986, Osservatore Romano (25 July, 1986):5-6.
- 4. Perfectae caritatis, no. 2.
- 5. See Aime Solignac, Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique, s.v."Imitation du Christ"
- 6. See RegNB I 1; RegB I 1. In all the citations from the writings and biographies of St. Francis, from the Chronicles and other documents from the first Franciscan century and from the writings of St. Clare, I follow the Fonte Francescane (Assisi, 1978).
- 7. "There are a variety of charisms, of ministries, of works... To each is given a special manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.... In all these things it is the selfsame Spirit that is at work, distributing to each as It wishes.... Just as the body though it has many members... so also Christ" (1 Cor. 12:4). See Eph. 1:23; Solignac, Dict. de Spir., s.v. "Imitation du Christ."
- 8. 1 Cor. 15:41.
- 9. Paul VI, Evangelii nuntiandi, 8 Dec. 1975, no. 66.
- Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, and the Congregation for Bishops, Mutuae relationes, 14 May 1978, no. 11. See Cardinal Eduardo F. Pironio, Prefect of the Congregation for Religius and Secular Institutes, "Espíritu del documento," Informa-tiones SCRIS, year 4, no. 1 (June 1978):95.
- 11. Life and Missionary Activity, the concluding document of the Third Plenary Council of the Capuchins, Mattli, 29 August 22 September 1978, no. 9.
- 12. See Perfectae caritatis, no. 2c.
- 13. See Osservatore Romano (25 July 1986):5-6.
- 14. See Perfectae caritatis, nos. 2-3.
- 15. See Lorenzo Alvarez-Verdes, "La sfida del nuovo nella morale," *Il problema del nuovo nella Teologia Morale* (Rome, 1986), p. 9. In the same volume see Carlo Molari, "L'eremeneutica del nuovo," p. 78.
- 16. Mutuae relationes, chap. 1, part 1, no. 23.
- 17. See Acta Capituli Generalis Specialis Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum Romae a die 19 Augusti ad 25 Octobris 1968 celebrati (Rome, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 95, 110, 313, 331; vol. 2, pp. 110, 416, 451. See also "De natura, extensione et concreta applicatione principii pluriformitatis in unitate," the Extraordinary General Chapter O.F.M.Cap., AnalOFMCap, 90 (1974):304. See also the Letter of Paul VI to our minister general, Paschal Rywalski, on the occasion of the Extraordinary General Chapter of the Order, 29 August 1974, AnalOFMCap 90 (1974):278.
- ConstOFMCap IV V. See Acta Capituli Generalis LXXIX Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum, 1 July - 11 July, 1982 (Rome, 1983), p. 207; ConstOFMCapIV 4," AnalOFMCap 90 (1974):342.
- 19. See ConstOFMCap 5:4.

20. See RegNB Prologue 3; I 1; II 9, 12; V 17; RegB I 1,3; II 11, 14; Test 27.

21. See L. Alonso Schokel and J.L. Sicre Diaz, S.J., Profetas, vol. 2 (Madrid, 1980); Gerhard von Rad, Teologia del antiquo Testamento: Il Teologia de las tradiciones proféticas de Israel (Salamanca, 1984); Walter Eichrodt, Teologia del Antiguo Testamento (Madrid, 1975), vol. 1, p. 307; José L. Sicre, Con los pobres de la tierra: La justicia social en los profetas de Israel (Madrid, 1984); Sicre, Los dioses olvidados: Pobreza y riqueza en los profetas preexilicos (Madrid, 1979); Norbert Lohfink, S.J., I profeti ieri e oggi (Brescia, 1973); Andre Neher, La esencia del profetismo (Salamanca, 1975); Frederic Raurell, "Francescanesimo e profezia: un binomio da spiegare", ed. E. Covi, Francescanesimo e profezia (Rome, 1985), pp. xi - xxv, and "Profetisimo, palabra nueva y liberadora," pp. 362-452; Stefano Virgulin, Profeti e Sapienti, uomini dello Spirito (Rome, 1985); Bruno Maggioni, I profeti d'Israele (Rome, 1984); Bruno Maggioni, La vita delle prime communità cristiane: Riflessioni bibliche e pastorali (Rome, 1983); Santos Sabugal, ¿Liberación y secularización? Intento de una respuesta biblica (Barcelona, 1978); Leon Ralmot, O.P., Dictionnaire de la bible, s.v. "Prophétisme"; Helmut Krämer et al., "Profeta," Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento (Brescia, 1977); Gaetano Savoca, Dizionario Teologico Interdisciplinare, s.v. "Profeti dell'Antico Testamento"; Karl Rahner, Sacramentum Mundi, s.v. "Profetismo"; José Maria González Ruiz, "Profetismo," Conceptos fundamentales de pastoral (Madrid, 1983); Angelo Gonzáles Nunez, Profetas, sacerdotes y Reyes en el Antiguo Israel: Problemas de adaptación del Yahvismo en Canaán (Madrid, 1962); Louis Monloubou, Profetismo y profeta: Profeta, ¿quien eres tu? (Madrid, 1971).

