# The Story of the True Joy: An Autobiographical Reading

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# The Writings of Saint Francis

#### A

The same Brother Leonard narrated that one day at Saint Mary's, blessed Francis called Brother Leo and said: "Brother Leo, write." He responded: "Look, I'm ready!" "Write," he said, "what true joy is."

- (a) "A messenger arrives and says that all the Masters of Paris have entered the Order. Write: "this isn't true joy!"
- (b) Or, all the prelates, archbishops and bishops beyond the mountains,

- (c) as well as the King of France and the King of England [have entered the Order]. Write: this isn't true joy!
- (d) Again, my brothers have gone to the non-believers and converted all of them to the faith;

# Actus, Chapter 7. Saint Francis Teaches Brother Leo That Perfect Joy Is In The Cross

#### A.

On one day in winter Saint Francis was going from Perugia to Saint Mary of the Angels. Brother Leo was with him and they were suffering very acutely from the cold. Saint Francis called to Brother Leo who was walking a short distance in front of him.

- (a) "Brother Leo," he said, "although in every area the Friars Minor give great example of sanctity, honesty and edification, nevertheless write, that is, diligently note that perfect joy does not consist in this."
- (b) Then after he walked a little farther, he called to him again: "O Brother Leo, even if a Friar Minor should give sight to the blind, straighten crooked limbs, cast out demons, give hearing to the deaf, movement to the halt, speech to the dumb, and, what is more, life to one dead for four days, write that this is not perfect joy."
- (c) And calling again he said: "O Brother Leo, if a Friar Minor knew the languages of all peoples, all knowledge and all Scriptures, so that he could prophesy and reveal not only the future but also the consciences of others, write that this is not perfect joy."
- (d) And while they were walking he called again: "O Brother Leo, little lamb of God, even if a Friar Minor

(e) or, I have so much grace from God that I heal the sick and perform many miracles. I tell you true joy doesn't consist in any of these things."

B.

"Then what is true joy?" "I return from Perugia and arrive here in the dead of night. It's winter time, muddy and so cold that icicles have formed on the edges of my habit and keep striking my legs and blood flows from such wounds. All covered with mud and cold, I come to the gate and, after I've knocked and called for some time,

a brother comes and asks: 'Who are you?' 'Brother Francis,' I answer. 'Go away!' he says. 'This is not a decent hour for going about! You may not come in!'

When I insist, he replies: 'Go away! You are a simple and stupid person! Don't come back to us again! There are so many of us here and such that we have no need of you!'

spoke with the tongue of an angel, and knew the courses of the stars and the powers of herbs, and knew the locations of the earth's treasure, if he knew the worth and properties of bird and fish, of animals, men, roots, trees, stones and waters, write down and diligently note that perfect joy is not there."

(e) And after a little while he cried out again: "O Brother Leo, even if a Friar Minor knew how to preach so well that he could convert all infidels to the faith, write that this is not perfect joy."

B.

This type of talking went on for about two miles. Brother Leo, however, was in admiration about all this and said: "Father, I ask you in God's name to tell me where will I find perfect joy?" Francis answered: "When we arrive at St. Mary of the Angels so drenched by the rain and frozen by the cold, spattered with mud and suffering from hunger, and we knock on the door of the place

and the porter came and angrily said: 'Who are you?' And we said: 'We are two of your brothers'; and he said in return: You are, in fact, coarse fellows who go about the world stealing alms from the poor;' and he will not let us enter but keeps us standing in snow and water, in cold and hunger until it is night, and then if we patiently endure such insults and rebuffs without being disturbed or murmuring, and humbly and charitably feel that even this porter knows us for what we are and that God loosened his tongue against us, O Brother Leo, write that this is perfect joy.

And if we persevere in knocking, and the porter, disturbed at our importunity, comes out and attacks us with very hard blows and says: Leave here, you worthless idlers, and go to an inn! Who do you think

I stand again at the door and say: 'Out of love of God, take me in tonight!' And he replies: I will not! Go to the Crosiers's place and ask there!'

I tell you this: If I had patience and did not become upset, true joy, as well as true virtue and the salvation of the soul, would consist in this." you are? You certainly are not going to eat here! And if we bear these things patiently and with love accept the insults wholeheartedly, O Brother Leo, write that this is perfect joy.

And if thoroughly suffering from great hunger and painful cold as night comes on we continue to knock and call out and tearfully cry out for admittance, and the aroused porter says: "These men are very impudent and bold, and I will quiet them!" Then coming out with a knotty club and grabbing us by the capuche, he throws us to the ground in mud and snow, and so beats us with the club that we are filled with wounds on all sides.

And if we endure so many evil, so many insults and blows with joy, thinking that we ought to bear and endure most patiently these pains of the blessed Christ, O Brother Leo, among all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which Christ gives to his friends is to conquer oneself and willingly endure abuse for Christ and for the love of God. For in all the wonderful things mentioned above we can not glory, because they are not ours but God's: Name something you have that you have not received, If, then, you have received it, why are you boasting as if it were your own? But we can boast in the cross of tribulation and affliction, because that is our own. Therefore, the Apostle says: May I never boast of anything but the Cross of our Lord," to whom be praise forever.

One of the best-known stories from the *Fioretti* is the story about perfect joy (chapter 8, or *Actus*, chapter 7). Until recent times an unanswerable question remained: To what extent did this story trace itself back to the historical Francis himself? And to what extent did legend play a part in its formation? However, as sudden fortune would have it, an older version of the story was uncovered, which, according to the document itself, traced itself back to Brother Leonard directly, one of the constant companions of Francis after returning from the Middle East. One finds all the givens of a critical examination of this

older version with Kajetan Esser. As a result of his examination, Esser believes that we have here a typical example of a dictation. As such, he has given it its own place alongside the other writings of Francis.

