

The Spirit of Prayer and the Active Life According to the Mind of St. Francis

Oktavian Schmucki, O.F.M. Cap.

Translated by Paul Barrett, O.F.M. Cap.

L'Esperienza di Dio in Francesco d'Assisi, Rome: *Laurentianum*, 1982,
ed. E. Covi, O.F.M. Cap., 376-403

*Spiritus Orationis et Actionis Humanae
Compositio ad mentem S. Francisci Assisiensis*

The problem implied in the title of this article is one that is being experienced with special intensity nowadays. But so far as we know, up to the present few authors have addressed it in the light of the Franciscan sources.¹ Certainly, nowhere in his writings does St. Francis explain how the obligation to pray is to be reconciled with the demands of the active life, nor does he show how we can fulfil the duties of an earthly city while, at the same time, we are seeking a heavenly one. In short, Francis does not tell us how the "horizontal" and "vertical" dimensions are to be united. Yet there are individual references in his writing which indicate that he saw a crisis impending because the two forces in the brothers' life would not merge but would instead oppose each other. If we also include biographical evidence in our

¹For a bibliography on Franciscan prayer, see Ignace Schlaury, "Saint François et la Bible. Essai bibliographique de sa spiritualité évangélique," *Collectanea Franciscana* 40 (1970) 365-437, especially 418-430; Raphael Brown, "A Francis of Assisi research bibliography, comprehensive for 1939-1969, selective for older materials," *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of Sources for the Life of Saint Francis*, edited by Marian A. Habig, [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973] 1667-1760; The following deal directly with our subject: Oktavian Schmucki, "Mentis Silentium: Contemplation in the Early Franciscan Order," *Greyfriars Review* 4 (1990) 35-71; H. E. Goad, "The Dilemma of Saint Francis of Assisi and the Two Traditions [Eremitical and Community]," *Francis of Assisi: 1226-1926: Essays in Commemoration* [London: 1926] 129-162; Dacian Bluma, "Franciscan Life of Prayer: St. Francis's Thought on the Place of Contemplation in the Franciscan Vocation," *The Cord* 13 [1963] 49-55; H. J. Süjer, "Vie et Prière," *Evangelie Aujourd'hui* 72 (1971) 21-28; Francisco Saverio Toppi, "De Spiritu Orationis et Praxi Orationis Sancti Patris Nostri Francisci," *Analecta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuchinorum* 89 (1973) 39-55; E. Caroli, "Evangelizzare e Contemplare—Binomio per Una Vita," *Vita Minorum* 47 (1976) 299-309; Anton Rotzetter, "Gottzugewandtheit als Zuwendung zur Welt," *Katholische Akademie Augsburg. Franz von Assisi ein Heiliger für unsere Zeit?* [Augsburg 1976] 58-87; Pasquale Magro, "Pregihera e Apostolato nella Vita di San Francesco," *San Francesco Patrono d'Italia* 57 (1977) 247-251, 291-296; M. Steiner, "Acción y Contemplación según los escritos de San Francisco," *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* 9 (1979) 117-131

treatment of the subject, we shall see clearly that Francis was aware of this danger. But we shall also find there certain elements which favoured the union of the two opposing forces. Accordingly, we shall try to investigate our subject by considering: first, the primacy of prayer in the Franciscan life; second, the alternation between the contemplative and active lives; third, prayer as the source of all activity; and fourth, the eminently Apostolic Power Of Prayer.

I. The Primacy of Prayer in the Franciscan Life

1. The primitive sources show clearly the great importance which Francis ascribed to prayer, so much so that it is scarcely necessary for us here to quote him at length on the subject. From many possible examples we can profitably recall what he recommended to his sons in the *Earlier Rule* (RegNB XXII 19f, 25) almost as a kind of spiritual last will and testament and given probably even at the very time when he relinquished the office of General Minister, in 1220.²

As the Saint himself said forcibly, prayer is difficult because we find it hard to direct our whole heart, our inner psychological core to God and keep it fixed there so firmly that it has the Lord's words and precepts deeply engraved upon it. Hence he reminded his sons: "And let us be very careful of the malice and the subtlety of Satan, who wishes that a man not raise his mind and heart to God" (RegNB XXII 19). Nor did he fail to point out the dangers that threaten the pre-eminent place that prayer should be given. For the Evil One can tempt us to seek praise or a reward from others,³ or even to pursue some good purpose, to help our neighbor, so that we will be led to abate the fervor of our prayer: "As [the devil] prowls about (cf. 1 Pt 5:8) he wants to ensnare a person's heart under the guise of some reward or assistance, to choke out the word and precepts of the Lord from our memory (cf. Mk 4:19), and, as he desires a person's heart, to blind it through worldly affairs and concerns and to live there," (RegNB XXII 20).

²Cf. *Opuscula sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*: K. Esser, Grottaferrata 1978, and also *François d'Assise, Ecrits. Texte Latin de l'Édition Kajetan Esser*. Introduction, translation and notes by Théophile Desbonnets, Jean-François Godet, Thadee Matura, Damien Vorreux. Sources Chrétiennes 285 [Paris:Les Éditions du Cerf, 1981. David Flood suggested that the *Earlier Rule* XXII as Francis' testament before his journey to the Near East in 1219, cf. *Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder* [Werl/West. 1967] 133f. However, we think it is more likely that Francis gave this testament when he "resigned the office of superior of the Order in a certain chapter before all the brothers" (2 Cel 143: *Analecta Franciscana* X 212: we shall use the usual abbreviations throughout).

³The word *mercedis* seems to have this meaning here: cf. also Adm XXI 1; XVIII 1f.

In the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-9; 18-23 and similar places in the other synoptic Gospels), which the Saint had quoted before (RegNB XXII, 11-17), the phrase "the cares of the world" has the sense of a anxious solicitude about temporal affairs⁴ which weakens inner vision and the spirit of prayer. "Therefore, all my brothers, let us be very much on our guard that, under the guise of some reward or assistance, we do not lose or take our mind away from God. But, in the holy love that is God (cf. 1 Jn 4:16), I beg all my brothers, both the ministers and the others, after overcoming every impediment and putting aside every care and anxiety, to serve, love, honor and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind in whatever way they are best able to do so for that is what He wants above all else." (RegNB XXII 25-26.) As the highest possible way to praise prayer, Francis invokes the inner nature of God, the origin and plenitude of all love (Cf. 1Jn 4:8, 16).⁵

2. The importance of prayer is stressed equally in the *Later Rule* (V, 1f, where the Holy Founder deals succinctly with the manner of working: "Let those brothers to whom the Lord has given the grace of working work faithfully and devotedly so that, avoiding idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things must contribute." Therefore, the spirit of intimate converse with God must prevail over all other human activities and duties and must permeate them as their soul and final end. It would be difficult to express more simply and clearly the principle that external activity must be subordinated to the inner life of the soul. Similarly, the *Later Rule* (RegB X, 7) stresses that the desire for prayer must inspire and rule every action: "Moreover, I admonish and exhort the brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ to beware of all pride, vainglory, envy and greed, of care and solicitude for the things of this world (cf. Mt 13:22; Lk 12:15), of detraction and murmuring. Let those who are illiterate not be anxious to learn, but let them attend to what they must desire above all else: to have the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy manner of working, to pray always to Him with a pure heart." Once more, Francis lists the

⁴Cf. Our study cited above in note 1: "Mentis silentium," 199-204, especially 200f, n. 75, where we give a bibliography.

⁵Cf. the sensitive exposition of this text in W. Thüsing, *Die Johannesbriefe* [Düsseldorf:1977] 140-14. On RegNB XXII, we'd like to direct the reader to O. Schmucki "Linee Fondamentali della 'Forma Vitae' nell'Esperienza di San Francesco," *Lettura Biblico-teologica delle Fonti Francescane*, edited by G. Caradopoli and M. Conti, [Rome:Antoniano, 1979] 183-231, especially 200f. Cf. also Anton Rotzetter "Aus Liebe zur Liebe.' Zu einem Wort des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 44 [1981] 154-167, where, however, some of the interpretations are completely subjective.

negative forces that hinder prayer, namely, those sins which are most contrary to the religious duty of the brothers who, "As pilgrims and strangers in this world (cf. 1 Pet 2:11), serving the Lord in poverty and humility," (RegB VI 2). They should live in such a way that, being completely open to the influence of the Holy Spirit and with their hearts free from any inordinate self-love, they never cease to pray.

