

Franciscan Reconciliation: The Struggle to Embrace Joy

Joan Mueller, O.S.F.

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When asked to identify a saint known for peacemaking and reconciliation, Christians and non-Christians respond with the name of Saint Francis of Assisi. Many searching for inner peace and balance contemplate Francis's communion with nature. Those who are called to develop a spirituality of peacemaking and reconciliation in the midst of violence often look to St. Francis for guidance.

When exploring the early biographies of St. Francis of Assisi with the theme of reconciliation in mind, one notices that Francis's life, not unlike Jesus' life, contains moments that were anything but reconciling. One recalls Francis's probable participation in the people's siege of the Rocca Maggiore,¹ his going to war with Perugia and subsequent capture in 1202,² and the conflict with his father over Francis's conversion.³ The purpose of this essay is to critically reflect on the theme of peacemaking and reconciliation in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. The method of this essay is to review the early sources through the hermeneutic of the following questions: 1) What is meant by Franciscan reconciliation? 2) How does

¹See Arnaldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, trans. Helen Moak (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 119-20.

²L3S 4. Unless otherwise indicated all quotations of Franciscan source material are taken from *St. Francis of Assisi Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of Sources*, ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press: 1973).

³1Cel 10-15.

Francis live this reconciliation? 3) Is Francis truly a model of Christian reconciliation? The mission of this essay is to do this critical reflection for the service of contemporaries desiring spiritualities of peacemaking and reconciliation while engaging in a violent world.

Francis's Conversion

Francis's embracing of an upside-down world where the bitter becomes sweet and the sweet becomes bitter⁴ gives him a vision of life that makes him appear mad. The leper initiates Francis into this upside-down world. The *Legend of the Three Companions* gives an interesting account of the exchange that takes place during this meeting. The merchant Francis dismounts his horse, gives the leper a coin and kisses his hand. The leper in return gives Francis the kiss of peace.⁵ In later years Francis claimed that it was the Lord who taught him to greet people with: "The Lord give you peace!" Whenever he preached, he gave this greeting to the people, wishing them "Pax et Bonum," Peace and All Good!⁶

In his *Testament* Francis reflects that it was the embrace of that which seemed bitter to him, the lepers, that converted his perception of reality. It was not long after this change in vision that Francis left the world.⁷ Unlike the monastic vocation, this flight from the world did not take the form of physical removal from worldly society. Rather it required that Francis leave his previous life of luxury for the penitential life.⁸

It is important to notice the movements of Francis's prayer during this time. Praying before the San Damiano crucifix, Francis receives an interior wounding which imprints in his heart a love and compassion for the crucified Christ.⁹ Francis, who experienced the presence of Christ in the lepers, the outcasts of society, now weeps over the passion of Christ.

⁴Test 3.

⁵L3S 11.

⁶L3S 26.

⁷Test 1-3.

⁸See Theophile Desbonnets, *From Intuition to Institution: The Franciscans*, trans. Paul Duggan and Jerry Du Charme (Chicago: The Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 12.

⁹L3S 14.

Francis suspects where his conversion might lead him. The consequences of rejecting his father's values promise him a future of poverty and disgrace. In meditating on the glorified Jesus present on the cross of San Damiano, Francis begins to appropriate the Paschal mystery, finding sweetness amid the bitterness of suffering. For Francis this is not pious or masochistic jargon; rather, it is his own experience. Among the lepers Francis embraces that which repulses him most. In this embrace he finds consolation, joy, peace and freedom. In looking at the glorified Jesus hanging on the cross, Francis sees his own journey. In solidarity with the poor, life is reconciled. Francis knows this because in his tortuous searching, it is the lepers who have given him peace.

Francis's new vision does not bring peace to his family. The selling of his father's cloth in the city of Foligno brings grave family conflict. His mother, trying to protect Francis from his father's blows, becomes the victim of her husband's beating.¹⁰ Francis's father, humiliated by the mad indiscretion of his son, beats him and locks him in prison. Eventually Pietro Bernardone takes his son before the civil authorities demanding that Francis restore the money he stole. Claiming that Francis is a penitent and therefore under ecclesial jurisdiction, the civil authorities refer the case to Bishop Guido. Guido, who has been advising Francis from the beginning of Francis's conversion,¹¹ hears the case.