The discovery of this older version of the story is certainly enriching, because we can now in fact compare the two versions with each other. In the process of comparing them, one can perhaps discover some laws pertaining to legend-formation. Here and there in our study we will in passing point to such laws. However, our main concern will be to compare the two versions against each other with another intention in mind. It is commonly agreed that a story becomes ever more disengaged from its historical setting from which it takes its origin and out of which it grows. This can happen for a variety of reasons. However, in every case, the fact that attention is directed primarily to the meaning of the story plays an important role. The meaning captures the attention, and the details accommodate themselves to it. Concretely, this can mean that one begins to adapt certain details of the story when such details as a result of changed circumstances are no longer understandable, or, at least, begin to say very little to its new listeners. Thus in the story's evolution certain details no longer function, and are easily replaced by others which are more capable of elucidating its principal meaning to its new hearers. In this way a story in taking on legendary details becomes freer from the historical roots from which it has grown.

For the historian this is an important given, especially if he has at his disposal the old and the new version of a story to compare. He must direct his attention primarily to the change in details, and, in conjunction with this, constantly pose certain questions: Is this not an adaptation to the situation of the new hearer? Were the old details no longer understandable to the new listener? Why not? What has changed historically? In treating such questions, he can perhaps succeed in hearing the story as the old listener heard it. He is then able to give back to the old details of the story their original power of expression. He can again better place the story within its original historical setting out of which it has arisen. This is now our main purpose as we compare the story from the Actus with the older version. Which details have changed? Is there an adaptation? What is the reason for such an adaptation? Accordingly we hope to discover the details of the original story which would at the same time reveal that story's true historical roots.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Kajetan Esser, Opuscula des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi, Neue textkritische Edition (Coll. S. Bon. Rome, 1976), pp. 459-61. See Archivum Franciscanum Historicum 20 (1927): 107. See also Jacques Campbell, O.F.M., I Fiori dei tre compagni (Milan, 1967), pp. 370-72. Already in 1926, P. Benvenuto made an Italian translation of it in his I Fioreti (Florence, 1926), p. 48.

We wish to clarify our method still further. One can say generally that every writer always writes autobiography at least to the extent that he writes down his ideas. But an idea is never born in a vacuum. An idea is a reaction to one's own particular life experience. It always has a Sitz im Leben, which is ultimately the writer himself. Moreover, the writer will usually betray his Sitz im Leben as well, at least before a good listener who knows about his life. One must therefore listen to the story almost as a psychotherapist. Elements of a story exist in the first place naturally in function of the primary meaning of the story. However, along with this, one can ask: Why is this particular example used at this point? Why is this particular expression or that word used? All this is not accidental. In the choice of words and expressions, in the selection of examples, one can always hear more than the main idea. In these the writer reveals, often unconsciously, the roots which the idea has in his own life.

Our intention is, therefore, also to read the story of the true joy as an autobiographical story. Does Francis not reveal in the details of the story the Sitz im Leben, the situation of his own life? Does the story not contain significant words and examples by means of which one can understand more than the main idea? These words and examples constitute details which are not accidental. They communicate much. But which details are they? Are they not the later adapted details? Have not the details been adapted because one no longer understood them in their true significance, that is, in their historical reference to the author and his life?

It is here in our opinion where the most chances exist to find connecting points with Francis's life for the one who listens with at least a double ear: not only with the ear of the ordinary hearer who listens to the sense of the main idea of the story, but also, at the same time, with the ear of the historian who listens to the historical roots of the story and to the autobiography which resonates throughout it.

### The Primary Meaning of the Story

We must make a distinction between the primary meaning of a story and its historical roots. For the sake of completeness, therefore, we want also, in comparing the two versions, to say something in short about the primary meaning of the story. We may confidently say that both versions have the same sense or the same principal meaning. (From here on, we shall designate the oldest version as Version 1, and the version from the *Actus* as Version 2.) Both are clearly structured in function of practically identical key sentences:

version 1: If I had patience and did not become upset,

version 2: if we endure patiently... without being upset and without complaining...

Firstly, a false or imperfect form of joy is described, a form, however, which man would spontaneously consider true and perfect, namely, success — and especially sensational success. This sensationalism is an important element in the story. It lies completely in the line of gloriari (to boast or glory in), an important word from the Admonitions of Francis. In opposition to sensational success there is a situation sketched in which man is misjudged by his fellow man — the opposite of success, recognition and glory. This misjudgment is described to the extreme. Every form of glory in the eyes of people is entirely undermined. This situation is now the touchstone. In reaction to such an extreme situation of misjudgment, one must lay himself open to it. Amid such misjudgment, if he can still preserve his heart from being disturbed, then that is a proof that he has not lost himself in the outside world, that is, in the eyes of his fellow men. This is the proof that he bears in himself an invulnerable core.

What this invulnerable core is, is not directly expressed in the story. Yet we can easily locate it in the *Admonitions*, especially in *Admonition* XIX:

Blessed is the servant who does not consider himself any better when he is praised and exalted by people than when he is considered worthless, simple and despised, for what a person is before God that he is and no more.

Even in the face of severe misunderstanding he knows that he is still understood by God. He no longer invests his feelings of worth in the value of judgments of people but in the value-judgment of God. This makes the human person vulnerable; and, as a result, even extreme misunderstanding cannot effectively touch him.