3. It is of interest here to note what our Holy Founder said shortly after the solemn confirmation of the *Later Rule* on November 29, 1223, when he granted St. Anthony the faculty to teach theology: "I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers as long as you 'do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion' during study of this kind, as is contained in the Rule." (EpAnt 2). Thus, Francis clearly included the study of Sacred Scripture in his admonition, in which he asked that all occupations should be subordinated to prayer.⁶ We find him setting down the same principle in the *Rule for Hermitages* (RegErm) where he legislated for those brothers who were leading the life of Mary in hermitages: "Let them seek first of all the kingdom of God and His justice" (Mt 6:33), and then he proposed the recurrent cycle of the liturgical hours as the rhythm which their life of contemplation should follow.⁷

4. It is worth noting that we can find evidence in the main biographical sources that fully supports the statements found in the Saint's writings. Thus the *Legend of the Three Companions* (55)⁸ tells the story of the peasant who drove his donkey straight into the hut at Rivo Torto in which the brothers were "intent on silent prayer." Francis's reaction was to say to his friars: "Dear Brothers, I know that God has not called me to entertain a donkey and live in the company of men, but to show men the way of salvation by preaching and wise counsel. We must, therefore, above all, make sure of being able to pray and give thanks for the graces we receive." The words "above all" show the Saint's scale of values. From the very beginnings of the brotherhood, the duty of adoration and thanksgiving took precedence over the words of proclaiming penance and peace, both from moment to moment and in the long term. This

⁶Cf. Concerning the authenticity and contents of *Letter to Brother Anthony*, cf. K. Esser, *Die Opuscula des bl. Franziskus von Assisi*, [Grottaferrata: 1976] 147-154.

⁷Cf. K. Esser, *Die Regula pro eremitoriis data des bl. Franziskus von Assisi* in IDEM, *Studien zu den Opuscula des bl. Franziskus von Assisi*, Rom 1973, 137-179, spec. 171-173; Optatus van Asseldonk, *La Regola pro eremitoriis data*, in *Studi e Ricerche Franciscane* 8 (1979) 3-18.

⁸N. 55: Theophile Desbonnets, *Legenda trium Sociorum. Edition critique*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 67 (1974) 129s; we will use this edition throughout.

text also shows that thanksgiving occupied a truly outstanding place in the prayer of the first brothers, a fact which is reinforced by the frequency with which the praises of God, recur in the Saint's writings.⁹

5. On this same point, there is a significant passage in the *Legend of Perugia*.¹⁰ It is an account of a certain lay brother novice (2 Cel 195) "who could read the Psalter, but not very well," and who wanted to ask Francis in person for permission to have a Psalter of his own,¹¹ although he had already asked for and obtained that permission from the Vicar General of the Order, Elias of Assisi. He did this because (LP 70):

He had heard it said that the holy father did not want to see his brothers eager for learning and for books, but that he preferred to see them—as he preached it—eager for pure and holy simplicity, for prayer, and for Lady Poverty. That is the way the first brothers were trained. These first brothers were saints and believed that such was the surest way to salvation.

This is really not the place to bring up the very complex historical problem concerning Francis's attitude and practice regarding the position of theology in his Order.¹² But we must do so in order to examine the evidence just quoted, which demonstrates that "holy prayer" is the first duty of the religious and which also shows that the Saint was afraid that an undue preoccupation with theology might detract from the fervor and frequency of prayer.¹³

II. The Alternation between the Contemplative and Active Lives

1. Even for the "praying brothers" (Cf. RegNB XVII 5) who lived in hermitages, it was decreed (RegEr 10) that they were to be called "Mary" or "Martha" (Cf. Lk 10:38 42) according as they devoted themselves to contemplative prayer or domestic chores: "The sons (another name for the friars then engaged in contemplation) should sometimes assume the role of the mothers (or "Marthas"), as from time to time it may seem good to them to exchange

⁹Videas v. g. *CantSol*; *LaudDei*; *EpFid II*, 61f; *EpOrd* 26f; *ExbLd*; *LaudHor*; *OffPass*; *RegNB XVII* 17f, XXIII.

¹⁰N. 70: R. B. Brooke, *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angelorum, Sociorum S. Francisci*, [Oxford: 1970] 208-210; M. Bigaroni, *Compilatio Assisiensis' dagli Scritti di fr. Leone e Compagni su S. Francesco d'Assisi* [Assisi: S. Maria degli Angeli, 1975] 306-312. This source has many different titles, among them the unsuitable "Legend of Perugia." Cf. *Collectanea Franciscana* 51 (1981) 29-31.

¹¹For the historical context and the greatly changed liturgical laws regarding lay brothers which were brought in by the *Later Rule* (III), we refer the reader to our commentary: ... with a bibliography. appended in the notes.

¹²Cf. D. Berg, *Armut und Wissenschaft. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Studienwesens der Bettelorden im 13. Jahrhundert*, [Düsseldorf, 1977].

¹³It is scarcely necessary to note that this concern of Francis recurs in his writings in similar words.

(roles)." Even a close examination of this text does not show how often the roles of "mothers" and "sons" were to be interchanged. Merely from the recurrent use of the names of the two sisters, Mary and Martha, in the *Rule for Hermitages* (RegEr 2), it is difficult to deduce exactly how Francis interpreted the passage in St. Luke's Gospel (10:38-42).¹⁴ But there is no doubt that he saw Martha as the exemplar of the of the active life and Mary of the contemplative. Yet it is noteworthy that he did not regard the "Mary" function as a fixed duty. that is to say, the completely contemplative life did not form a permanent state in the Franciscan vocation but was changed when fraternal charity required it. Moreover, the friars who were named "Martha" were also called the "mothers" of the other brothers, who in turn were called "sons" because of the maternal love that the "mothers" were expected to show them in any necessity of body or soul. From this we can plainly see that Francis did not by any means always adhere to the usual interpretation of the Gospel passage in question. For the rest, the interchange between the active and contemplative lives, even in the case of those friars who were specially destined for the contemplative vocation, imparted a special character to the Franciscan spirit. Inner poverty demanded that no friar should retain for himself any mission whatsoever, be it preaching or contemplative prayer. In this, the Saint showed a deep knowledge of human psychology. Even though someone may have reached the heights of mystical experience, he sometimes needs to return from solitude to be with his brothers, to work with his hands and to say the Office in company with them. Otherwise, he runs the risk of spiritual alienation from human life, a certain unhealthy "angelism," and a subtle self-love under the guise of piety.

A different approach to the periods of alternation was adopted by some Spanish friars living in a certain poor hermitage¹⁵ in their own country. A visiting Spanish cleric who "enjoyed the sight of and conversation with Francis told him about these friars' (2 Cel 178). "Your brothers," he said, "live in our country in a certain poor hermitage and they have so established their way of

¹⁴For a skillful discussion on the exposition of this biblical passage in the first four centuries, and despite an abundance of errors in the German text, see: D.A. Csanyi, "Optima pars. Die Auslegungsgeschichte von Lk 10:38-42 bei den Kirchenvätern der ersten vier Jahrhunderte," *Studia Monastica* 2 (1960) 5-78; examine E. Laland, "Die Maria-Martha Perikope Lukas 10: 38-42. Ihre kerygmatische Aktualität für das Leben der Urkirche," *Studia Theologica* 13 (1959) 70-85. Cf. also K. Esser, "Die 'Regula pro eremitoriois data,'" *Studien zu den Opuscula des b. Franziskus von Assisi*, [Rome, 1973]; see also below, n. 36.

¹⁵2 Cel 178; Cf. Octavian Schmucki, *Secretum solitudinis. De circumstantiis externis orandi penes sanctum Franciscum Assisiensem*, in *Collectanea Franciscana* 39 (1969) 5-58, 38s.

living that half of them take care of domestic needs and the other half spend their time in contemplation. In this way each week those who lead the active life exchange with those who lead the contemplative life and the quiet of those giving themselves to contemplation is changed for the business of work." It is well worth noting that the friars in this hermitage, outstanding for its narrowness and poverty, and built at a time and in a place in Spain unknown to us, drew up for themselves norms that complemented the provisions of the Rule.¹⁶ The weekly exchange of duties between the contemplative friars and those performing the domestic tasks seems to have been practised in this hermitage alone since accounts of the other hermitages say nothing about it.

