

Fundamental Characteristics of the Franciscan "Form of Life"

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"Linee fondamentali della 'forma vitae' nell'esperienza
di san Francesco"

Lettura biblico-teologica delle Fonti Francescane
Roma: Ed. Antonianum, 1979, pp. 183-231

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Even a cursory reading of the writings of St. Francis cannot fail to reveal the strikingly vital character of his spirit. If proof of this were needed it could be verified statistically, for the word 'life' occurs no less than sixty-three times in his writings.¹ But what is of greater significance than this type of calculation is the language that Francis uses in key passages in the *Earlier Rule*.² He begins with a formula invoking the Trinity, typical in medieval documents.³ Then he declares: "This is the life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which Brother Francis asked the Lord Pope Innocent be confirmed for him" (*RegNB*, Prol. 1-2). It is worth emphasizing that this awareness of being guided and formed by the Gospel model of life remained with him until his death. In fact, he says in the *Testament* that "the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the holy Gospel" (v. 14).

Upon this idea that the life of the lesser brothers is inspired by the Gospel is based the concept of a life according to the form of the Roman Church. To the program of life "according to the form of the holy Gospel" is joined the command not to act "contrary to the form and regulations of the holy church" (*RegNB* XVII 1). Especially in those writings of Francis that are addressed to his followers, there is the insistent call "to observe in a more Catholic manner the *Rule* which we have promised to the Lord" (*Test* 34).

¹ See J.F. Godet and G. Mailloux, *Opuscula sancti Francisci: Scripta sanctae Clarae*. Concordance, Index, Listes de fréquence. Tables comparatives. Corpus des sources franciscaines, 5 (Louvain, 1976), p. 305a.

² [For the English translation I have used Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap. and Ignatius C. Brady, O.F.M., eds. and trans., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, Ramsey and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1982), used by permission of Paulist Press. — Trans.]

³ See A.M. Stickler, *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche*, s.v. "Invokation."

With such a breadth and variety of themes, I have only two choices. On the one hand, I can do a rapid survey, tracing the fundamental characteristics in three areas: life according to the Gospel, life according to the church, and life according to the *Rule*. Or I can spend more time illustrating the first area — certainly the most important — in more detail. Those who know me will not be surprised that I have immediately eliminated the first alternative, since this would have constrained me to present you with no more than a skeleton picture of the whole.⁴

Before beginning, I would like to emphasize that a saint's religious spirit is made up of his many-faceted way of looking at certain major elements of the Gospel message common to all. In addition, there is a

⁴ For life according to the form of the Church, I refer the reader to my study and the bibliography found therein: "Franziskus von Assisi erfährt Kirche in seiner Bruderschaft," in *Franziskanische Studien* 58 (1976): 1-26; or the Spanish translation: "Francisco de Asís experimenta la Iglesia en su Fraternidad," in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* 7 (1978): 73-95. For regular life according to St. Francis, see the notes and bibliography in O. Schmucki, O.F.M.Cap., "De loco sancti Francisci Assisiensis in Constitutionibus Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum anni 1536," in *Collectanea Franciscana* 48 (1978): 249-310. I have made this synthesis of the spirituality of St. Francis almost exclusively based on his writings.

For other attempts see I. Schlaury, "Saint François et la Bible: Essai bibliographique de sa spiritualité évangélique," in *CF* 40 (1970): 365-437; Raphael Brown, "A Francis of Assisi Research Bibliography: Comprehensive for 1939-69, Selective for Older Materials," in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, ed. Marion A. Habig, O.F.M. (Chicago, 1972), pp. 1667-1760, passim [hereafter cited as *Omnibus*. See also *Bibliographia Franciscana*, vol. 13 (1964-73), nos. 231-1008 passim; O. Schmucki, O.F.M.Cap., *Saggio sulla spiritualità di san Francesco*, Quaderni dell'Italia Francescana, Spiritualità francescana, 3 (Rome, 1967), and *BF*, vol. 13, no. 625; Sebastián López, O.F.M., "El carísimo franciscano," in *Verdad y Vida* 30 (1972): 109-41, 323-60; D.V. Lapsanski, "Francis of Assisi: An Approach to Franciscan Spirituality," in E. Rozanne and Elde, ed., *The Spirituality of Western Christendom* (Kalamazoo, 1976), pp. 116-24. See D. Gagnan, O.F.M.Cap., in *CF* 48 (1978): 149-51, esp. p. 150; J. Lortz, *Der unvergleichliche Heilige: Gedanken um Franziskus von Assisi*, Bücher franziskanischer Geistigkeit, 18 (Werl in Westphalia, 1976).

For translations into other languages, see *CF* 46 (1976): 360-61; A. Monteiro, O.F.M.Cap., "Fontes de inspiração imediata nos escritos de S. Francisco," in *Itinerarium* 23 (1977): 113-27, or the Spanish translation in *Sel. Fran.* 7 (1978): 181-91. See also J.R.H. Moorman, *Richest of Poor Men: The Spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi* (London, 1977). See also D. Gagnon, in *CF* 48 (1978): 148-49; Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., *San Francesco, uomo dello Spirito: Settimana di studio e di spiritualità francescana*, Passo della Mendola, 1977, *Esperienze dello Spirito*, 1 (Vicenza, 1978); Sebastián López, "Espíritu, palabra, eucaristía, Iglesia," in *Sel. Fran.* 7 (1978): 269-86; Stanislaw da Campagnola, O.F.M.Cap., "Lettura delle 'Fonti Francescane' per un 'itinerario di spiritualità,'" in *Laurentianum* 20 (1979): 165-85; F. Uribe Escobar, *Strutture e specificità della vita religiosa secondo la regola di S. Benedetto e gli opuscoli di S. Francesco d'Assisi*, Pontificio Atheneo Antonianum, Facultas theologiae, no. 250, sectio spiritualitatis (Rome, 1979). The monographs dealing with various individual aspects will be noted below as these topics are treated.

particular vision of God and of Christ, leading to a spiritual experience and special style of life, along with an original way of situating oneself within the life of the church.⁵

1. The Life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Since Father Martino Conti, O.F.M., has already given a lecture on "Sacred Scripture in the Experience and Writings of St. Francis," I do not wish now to take up the same topic. However, it is necessary to offer a few thoughts in order to provide background for those individual elements that according to the writings comprise an integral part of the "form of the holy Gospel."

As Father Conti has demonstrated in great detail,⁶ the discourse in Matthew 10: 1-15 for the sending of the Twelve, or the seventy-two disciples in Luke 10: 1-16, is the point of departure and guiding principle of the Franciscan *Rule*. This holds true for the "life proposal" or *Proto-Rule* of 1209, to which were added further elements until it reached its final form in 1221, as well as for the *Later Rule* of 1223, which remains the obligatory "form of life" for the First Order.⁷ The importance that Francis attached to the commissioning of the apostles explains why itinerant preaching, prohibition of the use of money, restrictions in clothing, and absolute trust in divine providence are the distinctive elements of the plan for Franciscan life.

There is the well-known controversy in which certain authors hold that Francis has tragically misunderstood the meaning of Scripture when, with an unacceptable literalism, he imposed binding norms on his order — unobserved and unobservable by the community and intended by Christ only as directives limited in time and place.⁸ It is

⁵ In this regard, see for example Pius XII, "Prerogative di perfezione, spiritualità e ardimento del Terz'Ordine di san Francesco," in *AAS* 48 (1956): 573-77, esp. p. 575. See also A. Matanic, O.F.M., "Per una sintesi della spiritualità francescana," *Cinquant'anni di ricerche* (1912-62), in *Vita Minorum* 36 (1965): 27-52; Alberto Ghinato, O.F.M., "Le 'opzioni fondamentali' della spiritualità francescana nella recente bibliografia," in *Fonte Francesco* 39 (1972): 147-56, and *BF*, vol. 13, nos. 1221-22.

⁶ Conti, *La missione degli Apostoli nella regola francescana* (Genoa, 1972); idem, *Lettura biblica della Regola francescana*, *Problemi educativi*, 4 (Rome, 1977). See Costanzo Cargnoni, O.F.M.Cap., in *CF* 48 (1978): 460-62. For the first monograph see my review in *CF* 44 (1974): 143-46. Most recently there is also Willi Egger, *Nachfolge als Weg zum Leben*, *Chancen neuerer exegetische Methoden dargelegt an Mk 10:17-31*, *Österreichische Biblische Studien*, 1 (Klosterneuburg, 1979), esp. chap. 3: "Ein Beispiel aus der Wirkungsgeschichte des Textes (Mk. 10: 17-31 par als der Text für Franz von Assisi)," pp. 237-84, with detailed discussion of the preceding studies.

⁷ For sources and bibliography see O. Schmucki, "Gli scritti legislativi di san Francesco," in *Approccio storico-critico alle fonti francescane*, eds. G. Cardaropoli and M. Conti, Pontificio Atheneo Antonianum, *Facultas theologiae*, no. 250, *sectio spiritualitatis* (Rome, 1979), pp. 73-98.

⁸ See A. Ott, *Thomas von Aquin und das Mendikantentum* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1908),

impossible to take up the entire exegetical and historical question here. However, it does not take much insight to realize how incredibly superficial it is to attempt to confine the prophetic mission of the Poverello within such inadequate categories. If Jesus' exhortation to the Twelve or to the seventy-two referred only to a passing moment and recalled a temporary event, it would be impossible to explain why the apostles proposed it as a subject for preaching, and the evangelists took such careful note of it.⁹

The "form of the holy Gospel," which is transmitted through the behavior of Francis and his brothers is certainly not limited exclusively to the missionary discourse, but it grew as the saint's knowledge of Scripture increased. Already as a boy, Francis very probably learned to read and write some Latin with the help of the Psalter.¹⁰ This supposition would more easily explain his extraordinary knowledge of the Psalms, as is evident for example in his *Office of the Passion*.

Already when Peter of Catania was vicar general (1220-21), the brothers at the Portiuncula would use the single available copy of the New Testament for the readings at Matins, since they did not yet have a Breviary, as Thomas of Celano relates.¹¹ In their frequent apostolic journeys or during their work as occasional farm laborers, or when in the houses of others or in hospitals, the brothers would hear and recite the Divine Office with the local clergy in the parish churches where they happened to be at the moment (see *Test* 18; *L3S* 38).

In a note inserted by Brother Leo in his own hand into the so-called Breviary of St. Francis, it is related that the Poverello "also had this Gospel Book (*evangelium*) written;¹² and when on account of sickness or

pp. 6-7: "Under the influence of the overwhelming personality of St. Francis, it eventually became — for a long time — far and away the most popular religious ideal [i.e., the ideal of apostolic poverty] of the time." Against Ott and other who hold the same view see Th. Soiron, O.F.M., "Das Armutsideal des hl. Franz von Assisi und die Lehre Jesu über die Armut," in *FSien* 4 (1917): 1-17; Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 408-9, nos. 263 and 269. The same criticism reappears in *Franz von Assisi: Legenden und Laude*, ed. O. Karrer (Zurich, 1945), p. 19. See Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," p. 402, no. 217.

⁹ In addition to the studies of Conti cited in n. 6 above, see for example L. Cerfaux, *Discours de mission*, Spiritualité biblique, L'Évangile de Saint Matthieu (Tournai, 1956); Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 400-401, no. 209.

¹⁰ See O. Schmucki, "Ignorans sum et idiota": Das Ausmass der schulischen Bildung des hl. Franziskus von Assisi, in *Studia historico-ecclesiastica*, Festgabe für Prof. Luchesius G. Spätling, O.F.M., I. Vazquez, O.F.M., ed. (Rome, 1977), pp. 283-310, esp. pp. 284-91.

¹¹ *2Cel* 91: "The book, therefore, was given to the woman, and thus the first Testament that was in the order was given away through this holy kindness." See *L3S* 56; O. Schmucki, O.F.M.Cap., *Preghiera liturgica secondo l'esempio e l'insegnamento di san Francesco d'Assisi*, Sussidi Formazione permanente, 7 (Rome, 1979), pp. 5-6, 16-17 (bibliog.).

¹² In Latin, *evangelistare*. See Leonhard Lemmens, O.F.M., *Testimonia minora saeculi*

other manifest impediment he was unable to hear Mass, he would have the Gospel passage read, even until his death." Thus it is ignorance of the real situation, in which the primitive Franciscan fraternity found itself on account of its strict poverty and the excessive cost of books, that leads a scholar such as Lapsanski¹³ to suppose that Francis effectively knew all the writings not only of the New Testament but of the Old as well. How far such an opinion is from the real historical situation can be seen in from the casual remark made by Thomas of Celano with regard to the saint's last days. As he lay dying in a cell at the Portiuncula, at his wish there was brought to him the volume that contained *tota et plena Bibliotheca*, that is, "the whole and complete Bible" (*ICel* 110).¹⁴

I believe it is much more in accord with historical data already scrutinized by scholars to say that the Poverello had listened many times to the sequence of Scripture readings in the liturgy, and in his meditation he spent more time on those passages and texts that had particularly struck him. No doubt the Psalms were especially familiar to him, since he knew them by heart, as I have indicated earlier. Moreover, a certain spiritual affinity must have familiarized him with Gospel texts or other New Testament passages containing references to Christ as poor, humble and despised. There was also the High Priestly Prayer of John 17: 1-26, and Pauline and Petrine passages on themes such as 'boasting', the 'spirit', and 'spiritual', as well as "following the footprints of Christ."¹⁵

XIII de S. Francisco Assisiensi (Quaracchi Ad Claras Aquas, 1926), p. 61. See also A. van Dijk, O.F.M., "The Breviary of Saint Francis," in *Franciscan Studies* 9 (1949): 13-40, esp. pp. 20-21), and *BF*, vol. 9, no. 193.