See various numbers of Concilium on prophecy, 1968 and 1965; José Alonso Diaz, S.J., Discernimiento entre el verdadero y falso profeta (Madrid, 1987); Walter Vogels, "Comment discerner le prophète authentique?", Nouvelle Revue Théologique, 99 (1977):681-701; González, Lohfink and von Rad, Profetas verdaderos, profetas falsos; Angel Garamendi, Denuncia y anuncio proféticos en la pastoral de hoy (Madrid, 1972); Gregorio Ruiz, "Los profetas y la politica," Iglesia viva, 44-45 (1973):151-68; Bertulf van Leeuwen, O.F.M., "La partecipazione comune del popolo di Dio all'ufficio profetico di Cristo," La Chiesa del Vaticano II: Studi e commenti intorno alla Costituzione dommatica "Lumen Gentium", ed. William Baraúna (Florence, 1965); Marie-Dominique Chenu, "Un peuple prophètique," Esprit, 25 (1967):602-11; Oscar Cullman, Jesús y los revolucionarios de su tiempo: Culto, sociedad, politica (Madrid, 1971); Congar, "Vera e falsa riforma." One can find summary and essential expositions of prophecy in various biblical dictionaries which are well known and available to all.

22. See John Paul II, encyclical letter Redemptor hominis, 4 March 1979, no. 6.

23. See Norbert Lohfink, Ascolta, Israele: Esegesi di testi del Deuteronomio (Brescia, 1986), p. 9.

24. van Leeuwen, La Partecipazione comune del popolo di Dio, p. 474.

25. See Maggioni, I profeti d'Israele, pp. 9-10, and La vita delle prime comunità cristiane,

p. 76.

26. See Mic. 3:9-12; Amos 5:14. See also João Evangelista Martins Terra, S.J., "La liberazione nell'Antico Testamento," Osservatore Romano, (9-10 May 1986):9; Maggioni, I profeti d'Israele, p. 10; Norbert Lohfink, Il Dio della Bibbia e la violenza: Studi sul Pentateuco (Brescia, 1985), and his Sogni sulla Chiesa (Milan, 1986), p. 119.

27. Maggioni, I profeti d'Israele, p. 10.

28. Lohfink, I profeti ieri e oggi, p. 34, and his Ascolta, Israele, p. 9; Maggioni, I profeti d'Israele, p. 8.

29. Lohfink, I profeti ieri e oggi, pp. 92-93.

30. Maggioni, I profeti d'Israele, p. 7; Congar, "Vera e falsa riforma," p. 154.

31. Adrien Nocent, "L'annuncio del Vangelo nella Liturgia: 1. Un popolo di profeti," L'annuncio del Vangelo oggi, ed. Adrien Nocent (Rome, 1977).