The story of the true or perfect joy has as its basis most of the Admonitions. These are almost all built abound the words gloriari (to boast), patientia (patience), ira (anger), perturbatio (disturbance). Anger, impatience and agitation Francis sees as symptoms of glory, appropriation, and possession, in other words, surrendering oneself to the outside world. Hence the outside world can disturbingly pierce one's innermost self. On the contrary, however, the person who does not involve himself in such emotions, but preserves his patience, is truly poor and surrenders himself exclusively to God. This last statement is stronger in Version 1, especially in the last two words vera virtus (true virtue) and salus animae (salvation of the soul). Here the soul of the person, the human core itself, safe and untouchable, is invulnerable. Here is man saved, redeemed, healed.

## The Autobiographical Reading

1. The Comparison of Version 1 with Version 2

We think that Francis also reveals many autobiographical elements in certain details of the story. As intended, we shall compare Version 1 with Version 2 to illustrate this claim. Both stories differ rather remarkably in significant details, that is, historical-biographical details which under the influence of legend-formation have been relinquished, changed or adapted. By comparing both stories, certain differences are noticeable.

a) The first noteworthy difference is the epithet which is used with joy. Francis always speaks of "true" joy, while the *Actus* always talks about "perfect" joy.<sup>2</sup> This is not an unimportant difference, because "true" and "perfect" are not without their synonyms. The word "true" very strongly suggests its opposite: "false".

Moreover, it is an exclusive opposite; the one completely excludes the other. However, this is not the case with the word "perfect". It evokes less strongly its opposite "imperfect", and does not completely exclude it. Imperfect—perfect is rather seen as a gradation. The perfect is not a complete rejection of the less perfect. Therefore, this difference of epithet is important, since it gives a certain coloration especially to the first part of the narrative. This means that in Version 1 all the described forms of joy are "false" forms, and thus completely rejected. On the contrary, in Version 2 the described forms of joy in the first part appear to be less than entirely rejected. The coloration they receive is that of being less than perfect. Why then did the later storyteller prefer to use the opposition "perfect—imperfect"? At this point we can say but little. It will perhaps become clearer after further analysis.

b) Furthermore, we wish to call attention to the illogical beginning of Version 2. While Francis and Leo are walking, it is Francis's wish, nevertheless, that Leo write. This is impossible. Such an illogical beginning once more betrays the older version which lies behind the story. Despite the evolution in the story, an earlier step is still visible here. It is obvious that in legend-formation, a story, in being constantly retold, becomes more and more "story". Colorful elements increase. And one such important colorful element is action. The old version, which is built upon a supposition, is now completely translated into action. But it does not fully succeed here. The new layer is still not completely free, and in the word "scribe" an element of the old layer is visible through the new.

This inclination to action has had, moreover, results for the further formation of the story, especially in the second part. Part two of Version 1 is written in the first person solely around the person of Francis. However, moving away from the original supposition, there are now

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Esser, in *Opuscula*, p. 461, uses the title *De vera et perfecta laetitia* (Concerning true and perfect joy). This appears to be inconsistent because of the fact that Francis himself always speaks exclusively about *vera laetitia* (true joy). Esser seems to iron over the difference between Version 1 and the *Actus*.

two persons on the journey. Because of this, the narrator found it necessary to change the conversation at the door. Concerning the question: "Who are you?" Francis answers in Version 1 with his own name. This typical personal feature is lost in Version 2. Here Francis answers: "We are two of your own brothers." The reaction of the porter in Version 1 is likewise personally directed to Francis himself. Francis is personally misjudged. He is "unus simplex et idiota (one who is simple and unlearned)." This directly personal element disappears in Version 2. There the porter renders no personal reproach. He merely refuses to acknowledge the two of them as his fellow brothers. It is a reproach that could be leveled against either of the bothers. In Version 1, however, it is a reproach which Francis alone can suffer. Francis is recognized here, and the misjudgment applies personally to him alone. He is merely a simple and uneducated person. This reproach is perhaps less conspicuous now that Leo is present.

However, in our opinion, this is not the main reason why the narrator has reformulated the entire word-exchange in Version 2. It appears all the more probable that he (and his new listeners) no longer realized the implication of the reproach "unus simplex et idiota." Therefore, he searched for a more understandable remark that would equally sustain the drama for his hearers. He makes the reproach more general, so that it can be leveled against either of the fellow brothers. Nevertheless, by doing this, he deprives the story of much of its poignancy; the personal touch is lost.

Are we not in the presence of an important autobiographical detail? Does the personal reproach of the doorkeeper not have roots in Francis's own life? For the expression "simplex et idiota" appears elsewhere in his life with a very specific Sitz im Leben. Later we shall examine this more closely.

c) A very important difference between Version 1 and Version 2 is the makeup of the first part. It is surprising that the Actus borrows from Version 1 only one of the forms of false (or imperfect) joy. To understand fully the import of this we must first say something about the formation of part one of Version 1. The examples of false joy which Francis gives form no unity. There is a difference between the first four examples and the last. The first four examples are all instances of the expansion of the order, which is not so much geographic as social. It is an expansion into the higher circles of the university, clergy, and political arena. The fourth example is an instance of transition. Yet the weight still lies on the expansion, that is, the geographic expansion into the pagan world. At the same time, however, it requires a personal quality or gift which is to some extent alluded to here. The last example is further worked out in the direction of personal qualities, talents, or gifts.

It is surprising that the *Actus* chooses its examples only in the last direction, examples therefore of great personal qualities or gifts. All the other instances concerning the expansion of the order disappear. Even the example about the conversion of the pagans is told exclusively in function of personal quality, with the addition of the word *solemniter* (solemnly). The quality of preaching stands now in the forefront, while Version 1 says nothing about it.

In summary, we can say that the emphasis in Version 1 deals with the expansion of the order as a false avenue to joy, while the *Actus* speaks exclusively about personal qualities, talents and gifts as an imperfect road to joy.