¹³ *Perfectio evangelica: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung im frühfranziskanischen Schrifttum* (Munich, Paderborn and Vienna, 1974), p. 55, n. 70. See O. Schmucki, O.F.M.Cap., "Messis optima librorum ab obitu S. Francisci Assisiensis anno 750^o recurrente vulgatorum," in *CF* 46 (1976): 321-64, esp. pp. 354-57. The English translation of this work is in *CF* 48 (1978): 151-54, with a review by D. Gagnan. See also Egger, *Nachfolge*, pp. 261-62, cited in n. 6 above.

¹⁴ *Analecta franciscana* 10 (1926-41): 86 [English translation from the *Omnibus*. — Trans.]

¹⁵ Sigismund Verhey, O.F.M., *Der Mensch unter der Herrschaft Gottes. Versuch einer Theologie des Menschen nach dem hl. Franziskus von Assisi* (Düsseldorf, 1960), pp. 179-89 (Francis and the Gospel/Sacred Scripture). See also F. Manns, O.F.M., "François d'Assise, exégète," in *Francesco d'Assisi nel 750^o della morte (1226-1976)*, Quaderni di Terra Santa (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 201-24, a study particularly worthy of merit as I have noted in *CF* 47 (1977): 136-37. See also A.G. Matanic, O.F.M., "S. Francesco e il Vangelo," in *Studi Francescani* 73 (1976): 223-30; Optatus van Asseldonk, O.F.M.Cap. "S. Giovanni evangelista negli scritti di S. Francesco," in *Lau* 18 (1977): 225-55; idem, "Le Lettere di san Pietro negli scritti di san Francesco," in *CF* 48 (1978): 67-76. See also Thaddée Matura, O.F.M., *Le projet évangélique de François d'Assise aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1977), and *CF* (1977): 370-71. See also Kajetan Esser O.F.M., "Evangelii Jesu Christi mysterium implere', Gottes Wort im Leben des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," in *FSien* 60

I think it is fair to ask what was Francis's particular point of view as he read and heard the Scriptures. Among various proposals, that of Javier Garrido, O.F.M., deserves attention.¹⁶ According to him, the key to our understanding lies primarily in the following of Christ the servant of God, and secondarily in the sending of the apostles and the Sermon on the Mount. On the other hand, I find the views of Father Anton Rotzetter, O.F.M.Cap., oversimplified.¹⁷ He believes that the key lies in the notion of self-emptying, or *kenosis* (Phil. 2: 7). No scholar, of course, would doubt the great number of spiritual implications contained in this theme.

It is to the credit of the late Father Kajetan Esser, O.F.M., that already in his first great work written in 1949 on the *Testament*¹⁸ he pointed out the marvelous balance between the word of God and sacrament in the writings of Francis. After Francis emphasized his regard for the Eucharist and for priests, he goes on: "Wherever I come upon His most holy written words in unbecoming places, I desire to gather them up, and I ask that they be collected and placed in a suitable place. And we should honor and respect all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words as those who minister spirit and life to us" (Test 12-13; 6-11).

Francis had an extremely vivid awareness that the Lord spoke to him directly, beyond limits of space and time, through the words of Scripture. He saw them as a prolongation of the Incarnation of the Word manifesting to him the divine will and truth. The frequent citations or allusions to John 6: 64 ("The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and life"¹⁹ — see *RegNB* XXII 39) show how much he followed the soundest Christian and monastic tradition and grasped the

(1978): 347-60; Lázaro Iriarte, O.F.M.Cap., "Tesi del Nuovo Testamento particolarmente cari a san Francesco," in *Lau* 19 (1978): 261-74.

¹⁶ *La forme de vida franciscana*. Introducción teológica a la Regla de san Francisco de Asís (Oñate [Guipúzcoa], 1975), p. 85. See Schmucki, "Messis/optima librorum," pp. 358-60, cited in n. 13 above.

¹⁷ According to *Die Funktion der franziskanischen Bewegung in der Kirche*. Eine pastoral-theologische Interpretation der grundlegenden franziskanischen Texte (Schwyz/Schweiz, 1977), pp. 266-68. See Schmucki, in *CF* 49 (1979): 118-120. According to Egger (*Nachfolge*, pp. 261-73, cited in n. 6 above), evangelical perfection consists in following Christ in poverty: "Franziskus sieht die Vollkommenheit des Evangeliums in einer Lebensweise, die die Armut Jesu bis ins letzte verwirklicht" (p. 273). I believe that this view is too restricted and over-simplified, although his exposition is full of excellent notes and deserves attention.

¹⁸ *Das Testament des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi*. Eine Untersuchung über seine Echtheit und seine Bedeutung (Munster/Westphalia, 1949), pp. 153-60. Or see the most recent translation from the German into Italian: *Il Testamento di san Francesco d'Assisi*, trans. A. Gerna and L. Padovese, O.F.M.Cap., (Milan, 1978), pp. 119-37.

¹⁹ See Esser, "Evangelii Jesu Christi mysterium," p. 341, cited in n. 15 above.

quasi-sacramental nature of *lectio divina*.²⁰ In this context the saint's heartfelt appeal to his followers takes on its full meaning: "Let us, therefore, hold onto the words, the life, and the teaching of the holy Gospel of Him Who humbled Himself to ask His Father for us and to make His name known to us" (*RegNB* XXII 41).

2. The Vision of God:

**"God most high, most holy, Who alone is good,
all-powerful and all-present"**

The passage just quoted from the *Earlier Rule* expresses something that is confirmed many times by other texts. As Francis contemplated in the Gospels the example of Christ at prayer, his initial concept of God gradually became clearer. Because time is limited, I can give only a brief sketch of his vision of God and mention a few ways in which it influenced his spiritual life.

Among the many prayers which could be quoted here, I shall mention the one with which Francis concludes the very long chapter on preachers in the *Earlier Rule*. Since the brothers would inevitably come to occupy a prestigious role in society once they were entrusted with "the office of preaching" according to "the form and regulations of the holy church" (*RegNB* XVII 4 and 1), they might allow themselves to be tempted by pride or a sense of superiority. In strong contrast to this, Francis emphasizes their role as mere instruments. As often happens to him in moments of heightened emotion, he moves from admonition to prayer: "And let us refer all good to the most high and supreme Lord God, and acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him for everything, [He] from Whom all good things come. And may He, the highest and supreme, Who alone is true God, have and be given and receive every honor and reverence, every praise and blessing, every thanks and glory, for every good is His, He Who alone is good" (*RegNB* XVII 17-18; see Luke 18: 19).

As a charismatic preacher of the word of God, again and again Francis felt himself an unworthy and powerless instrument of the immense power of the supreme Lord, before Whom he prostrated himself with sentiments of deepest reverence. At the same time, however, he experienced God as love personified (*RegNB* XVII 5; see 1 John 4: 8). From God, as if from a primordial and inexhaustible fountain, issue "all pardon, all grace, all glory, of all the penitent and the just, of all the blessed who rejoice together in heaven" (*RegNB* XXIII 9). And so in a moving act of thanksgiving, Francis extols this boundless mercy with ever new expressions of praise. As he prays, the awesome greatness of

²⁰ See for example M. Magrassi, "Bibbia pregato," in *L'oggi' della parola di Dio nella Liturgia* (Turin, 1970), pp. 177-292.

God, simultaneously and in an important union of opposites, is revealed to him as ecstatic goodness.

To the divine attributes of infinite greatness and goodness are often added, as motives as it were, the omnipotence and essential holiness of the Creator, as we see for example in the prayer that concludes the *Praises To Be Said at All the Hours*: "All-powerful, most holy, most high, and supreme God: all good, supreme good, totally good, You Who alone are good (Luke 18: 19); may we give You all praise, all glory, all thanks, all honor: all blessing, and all good creatures. So be it. So be it. Amen" (v. 11).

When the Poverello addresses God, he insistently repeats the expression "most high." This shows that his psychological image of God includes the marks of the majestic and the sublime, or to use an expression taken from the history of comparative religion, the numinous.²¹ God, being the One Who is totally other, is infinitely above all creatures. Before the image of a God Who is sublimely exalted, Francis feels himself sink into his own nothingness. With special acuteness he feels the unfathomable distance between the divine "Thou" and the wretched "I", which he had most likely learned from his frequent use of the Psalms, for example, Psalm 56: 3, or from Luke 1: 32.²²

Besides the description of God as "most high," we also find in the texts just cited a growing series of variations on God "the supreme good, all good, totally good, [You] Who alone are good." The last phrase shows clearly the Gospel origins of the concept.²³ Francis seems to have pondered often the response of Jesus to the rich young man: "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone" (Luke 18: 19). It should be remembered that this reference is inserted into the same passage where our Lord asks the man to distribute all his goods to the poor (Luke 18: 22). In addition to this, the Poverello's soul must have been steeped in the definition given by John: "God is love" (1 John 4: 8b and 16b).²⁴

Francis was not overwhelmed by his experience of the transcendence of God, but instead felt irresistibly attracted by the fascinating One Who spoke to him in order to manifest His own love and gratitude. He experienced the most high God above all as absolute goodness. Evi-

²¹ See R. Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Munich, 1963), passim. See also O. Schmucki, O.F.M.Cap., "Die Stellung Christi im Beten des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 25 (1962): 128-45, esp. pp. 130-32.

²² See *OffPass* III 3; Esser, "Evangelii Jesu Christi mysterium," p. 196, cited in n. 15 above; *EpOrd* 4.

²³ See Egger, *Nachfolge*, p. 240, cited in n. 6 above.

²⁴ See Esser, *Opuscula*, p. 346. For bibliography see n. 15 above.

dently he came to this not by philosophical reasoning, but because of his historical and salvific vision of human events. This is amply confirmed by the amazing chapter twenty-three of the *Earlier Rule*, which has been characterized as a profile of Franciscan life in the form of a song of praise. Here the Poverello celebrates the divine goodness revealed in the creation and redemption of the human race. Every created good is like a drop that overflows from the source of infinite goodness which is God, Who is love personified.

Another divine attribute that occurs in the writings of Francis with surprising frequency is that of God Who is present and at work everywhere. No document proves this more convincingly than the *Testament*. Its very first words are emphatic: "The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way" (v. 1). He continues: "The Lord gave me such faith in churches" (v. 4); "the Lord gave me and gives me still such faith in priests" (v. 6); "the Lord gave me brothers" (v. 14); "the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the holy Gospel" (v. 14); and finally, the Lord revealed to him the greeting of peace (v. 23).

Undoubtedly the Poverello considered God as the supreme director of his life. And this was not in a formalistic sense or through conventions of language at a time when the new Italian tongue was completely permeated with the language of the Vulgate. The constant and emphatic use of "God" as grammatical subject, with the human person appearing as the object of His loving interventions, translates into a language that Francis lived as the central conviction of his faith. Perhaps no element so well describes the Poverello's spirit as his unshakable confidence in divine providence. God, Who is supreme goodness, guides him at every moment and in every place; He is for him the constant point of reference, his firm support and secure refuge.

If further proof is necessary, it may be found in the exhortation addressed to the preachers in chapter seventeen of the *Earlier Rule*, that they should "not take pride ... about any good thing that God does or says or sometimes works in them and through them" (v. 6). *Admonition VIII* shows what depths of mystical intuition he had attained: "Whoever envies his brother the good which the Lord says or does in him commits a sin of blasphemy, because he envies the Most High Who says and does every good" (v. 3).

Lack of time prevents me from completing the features of St. Francis's distinctive vision of God that gave rise to his prayer and activity. I would have liked to present the eminently Trinitarian nature of his concept of God.²⁵ Let it suffice for now to quote the words with

²⁵ For further information and bibliography see Schmucki, "Die Stellung Christi," pp.

which he begins chapter twenty-three of the *Earlier Rule*: "All-powerful, most holy, most high and supreme God, holy and just Father..., we thank you ... for through Your holy will and through Your only Son with the Holy Spirit You have created all things spiritual and corporal." At any rate, I hope I have managed to show the nature and biblical origins of Francis's vision of God.

3. The Vision of Jesus Christ: For Love of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Much has been written about the so-called Christocentrism of St. Francis. In light of the writings, such a term should be used with a certain caution. If the term is used in a broad sense to indicate the amount of space and special position given to Christ in the piety and life of the Poverello, no one can take exception to this. On the other hand, if it is maintained that in the writings direct references to Christ are more frequent than those to God the Father and to the Trinity, this runs contrary to the statistical evidence, as I have shown elsewhere.²⁶ Not only do we rarely find prayers addressed directly to Christ, but even in other Christological texts we notice the orientation to God the Father, thus indicating Christ's function as mediator. It is worth noting how the one who referred to himself as "ignorant and unlearned" (*EpOrd* 39) nearly always let himself be guided by this vision of salvation history.

An example that is very helpful for evaluating the statement just quoted is provided by a passage from the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*. Francis feels that he has been sent "to serve all and to administer to them the fragrant words of my Lord" (v. 2). Prevented by infirmity, he hopes by his letter "to set before you ... the words of our Lord Jesus Christ ... and the words of the Holy Spirit, which are spirit and life" (v. 3; see John 6: 64). Since the words of Sacred Scripture are revealed and thus free from error, they contain the power of the Holy

132-34. See also Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 418-19; *BF*, vol. 13, nos. 661-63; Sebastián López, "El Dios para quien ballaba Francisco," in *Verdad y Vida* 34 (1976): 33-55; Pierre B. Beguin, O.F.M., "Visión de Dios en San Francisco y la que tiene el hombre de hoy," *Verdad y Vida* 35 (1977): 47-71. See also n. 36 below.