The scene before the Bishop pits the merchant Bernardone against the feudal bishop. Guido tells Francis to return his father's money, for it may have been acquired dishonestly. Dishonest money is not a legitimate resource for the building of churches. Guido advises Francis to trust in God, who will give Francis everything needed to fulfill his mission.¹²

Superficially it would seem that Francis chooses the feudal church system over the capitalist system of the new merchant class. Bishop Guido covers the naked Francis as a father, but Francis's proclamation of God as his Father gives no reference to the bishop.¹³

¹⁰L3S 18.

¹¹L3C 10.

¹²L3C 19.

¹³L3C 20.

According to the *Legend of the Three Companions*, Francis leaves the scene of the trial and goes back to San Damiano. He is now clothed in a hermit's habit identifying him as a lay penitent. This choice preempts other choices Francis may have made as a result of a religious conversion: the choice to become a priest, the choice to become a monk, the choice to become a heretic critical of the widespread decadence of the priests and monks of the time.¹⁴ Francis eventually exchanges the hermit's garb for the clothing of a beggar. These beggar rags give Francis no status within civil or ecclesial society. Francis is identified with the poor and must suffer the consequences of being truly poor.

It is easy to forget that Francis remains alone struggling with the ramifications of his decision to renounce his earthly father for two years before receiving companions. During this time many regard him as a madman. His father and brother join the town's mockery of Francis.¹⁵

One might legitimately wonder how a man who causes his family such great pain, who opts out of societal responsibility, who takes refuge in the church and then refuses an established role in the church, can be canonized as a model of peace and reconciliation. Is not this man a loner, a derelict, a sociopath? If one can tell a tree by its fruits, is this tree not condemned by its lack of fruit? In asserting his unique spiritual identity, is not Francis undermining legitimate paths to holiness? Does his spiritual journey lead only to isolationism?

The first sentence in chapter one of *The Early Rule* states: "The rule and life of these brothers is this: 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."¹⁶ The journey of discipleship implies that one accepts the consequences of choosing to follow Jesus. While hiding from his father, Francis finally finds the courage to embrace the hardships of his choice. He renounces his father, forever giving up the luxury of living in two worlds. He is now dead to his father and also dead to the option of using his

¹⁴For further development of this choice see Raoul Manselli, *St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. Paul Duggan (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 62-71.

¹⁵L3C 23.

¹⁶Translation taken from *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M. (New York, Paulist Press, 1982), 109.

father's resources. He no longer is a generous benefactor of the poor. Rather, he becomes poor like the crucified Christ he has contemplated.

One might pause to ask: How can one discern whether persons who are alone and deemed mad by others are in such a state because of their own weaknesses or because of their fidelity in embracing the cross of Christ? Perhaps one might begin to ponder this question by admitting that the poles of weakness and holiness are not mutually exclusive. One embraces the cross of Christ in one's weakness. Francis begins his journey of conversion as a rather impulsive businessman who enjoys the good things in life. His preoccupation with bitterness turning to sweetness betrays his weakness for life's delicacies. The Christian does not wait for perfection before following in the footprints of Jesus.

One distinguishes Francis's call to poverty from false isolationism by discerning whether or not Francis's call from God was genuine. Francis in his prayer waited for the call of God; he did not run ahead of grace. His prayerful reflection on the crucified Jesus in light of his experience among the lepers invites him to accept that which is difficult—the disowning of his family—as part of the price of a genuine call. Is Francis impulsive and a bit severe in his style of executing this choice? Perhaps. There is no evidence in the sources suggesting that Francis ever did reconcile with his father. This violent tearing of family bonds certainly cannot be the general norm of Franciscan response to the call of God. Another personality might have been able to execute the break with less drama. The authenticity of Francis's call is measured not so much by its diplomatic acuity as by its fidelity. Francis's conversion to poverty is authentic not because it is perfectly ordered, but because it truly is a call.