Why the difference? We wish to explain it as an adaptation. The origin of the *Actus* is much later, that is, during the time when the expansion of the order was already a fact of life, and, accordingly, no longer felt to be a possible reason for joy. In thinking about such names as Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure, the social expansion into higher circles sounded then not to be so uncommon or extraordinary, and certainly no longer "false" in one's eyes. Thus, the narrator has reworked only the last example in a strongly dramatic and colorful way. In this he has been helped by *Admonition* 

V. At the close of Version 2, the storyteller presents us with the theological interpretation of the story. This interpretation is clearly inspired by Admonition V.<sup>3</sup> And that directly concerns the principal meaning of the story. Admonition V also mentions different forms of false joy or false glory which lie on the level of personal qualities or gifts. The narrator of Version 2 borrows these examples from there.

### Admonition V

all knowledge every kind of language to scrutinize heavenly matters

[and] those of earth

#### Version 2

all knowledge the languages of all peoples the courses of the stars the angelic language the powers of herbs

The storyteller of Version 2 omits every example about the expansion, and completely works out part one from the last example of Version 1, while at the same time taking as his inspiration Admonition V. Because of this, part one gains an internal unity. Yet at the same time, much is also lost to the reader. If the author of Version 2 no longer experienced very strongly the expansion of the order, does this not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that the title of Actus 7 is different from that of Fioretti 8. In the title of the Actus one reads an already theological interpretation of the story: De magisterio sancti Francisci ad fratrem Leonem quod in sola cruce est perfecta laetitia (Concerning the teaching of Saint Francis to Brother Leo that perfect joy is only found in the cross). Does this already betray the fact that the Actus is a further evolution than the Fioretti?

point to the fact that Version 1 has originated in a time when the expansion of the order was indeed strongly felt, not only by its listeners at that time but also especially by Francis himself? In choosing these examples, it seems to us that Francis chooses examples which are significant and which have their roots in a very concrete Sitz im Leben in his life. It is not accidental, therefore, that these examples come to the surface. The non-accidental character of such examples deserves closer investigation.

## 2. The Expansion of the Order of Friars Minor

David Flood describes the expansion of the order in his article "Franziskus und sein Orden im 13. Jahrhundert." He points, in the first place, to the increase in numbers of the friars (in 1221 already 3,000?) and, in the second place, to its social expansion into higher circles. This expansion is a complex fact. And behind this fact, many factors converge which reciprocally influence one another. Although the question of number constituted an important factor in the evolution of the order. Flood devotes little attention to it. When you are suddenly faced with many, you must begin to organize. Thus, an institution is born. And ordinarily, number and organization create a social power without anyone actually willing it consciously. It was especially this last factor, that is, a development into an organized social power, that struck a sensitive chord in Francis. Given such a development, he saw his original purpose severely threatened. This sensitive chord was not, in our opinion, so much poverty as minority. He wished intentionally that his brothers be called "minor", inspired by the Gospel texts of Matthew 20: 25–26 and Luke 22: 26 (see the Earlier Rule V 90–12). Bonaventure also said it very clearly: "For this reason Francis, the model of humility, wanted his brothers to be called Minor and the superiors of his Order to be called ministers, in order to use the very words of the Gospel(...): Whoever wishes to become great among you, let him be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you, will be your slave."5

Again, Francis's answer to Cardinal Hugolino, when the prelate wished that the friars accept important functions in the church, is highly significant: "Lord, my brothers are called Minors so that they will not presume to become great men."

Hence minority also had a clearly social meaning for Francis. He wanted his brothers always to remain *minor* in the social sense of the word, possessing no social power, for this was his original idea of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Wissenschaft und Weisheit 40 (1977): 204-9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> LMaior VI 5. See also 2Cel 148.

<sup>6</sup> Thid

place of his brothers in society. Chapter seven of the Earlier Rule is explicit on this point. The brothers may not exercise any office through which they would stand above others socially: "They may not be in charge (!)... Let them, instead, be the lesser ones and be subject to all in the same house." This last expression (inspired by 1 Peter 2: 13) was very much loved by Francis, and he understood it literally in the social sense of the word. This was for him a central given because, precisely in this, he wished that he and his order would be a protest against the mentality which dominated and divided a city like Assisi and society as a whole, namely, the struggle and effort to belong to the maiores, the top echelons of society. Minority in its social context belonged to the kernel of the original thinking of Francis. And it was precisely this dimension of minority that became threatened with the expansion of the order. In a word, one can say that the very weak spot of Francis's order became her success.

The numerical expansion of the order was seen as a threat to its original ideal, as we read in the Legend of Perugia 75. The observation of one of the brothers is noteworthy. He describes the earlier situation, the simplicity and poverty of former times, and then says: "Now [nunc], for some time this purity and perfection are beginning to change for the worse, and the brothers excuse themselves by saying that numbers run contrary to observance." The opposition between olim (once) and nunc (now) is significant. The friars are well aware of an evolution in the order.