²⁶ Schmucki, "Die Stellung Christi," pp. 188-209; cf. pp. 129-30, 132, 134. After Esser's critical edition of the *Opuscula* and his discovery of new writings that can be attributed with certainty to St. Francis, the subject should be taken up once again. I hope to be able to do this with the collection and Italian translation of my studies on St. Francis and prayer in one volume. For further bibliography on the topic see Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 419-26; *BF*, vol. 13, nos. 664-65, 668-69, 672-75, 679, 681-82, 685-87; Leonardo Boff, O.F.M., "Jesus de Nazaré e Francisco de Assis," in *Nosso irmão Francisco de Assis* (Petrópolis, 1975), pp. 111-35; Isidro de Villapadierno, O.F.M.Cap., in *CF* 47 (1977): 369.

Spirit. In some way they contain the mystery of the incarnate Word, Who becomes not only visible but audible as well.

By an association of ideas — a process that is both habitual and typical of the saint — he is immediately drawn back to the mystery itself: “Through His angel St. Gabriel, the most high Father in heaven announced this Word of the Father — so holy and glorious — in the womb of the holy and glorious virgin Mary, from which He received the flesh of humanity and frailty” (v. 4).²⁷ Unfortunately, I know of no Italian translation that exactly captures the strong realism with which Francis, in clear opposition to the Docetism of the Cathari, reaffirms the reality of the body assumed by the Word in the womb of His mother Mary.

Once again the Poverello’s distinctive way of viewing the history of salvation comes into play as he continues: “Though He was rich beyond all other things (2 Cor. 8: 9), in this world He, together with the most Blessed Virgin, His mother, willed to choose poverty” (v. 5).

Francis continues his Christological meditation, accompanying Jesus into the Cenacle and relating the institution of the Eucharist. Then he evokes the agony in the Garden of Gethsemani, reporting our Lord’s prayer: “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me” (Matt. 26: 39).²⁸ Passing from one evangelist to another, he describes another detail that again emphasizes the tangible reality of Christ’s earthly life: “And His sweat became as drops of blood falling on the ground” (Luke 22: 44). With a bold, yet expressive image he describes the Redeemer’s absolute submission: “Nonetheless, He placed His will at the will of the Father” (v. 10).

In the next passage, Francis mentions the details of the divine plan of salvation: “And the will of the Father was such that His blessed and glorious Son, Whom He gave to us and [Who] was born for us, should, through His own blood, offer Himself as a sacrifice and oblation on the altar of the cross — not for Himself through Whom all things were made (see John 1: 3), but for our sins, leaving us an example that we should follow in His footprints” (vv. 11–13; see 1 Pet. 2: 21).²⁹

In this brief Christological description, amazingly dense yet balanced, we note how he emphasizes the actual death, the sacrificial character of the Redemption, and the soteriological purpose of Christ’s entire earthly existence. The only thing missing is mention of the

²⁷ See Esser, *Opuscula*, p. 115; idem, “La Lettera di san Francesco ai fedeli,” in *CF* 43 (1973): 65–78, esp. p. 72.

²⁸ See Esser, *Opuscula*, p. 116 and n. 11.

²⁹ The translation in *Fonti Francescane* should be compared with that of Giacomo V. Sabatelli, O.F.M., *San Francesco d’Assisi, Gli scritti* (Assisi: S. Maria degli Angeli, 1971), pp. 123–24.

Resurrection, which however is found in the *Office of the Passion*, for None of Good Friday.³⁰ As is also evident from other parallel passages, Francis never isolated one of the Christological mysteries. Therefore, to speak of the Poverello's "passion-centrism" is to admit to having never read his writings.

The saint concludes his spiritual evocation with a reference to the mystery of the Eucharist, which in other writings is extolled much more profusely: "And [the Father] wills that all of us should be saved through Him [Christ] and that we receive Him with our pure heart and chaste body" (v. 14). After the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and Honorius III's apostolic letter *Sane cum olim* of 1219-20,³¹ Francis launched a kind of spiritual crusade to revive Eucharistic faith and practice among the Christian faithful. In this text it seems that he intends to reemphasize the necessity of the Sacrament for salvation.

For a more complete idea of his Eucharistic doctrine, it would be necessary to comment on *Admonition I*, which deals with the Body of Christ,³² where he draws the analogy between the Incarnation and the Eucharistic presence. He arrives at this conclusion: "And in this way the Lord is always with His faithful, as He Himself says: 'Behold I am with you even to the end of the world'" (v. 22; see Matt. 28: 20).

An essential dimension of St. Francis's devotion to Christ would be lacking were I to omit some of the elements of the Christological mysticism present in his writings. In his *Testament* 6-10, Francis states that because of their ordination he experienced Christ at work even in priests who were sinners, since he saw in them the Son of God. That they are a living image of Jesus was manifested to him especially in the "most holy Body and Blood, which they receive and which they alone administer to others."

Likewise, referring to the mystery of the Eucharist, the Poverello perceives Christ's mystical presence among his brothers, as he shows by the use of scriptural quotations in chapter twenty-two of the *Earlier*

³⁰ See Esser, *Opuscula*, p. 203. The reader may wish to consult my study "Das Leiden Christi im Leben des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," in *CF* 30 (1960): 129-45 [English translation "The Passion of Christ in the Life of St. Francis of Assisi," in *Greyfriars Review*, supplement to vol. 4, 1990 — Editor]. Or the Italian version "L'Ufficio della Passione come esempio per celebrare la Liturgia delle ore," in *Preghiera liturgica*, pp. 19-30, esp. pp. 26-27, 30, cited in n. 11 above.

³¹ See Kajetan Esser, O.F.M., "Über die Chronologie der Schriften des hl. Franziskus," in *Studien zu den Opuscula des hl. Franziskus von Assisi*, E. Kurten, O.F.M. and Isidro de Villapadierna, O.F.M.Cap., eds. (Rome, 1973), pp. 307-13.

³² I have translated this *Admonition* in my study "L'annuncio del mistero eucaristico di S. Francesco, esempio per la pietà e predicazione eucaristica dei suoi figli," in *Fidelis* 64 (1977): 106-18; or in *Atti FF Min. Cappuccini Prov. Lombardia* 15 (1976): 5-19; or in the Latin translation "Doctrina et pietas eucharistica S. Francisci Assisiensis lumine primi verbi admonitionis ipsius," in *AnalOFMcap* 93 (1977): 28-39.

Rule 35–42, where he addresses to them an exhortation that sounds like a spiritual testament. Since they have only one Father in heaven, they are all brothers among themselves. They also have only one teacher, the One Who is in heaven. Now “wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (v. 37; see Matt. 18: 20). Christ, mystically present, is the heart and the bond among the brothers when they gathered in a common faith and love.

Without a doubt St. Francis reaches the peak of Christological mysticism when he affirms in the *First and Second Versions of the Letter to the Faithful*³³ that all Christians committed to live the Gospel ideal are “spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.” After establishing this bond, based on the words of Jesus concerning His true relatives as recorded in Matthew 12: 50 (with the addition of the spousal relationship), he continues with an explanation of the individual images. To be a spouse of Christ means to be joined to Him in nuptial love by the Holy Spirit. Those who together with Him carry out the will of the heavenly Father (Matt. 12: 50) become His brothers. Special emphasis is placed on the maternal role of those who are reborn to the divine life: “[We are] mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body (see 1 Cor. 6: 20) through love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to Him through [His] holy manner of working, which should shine before others as an example” (v. 53). The soul in the state of grace resembles the Blessed Virgin Mary, and therefore it is united to Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit in nuptial love, completely open to fulfill the will of the Father, following the example of Jesus. Just as the divine child grew in Mary until the moment of His birth, so in the soul that leads a virtuous life, especially through love, Christ progressively grows until He becomes the light that enlightens and regenerates its supernatural life. In this way, all of Christian existence assumes a Marian function by giving birth to Christ spiritually in those in whom He is either dead or not yet born.

The growing crescendo of affective expressions shows that here Francis is not speaking from his simple spiritual reflection on a Gospel text, but rather out of his own mystical experience: “Oh, how holy and how loving, pleasing, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable, and desirable above all things to have such a brother and Son, Who laid down His life for His sheep (John 10: 15) and [Who] prayed to the Father for us, saying...” (*2EpFid* 56).³⁴

³³ Esser, *Opuscula*, pp. 108–9, 122–23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123; Idem, “Die Marienfrömmigkeit des hl. Franziskus von Assisi,” in *Wiss. Weish.* 17 (1954): 176–90, or in the Italian translation “La devozione a Maria Santissima in S. Francesco d’Assisi,” in *Temi spirituali*, Presenza di S. Francesco, 11 (Milan, 1973), pp. 305–36. See also “De seraphici Patris Francisci habitudine erga beatissimam

From what has been presented thus far, it is clear that based on the evidence one cannot assume the predominance of the historical Christ — especially as He is presented by the synoptic Gospels — in the piety of Francis. As an added reason for rethinking this too rigid interpretation, let us observe how acutely Francis kept his eyes fixed on the Christ Who is to come. In fact, in the prayer with which he concludes the *Earlier Rule* XXIII 4, the Poverello prays: "And we thank You, for Your Son Himself will come in the glory of His majesty to send the wicked ones who have not done penance and who have not known You into the eternal fire, and to say to all those who have known You and have adored You and have served You in penance: 'Come, you blessed of My Father; receive the kingdom, which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world'" (Matt. 25: 34). Francis kept this eschatological dimension spiritually before himself at every liturgical Hour he recited, as is clear from the beginning of the *Praises To Be Said at All the Hours*. The same outlook determines his devotion in the *Office of the Passion*, since more than once he mentions his ardent waiting for the judge Who is to come, repeating the verb: "And we know, for He comes, for He will come to judge justice" (Part 1, None 16; see Ps. 95: 13b).

After all that has been said thus far, it seems unnecessary to dwell on the imitation of Christ as found in Francis's writings. I have already quoted a passage from the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*, which contains the image of the suffering Christ, an image also found in 1 Peter 2: 21: "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His footprints." Just as a traveling companion going over treacherous ground follows the guide step by step, placing his foot in the prints left by the guide, so Francis intends to adhere to the conduct of Jesus described for us in the Gospels. This metaphor could give the impression of a sterile kind of external mimicking. Such an accusation, sometimes made against the Poverello by scholars, is seen to be completely unfounded when we recall the prayer that he adds to his *Letter to the Entire Order*.³⁵ It is evident from this passage that for Francis the following of Christ was never the result of moral effort alone, but rather a gift of divine grace, and that his progressive conformity to Jesus was dependent upon the light and warmth of the Holy Spirit. In fact, he prays for an understanding of God's will and the ability to carry it out: "Thus, inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened,

Virginem Mariam," in *Regina Immaculata*, studia a sodalibus capuccinis scripta occasione primi centenarii a proclamatione dogmatica Immaculatae Conceptionis B.M.V., ed. P. Melchiorre a Pobladura, O.F.M.Cap. (Rome, 1955), pp. 15-47, esp. pp. 38-44 [to appear in *Greyfriars Review* — Editor].

³⁵ See for example Verhey, *Der Mensch*, pp. 82-88, cited in n. 15 above.

and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit, we may be able to follow in the footprints of your beloved son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And by Your grace alone may we make our way to You, Most High" (vv. 51–52).

4. The Spirit of Holy Prayer and Devotion

There is no doubt that St. Francis was one of the greatest men of prayer in the history of Christianity.³⁶ Prayer is an essential element of the saint's charisma, one that is easily ignored or at least underestimated in studies, and especially as it was concretely realized in his followers. We need to emphasize that constant and fervent prayer was a predominant element — in importance as well as in the time devoted to it — in his life "according to the form of the holy Gospel." One important proof of this is found in the prayers that are interspersed throughout his writings. Even in a literary sense Francis achieves the apex of self-expression every time he prays.³⁷ Obviously in a synthesis such as this I can offer only a few basic ideas.

The Gospel ideal of unceasing prayer, which Francis made his own, is revealed especially in chapter twenty-two of the *Earlier Rule*, which emphasizes above all the necessity of constant prayer: "Watch, therefore, praying constantly" (v. 27; see Luke 21: 36). "And let us adore Him [the Father] with a pure heart, because we should pray always and not lose heart" (v. 29; see Luke 18: 1). This urgent recommendation to extend the obligation of prayer over the entire course of the day also occurs elsewhere. In an earlier chapter he asks that his brothers, as servants of God, "must always give themselves totally to prayer or to some good work" (*RegNB* VII 12). Likewise in the *Later Rule* he exhorts them to "desire above all things to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working, to pray always to Him with a pure heart" (*RegB* X 8–9).