2. The prescriptions of the *Earlier Rule* (XVII 5) are thought to refer back to the time before the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.¹⁷ From this text we see that, in the first years of the Franciscan fraternity, there were already friars "who preach(ed), pray(ed), work(ed), whether cleric or lay." Some brothers travelled around preaching the peace of the Gospel to the people and calling on them to do penance without delay.¹⁸ There were also others who devoted themselves to contemplative prayer in hermitages;¹⁹ while still others dwelt "in various places ... among the people to serve or work."²⁰

¹⁶Because we cannot determine more precisely the date of these events (although quite probably it was after 1220), we don't know if the Rule in question was the earlier one, which reached the end of its evolution in 1221 (Cf. *Die Opuscula sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*: K. Esser, [Grottaferrata 1978] page 404, note 6), or the Rule that was confirmed in 1223. There is little doubt that the *Rule for Hermitages* originated around 1217/18-1221, judging from the biographical context (Cf. *Die Opuscula sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*: Kajetan Esser, [Grottaferrata 1978] 410f.). It is surprising that the ancient biographers omit this incident completely with the possible exception of 2 Cel 178: Cf. *Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources*, ed. Marion A. Habig [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973] 504-505.

¹⁷Cf. D. E. Flood, *Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder* [Werl/West. 1967] 123f, 139f, note 2).

¹⁸18 Cf. RegNB XIV 13 and, for the period after 1215, an example of praise and exhortation "which all the brothers can follow:" XXI (Cf. Below, IV 3): regarding this duty as exercised by the first friars, Cf. the bibliography. which we indicated in *Collectanea Franciscana* 48 (1978) 304, n. 264.

¹⁹Cf. RegNB VII 13; Fragm. I, 67; EpMin 8, which Kajetan Esser *Die Opusula* (n. 6), 233-235, correctly believes originated between 1217-21; cf. above n. 7; along with the bibliography in nn. 1, 7, 15; cf. also Octavian Schmucki ... Napoli, 1978, 29-53, spec. 33f, n. 1, where we have collected another Franciscan bibliography; regarding the influence on the subsequent history of the Order, Cf. C. Cargnoni "Le case di preheiera nella storia dell'Ordine francescano, ibid, 55-112, for the era before the coming of St. Francis, an era which was pervaded by the eremitical spirit, see the learned work of I. Gnädinger and V. Mertens which we reviewed in *Collectanea Franciscana* 43 (1973) 429-431 and 50 (1980) 366-368; we cite also the article written by several authors: *Eremitismo in Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, III, [Rome 1976], 1242-1244.

²⁰Cf. RegNB VII 1: we gave a bibliography regarding manual labor in *Collectanea Franciscana* 48 (1978) 299, n. 236; cf. also *Bibliog. Franc.* XIII, n. 1443.

Already St. Francis had expressly legislated on the subject of preaching friars: "And no minister or preacher should appropriate to himself the ministry of the brothers or the office of preaching, but he should set it aside without any protest whenever he is told." (RegNB XVII 4). Similarly, in a general way he urged: "Therefore—(that is, to avoid idleness, the enemy of the soul)—the servants of God must always give themselves totally to prayer or to some good work" (RegNB VII 2). Our thesis is supported by what Jacques de Vitry wrote in November, 1216, in Genoa: "During the day they go into the cities and villages, giving themselves over to the active life of the apostolate; at night, they return to their hermitage or withdraw into solitude to live the contemplative life."²¹ That is how an eyewitness described the first friars' heroic form of life, divided between apostolic activity by day and fervent prayer by night.²² Likewise, the Life of Brother Giles²³ shows that over a long period of time, from 1214/15 onwards, there were friars who were living the contemplative life:

When he came back from his travels, blessed Francis convinced that Brother Giles was a man of God and a good example, was greatly overjoyed and said to him that he could go wherever he might wish, to which Brother Giles replied that he did not wish to go and live in such free obedience. Then, in the sixth year of (Giles's) conversion, Francis sent him to a certain hermitage at Fabian on the Perugian plain.

These source texts tell us that, in the first years, the brothers cultivated a life of very fervent prayer even while they were engaged in apostolic travel. Clearly, the eremitical spirit permeated the activity of these friars who served others or who preached peace and penance to them. Finally, we see from the example of Brother Giles that individual friars whom St. Francis judged to have a special call from God were given permission to devote longer periods to prayer alone.²⁴

²¹Leonhard Lemmens, O.F.M., *Testimonia minora saeculi XIII de S. Francisco Assisiensi*, Ad Claras Aquas 1926, 79f; cf. Kajetan Esser, *Origins of the Franciscan Order*, trans Aedan Daly and Irina Lynch [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1970] 217-227.

²²Cf. also 1 Cel 44; especially 1 Cel 47: "For while, kindled by the fire of the Holy Spirit, they chanted the *Pater Noster*, not only at the appointed hours, but at all hours, with suppliant and melodious voice, being little occupied with earthly sollicitude and troublesome anxiety of cares." In addition, see *Vita beati fratris Egidii*, n. 7: Rosalind Brooke, *Scripta Leonis* (n. 10), 328: "Some time before this (i.e. before the mystical experience at Perugia), when he was in the church of St. Appollinaris in Spoleto, where the friars were then staying, he arose at night, went into the church and was standing bowed down in prayer when he felt the devil heavily oppressing him"

²³*Ibid.* n. 6: 326.

²⁴Stanislao da Campagnola, "la 'leggenda' di frate Egidio d'Assisi nei secoli XIII-XIV,"

3. Only a prejudiced observer would deny that, from the time of his conversion, Francis was strongly attracted to the contemplative life, to such an extent that he entertained the idea of turning his back on the apostolic activity and retiring to solitude. According to Thomas of Celano, the friars discussed this very point shortly after Innocent III (1209/10) had, with some hesitation, confirmed their *Propositum vitae*.²⁵ This discussion took place when Francis and eleven of his disciples returned to Spoleto, to an unfrequented area near the city of Orte, probably at the church of St. Nicholas ad Scopulos. They stayed there for "some fifteen days," rejoicing in "the pleasantness of that place. "They all conferred together, as true followers of justice, whether they should dwell among men or go to solitary places. But St. Francis, who did not trust in his own skill, but had recourse to holy prayer before all transactions, chose not to live for himself alone, but for him who died for all, knowing that he was sent for this that he might win for God the souls the devil was trying to snatch away."²⁶

We are of the opinion that this episode, which the biographer locates at an appropriate place and time, is neither dubious nor fictitious since it contains no elements which Celano could have erroneously transferred from the subsequent events back to the beginning. It would indeed be strange if the Gospel fraternity were to be assailed by anxious doubts as to whether or not they should take on an apostolic mission which the Pope in person had entrusted to them only a few days before with the words: "Go with the Lord brothers, and as the Lord will deign to inspire you, preach penance to all" (1 Cel 33). If we are not mistaken, the first friars were acutely aware of their ignorance and their lack of skill in preaching penance. We must believe the biographer when he shows Francis and his followers thinking through their doubts and resolving to imitate Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for all.

Francescanesimo e società cittadina: l'esempio di Perugia, [Perugia, 1979] 113-143, 125 states: "Giles ..., having wandered around freely for years, declared his obedience to Francis and was sent by him to the hermitage at Fabrione. [This] is not merely the first instance of someone being assigned to a specified place but may perhaps also be a reaction to the organizational requirements of adapting to the prescriptions of the Fourth Lateran Council [1215], which had confirmed the prohibition of preaching, itinerant or otherwise, by the laity." In the light of this prohibition, we ask how could Francis have dictated XXI: The praise and exhortation which all the Brothers can offer? Cf. also below IV 3.

²⁵Cf. 1 Cel 32-34. Concerning the hard-earned approbation of the *Propositum vitae*, cf. M. Maccarrone *Riforme e innovazioni di Innocenzo III nella vita religiosa*, Studi su Innocenzo III [Padova, 1972] especially 300-305. On the events which follow, we refer the reader to our commentary: *Secretum solitudinis* (n 15) 14.

²⁶1 Cel 34ff.