Because the order was now greatly expanding, persons in the higher and more intellectual circles found it more attractive. More possibilities arose for them to utilize their talents, capabilities, and the assets of their formation in and by means of the large group. And with this amalgamation of talent and expertise, the social influence of the order increased. Above all, these men were directly formed to assume functions in society. They wished to make their formation something which would benefit them in society. Given this state of affairs, they perceived the order as functioning more directly in the society at all levels, including leading functions in the university and the church, for which in fact they were formed. Thus, almost unnoticed, the order became a powerful social institution, even though this was not directly intended. It is symptomatic, for example, that Cardinal Hugolino asked Francis whether he could bestow ecclesial offices on competent friars. One must not construe this as being maliciously intended, as much as being merely a misunderstanding. From her own standpoint, the church saw these capable persons gathered around her as useful within her struc-

Furthermore, the following has to be considered. In Francis's original intentions, the kerygma shared an important place. And the an-

nouncement of the kerygma constituted the general mandate of the church exercised through ecclesial office. Thus, given Francis's intention, there existed from the very beginning a certain openness to ecclesial office, since kerygmatic preaching comprised part of its typical mandate. The Fourth Lateran Council declared preaching to be strictly bound to the office of priesthood. Moreover, there was in the church an evolution in progress. Under Innocent III there existed a greater acceptance of the new developments of itinerant preaching and mendicant movements. Thanks to this openness, Francis was able to express more widely his charism within the church. Very slowly this movement found more room within the church's structure. Thus it is not difficult to comprehend the request of Hugolino. From each side, therefore, there existed at least an openness to accommodate itself to the other in what concerned offices and responsibilities. This evolution reached its conclusion in 1240 under Haymo of Faversham, who completely clericalized the order and established its pastoral outreach into the city.

Hence, inconspicuously, the Friars Minor, by means of such an evolution, began to belong to the *maiores*, and gradually coalesced into a social power, first and foremost because of their numbers; furthermore, through the gathering of experts into her womb; and finally by her ever-increasing acceptance of social and ecclesiastical functions. It is not as though this were an insignificant life-style; it is just that Francis had not expected his brothers to be in such social places. This was not the manner in which he wanted to be present in the church and in society. The church had need of leaders among her ranks, but she also had need for the charism of *minoritas*. Yet it was this *minoritas* that

Francis gradually saw disappear.

David Flood writes a significant sentence at the close of his article: "From now on, therefore, a good Franciscan is in two senses banned': in that he shares in the general conditio humana and, even more, he has been cast out of the newly blossoming Paradise of the beginning of time." Is this experience of exile and alienation not the underlying meaning of the story of the true joy? There Francis does not describe his exile and alienation in the way stated above, but in its reverse. He was not excluded from the time of the order's beginnings. On the contrary, because he held fast to this time, he became "excluded from the order." Francis, founder of the Order of Friars Minor, was no longer admitted into the house where it was founded. He was excluded from the place where he had in the beginning completely understood his ideal, from the place where he founded his order, the dearest and warmest abode for him in the world. What could have been more

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> David Flood, O.F.M., "Franziskus und sein Orden," p. 209.

painful, more ironic? What a most tragic and dramatic moment in the story! What a most tragic moment especially in the life of Francis himself! It is here that his hidden feelings are exposed in connection with the new development of the order. He felt himself excluded in connection with the new development of the order. He felt himself excluded, alienated, exiled, and ostracized from his own order. He was no longer at home in the order. Around him it had become cold, ice cold. He felt chilled to the bone. For he was refused admittance to his home and his ideal. There was no longer any place where he could warm himself, where he could satisfy his hunger. And it was in this situation that he experienced the most extreme form of poverty. This is the Sitz im Leben of the story of the true joy. Out of a fundamental misunder-standing on the part of his own friars, the story grew up.

# 3. Unus simplex et idiota (One who is simple and unlearned)

We have pointed to some indications in Version 1 which warrant that we place the story back into the historical period of the expansion of the order. The clearest indication of this is the personal reproach of Brother Porter: "Tu es unus simplex et idiota." It is an expression which Francis, in this period, attributed regularly to himself. The remark of the doorkeeper actually epitomized Francis's feeling about the order at that moment. In these words Francis expressed his feelings of powerlessness. The new development which gripped the order was so expansive and so complex an event that it completely escaped him. He had no clear overview of the entire development. And above all, he stood before a large group of intellectuals, that is, the well-educated who were spoken well of, and who could engage in convoluted reasoning which Francis was unable to do. In the face of this, Francis felt simple and uneducated, and experienced feelings of powerlessness: "Why, O Lord, have you placed this burden on me? Why have you made a simple, unlettered, despicable creature like me head of this Order?"8

Thus it was not merely because of his health that Francis resigned his office as minister general. Whatever the case may have been, a very beautiful testimony from Second Celano is enlightening in this respect. Francis talks about the true Friar Minor, and narrates a fictitious example (but is it so fictitious?) about his fellow friars who no longer wanted him as minister general after his speech at the chapter. For they accused him of being: "An unlettered and contemptible person is not suitable for us; therefore we do not want you to rule over us,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Bonaventure, "Sermo quarto de S. Francesco," Opera Omnia, vol. 9, (Quaracchi: ad Claras Aquas), p. 589a. Translation is that of Eric Doyle, The Disciple and the Master: St. Bonaventure's Sermons on St. Francis of Assisi (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 91

because you have no eloquence, you are simple and unlettered." It is indeed no accident that this is the same expression that appears in the story of the true joy. Furthermore, it is surprising how this short story in Second Celano runs completely parallel to the story of the true joy with respect to construction, situation and meaning.

First of all, concerning the structure, there exists the same opposition between, on the one hand, success (being educated and spoken well of), and, on the other hand, misjudgment (a simple and uneducated man who can be no longer superior). And the situation is likewise the same. Here Francis is disowned by his own friars for the same reasons that we find in the story of the true joy, namely, because he is but a simple and uneducated man. Moreover, this reproach is used to indicate that the order now found itself on a different level than Francis. "An unlettered and contemptible person is not suitable for us." The order, in other words, had arisen to such a social level that a chasm now existed between it and the simple and uneducated Poverello. This same "level-difference" is also found in the story of the true joy. After Francis's plea to be allowed to enter, the porter says: "Sumus tot et tales quod non indigemus te (There are so many of us here and such that we have no need of you)." Finally in Second Celano everything is concentrated upon the meaning of this test situation. That is, in his reaction to total misunderstanding, a man reveals his true self. Here again, the preservation of joy is the decisive symptom. "I say to you, unless I listen to these words with the same face, with the same joy, with the same purpose of sanctity, I am in no way a Friar Minor." In other words, whoever loses his joy shows that he is not a true Friar Minor; still more strongly, that he is not a Friar Minor.