Besides the effort to maintain unceasing and familiar conversation with God, the text just cited also refers to the Holy Spirit. From a whole series of texts we can see that when in his writings Francis uses the terms 'spirit' and 'spiritual', he is referring to the inner openness to grace and submission to the Holy Spirit, which are the marks of all true

³⁶ See "Franciscus 'Dei laudator et cultor,'" in *Lau* 10 (1969): 3–36, 173–215, 245–82, with bibliography listed there and in *BF*, vol. 13, nos. 701–20. See also M. Hubaut, O.F.M., "Le mystère de la vivante Trinité dans la vie et la prière de saint François d'Assise," in *Evangelie aujourd'hui*, no. 95 (1977): 43–50; Sebastián López, O.F.M., "El gran limosnero: La creación, don de Dios y restitución del hombre en alabanza y servicio a los hermanos," in *Sel. Franc.* 5 (1976): 123–44; C. Del Zotto, O.F.M., "Un uomo fatto preghiera," in *Vita Minorum* 48 (1977): 447–60. See n. 25 above.

³⁷ This has been rightly pointed out by A. Rotzetter and E. Hug, *Franz von Assisi, Die Demut Gottes. Meditation, Lieder, Gebete* (Zurich and Einsiedeln, 1977). See *CF* 48 (1978): 456–57.

progress.³⁸ Here, as elsewhere, the Poverello completes the picture with a quotation taken from Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4: 23-24): "The Father seeks such worshipers. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (*RegNB* XXII 30-31). If I am not mistaken, Francis is indicating here his preference for interior or mental prayer, based on the principle that it is most in conformity with the spiritual nature of God. The need for 'truth' on the other hand seems to indicate the need for the utmost commitment, as is fitting in one's relationship with God.

By his use of a series of biblical concepts, Francis proposes a kind of theology of prayer that deserves to be summarized briefly. In the same chapter twenty-two of the *Earlier Rule*, probably addressed to his followers before he left for the Middle East, he strongly emphasizes the essential function of the heart, from which, according to our Lord, proceed all evil acts. Thus he insists that this vital center of our spirit be guarded from negative influences and that it remain open to those that are good. Here he refers to the parable of the sower, interweaving texts taken from the synoptics (Matt. 13: 18-23; Mark 4: 13-20; Luke 8: 4-8 and 11-15).

Based on these premises, the sense of the following admonition is self-evident: "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" (v. 19). With shrewd psychological intuition he goes on to point out how various forms of activity may be twisted in such a way as to take complete possession of the human heart, with the result that they "snuff out our memory of the word and the precepts of the Lord," and that they "blind the heart of a person through worldly affairs and concerns" (v. 20).

Therefore, he emphasizes again that we should not turn our mind and heart from the Lord (v. 25): "But in the holy love which is God (1 John 4: 16), I beg all [my] brothers ... as they overcome every obstacle and put aside every care and anxiety, to strive as best they can to serve, love, honor, and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind, for this is what He desires above all things" (v. 26). The teachings of Jesus concerning the pure heart and the good soil that is open to receive the divine seed are based on a wonderful synthesis in which the simplicity of the language conceals for many people the profound nature of the teaching. In a distinctly contemplative manner he gives a

³⁸ See the historical and spiritual excurses on "Geist, geistlich (spiritualis)," in Kajetan Esser, O.F.M. and Lothar Hardick, O.F.M., *Die Schriften des hl. Franziskus von Assisi* (Werl in Westphalia, 1972), pp. 202-6. See also "Lo 'spirito' nella 'regola e vita dei Frati Minori,'" in *Vita Minorum* 38 (1967): 38-73. For other bibliography see Schlaury, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 401-2.

definition of prayer: To keep one's mind and heart fixed on God. But to achieve this we must know how to detach ourselves from the preoccupations and cares that distract our attention. Here lies the significance of the Franciscan eremitic life. In the *Rule for Hermitages* 3, Francis expresses the same thought with this variant, that Franciscan hermits should "seek first of all the kingdom of God and His justice" (see Luke 12: 31).

The influence of poverty's predominant role in living out the vocation of prayer is significant. As Francis uses the term, 'to pray' always means to give back with praise everything in which we have been made sharers, thanks to God Who is love personified. This is how we must read the conclusion of chapter seventeen of the *Earlier Rule*: "And let us refer all good to the most high and supreme Lord God, and acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him for everything, [He] from Whom all good things come. And may He, the Highest and Supreme, Who alone is true God, have and be given and receive every honor and reverence, every praise and blessing, every thanks and glory, for every good is His, He Who alone is good" (vv. 17-18; see Luke 18: 19). This is the reason why the saint's prayers which we possess are mostly prayers of adoration and thanksgiving. In the presence of God, Francis recognizes his own absolute need, and he realizes that he owes exclusively to God whatever good may be found in him. To pray means to attempt to give back to God what we have received from Him, honestly recognizing our own condition as creatures.

Perhaps it is superfluous to state that according to St. Francis prayer must be given a preeminent place in Franciscan life if it is not to risk losing its very substance. In no other passage does he emphasize this so explicitly as in the *Later Rule* V 1-2, the chapter on work, where he invites the brothers to 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 other things of our earthly existence ought to contribute." Here with unequivocal clarity is stated a scale of values, in which the theological and contemplative orientation stands out above all other areas of earthly activity. Here we come to the root of the contemplative dimension of the Franciscan charism, a root that every authentic reform of the Order rediscovers and relives.

5. The Life of Penance

The relationship between penance³⁹ and Franciscan life is confirmed for us by the autobiographical note that begins the *Testament*: "The

³⁹ See the bibliography in Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 403-5; *BF*, vol. 13, nos. 562-65, 793-94; Kajetan Esser, O.F.M., "La penitenza secondo san Francesco," in

Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way..." From this point on, we must note the gratuitous character that the Poverello recognizes in his own spiritual transformation. He began to do penance not as a result of his own merits but through the gift of divine mercy. The summary nature of the expression 'to do penance' and its gratuitous quality are also seen in the prohibition against asking privileges from the Roman curia "under the guise of preaching or even for the persecution of their bodies; but wherever they have not been received, let them flee into another country to do penance with the blessing of God" (vv. 25-26).

According to chapter twenty-three of the *Earlier Rule* 7-8, the life of the brothers is presented in the form of a joyful hymn of praise. To be a Christian means to know, adore, and serve God in penance, or to "persevere in the true faith and in penance." It is a question then of a state of life that lasts as long as the Christian's earthly existence.

But at this point one may ask what Francis understood by the word 'penance'. An initial and partial response sends us back to the text from the *Testament* just quoted. To do penance is first of all to break away from being "in sin" (v. 1) and to leave "the world" (v. 3). A decisive break such as this does not happen once and for all, but requires continuous effort to overcome oneself. Thus in the *Earlier Rule* XVII 7 Francis urgently states: "And we should be firmly convinced that nothing belongs to us except [our] vices and sins." In another place he admonishes the itinerant brothers: "Let them not judge or condemn. And, as the Lord says, they should not take notice of the little defects of others (see Matt. 7: 3; Luke 6: 41). Rather they should reflect much more on their own [sins] in the bitterness of their soul" (*RegNB* XI 10-11; see Isaiah 38: 15).

A touching example of the Poverello's public confession in the presence of the entire fraternity is preserved for us in the *Letter to the Entire Order*, where with a sense of deep humility he recognizes himself as a sinner, to some degree accusing himself of that which was a pure physical impossibility: "I have offended [God] in many ways through my grievous fault especially in not having kept the *Rule* which I promised the Lord, nor in having said the Office as the *Rule* prescribes, either out of negligence or on account of my sickness, or because I am ignorant and unlearned" (v. 39).

This keen awareness of being "in sin" seems at times to border on a certain pessimism regarding human abilities — a clearly Augustinian influence. Thus Francis seems to come close to certain harsh descrip-

Antonianum 51 (1976): 369-76; C. Carpaneto, O.F.M.Cap., "San Francesco 'Penitente'," in *L'ItFran* 53 (1978): 417-26.

tions found in the contemporary treatise *On Contempt of the World*, when in his praise of the life of the lesser brothers he states: "He [the Lord God] did and does every good thing for us [who are] miserable and wretched, rotten and foul-smelling, ungrateful and evil" (*RegNB XXIII 8*). No less expressive are his words in the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful 46*: "And let us hold ourselves in contempt and scorn, since through our own fault all of us are miserable and contemptible, vermin and worms, as the Lord says through the prophet: 'I am a worm and no man, the scorn of men and the outcast of the people'" (Ps. 21: 7).⁴⁰ Although in many passages Francis uses the term 'body' in the Pauline sense of 'flesh', meaning egoism, which is prone to sin, it is nonetheless undeniable that he attributes to the human body an instrumental and not indifferent role in the act of sin. This is evident in the same *Letter* when he speaks of the impenitent who "bodily serve the world by the desires of the flesh, the cares and anxieties of this world, and the preoccupations of this life. [Such people] are deceived by the devil, whose children they are" (vv. 65–66). He also says that "it is sweet to the body to commit sin and bitter to it to serve God" (v. 69).

At the same time he makes it unequivocally clear that the human heart, the center of every option, is the principle of perversion as well as conversion. In fact, in the text just cited, the saint continues: "...because all evils, vices, and sins come from and proceed from the heart of men, as the Lord says in the Gospel" (v. 69; see Mark 7: 21, 23). In this ambivalence, where Pauline intuition is blended with a certain depreciation of the importance of the body, Francis exhorts: "We must hate our bodies with [their] vices and sins, because the Lord says in the Gospel: All evils, vices, and sins proceed from the heart (see Matt. 15: 18–19).... We must also deny ourselves and place our bodies under the yoke of service and holy obedience, as each one has promised to the Lord" (vv. 37, 40).

There is perhaps no passage where the Poverello shows more fully and completely what is required for overcoming sin in body and soul than in the *Earlier Rule*: "But the Spirit of the Lord [in contrast to the spirit of the flesh — see v. 11] wishes the flesh to be mortified and despised, worthless and rejected. And it strives for humility and patience, and [for] the pure and simple and true peace of the spiritual person. And above all things, it always longs for the divine fear and the divine wisdom and the divine love of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (XVII 14–16).

⁴⁰ For the translation see Sabatelli, *San Francesco d'Assisi, Gli scritti*, pp. 127–28, cited in n. 29 above. For the Poverello's Christological interpretation of Psalm 21: 7, see my study "Das Leiden Christi," pp. 259–60, cited in n. 30 above.

In the breadth of vision shown here we can see the characteristic elements of Franciscan penance: docile openness to the guidance of the Spirit or divine grace; mortification and denial of whatever in soul or body is opposed to the lordship of Christ; the effort to humbly recognize one's moral weakness, to be patient in adversity, and to constantly strive for interior peace; an intense desire for the fear as well as the love of God and for a sapiential experience of the Trinity. In the final analysis, to be penitent is to allow oneself to be guided by the Spirit in the slow and gradual process of transformation into divine love.

Even though it is not explicitly stated, this conversion to divine love is extended from God to our brothers and sisters. This is exactly what Francis experienced at a decisive stage in his own conversion: "The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them, that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world" (*Test* 1-4).

6. The Life of Poverty

Among all the traits that make up the picture of life according to the form of the holy Gospel, poverty stands out above all. Given the extraordinary number of possible references, I can give only a general outline.⁴¹

The relationship of the life of the lesser brothers to the poverty of Christ is perhaps the aspect of Francis's charism that is given the strongest and most frequent emphasis. The most explicit text is the exhortation on begging alms that introduces chapter nine of the *Earlier Rule*: "All the brothers should strive to follow the humility and the

⁴¹ For part of the vast bibliography on this subject, see Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 405-10; *BF*, vol. 13, nos. 761-80; Lázaro Iriarte, O.F.M.Cap., *Vocazione francescana*. Versione italiana a cura dei Frati Minori Cappuccini di Lombardia (Milan, 1975), pp. 85-126, with ample bibliography. See also *Poverty in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Flood, *Franziskanische Forschungen*, 27 (Werl in Westphalia, 1975), esp. K. Esser, *Die Armutsauffassung des hl. Franziskus*, pp. 60-70, and my review in *CF* 46 (1976): 366-43. See also "La povertà del secolo XII e Francesco d'Assisi," *Atti del II Convegno Internazionale, Assisi, 17-19 ottobre 1974* (Assisi, 1975), esp. Stanislaw da Campagnola, *La povertà nelle 'Regolae' di Francesco d'Assisi*, pp. 217-53, and Raoul Manselli, *La povertà nella vita di Francesco d'Assisi*, pp. 255-82; *CF* 46 (1976): 340-42; L. Thier, O.F.M., "Der Friede erwächst aus der Armut," *Armut und Friede im Leben des hl. Franziskus*, in *Wiss. Weish.* 39 (1976): 108-22; D. Gagnan, "Typologie de la pauvreté chez saint François d'Assise: l'épouse, la dame, la mère," in *Lau* 18 (1977): 469-52; J. Schlageter, O.F.M., "Würde die Armutsauffassung des Franziskus von der 'offiziellen' Kirche schliesslich abgelehnt?" *Francisci Armutverständnis und der Streit über 'dominium Christi' und 'paupertas Christi' unter Papst Johannes XXII (1316-34)*, in *FSien* 60 (1978): 97-119. See also nn. 8 and 17 above, and 48 below.

poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). In the same chapter Francis specifies the meaning of these two virtues that were manifested in the earthly life of Jesus. Referring to the necessity of begging alms if it should be necessary because of the lack of other means of sustenance, he admonishes: "And they should not be ashamed, but rather recall that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living and all-powerful God, set His face like flint (Isaiah 50: 7) and was not ashamed. And He was a poor man and a transient and lived on alms — He and the Blessed Virgin and His disciples" (vv. 4–5). For the moment let us simply point out that here the Poverello is not free from the influence of the pauperistic movements of his age; nor does the type of mendicancy practiced by Jesus and especially by Mary, which underlie this passage, correspond perfectly with the data of modern exegesis.⁴²

But it must be remembered that even here the concept of self-emptying shines through, in the sense that the Son of the living and all-powerful God humbled Himself, even to taking on the condition of a poor man, forced to depend upon the assistance of others (see Phil. 2: 6–8). Adhering more closely to the biblical model of 2 Corinthians 8: 9, in the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful* 5, Francis captures even more clearly the image of self-emptying: "Though He [the Word] was rich beyond all other things in this world, He, together with the most Blessed Virgin, His mother, willed to choose poverty."