- See Matt. 13:57; 21:11, 45; Mark 6:15; 8:28; Luke 7:16, 39; 9:8, 19; 13:33; 24:19; John 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17; Acts 3:22; 7:37. See also Juan Alfaro, S.J., "Cristo como profeta," Mysterium Salutis, vol. 3 (Madrid, 1980), p. 507; van Leeuwen, La partecipazione comune del popolo di Dio, p. 467.
- 33. See van Leeuwen, La partecipazione comune del popolo di Dio, p. 466.
- 34. Sicre, Con los pobres de la tierra, p. 457.
- 35. See Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10; 1 Cor. 13:2; 14:3, 24; Eph. 3:5; 1 Tim. 4:14; Rev. 22:6.
- See 1 Cor. 12:4; 14:3, 24, 31. See also C.H. Peisker, Dizionario dei concetti biblici del Nuovo Testamento, s.v. "Profeta"; van Leeuwen, La partecipazione comune del popolo di Dio, p. 472.
- 37. See 1 Cor. 11:17; Gal. 2:1.
- 38. Rahner, Sacramentum Mundi, s.v. "Prophetism"; van Leeuwen, La partecipazione comune del popolo di Dio, p. 471.
- 39. Acts 2:17. See John 14:16, 26; 15:25; 16:13; Lumen gentium, nos. 12, 30, 31, 35; Presbyterorum ordinis, no. 2; Apostolicam actuositatem, nos. 1, 10; Ad gentes, no. 15; Maggioni, La vita delle prime comunità cristiane, p. 74; van Leeuwen, La partecipazione comune del popolo di Dio, p. 471; Gerard Philips, La Chiesa e il suo mistero nel Concilio Vaticano II: Storia testo e commento della Costituzione "Lumen Gentium" (Milan, 1982),
- 40. Lumen gentium, nos. 12, 35, 31. See Presbyterorum ordinis, no. 2; Apostolicam actuositatem, no. 10; Ad gentes, no. 15; Vladimir Truhlar, Lessico di spiritualità, s.v. "Credente-profeta e Profeta." The Scripture citations (Lumen gentium, no. 35; Acts 2:17; Rev. 19:10) refer to all the faithful: Modi a Commissione doctrinali examinati a patribus conciliaribus propositis, vol. 4, chaps. 4-5: De laicis, De universali vocatione ad sanctitatem in Ecclesia (Vatican: 1964), p. 10. See also Acta Synodalia Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, vol. 1, third period, part 1, public session 4 (Vatican, 1973), pp. 282, 285, 287; Rahner, Sacramentum Mundi, s.v. "Profetismo."
- 41. Acts 1:8. See Luke 24:28.
- 42. Donze-Alain Galichon, "I Laici,", La Chiesa: Costituzione "Lumen Gentium", ed. Vittorino Jones (Brescia, 1966), p. 169.
- 43. See Lumen gentium, nos. 12, 31, 35; Presbyterorum ordinis, no. 2; Apostolicam actuositatem, nos. 2, 10; Ad gentes, no. 15.
- 44. See Lumen gentium, chaps. 5-6. See also "Il ruolo profetico dei religiosi nell'impegno per la promozione humana," Informationes SCRIS, n. a., 4 (1987):294.
- 45. Presbyterorum ordinis, no. 2; Lumen gentium, no, 31.
- 46. See Manselli et al., Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione, s.v. "Profetismo"; Juan Manuel Lozano, La sequela di Cristo: Teologia storicasistematica della vita religiosa (Milan, 1981), p. 124; Bruno Secondin, Sequela e profezia: Eredità e avvenire della vita consacrata (Rome, 1983), p. 5; "Il ruolo profetico dei religiosi," n. a., pp. 291-307.
- 47. See Le lettere di Paolo, vol. 1 (Rome, 1980), p. 457.
- 48. Lumen gentium, no. 12.
- 49. See St. Irenaeus, Adv. haer., 1, V, chap. 6, PG 17, 1137. See also the reference of Eusebius of Caesarea, Hist Eccl., 1, V, 7, 6, PG 20, 485; van Leeuwen, La partecipazione comune del popolo di Dio, p. 479.
- See Diaz, S.J., Discernimiento, p. 26; Vogels, "Comment discerner le prophète authentique"; González, Lohfink, and von Rad, Profetas verdaderos, profetas falsos; Heinrich Fries, "La revelación," Mysterium salutis, ed. Juan Alfaro, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1981), p. 249.
- 51. Matt. 7:20; 7:15. See Ortensio da Spinetoli, *Matteo: Commento al "Vangelo dalla Chiesa"*, 3d ed. (Assisi, 1977), p. 207. Here the fruits do not refer to the consequences of their preaching, which might also be good incidentally, but to the fruits which they produce in their life.