Thus we dare state that we stand here before a first draft of the story of the true joy, taking into consideration the same construction, the same or similar words, an almost identical situation, and the same meaning: the joy as the criterion of authenticity. Now it is of special interest to us that this story from Second Celano clearly bears evidence of its Sitz im Leben, that is, how Francis was confronted with the fact that an intellectual group began to lodge their demands ever more loudly, and how he stood helpless against it, while gradually becoming less the leader and father of the order. This must have been for him a penetrating experience, so penetrating that he later described it again, not only more extensively, but also in a more veiled way in the story of the true joy. He wanted to pass his own experience on to his brothers; but, at the same time, he concealed it behind a less recognizable

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>2Cel 145. See also LP 83.

supposition. It is fortunate for us that these autobiographical traces can still be recovered in the redacted story.

Given this new situation, Francis had to find himself in a new position within his own order. He had to try to establish himself within the new evolution. Thus, where did he situate himself and how did he view his new position? The Legend of Perugia 76 discloses a clear indication. In reacting to the brother who discussed with him these changed circumstances, he finally stated very clearly what his new place in the order would be: "Nevertheless, until the day of my death, I will continue to teach my brothers by my example and my life how to walk the road that the Lord showed me and which I in turn showed them, so that they may have no excuse before the Lord..."

Regarding the text, we wish to underline two things. First and foremost, that he remained steadfast to his original call to a personal charism ("...the Lord showed me"). Next, that he wished to remain steadfast in passing on this vocation to his brothers, but now by means of his example and his life. According to our opinion, this serves as an important text to situate and understand the later Testament. Francis indicated his new place in the order by way of example. Therefore, his Testament is completely written in the first person and reveals the story of his life. This was the most precious thing that he could bestow on his brothers, namely, his life and personal charism in the manner which the Lord showed him: "no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me..." With these words the story of the order also begins. He attaches much importance to the beginning of the order, and wants to preserve it as an example. This beginning, in which minoritas was still truly valid, is preserved as a kind of mirror for his fellow friars. And the accent is laid on minoritas: "And we were simple and subject to all." If all of the above is true — that verses 14 to 23 may be read as a remembrance of the Earlier Rule - then this excerpt retains special significance.11 Minority belonged to the first life-style.

From the early period, a testimony of Brother Aegidius can furthermore give us a better idea of the significance that the word *idiota* had for Francis. From the very beginning he wished to send his brothers out, because they have, according to him, a mission with regard to the salvation of the world. The brothers complain however: We *idiotae* (simple), lay brothers, what shall we be able to do for the salvation of the world? Francis answers them in the words of the Psalm (Ps. 54:

<sup>10</sup> See also LP 85, 87.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell, I Fiori, appendix no. 10, pp. 380–82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> See Jean-François Godet, "Le rôle de la prédication dans l'évolution de l'Ordre des Frères Mineurs," Franziskanische Studien 59 (1977): 53–64.

23): "Cast your care upon the Lord and He will provide for you," and in the words of the Gospel: "Do not think about how or what you will say, etc. It will not be you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father that will speak in you" (Matt. 10: 20). Does Francis not intend to instill in them here the salvific-historical (Heilsgeschichlich significance of the socially weak? For it is especially among the small and the weak that God will establish His kingdom in this world. God will speak to the world through them. He will nourish their thinking; He will speak through them in His Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, the Legend of the Three Companions 36 understands this text of Francis in a similar direction: "Do not be afraid to preach penance even though we appear ignorant and of no count. But preach penance in a simple way with confidence, putting your trust in God who overcame the world that, by His spirit, He will speak through you and in us..." The addition of "who overcame the world" suggests that it is precisely the weak and the small who will overcome the world in the same way that the poor and weak Lord did it and continues to do it through these who receive the wisdom of the Lord. "When Francis says

<sup>13</sup> See also the mission discourse in Matt. 10: 1–8, which is just prior to the text which is cited here. See also Matt. 19: 14, and esp. Matt. 11: 25; also 1 Cor. 1: 25; 2: 4–5. The theme of the salvific-historical meaning of the poor and the weak was widely known then. Under the influence of Joachim of Fiore? In any case, it was in line with the mendicant movement at that time. A remarkable phenomenon at this time was the Children's Crusade in 1212, that is, the crusade of the "little" and the "poor". See also Hans Sevenhoven, Verslag van een ontdekkingsreis (Gottmer: Haarlem, 1979), pp. 27–28.