Francis is referring not only to the behavior but even more to the teaching of Christ when he frequently recalls the invitation to the rich young man in Matthew 19: 21: "If you wish to be perfect, go sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." This Gospel text, which occurs in full in chapter one of the *Earlier Rule* 3, belongs with a high degree of certitude to the *Proto-Rule* of 1209, and thus must be considered a constituent element of the primitive Franciscan charism.⁴³

If the results of Flood's structural analysis of the *Earlier Rule* are acceptable as a working hypothesis,⁴⁴ chapters one to seventeen go

⁴² Manselli, in *La povertà*, p. 277, and in the discussion (*La povertà del secolo XII*, pp. 291–92) has rightly emphasized the influence of popular piety. See also "La religion populaire au moyen âge," *Problèmes de méthode et d'histoire* (Montreal and Paris, 1975), and the review by D. Gagnon in *CF* 48 (1978): 173–75. Without referring to the passage discussed here, another probable source of influence is pointed out by F. Manns, "San Francesco e gli Apocrifi," in *Frate Francesco* 45 (1978): 79–84.

⁴³ For this passage see Egger, *Nachfolge*, passim, cited in n. 6 above.

⁴⁴ David E. Flood, *Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder* (Werl in Westphalia, 1967), pp. 105–40. See David Flood, W. van Dijk and Thaddée Matura, *La nascita di un carisma, Una lettura della prima Regola di san Francesco*, traduzione di Ch. G. Cremaschi and F. Oligiati, O.F.M. (Milan, 1976). See *CF* 46 (1976): 321–22. Flood's analysis has inspired that of A. Rotzetter, *Die Funktion der franziskanischen Bewegung*, pp. 115–69, cited in n. 17 above.

back, at least substantially, to the time before the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. If this be true, as I think it is, then the scriptural foundation for the Franciscan life of poverty was very soon enriched with elements from the second missionary discourse of Luke 9: 3 and 10: 48. Thus the brother's life was predominantly one of wandering, without baggage or provisions for the journey, with the absolute prohibition against the acceptance and use of money except in the special case of sick brothers — all of this based on unlimited trust in divine providence: "When the brothers go about through the world, they should carry nothing for the journey, neither a knapsack, nor a purse, nor bread, nor money, nor staff" (XIV 1).

In a period that was probably a little later, the saint's attention was drawn by our Lord's answer to someone who had asked Him to act as mediator in obtaining his part of the inheritance from his brother: "The Lord commands us in the Gospel: 'Watch, be on your guard against all malice and greed'" (Luke 12: 15). He was also attracted by elements from the parable of the sower (Luke 8: 4-15; 21: 34): "Guard yourselves against the preoccupations of this world and the cares of this life" (VIII 1). From his experience in his own family of cloth merchants, Francis must have seen very clearly the almost inescapable attraction of money, with the almost inevitable result that all one's efforts are spent in holding on to it and increasing it.

In this same section of the *Earlier Rule*, which seems to belong to the first phase of its capitular development, after having given the exhortation to follow "the humility and the poverty" of the historical Christ, Francis adds the motive why the brothers should voluntarily limit themselves to the minimum necessary for life: "And [they should] remember that we should have nothing else in the whole world except, as the apostle says, having something to eat and something to wear, we be content with these" (IX 1; see 1 Tim. 6: 8). It is obviously difficult to establish whether this Pauline text belongs to the "constitutive" quotations from the early beginnings or if it was inserted into the final edition as one of the biblical ornaments added by Caesar of Speyer, to whom the Poverello had entrusted this task.⁴⁵ If the *Earlier Rule*

⁴⁵ Jordan of Giano, *Chronicle*, no. 15: "And Blessed Francis, seeing that a Brother Caesar was a man learned in the Sacred Scriptures, charged him to adorn with words from the Gospel the *Rule*, which he wrote in simple words" [English translation from *XIII Century Chronicles*, p. 30 — Trans.]. The question inevitably arises as to the extent of this collaboration. Willibrord Lampen, O.F.M. ("De textibus S. Scripturae allegatis in opusculis S.P.N. Francisci," in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 17 [1924]: 443-45, esp. p. 444) distinguishes texts that pertain to the substance of the topic, for which Francis seems not to have needed help, and longer and more complex citations that seem to derive from Brother Caesar. Karlmann Beyschlag (*Die Bergpredigt und Franz von Assisi* [Gütersloh, 1955], pp. 64-64, 66), going a step further and using the same criteria,

prescribes that the professed brothers have but one tunic (II 13), this surely reflects the command found in the missionary discourse not to take two tunics for the journey (see Luke 9: 3).

While examining some of the biblical texts that were contributing to the establishment of Franciscan poverty, we have discovered other aspects of its external and visible practice in the wandering life of the brothers. Now we can understand the necessity that candidates for the order, before being admitted to religious profession, must divest themselves of everything, selling their goods and giving them to the poor. As "pilgrims of the Absolute,"⁴⁶ the lesser brothers relied totally on divine providence, setting out on their mission of penance and peace in small groups, without the support of any reserves of money or food, with clothing restricted to the minimum required to cover themselves. In the case where they could not succeed in getting enough to eat by means of occasional labor, they would humbly have recourse "to the table of the Lord, seeking alms from door to door" (*Test* 22).

About 1214 there was a partial change from a life of continual, penitential, apostolic wandering to life in hermitages, at least on a temporary basis. When this happened, the concepts of absolute poverty and biblical pilgrimage were carried over to the hermitage. Thus Francis lays down in the *Earlier Rule* VII 13-14: "The brothers should beware that, whether they are in hermitages or in other places, they do not make any place their own or contend with anyone about it. And whoever comes to them, friend or foe, thief or robber, should be received with kindness." This is faithfully echoed in the *Later Rule*, though in a more condensed fashion: "The brothers shall not acquire anything as their own, neither a house nor a place nor anything at all" (VI 1).

A slightly later phase is reflected in the *Testament*, where the brothers' life in very poor dwellings is the sign that they are pilgrims on the road to "the land of the living" (*RegB* VI 5; see Ps. 141: 6). "Let the brothers beware that they by no means receive churches or poor dwellings or anything which is built for them, unless it is in harmony with

refers to the citations that he believes are from Francis as constitutive, and those that he gathered with the help of Caesar as ornamental or reflections. Such a criterion is also supported by Egger, *Nachfolge*, pp. 258-60, cited in n. 6 above.

⁴⁶ See Yves Congar, O.P., *Pellegrino dell'Assoluto*, *L'Assoluto del Vangelo nella Cristianità*, Spirito e tempo, 3 (Milan, 1966). See my review of a previous Italian edition in *CF* 37 (1967): 422-23. For the French edition see Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," p. 390, no. 148. This evocative description comes from the autobiography of Léon Bloy (1846-1917), *Le pèlerin de l'absolu*. Pour faire suite au *Mendiant ingrat*, à *Mon journal*, à *Quatre ans de captivité à Cochons-sur-Marne*, à *l'Invendable et au Vieux de la Montagne*, 1910-1912 (Paris, 1914 and 1941). My thanks to Father Paschal Rywalski, minister general of the Capuchins, who after my presentation graciously communicated this information to me.

[that] holy poverty which we have promised in the *Rule*, [and] let them always be guests there as pilgrims and strangers" (*Test* 24; see 1 Pet. 2: 11).

The "summit of poverty" (*RegB* VI 4; see 2 Cor. 8: 9) is enriched by a new form of expression in the *Testament* 24–25, with the severe prohibition against asking papal privileges of exemption for the order or for individual churches or houses, as well as apostolic letters for the purpose of guaranteeing more freedom in their apostolic ministry. The meaning of this arrangement is essentially religious, even though it is undeniable that it was directed against an entire ecclesiastical system from which had sprung an endless series of abuses and suits. The privilege of Francis and his followers was to abandon themselves solely to the protection of God, without having recourse to human support.

The extent to which poverty was like a thread running through the entire Gospel life of Francis is seen from the many applications of expropriation in areas that are purely spiritual. This is evident in Francis's admonition that no brother should appropriate to himself "the role of being over others" (*Adm* IV 1–3). If they are more upset about being deprived of this role than over losing the office of washing the feet of the brothers (see John 13: 14), so much the more are they amassing a false treasure (see John 12: 6) to the peril of their souls. Here there is a clear allusion to Judas's dishonest administration of the funds that belonged to the college of apostles.

With the same force, Francis emphasizes to the brothers who are preachers that "nothing belongs to us except [our] vices and sins" (*RegNB* XVII 7). Therefore, those who proclaim the word of God should not take pride in "their good words and deeds — in fact, about any good thing that God does or says or sometimes works in them and through them" (v. 6). Particularly explicit is another passage: "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" (v. 4).

Every sin, insofar as it is a transgression against the will of God, is an attempt at appropriation and a misuse of the human will (*Adm* II 1–4). Radical expropriation, in a moral sense, consists in having "nothing else to do except to follow the will of the Lord and to please Him" (*RegNB* XXII 9). Poverty is also associated with the use of one's own knowledge: "Those are killed by the letter (see 2 Cor. 3: 6) who merely wish to know the words alone so that they may be esteemed as wiser than others and be able to acquire great riches to give to [their] relatives and friends" (*Adm* VII 2). From this ideal of poverty, Francis derives a number of conclusions for the spiritual life that at first might seem rash. To be poor in spirit (see Matt. 5: 3) means not to be angered or scandalized "by a single word which seems injurious to their person,"

but a person who is poor in spirit "hates himself (see Luke 14: 26) and loves those who strike him on the cheek" (*Adm XIV* 1-4; see Matt. 5: 39).

Since I cannot continue to develop other aspects of the basic principle of poverty, I shall conclude these remarks with a passage which, more than any other, summarizes the meaning of to live without anything of one's own: "Therefore, hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, so that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally" (*EpOrd* 29).

7. The Life of Minority

More than once in the texts presented thus far humility has been placed alongside poverty as a virtue of equal importance in imitating Jesus Christ, the supreme example for the life of the brothers.⁴⁷ The importance Francis attaches to this spiritual attitude is also evident from the name "lesser brothers." What is told us by Thomas of Celano in his *First Life* 38 is certainly credible: "For he wrote in the *Rule*: 'And let them be lesser brothers', and when these words were spoken, indeed in that same hour, he said: 'I wish that this fraternity should be called the Order of Friars Minor.'" Celano then adds: "And indeed they were lesser brothers, who, being subject to all, always sought a place that was lowly and sought to perform a duty that seemed in some way to be burdensome to them, so that they might merit to be founded solidly in true humility, and that through their fruitful disposition a spiritual structure of all virtues might arise in them." Here the biographer has hit the nail on the head, as can be easily shown by Francis's writings. And so, in reconstructing his spiritual experience, I feel justified in departing from the principle I have followed thus far, namely, of relying exclusively upon Francis's own writings.

In order to show how human standards of judgment are to be set upside-down, Francis, in the *Earlier Rule* V 9-12, refers to our Lord's response to the mother of Zebedee's sons (see Matt. 20: 20-28; Luke 22: 24-27). Unlike the rulers of the people who "have power over them," and their leaders who "rule over them," whoever among the brothers "wishes to become the greater should be their minister and servant. And whoever is the greater among them should become like the lesser." In itself this passage bears all the signs of being relatively early. It was probably used quite soon to enrich the scriptural and disciplinary elements of the *Proto-Rule*.

The office of minister among the brothers must never become one of human power or despotic rule. It is conceived in a simple manner, as

⁴⁷ See the bibliography in Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 410-11; Iriarte, *Vocazione francescana*, pp. 85-127, cited in n. 41 above.

service in behalf of the community of brothers: "And let the ministers and servants remember what the Lord says: 'I have not come to be served, but to serve'" (IV 6; see Matt. 20: 28). By joining the two synonyms "minister and servant," he wishes to prevent the title 'minister' from becoming merely a convention, devoid of any real meaning.

Minority is also expressed among the brothers themselves: "Through the charity of the Spirit, they should voluntarily serve and obey one another" (V 14). "And no one should be called Prior, but all generally should be called Friars Minor. And the one should wash the feet of the others" (see John 13: 14), that is, be ready to perform the most humble tasks (VI 3-4).

With regard to the relations of the brothers with others, Francis teaches: "None of the brothers should be administrators or managers in whatever places they are staying among others to serve or to work, nor should they be supervisors in the houses in which they serve; ... instead, they should be the lesser ones and subject to all who are in the same house" (VII 1-2). Thus minority among outsiders [*ad extra*] means service that is humble and docile and, by free choice, a position as subject rather than administrator. In the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful* the reason for this preference is spelled out: "We must never desire to be over others; rather we must be servants and subject to every human creature for God's sake" (v. 47; see 1 Pet. 2: 13). In *Admonition XII* Francis adds another element that helps to understand more easily the real meaning of minority. The servant of God shows that he possesses the Spirit of God in this way — if he takes no pride when the Lord perform some good through him: "Rather he considers himself the more worthless in his own eyes, and esteems himself less than all others." By being truly subject to everyone and by occupying the lowest place in the church and society, the lesser brother fosters the awareness, even externally, that he is only an instrument in the hand of God.