Second, one can discern that Francis's aloneness is prompted by the Spirit of God because, despite his weaknesses, Francis does all he can to fully cooperate with grace. This means that he is faithful and generous in his relationship with God and others. Although Francis, desiring to witness loving relationship with God and others, consistently exhorted himself and his brothers to give good example, it is evident that even the best example can be criticized or at least minimalized. One finds a humorous reminder of this in Jordan of Giano's chronicle. Brother Jordan returned to Germany carrying the relics of the recently canonized St. Francis. Jordan, who had known St. Francis when he was alive, was aware of the human frailties of the saint. Because of this awareness he was somewhat stunned by the reverence the German brothers, many of whom had never met Francis, displayed

toward the relics in Jordan's possession. Inspired by their devotion, Jordan decided to take the saint more seriously. Apparently Brother Jordan found the devotion of the German brothers more convincing than actual acquaintance with Francis himself.¹⁷

Finally one can discern that the solitude of Francis has its source in God because the movement of this aloneness back into community is not manipulated by Francis. Francis is very clear that it was the Lord who gave him brothers and not his preaching or recruiting prowess. It is God who gives birth to the Franciscan community. It is also God who teaches Francis to live his life according to the holy Gospel.¹⁸

Reconciliation Within Franciscan Community

The sources picture the life of the early Franciscan community as less than idyllic. The composition of the early community was socially heterogeneous. Some brothers came from noble families, some from the new merchant class, others from poverty. Amid the tensions in Assisi at the time, such a group should not have lasted long! Because all were required to sell their possessions and give them to the poor,¹⁹ the society was founded on economic equality. All members possessed nothing. In this type of society one could argue that the poor who were used to the demands of poverty had an advantage.

Because the romance of embracing Lady Poverty could easily crumble under the hardships of hunger, scanty clothing and insufficient shelter, Francis carefully forms the fledgling community. Francis teaches his brothers how to keep a serene mind and a joyful heart.²⁰ Yet, Francis does not presume grace. In the crowded confines of Rivo Torto, in order to provide for some semblance of individual privacy, Francis writes the names of each brother on a beam above his space.²¹

¹⁷*XIIIth Century Chronicles*, trans. Placid Hermann O.F.M. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1961), 62-63, see note #88.

¹⁸Test 14.

¹⁹RegNB II:4.

²⁰ICel 42.

²¹ICel 44.

When the small community is displaced from Rivo Torto by a farmer and his donkey, Francis and his brothers simply move on without protest. This theme of moving on when another insists upon having one's space or rights is repeated in the *Testament*. Here Francis tells his brothers that if they are not received in a certain diocese they are not to go above the bishop by asking for papal permission for preaching. Rather, they are to simply and quietly leave the diocese, doing their penance somewhere else with the blessing of God.²²

As the Franciscan movement grew, it encountered many obstacles to a peaceful serene life. The brothers' place in the church needed to be addressed. St. Clare's struggle to obtain approval for her rule illustrates the Franciscan challenge to be true to one's call while remaining within the institutional church. Clare's ability to discern the time to negotiate and the time to accept institutional decisions illustrates the Franciscan gift of dancing with the other in a way that allows one to remain true to oneself and also true to the relationship with the other. One learns this dance not by attempting to out-power the partner, but by respecting the other while remaining true to one's vocational identity.

The Order's own success and its large following soon proved less than advantageous. At Rivo Torto, Francis was able to carefully guide and form the brothers. With the large numbers of brothers coming into the Order, this formation was no longer possible. Inappropriate behavior would follow and would have consequences for the entire Order.

Therefore, reconciliation within early Franciscan community life cannot be reduced to a simplistic snapshot of serene communal union at any particular instance, but was a prudent discernment of the movement of God's Spirit among brothers and sisters as this Spirit called these early Franciscans into ever deepening conversion. The Franciscan tradition insists that unity in the Franciscan family is the fruit of appreciation and respect of the diverse gifts of the members. While the Benedictine community symbolizes Trinitarian unity by expressing ONE GOD in three persons, the Franciscan community reflects Trinitarian community by mirroring one God in THREE PERSONS.²³

²²Test 25-26.