- 52. Daniel Ruiz Bueno, Padres apostólicos (Madrid, 1979), vol. 11, pp. 89, 29.
- 53. See Didache, X, 9, 12. Congar, "Vera e falsa riforma," p. 169.
- 54. See 1 Cor. 12:4; 14:3; Rom. 12:3; 1 Tim. 5:19; 1 John 2:20; 4:1-3; Lumen gentium, no. 12; van Leeuwen, La partecipazione comune del popolo di Dio, p. 476.
- 55. Roger Aubert, "I profeti nella Chiesa," Concilium, vol. 4 (1986), p. 17.
- 56. Fries, La revelación, p. 249.
- 57. N. Füglister, Dizionario teologico, s.v. "Profeta."
- 58. See Matt. 5:17; Rom. 10: 4; C. Spicq, O.P., Théologie morale du Nouveau Testament (Paris, 1965), pp. 481-548; Günther Schiwy, Introduzione al Nuovo Testamento (Rome, 1971), vol. 1, p. 105.
- 59. See Col. 3:14; Rom. 13:10; 1 Cor. 12:31; 13:1; Lumen gentium, no. 42.
- 60. Matt. 7:12.
- 61. Matt. 22:39; Mark 12:31; Rom. 13:9. See Lev. 19:18; da Spinetoli, Matteo, p. 203.
- 62. 1 Cor. 13:2. See 1 Cor. 12:31; 13:1; Le lettere di Paolo, pp. 478, 484, 486; Teodorico Ballarini, Paolo: Vita, Apostolata, Scritti (Turin, 1968), p. 504.
- 63. Lumen gentium, nos. 35, 12, 41.
- 64. 1 Cor. 14:1; 12:31; 13:1. See Acta Vat. II, 3d period, part 1, 4th public session, pp. 199, 200.
- 65. Aubert, I profeti nella Chiesa, p. 17.
- 66. Häring, Nuovo Diz. di Spiritualità, s.v. "Profeti."
- 67. "Lettera enciclica" di Frate Elia a tutte le Province dell'Ordine sulla morte di San Francesco, Analecta Francescana sive Chronica aliaque varia documenta ad Historiam Fratrum Minorum spectantia, "Legendae S. Francisci Assisiensis saeculis XIII et XIV conscriptae," vol. 10 (Florence, 1926-41), p. 526.
- 68. Nuovo diz. di Spiritualitá, s.v. "Profeti." See Cantalamessa, "Francesco, l'uomo del Tau sulla fronte," p. 10.
- 69. See Acta Vat. II, vol. 2, p. 176; Giovanni Caprile, Concilio Vaticano II (Rome, 1966), p. 127.
- 70. RegNB V 16; VII 4; XXIII 6; IIEpFid 17, 46, 76; EpOrd 19.
- 71. See 1Cel 3, 26 (title), 28, 96; 2Cel 3, 4, 12, 13, 27 (title), 48, 51, 54, 71, 103, 105, 164; LM Prologue 1, 5; I 6; II 5; III 2; IV 9; VI (title), 3, 4, 8; VII 8; IX 1, 7; XI (title), 3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 14; XII 1, 12; LMin IV (title), 3, 4, 8; VII 9; LP 8, 38, 82, 108; AP 15, 25, 29, 45; L3S 24, 26, 33, 45; SP 55, 65, 101 (title), 107; SC 19; Julian of Spires, "Vita S. Francisci," AF X:333, nos. 10, 16, 19, 27 (title), 29, 63, 65; TestCl 4, 5.
- 72. LP 38; 2Cel 105.
- 73. Yves Congar, O.P., Faith and Spiritual Life, trans. A. Manson and L.C. Sheppard (New York, 1968), pp. 29, 31.
- 74. Matt. 5:48; Luke 6:36.
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- 76. Raoul Manselli, S. Francesco d'Assisi (Rome, 1980), p. 44; idem, Nos quo cum eo fuimus (Rome, 1980), p. 269; idem, "La spiritualità francescana," Francesco: Il Francescanesimo e la cultura della nuova Europa (Rome, 1986), p. 222; Pietro Prini, La scelta di essere: Il "senso" del messaggio francescano (Rome, 1982), p. 81; ConstOFMCap 144:3f; 145:4; Vita e attività missionaria, final document of the Third Plenary Council of the Capuchins, no. 13; Cardinal Leo J. Suenens, "Il sacerdote testimone del vangelo per i poveri e per i richi," Osservatore Romano (1 March 1985):5.
- 77. Damiano Bianco, Mahatma Gandhi, verso la veritá (Milan, 1977), p. 153.
- 78. L3S 36. See Giovanni Boccall, Dizionario francescano, s.v. "Esempio"; Lázaro Iriarte, O.F.M.Cap., "Presencia penitential y profética del Hermano Menor," Francescanesimo e profezia, p. 557; Frederic Raurell, "Francescanesimo e profezia," pp. xx xxiv; Manselli, Nos qui cum eo fuimus, p. 270.