More than one witness cited thus far makes clear the social element of the Gospel vocation to minority. There is perhaps no text that states this so clearly as the following passage on begging, in chapter nine, verse 2, of the *Earlier Rule*: "And they must rejoice when they live among people [who are considered to be] of little worth and who are looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside." This is a deliberate preference for those who are socially uprooted and condemned to remain marginalized: the victims of famine, sickness, and injustice.

Professor Michel Mollat, the most highly respected authority on poverty in the Middle Ages, provides a vivid image of those whom Francis concretely had in mind when he expressed his option for the poor:

The poor man is the one who does not eat meat or drink wine. The poor man is infirm, blind, lame or deformed, covered with sores which can be seen through his rags with a lack of modesty that repels. He lives in filth. He is dirty. He arouses fear. He considers himself as evil. Even the dogs chase him. Being despicable, the poor man is despised. In miniatures he is shown with his head lowered, standing alone in the corner of the doorway or at a respectful distance from his benefactor. Being humiliated, he also humiliates others by his contact. The poor man has no friends. His attitudes are those of uselessness, unworthiness, and guilt...

The poor man is a wanderer and a vagabond; with sack on his shoulders and staff in his hand, he goes from village to village. He stays 'wherever'. He has no home, no profession.... Society ignores the poor man. Documents do not mention him by his name, assuming that it is known. This isolation pursues him even after his death. There is no place for his body among other Christians.⁴⁸

8. The Life of Obedience

The discovery of an intimate link between perfect obedience and the conditions laid down by Jesus for those who would follow Him seems to go back to the beginnings of the fraternity. Jesus, having made the first prediction of His coming passion, said: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matt. 16: 24).⁴⁹ In any case, this biblical passage is found in chapter one, verse three, of the *Earlier Rule*, with the clear intent of laying the foundation of Franciscan obedience. The obvious point of contact is self-denial, as is shown by the command in the *Later Rule* X 2-3): "On the other hand, the brothers who are subject to them [to the ministers] should remember that they have given up their own wills for God. Therefore, I strictly command them to obey their ministers in all those things which they have promised the Lord to observe." Obviously it is not my task here to examine the validity of this exegesis of the Gospel text.

More than once the Poverello expressly recalls the example of Christ in order to emphasize the spirit of submission in his order. In the *Letter to the Entire Order*, after having stressed the importance of the liturgical laws and regular observance in general, Francis gives the motive for all of this: "... for our Lord Jesus Christ gave His life that He might not lose the obedience of the most holy Father" (v. 46). From the *Second*

⁴⁸ "Il concetto della povertà nel Medioevo: problematica," in *La concezione della povertà nel Medioevo*. Antologia di scritti a cura di O. Capitani (Bologna, 1974), pp. 1-34, esp. p. 22-23.

⁴⁹ See my study "Das Leiden Christi," pp. 360-61, cited in n. 30 above. For the bibliography on obedience and St. Francis, see Schlaury, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 411-12; *BF*, vol. 13, nos. 745-60; Iriarte, *Vocazione francescana*, pp. 191-219, cited in n. 41 above. See also D. Lapsanski, "Obedience/Authority in Francis's Writings," in *The Cord* 25 (1975): 251-55; "Obéissance et autorité dans la spiritualité franciscaine," in *Vie Consacrée* 48 (1976): 274-84.

Version of the Letter to the Faithful 9–10, it is clear that he is thinking in particular of the agony of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, when our Redeemer “placed His will at the will of the Father.”

Thus it is not surprising that for Francis the brothers are “in true obedience” when “they have persevered in the commands of the Lord, which they have promised through the holy Gospel and their life” (*RegNB* V 17). This means, in other words, the promises that they have made at their religious profession — “To live in obedience, in chastity, and without anything of their own, and to follow the teaching and the footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I 1). In light of these statements, it is easier to explain why, according to Francis, obedience is a summary of the entire life of the lesser brothers. For this reason, in the chapter on reception into the order it is said: “When the year and term of probation has ended, let him [the novice] be received into obedience” (*RegNB* II 9). The same terminology also occurs in the respective chapter of the *Later Rule* (II 11).

The use of this term to cover the entire existence of the lesser brothers reappears in an admonition in which Francis calls back to obedience certain brothers who had probably taken the life of wandering as a pretext for undue independence: “And all the brothers, as often as they have turned away from the commands of the Lord and wandered outside obedience, as the prophet says, should know that they are cursed outside obedience as long as they knowingly persist in such sins” (*RegNB* V 16).

With much insight the Poverello has singled out obedience as a bond of fraternal as well as ecclesial unity. He demonstrates this in the prologue, verses three and four, of the *Earlier Rule*: “Brother Francis and whoever will be the head of this order promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and to his successors. And all the other brothers are bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors.” The bond of ecclesial and fraternal union provided by obedience is worthy of note, the more so since it is found again in the *Later Rule* I 2–3, with the pope now being Honorius III. This remains valid even if (as I think probable) it was Innocent himself who caused this bond of special submission to the Holy See to be inserted in the *Proto-Rule*, using the formal promise of obedience that the bishops of the province of Rome were obliged to swear to the pope.⁵⁰

Perhaps because of the tendency for a fraternity of pilgrims constantly on the road to become scattered and lose contact with the center, Francis felt it urgent to frequently instill in them the duty of

⁵⁰ M. Maccarrone, “Riforme e innovazioni di Innocenzo III nella vita religiosa,” in *Studi su Innocenzo III*, Italia Sacra, 17 (Padua, 1972), pp. 221–337, esp. pp. 300–306 (7. L’approvazione di S. Francesco), esp. p. 304.

obedience to the minister general and the ministers provincial. Not only did it belong to the office of the ministers to assign their brothers "to the provinces and to the places where they are to be," but likewise the right to be obeyed: "And all my other blessed brothers should diligently obey them in those matters which concern the well-being of their soul and [which] are not contrary to our life" (*RegNB* IV 2-3). This formulation, belonging to a section of the *Rule* that seems to go back to the years prior to 1215, merits special attention for its calmness of tone, completely uninfluenced by any experience of lack of discipline. I shall return later to the question of the limits that are expressly provided for in the carrying out of commands.

In the text from the *Later Rule* mentioned above, one can already see instead a certain sharpness in the firm and resolute manner of speaking: "Therefore, I strictly command them to obey their ministers in all those things which they have promised the Lord to observe" (X 3). Another passage in which there appears the obligation to be subject to the will of the various ministers is found in the *Testament* 27-28. It is clear from the context what has provoked the statement, namely, problems stirred up by the application of the liturgical laws in the *Later Rule*: "And I firmly wish to obey the minister general of this fraternity and another guardian whom it might please him to give me. And I wish to be so captive in his hands that I cannot go [anywhere] or do [anything] beyond obedience and his will, for he is my master."

Having himself willingly undergone the rigor of being totally subject to another — a familiar method of Francis by which he shows his knowledge of human psychology — he turns now to his followers, begging them with words less severe, but having the same practical consequences: "And all the other brothers are bound to obey their guardians" (v. 30). No doubt Francis here exaggerates the obligation of absolute submission because of the psychological situation in which he found himself. This was due to his diminished physical strength, his isolation from the rest of the fraternity following his abdication as minister general, and the information furnished by his intimate companions regarding its evolution. In fact, here there are no longer any limits to obedience — something that in other places Francis is always careful to mention.

In order to specify the traits that are typically Franciscan in his writings, I shall go back especially to *Admonition* III on perfect obedience. Here Francis interprets the theme of obedience from the point of view of poverty. Beginning with our Lord's command that a disciple must renounce all possessions (Luke 14: 33), he continues: "That person leaves everything he possesses and loses his body who surrenders his whole self to obedience at the hands of his prelate" (v. 3). This text presents a radical concept of subjection, one which coincides with the

voluntary renunciation of one's personal freedom to make decisions about one's life.

But in the *Admonition* (just as in the *Earlier Rule* and even in the *Later Rule*), Francis marks a boundary that cannot be crossed by either party, superior or subject: "But if the prelate should command something contrary to his conscience, although [the subject] does not obey him, still he should not abandon him" (v. 3). The limit indicated by the expression "contrary to his conscience" (*contra animam*) should most probably be taken to mean "the well-being of his soul."⁵¹ In both *Rules* this term is explained as "those matters which concern the well-being of their soul and [which] are not contrary to our life" (*RegNB* IV 3). Stated negatively: "That is not obedience in which a fault or sin is committed" (*RegNB* V 2). And finally in the *Later Rule*: "... to obey their ministers in all those things which they have promised the Lord to observe and which are not against [their] conscience and our *Rule*" (X 3). Moral good or the commandments of God, together with the life of the brothers as defined by the *Rule* (especially the vows), form the boundary that every superior must respect scrupulously when giving a command. If he exceeds this boundary, whether consciously or unintentionally, the subject ought to refuse to carry out the request.

Conscientious objection is not allowed, however, when the subject believes that he perceives a higher degree of moral goodness in an action or attitude different from that commanded by the minister: "And should the subject sometimes see that some things might be better and more useful for his soul than what the prelate may command him, let him willingly offer such things to God as a sacrifice; and instead earnestly try to fulfill the wishes of the prelate. For this is loving obedience because it pleases God and neighbor" (*Adm* III 5-6).

Such obedience is called 'loving' because it flows from our Redeemer's obedience that is based on heroic love, and because obedience is the 'sister' of the 'Lady, holy Charity' (*SalVirt* 3). The Poverello's teaching on loving obedience shows an unimagined depth, which I certainly do not pretend to have exhausted. The saying which more than any other seems to express Francis's intentions on this topic is found in the *Earlier Rule* XXII 9: "And now that we have left the world, we have nothing else to do except to follow the will of the Lord and to please Him."

9. The Life of Fraternity

In our exposition of Francis's ideal of minority, the importance of brotherhood has also come up in his writings.⁵² It is significant how the

⁵¹ Verhey, *Der Mensch*, p. 131, cited in n. 15 above.

⁵² See the bibliography in Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 410-11; Iriarte,

founder describes himself as "Brother Francis": in the prologue, verse 2, of the *Earlier Rule*; in the *Later Rule* I 2; in his letters such as the *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful* 1; and frequently in the *Testament* 1, 34, and 41. He consistently refers to the other members of the order as "all the other brothers," or "all my brothers, cleric and lay" (*Test* 38). It is a language that was not common at that time, but one rich in warmth and affection. For example, in the *Earlier Rule* IV 2-3 he speaks of "all the brothers who have been established as ministers and servants of the other brothers," as well as of "all my other blessed brothers," evidently meaning blessed by God.

Seen in this light, the brothers come together to form the 'fraternity' or communion of brotherly love (e.g. *Test* 27, 33). The Benedictine, Emmanuel Jungclassen, who is completely conversant with the writings of Francis, and who shows an acuity of perception, has recently affirmed that for the Poverello 'brother' and 'sister' are 'Urworte', that is, primary or fundamental terms.⁵³ I think one of the best proofs of this incontestable fact is found in the *Letter to the Entire Order*, which has the character of a spiritual testament, even though it is not called that (vv. 2-5). There we read among other things: "To all the reverend and much beloved brothers; to Brother A., the minister general of the Order of Friars Minor, its lord, and to the other ministers general who will come after him; to all ministers, custodians, and priests of this same brotherhood [who are] humble in Christ; and to all the simple and obedient brothers, from first to last: Brother Francis, a worthless and weak man, your very little servant, [sends] his greetings in Him Who redeemed [us] and washed us in His most precious blood (see Rev. 1: 5)."

So far we have given a number of examples of the central position occupied by the concept of fraternity in the writings. Now we must

Vocazione francescana, pp. 145-90, cited in n. 41 above; *BF*, vol. 13, nos. 809-18 (cosmic brotherhood). See also D. Lapsanski, "The Meaning of Fraternity in the Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi," in *The Cord* 25 (1975): 316-19; Sebastián López, O.F.M., "Familiares entre si' en la obediencia del Hijo," in *Sel. Fran.* 4 (1975): 216-26; idem, "Francisco, un hombre comunión," *Sel. Fran.* 4 (1975): 154-66, or in *Verdad y Vida* 33 (1975): 75-89. See also Lothar Hardick, O.F.M., "Brüderlichkeit als Struktur-Element," in *Geistliches Vermächtnis*, vol. 2, Wandlung in Treue, 18 (Werl in Westphalia, 1976), pp. 18-29; M. Vovk, O.F.M., "Die franziskanische 'Fraternitas' als Erfüllung eines Anliegens der hochmittelalterlichen Zeit," in *Wiss. Weish.* 39 (1976): 2-25; F. Iozzelli, "La vita fraterna nell'Ordine francescano primitivo," in *Studi Franc.* 74 (1977): 259-313; S. Nuñez, O.F.M., "Relaciones fraternas en el espíritu de San Francisco," in *Verdad y Vida* 35 (1977): 137-56; Sebastián López, O.F.M., "Mas con el ejemplo que con las palabras. Todos vosotros sois hermanos" (*RegNB* 22), in *Sel. Fran.* 7 (1978): 121-34; M. Steiner, O.F.M., "La experiencia de la fraternidad in S. Francisco de Asís," *ibid.*, pp. 97-115.