4. Be that as it may, the doubt that beset Francis at the beginning of his apostolic life (1209/10) seems not to have returned even once during the years immediately following. This is plain from St. Bonaventure's lengthy narrative, which points to a later time,²⁷ if we accept its details as historical. While the account itself is quite prolix, its main outlines are drawn so clearly that they are easy to discern.

a) The theme of the whole account is introduced like this: "In this matter (namely, his docility towards the Holy Spirit), it happened that he (Francis) fell into a great struggle over a doubt which, after many days of prayer, he proposed for resolution to the friars who were close to him" (LM XII 1). The first thing which our Holy Founder felt compelled to share with his brothers was the nature of his greatest anxiety, which St. Bonaventure compares to the death struggle: "What do you think, brothers?" he asked, "What do you judge better? that I should spend my time in prayer or that I should go about preaching?" Thus Francis was experiencing a return of that indecision as to whether he should embrace the contemplative or the active life which we saw had troubled him shortly after the approval of the *Protoregula*.²⁸

b) The biographer then tells us that the Saint explained his dilemma to the brothers who were there with him and enumerated the reasons which suggested the life of prayer to him, both because of his own condition and the transcendent nature of the object of prayer:

(1) "I am a poor little man, simple and unskilled in speech. I have received a greater grace of prayer than of speaking."²⁹

²⁷LM XII 1f. It is worth noting that Brother Sylvester was with Francis when the saint was thinking of going to France: LP n. 79-82; Rosalind B. Brooke, 226-232. A similar story is prominent in *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum ejus* XVI 1-13; *Little Flowers*, c. 16 Jn 1-13; H. E. Goad, *The Dilemma* (n. 1), while not analyzing this story in detail, does place it in the historical context of the Order in the 13th century and supports the apostolic orientation of the brotherhood as illustrated by outstanding saints such as St. Anthony of Padua, as against the narrow view of the Spirituals, who favoured the eremitical life. Some sections, in which critical notes are completely lacking, contain single statements that are clearly yet to be proved, but more often they put forward opinions which are quite unusual and not free of personal bias.

²⁸See above, II 3. *Actus* and *The Little Flowers* c.16, n. 1 relates: "In the beginning of his conversion when He had amassed many followers, Saint Francis experienced the agony of a great doubt whether he should spend all his time in prayer, or whether he should sometimes go to preach." The plan of St. Bonaventure's discourse is this: a) the theme of doubt: a life of prayer or the ministry of preaching?; b) elements favoring prayer—first, personal considerations; second, the object of prayer; c) the example of Christ the Redeemer as the preponderant reason urging him to undertake the mission of preaching; d) discussing the matter with his friends; e) Francis, a true "minor," consults Brother Sylvester and St. Clare on the subject; f) their answers agree; g) Francis immediately obeys the divine command.

²⁹LM XII 1. The *Actus* and *The Little Flowers* makes no mention of this preliminary consultation

(2) "Also in prayer there seems to be a profit and the accumulation of graces, but in preaching the distribution of gifts already received from heaven. In prayer our interior affections are purified and we are united with the one, true and highest good as well as strengthened in virtue; in preaching, we get dust on our spiritual feet, distraction over many things and relaxation of discipline. Finally, in prayer we address God, listen to him and dwell among the angels as if we were living an angelic life; in preaching we must think, see, say and hear human things, adapting ourselves to them as if we were living on a human level, for men and among men." It is quite clear that here the great scholastic teacher gave artless Francis a voice and judged it opportune to employ these four figures of speech to describe Francis's indecision about prayer and apostolic activity.³⁰

c) Despite what we have just said, there is a more compelling reason why the work of spreading the word of salvation should be preferred to an uninterrupted life of contemplation: "But there is one thing to the contrary, that seems to outweigh all these considerations before God, namely that the only begotten Son of God, who is the highest wisdom, came down from the bosom of the Father for the sake of souls in order to instruct the world with his example and to speak the word of salvation to men, whom he would redeem with the price of his sacred blood, cleanse with its washing and nourish with its draught, holding back for himself absolutely nothing that he could freely give for our salvation. And because we should do everything according to the pattern shown to us in him as on the heights of the mountain, it seems more pleasing to God that I interrupt my quiet and go out to labor."³¹

d) However, seeking the advice of his brothers did not result in certainty: "When he had mulled over these words for many days with his friars, he could not perceive with certainty which of these he should choose as more acceptable to Christ. Although he understood extraordinary things through the spirit of prophecy, this question he could not resolve with certainty on his own. But God's providence had a better plan, that the merit of preaching

with his brothers who were staying in that place.

³⁰Ibid. It would be a rewarding task to collate each of the ideas contained in these sentences with the works that are certainly attributable to St. Bonaventure. Cf. e.g. B. Apperibay "La vida activa y contemplativa según san Buenaventura," *Verdad y Vida* 2 (1944) 655-658; B. Apperibay, "Prioridad entre la vida activa y la contemplativa según san Buenaventura," *Verdad y Vida* 5 (1947) 65-97.

³¹LM XII 1: 611.

would be shown by a revelation from heaven, thus preserving the humility of Christ's servant."³²

e) Hence, showing that he was a true Friar Minor, Francis sent two of the friars to Brother Sylvester and St. Clare, seeking a sign of God's will³³ LM XII "Choosing, therefore, two of the friars, he sent them to Brother Silvester who had seen the cross coming out from his mouth and in those days spent his time in continuous prayer on the mountain above Assisi that Silvester might ask God to resolve his doubt over this matter and send him the answer in God's name. He also asked the holy virgin Clare to consult with the purest and simplest of the virgins living under her rule and to pray herself with the other sisters in order to see the Lord's will in this matter."

f) This is how the Seraphic Doctor records their unanimous response: LMXII 2 "Through the miraculous revelation of the Holy Spirit, the venerable priest and the virgin dedicated to God came to the same conclusion: that it was God's good pleasure that Francis should preach as the herald of Christ."³⁴

g) then he relates Francis's full, prompt obedience to God's will: LM XII 2 "When the two friars returned and told him God's will as they had received it, he at one rose, girded himself and without the slightest delay took to the roads.

³² Ibid.

³³ We omit the words of LM XII 2, describing the Saint's custom of seeking always and everywhere, to find out and follow God's will. *Actus XVI 2-9*: "He wished very much to know the will and good pleasure of our Lord Jesus Christ about this. His holy humility did not permit him to be presumptuous in this matter; and therefore he humbly had recourse to others, by whose prayers he would be able to know God's will. Calling Brother Masseo, Francis said to him: 'My dear brother, go to Saint Clare, and tell her for me that with one of her more spiritual companions she should suppliantly ask God to indicate to me what pleases him more: whether I should sometimes preach, or be at leisure continually to pray. Go also to Brother Sylvester who is staying on Mount Subasio and tell him the same thing.' This Brother Sylvester was a man of such sanctity and grace that whatever he asked for in prayer, was immediately granted. The Holy Spirit had made him singularly worthy of conversation with God, and therefore Saint Francis had great devotion toward and great faith in him. This saintly Brother Sylvester was living alone on Subasio. As he had been ordered by Saint Francis, Brother Masseo first brought the message to Saint Clare, and then to Brother Sylvester. Brother Sylvester immediately went to pray. While he was praying, he immediately received an answer from God. He then came out to Brother Masseo and said: 'The Lord says that you tell Brother Francis, that God called him not for himself alone, but that he may produce a harvest of souls and that many souls may be gained through him.' After this, Brother Masseo went to Saint Clare to find out what answer she received from the Lord. She said that both she and her companion had a response similar in all things to the response given to Brother Sylvester. The evolution of this narrative is quite obvious, enriched as it is with individual, even singular, details from oral tradition. Re the hermitage at the Carceri, cf. M. Gatti *Le Carceri di San Francesco del Subasio* [Assisi, 1969].

³⁴ LM XII 2: 611.