<sup>14</sup> It is, however, surprising that Celano in his version about the first sending out of the friars (1Cel 29) does not cite the central Gospel text. It is understandable that the learned Thomas found it more difficult to understand the salvific-historical meaning of the "uneducated", that is, the socially weak. Instead, he emphasizes much more strongly the great expansion of the order, and in doing so suggests that it was precisely because of this expansion that the order gained in strength (1Cel 27). Is Celano himself here not a symbol of the misunderstanding between Francis and the second generation? (Read also LP 114.) It is also surprising that in his story about Francis's dismissal as superior, Thomas doesn't mention: "I rise and preach as the Holy Spirit inspires me" (2Cel~145; LP83). An unintended omission perhaps, but one which is at the same time very significant. Here the version of the Legend of Perugia is much sharper, for it practically interprets Francis's dismissal as a rejection of the Holy Spirit. At any rate it is a rejection of the salvific-historical function of the simple and uneducated one in whom the Holy Spirit speaks. In other words, here also (but not in Celano) we can read about the rejection of the original purpose of the order: the salvific-historical place of the simple and socially weak. Furthermore, there is another fact worthy of consideration. When Hugolino asks Francis to preach before the pope and the cardinals, Francis excuses himself with the words: "...saying that he was simple and unlearned" (L3S 64). Finally he does go to preach before them: "...spoke as he had been taught and prepared to do by the Holy Spirit." It is noteworthy to observe the connection that is constantly made between the 'simple', on the one hand, and the Holy Spirit, on the other hand. It is equally noteworthy that Celano (certainly 1Cel) pays so little attention to it. In his version of the affair, the context is much different and the emphasis lies elsewhere. In 1Cel 73 the context says that Francis had no time to prepare his sermon (the typical preoccupation of an educated

in his Testament "we were simple," he is thinking at the same time about the salvific-historical meaning of his movement. This assumption is strengthened when we look to the Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful 45-48: "We must not be wise and prudent according to the flesh (cf. 1 Cor 1: 26), but, instead, we must be simple, humble and pure." (Parallel with idiotae(simple) from his Testament?). "We must never desire to be above others, but, instead, we must be servants and subject to every human creature for God's sake." (Clearly parallel with subditi omnibus from his Testament). As a conclusion, Francis added: "The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon all those men and women who have done and persevered in these things (Is 11: 2; cf. Lk 4: 18) and It shall make a home and dwelling-place in them (cf. Jn 14: 23)." Here Francis thus explicitly connects the Holy Spirit to both conditions, which he sums up in his Testament. Is this not an important text to understand Francis's choice in the beginning? He chose the socially weak place because he ascribed a salvific-historical significance to the socially weak. On them the Holy Spirit rests.

It is this belief, namely, the salvific-historical significance of the weak, to which Francis wished to hold fast for his entire life. In this regard, Second Celano 193 says: "He wished finally that the order should be for the poor and unlearned, not only for the rich and wise. With God,' he said, 'there is no respect of persons, and the minister general of the order, the Holy Spirit, rests equally upon the poor and the simple." The reason that he gives is enlightening and points clearly to the first mission of the first brothers. Francis wanted this to be indicated in his Rule, but by then it was already approved.

Hence, given this background, it becomes clear that Francis left behind his deepest convictions in his *Testament*. The *Testament*, then, may be understood both as an example for and a reproach against the new development in the order, a development away from being *minor*, away from assuming minor places in society, away from manual labor, and finally away from the salvific-historical function of the poor and the weak, toward assuming the more scientific and prominent places in society.

man!). There is mention neither of Francis excusing himself nor of the Holy Spirit. Celano is more interested in the spectacular dancing of Francis. (In 2Cel 25 it is said: "...speaking without restraint whatever the spirit suggested"). And what Francis himself so often in his writings calls "parvulus (little one)" can we not understand in the light of Matt. 11: 25?: "Because he has hidden these things from the wise and prudent and had revealed them to the little ones"? See 1EpCust 1: "Francis your servant and little one in the Lord" As a "little one" he understands the "...new signs of heaven and earth that are great and extraordinary in the sight of God yet regarded as of little importance by many religious and others..." Does Francis not speak here about his own belief in his salvific-historical mission?

Now let us read once again with this understanding the story of the true joy. Brother Porter appears here to speak in the name of this new development. Consequently, we must not only understand these words unus simplex et idiota as an expression of Francis's feelings of powerlessness over against the new situation, but we must also at the same time see them as the nucleus of his original style of life as we find that returning in the Testament and the Earlier Rule. In other words, in this new development there appeared to be no place any longer for the original ideal of Francis. Bluntly formulated: in the Order of Friars Minor there was no longer any room for "minor" ones. The sequel of the reproach is still more clearly and at the same time more sadly given in the following: "There are so many of us here and such that we have no need of you!" The porter (the new development) expresses what the new development means, precisely in the words "there are so many of us here and such..." We have grown numerous (numerical expansion); and furthermore, we are now of another (higher) quality (social expansion). The doorkeeper expressly says that the Friars Minor have become so much different that there is no longer any place for a simple and uneducated man. Still more strongly expressed: there is no longer any room for the way of life in the beginning when the brothers were "simple and subject to all." The former way of life is finished and past. And very self-satisfied and arrogantly the porter then adds: "Quod non indigemus te, (we have no need of you)." There is also a double meaning here: we no longer have need of a simple and uneducated man, and especially, the former life-style no longer speaks to us, or still more bluntly, we do not need the representative of such a life-style any longer. Even Francis's life as one of example and testimony is rejected.

The porter finally directs Francis to the house of the Crossbearers. He must go there to ask for a home. Within the context this directive receives a sharp additional meaning. The Crossbearers were hospital-knights who cared for the sick and leprous. Here Francis could not help reflecting back upon his own conversion, to his encounter with the leper, and to the first years of his new life when he cared for lepers in the hospitals, and when these hospitals were common lodging places of the friars. Hence the porter directed him back to the initial years of the order, to the way of life at the beginning; but at the same time he said that now such a life-style had no longer a place in the Portiuncula.

Consequently, it is not accidental that the name of the hospital is omitted in the Actus — just like the later storyteller (and the new listeners), who no longer realized the implication of the social expansion of the order nor of the words unus simplex et idiota, understood even less the deep significance of the reference to the Crossbearers. One can wonder here whether in the name "Crossbearers" Francis heard "to carry the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ daily."