⁵³ *Die Fülle erfahren: Tage der Stille mit Franz von Assisi* (Freiburg, Basel and Vienna, 1978), p. 39. See my review in *CF* 49 (1979), pp. 101-2.

attempt to investigate its theological and spiritual motivation. Since the chronology of Francis's writings is unfortunately only partly known, it seems impossible to reconstruct the genetic development of the concepts that inspired the ideal of brotherhood. If the conjectures of David Flood can stand up to critical discussion, chapter twenty-two of the *Earlier Rule* must have been dictated as a kind of spiritual testament before Francis set out for Egypt in 1219 with the hope or near-certainty of suffering martyrdom.⁵⁴ The *Earlier Rule* contains Gospel texts that surely must have motivated the life of fraternity in the early days.

The verses that the Poverello has chosen from the discourse of Jesus against the Scribes and Pharisees (see Matt. 23: 1–12) figure in the first place: "All of you are brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father, for one is your Father, the One in heaven. And do not let yourselves be called teachers, for your teacher is the One Who is in heaven" (vv. 33–35). The Franciscan ideal of fraternity, then, draws its inspiration from the fatherhood of God the Creator, and from the divine sonship of Christ, as I shall show more explicitly in other passages later. A very special importance is to be attributed to the verse that concludes Jesus' instruction on prayer (Matt. 18: 19–20). I think this is something that has hitherto escaped the notice of scholars. Almost immediately it follows the words just quoted. It reads: "Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (v. 37; see Matt. 18: 20). The notion of the abiding mystical presence of Christ in the midst of the brothers joined together in a common faith and love is seen clearly in the citation of the final sentence of the Gospel according to Matthew (28: 20b): "Behold I am with you until the consummation of the world" (v. 38).

The selective nature of a series of Gospel texts from Matthew — all of them in support of a common theme — excludes the hypothesis that we are dealing with mere ornamentation that was added later. On the contrary, they are the fruit of Francis's own deep and lengthy meditation, so much so that in part he also uses them in his other writings.

Moreover, it is highly significant that the idea of Christ as our brother occurs in the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful*.⁵⁵ It is

⁵⁴ See D. Flood, W. van Dijk and Thaddée Matura, in *La naissance d'un charisme: une lecture de la première Règle de François d'Assisi* (Paris, 1973), pp. 23–84, esp. pp. 73–75. See O. Schmucki, "De operibus circa S. Francisci vitam ac spiritum nuperius in lucem editis," in *CF* 43 (1973), pp. 385–86.

⁵⁵ *IEpFid* 7–13. See Kajetan Esser, O.F.M., "Ein Vorläufer der 'Epistola ad fideles' des hl. Franziskus von Assisi, Cod. 225 der Biblioteca Guarnacci zu Volterra," in *CF* 45 (1975): 5–37; idem, "Un (documento) precursore della 'Epistola ad fideles' di san Francesco d'Assisi," Codice 225 della Biblioteca Guarnacci di Volterra, in *AnalTOR* 14, no. 129 (1978): 11–47.

impossible exactly to date this document, which is the product of early reflections. Unfortunately it is not contained in the *Fonti Francescane*. Therefore, I shall refer briefly to the *Second Version* 50–56. The affectionate nature of the term 'brother' must be emphasized, as is clear from the choice of adjectives that are used to go with it. There is also the theme of Christ as Redeemer, which gives justification to the title of brother: "Oh, how holy and how loving, pleasing, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable, and desirable above all things to have such a brother and Son, Who laid down His life for His sheep" (v. 56; see John 10: 15). I believe I can say without risk of making a convenient projection that Francis has transferred some of the warmth of his love for Christ into his use of the terms 'brother' and 'fraternity'.

The same motive of redeeming love on the part of Christ Who gave His life for the salvation of His brothers reappears in *Admonition III*. Francis emphasizes that the subject who is constrained for reasons of conscience to refuse a command should not abandon the superior, even if as a result he must suffer persecution. He continues: "For whoever chooses to endure persecution rather than be separated from his brothers truly remains in perfect obedience, for he lays down his life for his brothers" (v. 9). The allusion to John 15: 13 makes clear how important to the realization of the ideal of brotherhood is the example of Christ our brother, Who gave His life for His friends.

It would take many pages to show adequately the various ways in which brotherhood was put into practice in the Franciscan Order. Of necessity I shall limit myself to a few examples I think are particularly important.

We can catch a clear glimpse of the itinerant life of the early days from the first part of the *Earlier Rule* VII 15, where Francis exhorts: "And wherever the brothers are and in whatever place they meet other brothers, they must greet one another wholeheartedly and lovingly, and honor one another without complaining" (see 1 Pet. 4: 9). In clear contrast to the austerity, rigorous penances and gloom of the "perfect" Cathari, Francis adds: "And they must beware not to appear outwardly sad and like gloomy hypocrites (see Matt. 6: 16); but let them show that they are joyful in the Lord (see Phil. 4: 4) and cheerful and truly gracious."

In another chapter that is also based on primitive material, Francis considers mutual love in the light of voluntary submission, with a clear reference to the example of Jesus: "Nor should any brother do evil or say something evil to another; on the contrary, through the charity of the Spirit, they should voluntarily serve and obey one another. And this is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*RegNB* V 13–14). This allusion takes on a special flavor and meaning when we recall the very uncomfortable conditions among the small groups of

itinerant brothers, who were always in great need of moral support and mutual sustenance.

All of chapter eleven should be read from this existential point of view. As is clear from its negative admonitions, the text displays a healthy realism in referring to the experiences of limitation and imperfection that gradually arose as the brothers traveled the roads together. Thus they must guard against slander, disputes, quarreling, anger, murmuring, and rash judgment. This list of violations against fraternal love, which I have merely summarized, would create an inaccurate picture of the beginnings if it did not also at the same time demonstrate Francis's subtle intuition of spiritual psychology. Thus he counters the fault mentioned with the respective attitude for overcoming it. In fact, he asks them "to keep silence [in the face of provocations] whenever God gives them this grace," and "to respond humbly, saying: 'I am a useless servant'" (vv. 2-3; see Luke 17: 10). "And let them be modest, by showing meekness toward everyone" (v. 9; see Titus 3: 2). "And they should love one another, as the Lord says: 'This is My commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you' (John 15: 12). And let them express the love which they have for one another by their deeds (see James 2: 18), as the apostle says: 'Let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth'" (vv. 5-6; see 1 John 3: 18). I think it is likely that in constructing this biblical mosaic Francis made use of the help of a brother more skilled than he in Sacred Scripture.

Both the active aspect as well as the model for the brothers' behavior are brought out in the oldest section of the *Earlier Rule*. Chapter nine, dealing with begging, indicates how they must show themselves true brothers amid the hardships associated with living in permanent dwellings: "And each one should confidently make known his need to the other, so that he might find what he needs and minister it to him. And each one should love and care for his brother in all those things in which God will give him grace, as a mother loves and cares for her son" (vv. 10-11; see 1 Thess. 2: 7). We can easily see that the number one problem of the small groups of itinerant brothers was severe hunger and survival itself. The true extent of their fraternal love was shown in the effort they made to help one another overcome these things.

This text reappears in the *Later Rule* VI 7-9 with a transposition that compares not only fraternal and maternal love, but also the love of a mother for her child with the supernatural love of a spiritual brother. Just as grace transcends the level of natural relationships, so fraternal spiritual love must be far greater than that of a mother.

Concrete applications of love among the brothers — a love more tender and available than that of a mother — are found in the *Earlier Rule* X, when it treats of the sick brothers: "If any of the brothers shall fall ill, wherever he may be, the other brothers should not leave him

behind unless one of the brothers, or several of them if that be necessary, are assigned to serve him as they would wish to be served themselves" (v. 1).

With regard to the mercy to be shown toward those brothers who fall into sin, there is the testimony of the *Letter to a Minister* 9–11, which, as far as I know, has nothing to compare with it in the previous history of spiritual writings. If only it had always been observed throughout the history of the Franciscan family over the centuries!: "And by this I wish to know if you love the Lord God and me, His servant and yours — if you have acted in this manner: that is, there should not be any brother in the world who has sinned, however much he may have possibly sinned, who, after he has looked into your eyes, would go away without having received your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not to seek mercy, you should ask him if he wants mercy. And if he should sin thereafter a thousand times before your very eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him back to the Lord. Always be merciful to [brothers] such as these." This hymn of praise to evangelical mercy is so clear and eloquent that any comment is superfluous.⁵⁶

For the sake of completeness, I would also like to point out the cosmic dimension of Franciscan brotherhood. According to the Poverello, being a brother is not limited to the fraternity of the lesser brothers, but extends to all of humanity and even to the world of animate and inanimate creatures. Thus in the marvelous "Eucharistic" prayer of chapter twenty-three of the *Earlier Rule*, he asks that Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit give thanks to the eternal Father "as it pleases You and Him for everything" (v. 5). Moreover, he wishes to join himself with "the glorious mother and most blessed Mary ever-virgin" (v. 6), all the choirs of angels, and all the saints of all ages, "to give you thanks for these things as it pleases You, the supreme and true God" (v. 6).

Passing from a liturgical style, freely adapted to his own sensibilities, to a penitential exhortation, Francis turns to all the ecclesiastical orders, to all social states and classes, and to the lay professions, begging them all "to persevere in the true faith and in penance" (v. 7). In the name of those whom he has just called upon, he turns to the praise of God: "Let all of us, wherever we are, in every place, at every hour, at every time of day, everyday and continually, believe truly and humbly, and keep in [our] heart, and love, honor, adore, serve, praise and bless ... the most high and supreme eternal God, Trinity and unity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (v. 11).

⁵⁶ For a noteworthy commentary see E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern and Munich, 1964), pp. 139–66. For its translation into various languages see also *BF*, vol. 13, no. 286.

This is truly a universal prayer, one which extends to the farthest horizons and tries to bring together all things in a symphony of Eucharistic praise. Anyone who would separate the *Canticle of Brother Sun* from this spiritual background cannot understand it for what it really is — a hymn of praise to Francis's "most high, all-powerful, good Lord." With supernatural fraternal love, the saint embraces all creatures — brothers and sisters in their common creator and their common brother Christ — in order to offer them to Him. Francis never feels himself to be brother so much as when he prays from this choral and cosmic perspective.

For him, creation is not an event in the distant past, but something ever-present, not only in human beings but even in the animals in whom God continues to work and make known His will. Taking this point of view, we can understand the meaning of the last phrase of the *Salutation of the Virtues* 14–18: "Holy obedience destroys every wish of the body and of the flesh, and binds its mortified body to obedience of the Spirit and to obedience of one's brother, and [the person who possesses her] is subject and submissive to all persons in the world, and not to man only, but even to all beasts and wild animals, so that they may do whatever they want with him, inasmuch as it has been given to them from above by the Lord."⁵⁷

10. The life of the Apostolate: Itinerant Preachers of the Word of God

The Franciscan apostolate is like the choice fruit of an entire life "according to the form of the holy Gospel," and so it is interwoven with all the attitudes mentioned thus far. By way of preface, we should note that owing to elements reflecting the religious and social conditions of the time, apostolic ministry during that period consisted mostly in preaching the word of God.

The early preaching was undoubtedly purely evangelical in nature.⁵⁸ Perhaps in no part of Francis's writings is this more evident than in

⁵⁷ Regarding the *Sitz im Leben* of this passage, the most realistic and perceptive notes are those of Lorenzo Casutt, O.F.M.Cap., *L'eredità di S. Francesco: Riesame della sua spiritualità* (Rome, 1952), pp. 227–29.

⁵⁸ See the bibliography on the Franciscan apostolate in Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 416–18; *BF*, vol. 13, nos. 819–30; R. Zeffass, *Der Streit um die Laienpredigt, Eine pastoralgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Verständnis des Predigtamtes und zu seiner Entwicklung im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, Basel and Vienna, 1974), passim. See *CF* 45 (1975): 140–41; C. Delcorno, "Origini della predicazione francescana," in "Francesco d'Assisi e francescanesimo dal 1216 al 1226," *Atti del IV convegno internazionale* (Assisi, 1977), pp. 125–60; J.F. Godet, O.F.M., "Le rôle de la prédication dans l'évolution de l'Ordre des Frères Mineurs d'après les écrits de saint François," in *FSien* 59 (1977): 53–64; M. Hubaut, "Comment saint François a-t-il conçu et vécu l'annonce du Saint Evangile?" in *Evangile aujourd'hui*, no. 100 (1978): 37–43.

Admonition XX, where Francis, imitating the Gospel Beatitudes, states: "Blessed is that religious who takes no pleasure and joy except in the most holy words and deeds of the Lord and with these leads people to the love of God in joy and gladness" (vv. 1-2). Thus Franciscan preaching is like a joyful overflow that comes from meditation on the Scriptures, and whose efficacy derives precisely from its sweet and joyous character. But it is only in the light of Francis's writings that other traits are revealed which fill out the ones mentioned in this *Admonition*.

In chapter seventeen of the *Earlier Rule*, which is also part of its most primitive section, we read this incisive phrase: "All the brothers, however, should preach by their deeds" (v. 3). The task of every lesser brother — one that cannot be compromised — is to live the Gospel to the full and in an exemplary manner before he proclaims it with his lips. What this assignment involves in Francis's mind is seen in the chapter on the missionary brothers. He envisions the first form of evangelization, which precedes that which is explicit, as one of spiritual example: "One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake (see 1 Pet. 2: 13) and to acknowledge that they are Christians" (v. 6). The ideal and the method of Franciscan minority are clearly apparent, namely, not to oppose error with arguments, but rather to "speak well and act well" (*RegNB XVII 19*; see Rom. 12: 21), and thus to overcome it, while at the same time professing one's own Christian faith.