He went with such fervor to carry out the divine command and he ran along so swiftly that the hand of God seemed to be upon him, giving him new strength from heaven."³⁵

Both versions of the story, in the *Legenda Maior* and in the *Actus*, have a trustworthy historical nucleus, but they also contain many elements that plainly show the influence of oral transmission or theological reflection. Thus the assumption that Francis was afraid that his mind would be contaminated or darkened by dealing with other people does not originate in his own writings but rather in ideas current at the time, ideas which were redolent of the "intellectualism" and "individualism" of Platonism.³⁶ On the other hand, it seems probable that the Saint really was hesitant and even felt great anxiety. Certainly, since neither his own prayer nor his consultation with his companions provided him with a satisfactory answer, he had recourse to the mystical oracle³⁷ and asked two contemplatives, Brother Sylvester and St. Clare, to obtain a solution. It is difficult to ascertain when exactly this consultation occurred. Since St. Clare's name appears in both versions of the story, we know that the event must have taken place after 1212, the year in which she

³⁵Ibid. *Actus* XVI 10-13: Brother Masseo returned to Saint Francis. The Saint received him with love by washing Masseo's feet and preparing a meal. When the food had been eaten, Francis called Masseo into the woods. Baring his head, folding his hands and getting down on his knees Francis asked: "What does the Lord bid me to do?" Brother Masseo answered that the same response was made to Brother Sylvester, to Sister Clare and to her companion: "He wants you to go to preach, because God did not call you for yourself alone, but for the salvation also of others." Then the hand of the Lord was placed over Saint Francis. In a fervor of spirit Francis arose totally inflamed with the power of the Most High, and said to Brother Masseo; "Let us go then in the name of the Lord." Later (n. 14-16) it tells about Francis's apostolic activity in Cannara and also (n. 17-33) about his preaching to the birds between Cannara and Bevagna.

³⁶We had several things to say about this "ideological" interpretation being attributed to St. Francis without proof in *Secretum solitudinis* (n. 15), 9 n. 23 and 15f.: for the influence of philosophical theories on this interpretation cf. outlines and bibliography in Octavian Schmucki, "Vita activa et contemplativa," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* X (1965) 815-817; see above: M. E. Mason, *Active Life and Contemplative Life: A Study of the Concepts from Plato to the Present* [Milwaukee 1961]; D. Mieth, *Die Einheit von Vita Activa und Vita Contemplativa in den Deutschen Predigten und Traktaten Meister Echarts und bei Johannes Tauler* [Regensburg 1969]; A. Solignac, L. Donnat, "Marthe et Marie," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* X (1980) 664-673, 672 ff. (bibliography); cf. also above, n. 14.

³⁷According to the ancient sources, this "saintly casting of lots" or opening the book of the Gospels at random occurred more than once in his lifetime: cf. our inquiry: "The Passion of Christ in the Life of St. Francis of Assisi: A Comparative Study of the Sources in Light of the Devotion to the Passion Practiced in His Time," *Greyfriars Review* 4 (1990) Supplement; "De Sancti Francisci Assisiensis Stigmatum Susceptione. Disquisitio Historico-critica luce testimoniorum Saeculi XIII," *Collectanea Franciscana* 34 (1964) 27-30, where texts and bibliography are supplied.

entered the convent at San Damiano. If Francis preaching to the birds, which the *Actus* unhesitatingly adds immediately after the consultation,³⁸ really happened then, that brings us to around 1215.³⁹ Whatever about the difficulty of ascertaining the exact year of this event, we can certainly infer that the life of contemplative prayer occupied a pre-eminent place in Francis's striving after perfection. It was really a question of a critical moment in his life or, as we would say these days, a crisis of identity. The result of this interior trial of Francis was clear: the Gospel brotherhood of the Order of Friars Minor was not endowed with an exclusively and universally contemplative charism but was committed both to it and to the Gospel mission of carrying out the apostolate after the example and commandment of Christ.

5. When speaking about Francis's journey to Mount Alverna in 1224, where the Saint received the marks of Christ's Passion, the biographer also describes the custom according to which Francis often interrupted his preaching in order to devote himself completely to prayer.

1 Cel 91 "It was his custom to divide up the time given him to merit grace, and, as seemed necessary to him, to give part of it to working for the good of his neighbors and the rest to the blessed retirement of contemplation."⁴⁰

Francis had laid down the same principle of alternation even for those of his sons who were engaged in the work of preaching God's word:

2 Cel 164 "These, he said, divide wickedly who spend all their time at preaching and none at devotion. But he praised the preacher, certainly, but only one who thinks of himself at the proper time and provides wisely for himself."⁴¹

Then, finally, when a certain friar asked him to describe the virtues required in the General Minister, he named among other things:

2 Cel 185 "A man to whom zeal for prayer is a close friend; a man who sets aside certain hours for his soul and certain hours for the flock committed to him. For the first thing in the morning he must begin with the holy sacrifice

³⁸ *Actus XVI 17-33*; cf. Michael Bihl, O.F.M., "De Praedicatione a. S. Francesco Avibus Facta," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 20 (1927) 202-206.

³⁹ Cf. Octavian Schmucki, "De Sancti Francisci Assisiensis Stigmatum Susceptione. Disquisitio Historico-critica luce testimoniorum Saeculi XIII," *Collectanea Franciscana* 34 (1964) 17ff. adn. 1, I Fioretti, ed. B. Bughetti, R. Pratesi, note 27 which over confidently asserts: "The event occurred in the summer of 1212."

⁴⁰ 1 Cel 91: cf. also St. Bonaventure, LM XIII 1: we have written at length about this journey, *ibid.* 21-24: on the interpretation of Celano on the matter, cf. Octavian Schmucki, *Secretum solitudinis* (adn. 15) 15f.

⁴¹ 2 Cel 164.

of the Mass and commended himself and his flock to the divine protection in a prolonged devotion. After his prayers," he said, "he should make himself available to be stormed by all, to give answers to all, to provide for all with kindness."⁴²

Therefore, when Francis had overcome the personal crisis he suffered when he felt impelled to devote himself to the contemplative life exclusively in 1209/10 and 1215(?), he chose to alternate periods given mainly to contemplative prayer with others devoted to apostolic activity.

III. Prayer as the Source of all other Activity

1. We know that neither St. Francis's writings nor the ancient biographies record the famous motto: *Contemplata aliis tradere*—"To hand on to others the fruits of contemplation," so expressive of the mind of St. Thomas Aquinas that it became the motto of the Dominican Order.⁴³ Yet the idea underlying these words was not absent from Francis's religious life and spiritual teaching. An indication of this is preserved in the Saint's writings, especially in the *Earlier Rule*, chapter XXIII, with which he concludes the basic Franciscan rule of life, and which, as it were, reaches its highest point in a litany of praise to God written for those outside the Order.⁴⁴ Here, after thanking God fervently for all the benefits He bestowed on man throughout the history of salvation, Francis goes on to exhort "all those who wish to serve the Lord God within the holy, catholic and apostolic church" (7). Then he names them one by one, as if reading from a long military register trying to include every way of life, social class and profession. After that he goes on:

RegNB XIII 7 And all of us lesser brothers, *useless servants*, humbly ask and beg those who wish to serve the Lord God within the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and all the following orders: priests, deacons, subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, lectors, porters, and all clerics, all religious men and women, all lay brothers and youths, the poor and the needy, kings and princes, workers and farmers, servants and masters, all virgins, continent and married women, all lay people, men and women, all children, adolescents, young and old, the healthy

⁴² Cel 185: in a simpler form this is recorded also in the *Mirror of Perfection* 80.

⁴³ Cf. G. Gieraths, "Dominikanerorden," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* III (1959) 483-493; W.A. "Dominican Spirituality," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* IV (1967) 971-974; for St. Thomas, cf. P. Limreras, "Contemplata aliis tradere," *Angelicum* 40 (1963) 391-406.

⁴⁴ David Flood, *Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder* [Werl/West. 1967] page 136, note.2 suspects: Cf. the very prudent judgment of K. Esser, *Die Opuscula Sancti Francisci Assisiensis* [Grottaferrata, 1978] 403, note 6. We doubt whether the technical term, *Lauda*, can be applied to this chapter cf. L. Hoffmann-Erbrecht, "Laudi," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* VI [1961] 826 bibliography; and especially L. Cervelli, "Lauda," *Enciclopedia Cattolica* VII [1951] 954-956.

and the sick, all the small and the great, all peoples, races, tribes, and tongues, all nations and all peoples everywhere on earth, who are and who will be to persevere in the true faith and in penance for otherwise no one will be saved. will be saved.

Thus his praise of God, the Creator and Redeemer, shades almost imperceptibly into preaching, and his admonition turns into praise which progresses from loving God to saving one's brothers out of love for them. Whenever Francis began to meditate on God's generosity in the history of salvation, he was immediately caught up by zeal for the eternal salvation of all humanity.