- 79. RegNB XVII 3. See Manselli, Nos qui cum eo fuimus, p. 257.
- 80. 2Cel 155.
- 81. Lumen gentium, no. 12.
- 82. RegNB XVI 6. See Paul VI, Evangelii nuntiandi, 8 Dec. 1987, no. 41; the report to the Extraordinary General Chapter of the Capuchins: "De vita nostra apostolica ad mentem n. 12 Constitutionum et de officiis in mundo peragendis," AnalOFMCap 90 (1974):351-60.
- 83. "Parole dal deserto," Slogans dell'anima, p. 174.
- 84. See SC 63; Jacques de Vitry, Historia occidentalis XVII; Mon. Ger. Hist, XXCI, p. 514.
- 85. See Silvia Albini, Pregare con Martin Luther King (Milan, 1982), pp. 14, 34.
- Ibid., pp. 70, 12, 16, 33, 115; Mahatma K. Gandhi, Antiche come le montagne, 5th ed., (Milan, 1971), pp. 129, 119; Bianco, Mahatma Gandhi, p. 160.
- 87. See Albini, *Pregare con Martin Luther King*, p. 51; Segretariato generale "I profeti nella città secolare," *Concilium*, vol. 4 (1968), p. 172.
- 88. See Simon Legasse, O.F.M.Cap., I poveri di spirito: Vangelo e non violenza (Brescia, 1976), p. 102; Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, Insegnamento sociale di Giovanni Paolo: II/11: Il tema della violenza, ottobre 1978-ottobre 1985 (Rome, 1985); Giorgio Filibeck, "Il tema della violenza nell'insegnamento del Santo padre Giovanni Paolo II," Osservatore Romano (19-20 May, 1986):7.
- 89. L3S 36; LM IV 2; SP 65.
- Don Primo Mazzolari, "Il Vangelo della speranza," Slogans dell'anima, p. 39; Manselli, S. Francesco d'Assisi, p. 44; Manselli, Nos qui cum eo fuimus, p. 269; Manselli, "La spiritualità francescana," Francesco, Il Francescanesimo e la cultura della nuova Europa, p. 220; Prini, La scelta di essere (Rome, 1982), p. 81.
- 91. St. Francis of Assisi (Garden City, 1957), pp. 152, 106.
- 92. Mahatma Gandhi, "Lettere al'Ashram," in Albini, Pregare con Martin Luther King, p. 117.
- 93. See Rinaldo Fabris, La virtù del coraggio: La "franchezza" nella bibbia (Casale Monferrato, 1985), p. 86; Manselli, Nos qui cum eo fuimus, p. 270; Lohfink, Sogni nella Chiesa, p. 119.
- 94. Congar, "Vera e falsa riforma," p. 169.
- 95. Messaggio dei vescovi alle genti dell'isola (Palermo, 4 June 1985).
- 96. Manselli, S. Francesco d'Assisi, p. 72; idem, Nos qui cum eo fuimus, p. 270.
- 97. Iriarte, "Presencia peniticial y profética del Hermano Menor," pp. 603, 564, 569.
- 98. Ottaviano Schmucki, O.F.M.Cap., "San Francesco d'Assisi, messaggero di pace nel suo tempo," Studi e ricerche francescane, 5 (1976):221.
- 99. Congar, Faith and Spiritual Life, pp. 34, 44.
- 100. RegB 2, 17; III 10; RegNB XI 10; XVI 6; L3S 58; APer 38; Ottaviano Schmucki, "San Francesco, messaggero di pace," p. 223.
- 101. RegNB XVII 19. See Rom. 1:25.
- 102. Ezekiel 3:18-21. See "Presencia penitencial y profética del Hermano Menor," p. 569.
- 103. 2Cel 103. See LM XII 2; SP 53.
- 104. Epistola, 174, PL 182, 336, 9.
- "Renovation-Restauration," Actualité, 20 (1985):8. See Manselli, S. Francesco d'Assisi, pp. 95, 112, 135.
- 106. 1Cel 89, 474; LM III 9; XII 18. See Manselli, La spiritualità francescana, p. 219; Luigi Pellegrini, "Il ruolo 'profetico' di Francesco d'Assis Analisi sincronica del prologo della 'Legenda Maior,'" ed. E. Covi, Francescanesimo e profezia, p. 153.
- 107. See LP 80; SP 65.
- 108. RegNB IX 2.
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