Among the special qualities of Franciscan preaching of the word of God must be listed its auxiliary and itinerant character. Thus the *Later Rule* urgently states: "The brothers shall not preach in the diocese of any bishop when he has opposed their doing so" (IX 1). In the *Testament* 7, Francis says that he has freely bound himself to ask permission of pastors before preaching to their faithful, even if it should happen that the moral behavior of these priests is blameworthy.

With unaccustomed severity he forbids the brothers from having recourse to the Apostolic See to obtain privileges under the guise of preaching against the will of those bishops who opposed their auxiliary ministry (vv. 25-26). The idea of an itinerant apostolate was evidently inspired by the missionary discourse, to which is added the command "not to ride horses unless they are compelled by sickness or great necessity" (*RegNB XV 2*). Since the metaphor of "pilgrims and strangers" (*RegB VI 2*; *Test 24*) occurs in the context of poverty, it is admirably adapted to the characteristics of the early preaching.

Another typical quality that stands out is the universal scope of the Franciscan apostolate. It is indeed surprising that the Poverello as the founder of an order not only inserted in the *Rule* a chapter on "those who are going among the Saracens and other nonbelievers" (*RegNB*

XVI; see *RegB* XII 1–2), but also, though he called himself “ignorant and unlearned” (*EpOrd* 39), that he addressed himself in writing from apostolic motives to “all Christian religious: clergy and laity, men and women” (*2EpFid* 1). He proposes “to set before you in this present letter and message the words of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3). He begs all of his readers to receive and put into practice “these words and others of our Lord Jesus Christ with humility and love” (v. 87), to read them to those who are illiterate, indeed to learn them by heart, putting them into practice until the end, since they are “spirit and life” (see John 6: 64). His awareness of a religious mission is clearly evident. This would be a presumptuous encroachment were it not for his certainty that he is only proclaiming the life-giving word of God.

For some time scholars have pointed out how the earliest Franciscan preaching has the character of a penitential exhortation.⁵⁹ The elements mentioned above on the value of penance for the life “according to the form of the holy Gospel” have already demonstrated this. For further confirmation we need only refer to the example of “exhortation and praise,” which at that time all the brothers, regardless of their canonical status or degree of education, were allowed to give to the faithful. After an invitation to give praise to the Trinity, Francis suggests that his brothers admonish their hearers: “Do penance, performing worthy fruits of penance, since we shall soon die” (*RegNB* XXI 3). Then there typically follows the exhortation to be generous in relieving the needs of the poor, to forgive those who wrong you, and to confess your sins. There is also a reference to future rewards for those who die or do not die “in penance.” All of this is summarized in the urgent invitation: “Beware and abstain from every evil and persevere in good till the end” (v. 9).

It should be noted that this passage, which is also of great interest for an understanding of the charismatic attraction of Francis the preacher, is given the double name of “exhortation and praise.” One original element intended to help sinners turn “to the love of God” (*Adm* XXI) is the Poverello’s use of short prayers interspersed among

⁵⁹ Thus for example Gratien of Paris, O.F.M.Cap., *Histoire de la fondation et de l'évolution de l'Ordre des Frères Mineurs au XIII^e siècle* (Paris and Gembloux, 1928), p. 50: “... even to those religious especially designated and capable of exercising their ministry within the church, it was not the preaching of Scripture, i.e., of Theology, that was permitted, but only the preaching of penance. By this word ‘penance’, we must understand, to the exclusion of any dogmatic teaching, the great laws of Christian life, the observance of the commandments of God, forgiveness of injuries, restitution of unjustly acquired goods, extinguishing tensions and discords, the necessity of doing penance for the remission of sin, the fear and love of God, the Passion of Jesus Christ. From that time on, the term ‘penitential exhortation’ was ordinarily used to designate this unique kind of moral preaching that the laity were permitted to do.”

his exhortations to penance. He also gives examples of divine praises, perhaps at times composed and set to music expressly for preaching. We know this from biographical testimonies regarding the *Canticle of Brother Sun* (see LP 43). I think there are grounds for supposing the same thing for other prayers as well, such as the *Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*, in which according to the studies of Kajetan Esser, Francis probably made use of a preexisting text by an anonymous author, adding personal elements here and there.⁶⁰ Although I would hesitate to apply the technical name of *Lauda*⁶¹ to such examples of exhortation transformed into sung prayer, no one can deny the originality of their method and content. Prayer becomes preaching and preaching is transformed into a proclamation of divine praise, with the result that people are formed in the ways of prayer. In the light of this conclusion, the words of Admonition XX take on a well-defined meaning. Here the saint exhorts his followers to lead "people to the love of God in joy and gladness" (v. 2).

In this context must be situated the greeting of peace, based on Jesus' missionary discourse to the seventy-two disciples in Luke 10: 5: "Into whatever house you enter, first say: 'Peace be to this house.'" Francis extended this greeting personally to every person, family, or community he met, and he wished that it be always used among his brothers. In fact, in his *Testament* he says: "The Lord revealed to me a greeting, as we used to say: 'May the Lord give you peace'" (v. 23). The text from Luke occurs also in the *Rules* (*RegNB XIV 2; RegB III 13*). Elsewhere I have attempted to document the place of this form of pacifism in the mission of Francis and how it was of an exclusively religious nature.⁶²

In addition to the clear Gospel element implicit in the proclamation of penance and peace in the early days of the order, we must also mention the nature of the ecclesial mission to which Francis felt him-

⁶⁰ See Kajetan Esser, O.F.M., "Die dem hl. Franziskus von Assisi zugeschriebene 'Expositio in Pater noster'," in *Studien zu den Opuscula des hl. Franziskus von Assisi* (Rome, 1973), pp. 225-57. This study was first published in *CF* 40 (1970): 241-71.

⁶¹ Among other studies, see those of L. Cervelli, in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, s.v. "Lauda." See also A. Fortini, *La lauda in Assisi e le origini del teatro italiano* (Assisi, 1961). See also Mariano d'Alatri, O.F.M.Cap., in *CF* 32 (1962): 339-40; N. Bridgman, "Saint François d'Assise et la 'lauda' en Italie," in *Encyclopédie des musiques sacrées*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1969), pp. 308-13.

⁶² O. Schmucki, O.F.M.Cap., "San Francesco d'Assisi, messaggero di pace nel suo tempo," in Mastroianni and Matanic, *San Francesco d'Assisi, pacificatore e missionario*, Studi scelti di francescanesimo, 5 (Naples, 1976), pp. 3-24; or in *Studi e Ricerche Francescane* 5 (1976): 211-32. Further bibliography is given in Schlauri, "Saint François et la Bible," pp. 415-16; *BF*, vol. 13, nos. 801-8; Lothar Hardick, O.F.M., "Als Gruss, so hat mir der Herr geoffenbart, sollten wir sagen: 'Der Herr gebe dir den Frieden,'" in *FSien* 60 (1978): 328-35. See also n. 41 above.

self called. The chapter of the *Earlier Rule* dealing with preaching opens with the unequivocal command: "No brother should preach contrary to the form and regulations of the holy church unless he has been permitted by his minister" (XVII 1). In this statement, expressed with juridic precision, we see the mind of a canonical expert, perhaps even of the Roman curia, which by these words meant to guarantee the complete orthodoxy and the necessary preparation on the part of those who were to preach the word of God. On the other hand, what follows is more directly connected with the Franciscan charism. As I have shown above (see Part 6), Francis, for reasons of spiritual poverty, insisted that such canonical permission should never be given to a brother once and for all. He was afraid that an office of such great prestige, if granted permanently and especially if it met with success, could be a danger to the preachers's minority.

The juridic prescriptions are further reinforced in the *Later Rule*. Having emphasized the necessity of receiving the bishop's permission to preach within his diocese, it goes on: "And none of the brothers shall dare to preach to the people unless he has been examined and approved by the minister general of this fraternity and has received from him the office of preaching" (IX 2). This is not the place to review all the serious practical problems that were exacerbated by this legislation. No doubt we are in the presence of a second stage of evolution in which exhortations to penance, which could be given by all, had become the exclusive prerogative of clerics who possessed sufficient theological preparation.

Nevertheless, Francis tried to preserve in his order the penitential inspiration of its beginnings. After all, Jacques de Vitry was to call the Friars Minor "the true men of the crucified One and also an order of preachers."⁶³ In the same chapter of the *Later Rule* IX 3, not only does Francis ask that the preachers' language be marked by discretion and self-control for the edification of the people, but he also desires that they speak to the faithful "of vices and virtues, punishment and glory," that is, purely moral subjects with a clearly eschatological thrust. This command is connected with the model passage of "praise and exhortation" given in the *Earlier Rule* and with the command for a "discourse that is brief."

I have already referred to a passage of the chapter regarding "those who are going among the Saracens and other nonbelievers." Missionary activity is certainly an original and typical element of the Franciscan ministry (see *RegNB* XVI; *RegB* XII 1-2). It is clear from the *Later Rule* that Francis considered the mission among unbelievers a special vocation: "Those brothers who, by divine inspiration, desire to go among the

⁶³ *Historia occidentalis*, 1, II, c. 32, no. 3.

Saracens and other nonbelievers..." (v. 1). As an aside, it should be recalled, contrary to the "meta-historical" attempt of Father Giulio Basetti-Sani, O.F.M.,⁶⁴ that in both *Rules Francis*, like all his contemporaries, believed beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Saracens as nonbelievers were on the same level as pagans.

In both *Rules* the Poverello reserves to the minister provincial the right to examine the genuineness of this special vocation, as well as the worthiness of the candidate for the missions. In the *Earlier Rule* there is the significant directive that if the minister should determine with certainty the signs of a special vocation, he is no longer free, but must send the brother to the missions: "...for he shall be bound to give an account to the Lord if he has proceeded without discretion in this or in other matters" (XVI 4).

Any brother sent to the missions can realistically foresee the possibility of death as a martyr for the Christian Faith — in fact he ardently desires it. The Scripture text that introduces the chapter makes this clear to him: "Behold I am sending you as lambs in the midst of wolves" (XVI 1; see Matt. 10: 16). But there are even more explicit references: "And all the brothers, wherever they may be, should remember that they gave themselves and abandoned their bodies to the Lord Jesus Christ. And for love of Him, they must make themselves vulnerable to their enemies, both visible and invisible" (vv. 10–11). The legislator's tone become even more urgent with a series of texts taken from Matthew, Luke and John, which speak of losing one's life for the sake of Christ; of the blessedness of those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice and of the various forms of suffering undergone for the sake of Christ; of not fearing those who kill the body; of the salvation promised to those who are patient and persevere to the end (vv. 11–20). Some of the themes in this instruction given to the missionary brothers in view of their possible martyrdom occur again in the *Later Rule* (X 10–11).

Regarding missionary methods, the *Earlier Rule* alone furnishes a number of elements, which, seen against the background of the Crusades, are extraordinarily avant-garde. I have mentioned earlier the first form of spiritual presence — to live and profess one's Christian faith, carefully avoiding disputes. With the citation of 1 Peter 2: 13,

⁶⁴ Among his many studies in which he puts forth this unfounded thesis, see for example *Per un dialogo cristiano-musulmano*, Mohammed, Damietta e La Verna (Milan, 1969). See *BF*, vol. 13, no. 828, where several other studies by the same author are listed. For the missionary apostolate of Francis, see *BF*, vol. 13, no. 823–27. See my study *Das Leiden Christi*, pp. 365–79, cited in n. 30 above. See also A. Matanic, "Del viaggio di san Francesco in Oriente," in Schmucki and Mastroianni, *San Francesco d'Assisi pacificatore*, pp. 35–50, cited in n. 62 above; or in *Studi Ric. Franc.* 5 (1976): 243–58.

Francis exhorts the missionary brothers above all to live their vocation as lesser ones to the full (*RegNB XVI 6*).

From this indirect and essential witness, the missionaries will be able to move on to direct evangelization only "when they see that it pleases the Lord," that is, after they have carefully ascertained the opportuneness of making the word of God known to the "Saracens and other nonbelievers." Although he never speaks in these terms, Francis wishes to teach his followers how to read the will of God by deciphering the signs of the times (see Matt. 16: 3). Without pretending to be exhaustive, but with clear simplicity and a surprising sense of the essential, the Poverello indicates the topics of their proclamation: the mystery of the Trinity, God the Creator of all things, Christ the Redeemer and Savior, and the necessity for being born again of water and the Holy Spirit in order to be saved (v. 7).

"They can say to [the Saracens] and to others these and other things which will have pleased the Lord...." He exhorts them to consider the eternal reward promised by Jesus to those who acknowledge Him before others (v. 8; see Matt. 10: 32). Francis's missionary message, if compared with the ideas current at the time, is shown to be filled with that Gospel wisdom which the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, has been pleased to reveal to the little ones (see Matt. 11: 25).

I would not be able to conclude this attempt to reconstruct the main lines of Francis's life according to the form of the holy Gospel without quoting an important text that expresses the entire substance of his message: "And when we see or hear an evil [person] speak or act or blaspheme God, let us speak well and act well and praise God (see Rom. 12: 21), Who is blessed forever" (*RegNB XVII 19*; see Rom. 1: 25).