Finally, we wish to add one last observation. Here Francis again relived the first experiences following his conversion, when he was ostracized from his father's house; and, although wandering to and fro without a home, he offered his services to the sick. But now it is much more painful. For it is no longer a son who goes his own way and is put out of the house by his father, but now he is himself the father who is shown the way to the door by his own sons in his own house.

# 4. Vera laetitia (true joy), vera virtus (true virtue), et salus animae (and salvation of the soul)

Up to now we have shed light on the tragic moment in the story by referring to the life of Francis himself. However, this is not the principal point of the story. Its meaning is to clarify what true joy is. But the autobiographical background adds enormously to the story's breadth and depth. Therefore, it is not so much a fictitious story as a story which deals with Francis's own life. It is his testimony about how he, in spite of the deepest disappointment, humiliation and reproach, could elevate himself to true joy, and how he was able to heal his own soul in the midst of this experience. The deepest misunderstanding of him became the birthplace of true joy. But can we understand still more here? A testimony from the Legend of Perugia puts us on the right track. Francis is saddened on account of the bad example of the friars. Then the Lord said to him: "Tell me, why are you so sad when a brother leaves the Order or when others do not walk in the way I have shown you? Tell me, who planted the Order of the brothers? (...) Is it not I? (...) In you I did not choose a scholar nor an orator to govern my religious family, but I wanted a simple man so that you and the others may know that I am the one who watches over my flock. I placed you in their midst as a sign, so that they may see the works that I accomplish in you and so that they in turn may accomplish them."15

Here we possess, in one passage, almost all the elements which constitute Francis's experience during the new developments in the order. Francis, in a moment of enlightenment, saw more sharply his own position in the new situation. He suddenly realized more clearly that he himself, as a simple and uneducated person, had a salvific-historical function even for his own order ("...In you I did not choose a scholar nor an orator to govern my religious family, but I wanted a simple man... I placed you in their midst as a sign..."). And in realizing this, he became poignantly cognizant of the core of his sadness. Up to this time he had seen the order as his own possession. Consequently, a hidden sense — still deep — of wanting to possess it, formed the kernel of his melancholy. The good that God had carried out through him — he

<sup>15</sup> LP 86. See also 2Cel 158.

still had appropriated it. Here he considered the most extreme poverty as the true virtue, that is, how he must render everything, even his order, to God. Up to this time it was his greatest asset, his greatest glory. Here he lived out to the most extreme consequence what was the core of most of his Admonitions, among them: II, V, XXI–XV, XVIII, XIX. The totally poor man (Francis!) relinquished all his gloriari (boasting). He sought the pleasure of God alone. Adulation or blame by his fellow man no longer affected him. Hence, he became completely free — free from anger and anxiety, free from avarice and selfishness, free from all worry. He then became a man of joy. In this context Admonition XXVII receives a broader significance. It is not a proverb which everyone can recite. On the contrary, it is wisdom which has grown out of a concrete life situation — a true wisdom of living.

Where there is patience and humility there is neither anger nor disturbance. Where there is poverty with joy, there is neither greed nor avarice.

He experienced his deepest pain as the highest poverty. He knew what it meant and what it felt like. That pain became for him the true virtue. His joy indicated that he had abandoned the last form of possession. This is the true virtue, the only virtue which heals the soul.

Now we can say something more about the epithet vera (true). From the Admonitions we receive a picture of Francis as someone who is very sensitive to everything which is not genuine, to all possible subtle forms of illusion and deceit. Francis appears as a spiritual leader with discretion. He possesses the gift of the discernment of spirits. He saw sharply by what spirit someone was animated, and he didn't allow himself to be mislead by any appearance. Later, as we can easily understand, he was viewed less from this perspective. For he was already canonized, and therefore he was in turn looked upon as one who was holy, perfect, and worthy of emulation. Perhaps this influenced the change of the epithet "true" to "perfect". The story was now told as an exhortation to follow the perfect man, and less as a test. Thus the attention on the distinction between false-true disappears, all the more because the new storyteller could not enter into the situation of expansion as a test. He stood too far removed from this expansion and the enthusiasm attached to it. Expansion and the success thereof was probably highly used as a criterion of truth and authenticity.

Francis, however, as a spiritual leader with discernment, did not allow himself to be misled by this subtle temptation. For him, success was no standard of truth and authenticity. And whoever prides himself on success is misleading himself. He is deceived; it is false joy. The first part of the story must also be read then as a total rejection and not as a difference of degree, as the *Actus* seems to suggest. Over against false

joy, Francis proffers true joy, namely, when man does not lose himself in the outside world and measures his worth by his success, but instead measures his worth in God. And Francis knew personally the implication of this. His own life served as a testimony to it. He discovered, at his own expense, what deep poverty he had to endure before one could experience true joy — that virtue by which the soul is healed.

One can safely say that Francis experienced here the last consequence of his earlier symbolic gesture when he stripped naked before his father. Julian of Speyer says in conjunction with this: "For the naked man of God was conforming himself to the one who was naked on the cross." At this point he understood the naked and crucified One, the misjudged One par excellence, Who also saw His mission as unsuccessful. Halfway through the story of the true joy, Mount La Verna appears in the twilight, for this joy heals the soul. Every effort to possess, every form of greed, falls away, and he wants to be only a creature among creation. From that place he desires to give everything back to the origin of all good, to God, Lord and Creator, to Him alone Who deserves all glory and honor. All through the story of the true joy, one can already hear the tones of his Canticle of Brother Sun in the distance.

<sup>16</sup> Vita S. Francisci, I, 9.