2. There are also other events in the Saint's life which illustrate further the power of prayer in preaching the word of God. Thus St. Bonaventure, almost by chance, has preserved for us the memory of an instance where the Holy Spirit made His presence known in a spectacular way:

LM IV 4: "While the friars were still staying in the place already mentioned (Rivo Torto) one Saturday the holy man went to the town of Assisi to preach in the cathedral on Sunday morning, as was his custom. The devoted man of God spent the night in prayer, as he usually did, in a hut situated in the garden of the canons, separated physically from the friars." he appeared to them in a fiery chariot.⁴⁵

Thomas of Celano uses the image of an overflowing fountain to describe the one occasion on which Francis preached before Honorius III and all the Cardinals:

2 Cel 25: "For what had been reported of him shone forth in his life and resounded on his tongue; under such conditions there is no room for disrespect. He preached before the pope and the cardinals with ready and fervent foresight, speaking without restraint whatever the spirit suggested."⁴⁶

According to Bonaventure, Francis's zeal for prayer and for the work of the apostolate extended to all his actions:

⁴⁵LM IV 4: E. Pasztor, "San Bonaventura: Biografo di San Francesco," *Doctor Seraphicus* 27 (1980) 83-107, especially page 96 where the author is doubtful about the historical veracity of the incident of Francis's preaching in the cathedral. But there is evidence that he preached in the church of St. George: "It was there that he had gone to school and there that he first preached and there, finally, that he found his first place of rest" (LM XV 5). In addition, the bishop, Guido II, was a close friend of Francis (*Legend of the Three Companions* 20).

⁴⁶2 Cel 25; the subject is treated more fully in 1 Cel 73; details not found in the Order biographies are found in Stephanus de Bourbon, O.P. [fc. 1261], cf. L. Lemmens, *Testimonia Minora*, 94f., note 21.

LM X 1: Prayer was a support to this worker; for in everything which he did, distrusting his own effort and trusting in God's loving concern, he cast his care completely upon the Lord in urgent prayers to him.⁴⁷

In this he was guided by his unlimited confidence in the divine operation whose instrument he humbly felt he was.⁴⁸

The ecstatic devotion of his charity so bore him aloft into the divine that his loving kindness was enlarged and extended to all who shared with him in nature and grace. Since his heartfelt devotedness had made him a brother to all other creatures, it is no wonder that the charity of Christ made him more than a brother to those who are stamped with the image of their Creator and redeemed with the blood of their Maker. He would not consider himself a friend of Christ unless he cared for the souls whom Christ redeemed. He used to say that nothing should be preferred to the salvation of souls, offering as the supreme proof of this the fact that it was for souls that the only-begotten Son of God deigned to hang on the cross. This is the reason for his struggles in prayer, his untiring preaching tours and his lack of measure in giving example.⁴⁹

It would be difficult to find a firmer theological foundation upon which to build the union between prayer and the apostolate in the Franciscan life.

3. Francis taught his sons what he himself had experienced personally. As St. Bonaventure tells us, for Francis, the work of preaching and the conversion of sinners were "more acceptable to the Father of mercies than any sacrifice,

⁴⁷LM X 1: cf. Ps 54:23a in the Roman psalter: R Weber, *Le Psautier Romain et Les Autres Anciens Psautiers Latins. Edition Critique*, [Roma-Città del Vaticano 1953] 123a: *Iacta in Deum cogitatum tuum et ipse te nutriet*. See also 1 Cel 29: "But they [the first eight brothers whom St. Francis sent out to preach], accepting the command of holy obedience with joy and great gladness, cast themselves upon the ground before St. Francis. But he embraced them and said to each one with sweetness and affection: 'Cast thy thought upon the Lord, and he will nourish you.' This word he spoke whenever he transferred any brothers in obedience." This minor detail is correct: before the *Later Rule* III, 1, or until 1223, the brothers used the Roman Psalter, a fact which increases one's faith in the veracity of these sources in other matters. Cf. Octavian Schmucki, "Die Stellung Christi im Beten des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 25[1962] 128-145, 188-212, especially page 136, note 44.

⁴⁸St. Bonaventure plainly agrees with those we find in Francis's writings: cf., e.g. Test 1-2: "The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance.... And the Lord Himself led me among them (the lepers)...." St. Bonaventure once more shows to what extent Francis's theocentric vision and love of God united all the events and works of his life:

⁴⁹LM IX 4: cf. also 2 Cel 172, from which the Saint's biographer quoted freely: "Since the strength of Francis's love made him a brother to all other creatures, it is not surprising that the charity of Christ made him more than a brother to those who are stamped with the image of their Creator. For he used to say that nothing is more important than the salvation of souls, and he often offered as proof the fact that the Only-begotten of God deigned to hang on the cross for souls. This accounts for his struggles at prayer, his tirelessness at preaching, his excess in giving examples. He did not consider himself a friend of Christ unless he loved the souls that Christ loved."

especially if this eagerness arose out of perfect charity more by example than by word, more by tear-filled prayer than by longwinded sermons."⁵⁰

The duty of the ministers of the word was for each one of them to "pour out what is bubbling up within him."⁵¹ Celano also records the words of the Saint: "The preacher must first draw from secret prayers what he will later pour out in holy sermons; he must first grow hot within before he speaks words that are in themselves cold."⁵² Similarly in the *Legend of Perugia*, we read:

LP 71 "In this way he instructed the ministers and the preachers in the exercise of their responsibilities. He told them that the exercise of their office of minister or their duty as preachers and the anxieties these entail should not make them abandon prayer; that they ought to beg and do manual work like the other brothers in order to give good example and for the good of their souls and the souls of others. He added: "The brothers who are subjects will be very edified to see their ministers and their preachers devote themselves readily to prayer, and demean and humble themselves." A faithful disciple of Christ, Francis himself practiced what he preached to others as long as he enjoyed good health."⁵³

From this substantial evidence, it is clear that prayer was intimately linked with the whole life of the Friars Minor and was so indissolubly bound up with the religious mission of the Order that it took precedence over fraternal charity and even over Franciscan poverty and humility. Hence anyone who would remove one of these main aims would destroy them all.

Since itinerant preaching was the friars' only apostolic ministry,⁵⁴ it is easy to see why, in the evidence from the sources, there should be a constant tradition handed down from time immemorial that prayer, preparing for and permeating that ministry, should have been focused solely on the preaching of

⁵⁰LM VIII, 1.

⁵¹2 Cel 194 adapted the image found in: 1 Cel 115 to Francis's prayer: "The brothers, moreover, who lived with him knew how his daily and continuous talk was of Jesus and how sweet and tender his conversation was, how kind and filled with love his talk with them. His mouth spoke out of the abundance of his heart, and the fountain of enlightened love that filled his whole being filled his whole being bubbled forth outwardly."

⁵²2Cel 163.

⁵³LP n. 71: R. Brooke, 212; or n. 103: Bigaroni, 310-312.

⁵⁴Cf. e.g. RegB IX: the chapter entitled "Preachers." For the nature of itinerant preaching, cf. Cajetan Esser, *Origins of the Franciscan Order*, trans. Aedan Daly and Irina Lynch [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1970] 217-227; A. Rotzetter, *Die Funktion der franziskanischen Bewegung in der Kirche* [Schwyz/Schweiz, 1977] 154-169.

the word. As for the rest, it was not our purpose here to set forth Francis's whole spiritual teaching on the apostolic ministry.⁵⁵

IV. The Apostolic Power of Prayer

1. Prayer is shrouded in divine mystery because of the One to whom it is addressed, the object which it seeks and its infallible efficacy which God has promised. At any point in time—nowadays, for example—when the faithful are undergoing a widespread and extremely dangerous crisis of faith, it is no wonder that the need for frequent prayer—indeed, the need for any prayer—is being called into question. Few people in the history of the Christian religion prayed as Francis did, and his prayer sprang from the firmness and completeness of his faith. Instances of this are recorded in two narratives, the longer in the *Legend of Perugia*, and the shorter in Celano's *Second Life*.⁵⁶ It should be noted that the account is put in the context of a conversation between Francis and a brother novice who could not read very well (see above, I, 5), an incident which throws light on Francis's attitude to learning. According to the Saint's close companions, he once said:⁵⁷

LP 71 There are many brothers who day and night put all their energy and attention into the pursuit of knowledge, thereby abandoning prayer and their holy vocation. And when they have preached to a few men or to the people, and learn that certain ones were edified or converted to penance through their discourse, they are puffed up and pride themselves on the results and work of others. For, those whom they think they edified or converted by God through the prayers of the holy brothers who are completely ignorant of it; God wishes it this way for fear it should be grounds for pride for them. Behold my Knights of the

⁵⁵We have given a more recent bibliography, and some outlines in: *Linee Fondamentali*, pages 224-231, note 5; cf. *Bibliographia Franciscana* XIII numbers 819-830, 1766-1768; K. S. Frank, "Franciscus, vir totus apostolicus. Zur Vorgeschichte der mittelalterlichen vita apostolica," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 39 (1976) 123-142; K. Elm, "Franz von Assisi: Bußpredigt oder Heidenmission?," *Espansione del Franciscanesimo tra Occidente e Oriente nel secolo XIII* [Assisi, 1979] 69-103.

⁵⁶LP n. 71; R. B. Brooke, 212 or n. 103; M. Bigaroni 308-310; also 2 Cel 164: cf. also St. Bonaventure, LM VIII 2; see above, n. 10f. for the bibliography, given there.

⁵⁷Although Francis's speech is preceded by the words: "Once there was a brother novice who could read the Psalter, but not very well. Since he very much liked to read it, he asked the minister general [Elias of Assisi] for permission to have a Psalter. The minister consented to it. However, the brother did not want to avail himself of it until he had obtained the permission of blessed Francis. He had heard it said that the holy father did not want to see his brothers eager for learning and for books..." (n. 10). The teaching itself does not refer directly to the novice's question. It seems that Francis's companions, when telling about this episode, linked it with the Saint's speech by an association of ideas due to the similarity between the two: 2 Cel 164 has the heading for this incident: Against those (i.e. of the friars who preach) who seek vain praise and an exposition of a word of prophecy.

Round Table: the brothers who hide in abandoned and secluded places to devote themselves with more fervor to prayer and meditation, to weep over their sins and those of others. Their holiness is known to God, but most often unknown to the brothers and to men. When their souls will be presented to the Lord by the angels, the Lord will reveal the effect and reward of their labors, that is to say, the host of souls saved by their prayers. And he will say to them: 'My sons, see the souls saved by your prayers; since you were faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater.'

Blessed Francis explained the text: "The barren woman bears sevenfold, but the mother of many is desolate," as follows. "The barren woman," he said, "is the good religious who by his holy actions and virtues, sanctifies himself and edified others." He often repeated this saying in his conversations with the brothers and often, at the chapter of St. Mary of the Portiuncula, before the ministers and other brothers.⁵⁸

This statement of Francis's, reliably reported by his companions, unfolds in two stages. The first, refers to the "Round Table of Charlemagne," an image which would readily occur to someone steeped in the lore of chivalry; and the second is centered on a biblical quotation from 1 Sam 2:5, which Francis explains allegorically.

a) Those brothers who seek first "the kingdom of God and his justice" (Mt 6:33; RegEr 3), cultivating especially "the spirit of holy prayer and devotion" (Reg V 2), are Friars Minor *par excellence*. That is what Francis meant when he said: Behold my knights of the Round Table For they are alike those about whom the Saint spoke to the aforementioned novice:

The Emperor Charles Roland, and Oliver, all paladins and valiant knights who were mighty in battle, pursued the infidels even to death, sparing neither toil nor fatigue, and gained a memorable victory for themselves; and by way of conclusion, these holy martyrs died fighting for the Faith of Christ. We see many today

⁵⁸LP n. 71: R. Brooke 210-212, n. 103; Marino Bigaroni 308-310. See also 2 Cel 164: "But Francis said that preachers who often sell what they do for the price of empty praise are to be pitied. The abnormal growth of such men he at times cured with such an antidote as this: 'Why do you glory over men who have been converted when it was my simple brothers who converted them by their prayers?' Finally these words, "so that the barren may have borne many," he explained in the following way, 'The barren,' he said, 'is my poor little brother who does not have the duty of bringing forth children for the Church. This one will bring forth many at the judgment, because those he is now converting by his private prayers the Judge will give to him unto glory. She that had many children is weakened suggests that the preacher who rejoices over many as though he had brought them forth by his own power will learn that he had nothing to do with them personally.'" It is obvious that Celano described the historical context only partially and, out of mistaken loyalty, did not include the problems of learning and the eremitical life.

who would like to attribute honor and glory to themselves by being content with singing about the exploits of others.⁵⁹

The preaching friar, or those greedy for knowledge, who omit prayer are compared to minstrels who are prepared to entertain people by reciting tales of the great deeds of the Saints.⁶⁰

But the hidden life of the "Mary" brothers, removed from the admiring gaze of other people, and their work of prayer, meditation and intercession for sinners, are more effectual in God's eyes than preaching itself. For, while preachers of God's word easily deceive themselves into thinking that their sermons convert people, the brothers who are hidden away "in remote and lonely places" contribute greatly to those conversions but never hear about the fruits of their prayer.

b) The second part of Francis's warning is based on the well-known *Canticle of Hannah* (1 Sam 2:1-10), especially verse 5: "They that were full before have hired out themselves for bread: and the hungry are filled, so that the barren hath borne many: and she that had many children is weakened."⁶¹ Francis knew this Canticle from the breviary "according to the rite of the holy Roman Church" (RegB III 1), where it was recited at Lauds on Wednesdays.⁶² According to the shorter version in the *Legend of Perugia*, Francis compared Hannah, who was barren at first but who was later blessed with many children, to those Friars Minor who "by (their holy actions and virtues, sanctif(y) themselves) and edif(y) the others." Thomas of Celano (2 Cel 164) extends the metaphor

⁵⁹LP n. 72: Brooke, 214 or n. 103; Marino Bigaroni, 312. It seems that when Francis was growing up, he either read or heard read the book, *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotbolandi ou Chronique du Psuedo-Turpin*: C. Meredith-Jones, [Paris, 1936]; L. Oliger, "S. Franciscus cognovitne Pseudo-Turpinum?" *Antonianum* 2 (1927) 277-283; see also: *Das Rittertum im Mittelalter*, edited by A. Borst [Darmstadt, 1976]; M. Ott-Meimberg, *Kreuzzugsepos oder Staatsroman? Strukturen adeliger Heilsversicherung im deutschen 'Rolandslied.'* [Zürich-München, 1980] with a copious bibliography. appendix, 280-301.

⁶⁰C. F. Cardini, "L'avventura di un cavaliere di Cristo. Appunti per uno studio sull cavalleria nella spiritualità di S. Francesco," *Studi Francescani* 73 (1976) 127-128, especially page 154: "In the same way, Francis answered the novice who wanted a psalter and gave the example of Charles, Roland and Oliver, who were famed for having fought the infidel and served the Lord to the point of becoming martyrs. He contrasted these valiant warriors with those singers and minstrels who hoped to share in their martial glory by merely singing about their exploits, as did exegetes, theologians and scholars in general in regard to Christ, the saints and the Faith."—It is surprising that J. Auer, "Militia Christi," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* X (1980) 1210-1223, especially pages 1217ff. which omits all reference to the knightly influence on Francis.

⁶¹Translator's note: This is the Douay version. Cf. G. Bressan, *Samuele*. (La Sacra Bibbia), Torino-Roma 1954, 71-82, spec. 73 et 77b aut 82 (bibliog.).

⁶²Cf. G. Abate, *Il primitivo Breviario francescano (1224-1227)*, *Miscellanea Franciscana* 60 (1960) 47-240, 91.

still further: "The barren... is my poor little brother who does not have the duty of bringing forth children for the Church," since he is not entrusted with the mission of begetting the life of grace in souls either by the sacraments or by preaching the word of God (cf. 1 Cor 4:15): "This one will *bring forth many* at the judgment, because those he is now converting by his private prayers the Judge will give him unto glory." Hannah's rival, Peninnah, "she that hath many children is weakened" because "the preacher who rejoices over many as though he had brought them forth by his own power, will learn that he had nothing to do with them personally." If we are not mistaken, Celano⁶³ reports these thoughts of Francis more fully and more correctly than the *Legend of Perugia*, even though it be in his own high-flown style. On the other hand, a fact recorded by Francis's close companions in the *Legend* is deserving of notice, namely, that the Saint often repeated this metaphor to his brothers "in a collection of his words," probably in the form of admonitions given to groups of the brothers gathered in different places,⁶⁴ and especially at the Chapter of the brothers in the church of St. Mary of the Portiuncula before the ministers and other brothers." The allegorical interpretation of 1 Sam 2:5 which, according to Celano, Francis gave, is to some extent supported by the interpretation of the passage found in some older ecclesiastical writers.⁶⁵

2. Among the many attempts at resolving equitably the "tension" between prayer and activity, we must bear in mind St. Ignatius Loyola's wellknown saying: "Contemplative in action."⁶⁶ St. Francis is said to have required something similar although expressed in different words, reflecting the mentality of his time. For, according to the *Legend of Perugia*, at the General Chapter in 1217, "in which for the first time brothers were sent to overseas countries"⁶⁷ Francis, believing that he ought to be a model for all, decided that he, too, should leave for a distant country and there "undergo fatigue, humili-

⁶³St. Bonaventure also agrees with this, LM VIII 2, although he changes a word here and there.

⁶⁴A. Sturn, Collatio 1), *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* III (1959) 3:

⁶⁵Cf. [Anselmus de Laon [†1117], *Glossa ordinaria*, Lib. I reg., c. II, verse 5: PL 113, 543A: "The Church was barren among the unbelievers before this multitude which we see came forth."—Angelomus de Luxeuil [†c. 895], Enarr. in libros Ref. In Lib. I, c. II: PL 115, 265f: "We know that the Church does not cease to beget many children through the baptismal font and the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is called seven-fold. She who was barren among the unbelievers is now joyfully fertile in the Lord..." (265D).

⁶⁶Cf. C. VI. Truhlar, "In actione contemplativus," *Antinomiae vitae spiritualis* [Rome, 1958] 129-157, especially page 129, note 1 (bibliography) and page 131 (the mind of St. Ignatius).

⁶⁷N. 79: Brooke, 226: n. 108: Marino Bigaroni, 330; Cf. also 1 Cel 74 and 2 Cel 201; for the following events, see A. Callebaut, "Autour de la reconte à Florence de S. François et du cardinal Hugolin (en été 1217)," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 19 (1926) 530-558.

ations, hunger and all kinds of trials." Accordingly, he asked some brothers to: "Go and pray to the Lord that he may lead me to choose the country where I shall, best work for his glory, for the advancement and salvation of souls, and for the good example of the Order." His companions indicate the reason for his request:

"When he was about to go and preach in a distant country or even in a neighboring province, it was the most holy father's custom to pray and to have others pray that the Lord would inspire him to go where God preferred him to go."

Later he told his brothers that he was going to select "the country of France. It is a Catholic nation, and, more than all the other Catholic nations of the holy Church, it bears witness to the greatest respect for the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁶⁸

The same source tells us that the Saint admonished the brothers whom he had selected as his traveling companions: "In the name of the Lord, go out two by two with becoming dignity; in the morning, observe silence until after Terce by praying to God in your heart. Let there be no useless conversation, for although you are traveling, your conduct must be as upright as if you were in a hermitage or in your cell. Wherever we are, wherever we go, we bring our cell with us. Our brother body is our cell and our soul is the hermit living in that cell in order to pray to God and meditate. If our soul does not live in peace and solitude within its cell, of what avail is it to live in a man-made cell?"⁶⁹

The reader will be immediately struck by the extent to which Francis's exhortation is imbued with the eremitical spirit. The brothers who were accompanying him from Assisi to Florence,⁷⁰ walked two by two, following the Gospel account of the sending out of the disciples (Lk 10:1), and they faithfully observed silence until the hour of Terce (9:00 a.m.) in order to foster silence in the heart, as laid down in the *Rule for Hermitages*.⁷¹ So that the spirit of recollection and probity in speech and conduct might be more securely

⁶⁸LP n. 79: Brooke, 226, n. 108; Bigaroni, 330-332.

⁶⁹*Ibid.* n. 80: Brooke, 228; n. 108: Bigaroni, 334.

⁷⁰The reason why St. Francis did not go by the shorter Aurelian Way has that "in the 11th century (it was) almost obliterated;" M. Bihl, "De nomine S. Francisci," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 19 (1926) 469-529, especially pages 496ff.

⁷¹N. 4: "And let them recite Prime at the proper hour and, after Terce, they may end their silence, speak with and go to their mothers." Cf. Kajetan Esser, *Die Regula pro eremitoriis data*, 171-173, note 7; O. Schmucki, "Mentis silentium."

preserved, the apostolic pilgrims were to be mindful of the solitary life which the "Mary" brothers (RegEr 2) led in their cells or huts at the hermitages. For, in a way, they were itinerant hermits, carrying in their bodies the cells in which their souls were hidden so that they might thereby devote themselves more easily to prayer and meditation. In that way, the body becomes the brother of the soul, so promoting the service of God.⁷²

From this it is quite clear that Francis considered union with God as the supreme purpose for his sons. He wanted all of them to reach that goal whether they lived "religiously in hermitages" (cf. RegEr 1) or went "about through the world" (RegNB XIV 1) to preach peace and penance. Therefore, it would be of no benefit to the brothers to be confined to the solitude of the cloister or the cell unless they bent every effort towards reaching the calm of contemplation. From this admonition, there is no doubt that Francis regarded the life of his Order "according to the form of the Holy Gospel" (Test 14) as being completely imbued with the eremitical spirit.

3. Finally, we should turn our attention to the exhortation which, according to the *Legend of the Three Companions*,⁷³ Francis used to give his brothers "twice a year" at the Marian shrine of the Portiuncula: "The general behavior of the friars among people must be such that all who see or hear them may be drawn to glorify our heavenly Father and to praise Him devoutly." His great desire was that he and his brothers should abound in the good works for which men give glory and praise to God" Although these words do not appear in Francis's writings,⁷⁴ the historical force of the narrative should not, for that reason, be called into doubt. The passage is based on the verse from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:16): "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in

⁷²This way of viewing the relationship between soul and body shows that the mind of the time was imbued with Platonistic ideas; cf., e.g. articles by various authors, "Leib-Seele Verhältnis," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie V: L-Mn* [Basel-Stuttgart, 1980] 185-206, especially pages 186, 188ff. St. Francis's concept of the soul as bound to the body by a fraternal bond is also found in other places in the sources: cf. C. Andresen, "Asketische Forderung und Krankheit bei Franz von Assisi," *Theologie Literaturzeitung* 79 (1954) 129-140, especially page 135.

⁷³N. 58: Theophile Desbonnets, 132: concerning the introduction of this custom, "After blessed Francis had been given the sanctuary of Saint Mary of the Angels, the Portiuncula, by the abbot of Saint Benedict, he decided that twice in the year, at Pentecost, and at the feast of St. Michael in September all the brothers should gather there and hold a chapter." cf. *ibid.*, n. 57, and also Marinus [Mayer] de Neukirchen, *De Capitulo Generali in Primo Ordine Seraphico* (Rome 1952) 17-19.

⁷⁴Nevertheless, an allusion to this biblical passage appearing 1EpFid 1, 10 and 2EpFid 2, 53: "We give birth to Him through a holy activity which should shine before others as an example" (cf. Mt 5:16).

heaven."⁷⁵ The brothers' way of life, conduct and actions should so reveal God's goodness and greatness that all who meet them may be moved to praise Him. Whence the whole life of the Friars Minor is directed not only towards "pray(ing) always to Him (the Spirit of the Lord) with a pure heart" (RegB X 9), but also towards encouraging people everywhere to pray. Hence the brothers' every action is to be devoted to ensuring that no one should neglect to "raise his mind and heart to God" (RegNB XXII 19). For the rest, so far as Francis was concerned, the brothers' mission as they traveled about the world as witnesses to faith in, and love of God, was to spur people on to pray. This is evident from the typical admonition to praise God which he wrote in his *Earlier Rule* (XXI 1-2):

Whenever it pleases them, all my brothers can announce this or similar exhortation and praise among all peoples with the blessing of God: Fear and honor, praise and bless, *give thanks* and adore the Lord God Almighty in Trinity and in Unity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Creator of all.

⁷⁵This point is stressed by Englebert Grau, *Die Dreigefährten-Legende des hl. Franziskus. Die Brüder Leo, Rufin und Angelus erzählen vom Anfang seines Ordens*, Sophronius Clasen and Englebert Grau, editors, [Werl/Westf., 1972], 257, note 17; cf. W. Trilling, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, I. Teil*, [Düsseldorf, 1965] (1965) 106f.