²³This is not to say that the Rule of Benedict is not concerned with the individual. The care and concern for the individual in the Rule of Benedict moves the person towards union of heart and mind with the community. In struggling

This emphasis in respecting personality and personal gifts in the Franciscan community is exemplified in a story from the *Mirror of Perfection*. In it Francis attempts to describe the perfect Friar Minor. In this description Francis does not speak of a spirit of the community which forms the behavior of the Friars, but rather emphasizes individual gifts: "the perfect faith and love of poverty of Brother Bernard; the simplicity and purity of Brother Leo; the courtesy of Brother Angelo; the gracious look and natural good sense of Brother Masseo; the mind upraised to God possessed in its highest perfection by Brother Giles; the virtuous and constant prayer of Brother Rufino; the patience of Brother Juniper; the bodily and spiritual courage of Brother John; the charity of Brother Roger; and the caution of Brother Lucidus."²⁴

Franciscans sometimes suggest that Francis did not have a particular skill for organization. This is true if one believes that the Roman hierarchical model and the monastic model are the sole paradigms of ecclesial organization. Francis, while appreciating both the Roman and monastic models, founded a new model of community. This model not only makes room for individual differences but encourages the discernment necessary when true choices are possible. Reconciliation within the Franciscan community is not so much a process of bringing all into conformity with the common life as it is a process of inviting members to a fresh appreciation of the gifts of their brothers and sisters to be used and celebrated in the living and preaching of the Holy Gospel. One comes to this appreciation only with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.²⁵

towards this unity an individual is purified in relationship, and the Church witnesses relational unity. Communal worship flows from this form of life. In the Franciscan charism the emphasis is different. Here individuals are appreciated for their unique way of following in the footprints of Jesus. The community exists primarily to offer the human friendship and support needed to be faithful to this following. The brothers and sisters are to make their needs known to each other. Holy Franciscan persons are those who are at once unique in their style of following Jesus and yet at the same time always among friends. Devotional and mystical styles of prayer spontaneously develop out of this type of lifestyle.

²⁴SP 85.

²⁵See *Habere Spiritum Domini*, Encyclical Letter of the Four Ministers General, Rome, 1977, no. 9.

The Franciscan Reconciler

The life of Francis offers examples of conflict mediation. In the thirteenth year of his conversion Francis follows the movements of the Spirit within his soul and sets out for Syria.²⁶ The army of the Christians and the Moslem army are at close range opposite each other in the field. The Sultan offers a Byzantine gold piece to anyone who brings him the head of a Christian.

Francis decides to move from the lines of the Christians over to the Moslems. He knows that to do this means sure death. He prepares his heart by singing Psalm 23, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me." Taking Brother Illuminatus with him, he comes upon two lambs. Remembering the words of Jesus, "I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves"²⁷ Francis immediately sees the hand of God.

The men of the Sultan's army soon discover Francis and Illuminatus. They beat them savagely and bring them before the Sultan. In the midst of the intrigue of war, Francis stands before the Sultan and insists that it was God who sent him and not any earthly ruler or interest. Impressed with Francis's dignity and bearing, the Sultan offers Francis gifts. Francis tells him that he has no interest in these gifts but wants only to see a sign of the Spirit of God within the Sultan's soul. The Sultan, however, knows how to win the hearts of religious people. He again offers Francis gifts saying that Francis can use them for the poor or for Christian churches. Francis refuses this offer and then leaves because "he could see no sign of a genuinely religious spirit in the Sultan."²⁸

There are a number of movements to notice within this story. First, Francis's attempts to offer reconciliation failed. The reason they failed was because the moment of grace was not present within the Sultan's heart—"he could see no sign of a genuinely religious spirit in the Sultan." Francis did not condemn the blindness of the Sultan or force an agenda upon him. Instead, upon seeing that the moment of grace was not present, Francis simply left.

²⁶1Cel 57.

²⁷LM IX:7-8.

²⁸Ibid.

Second, there is a desire within Francis for reconciliation. This desire is so strong that it pushes Francis to risk martyrdom. Yet Francis's desire is a respectful desire. Evil can be overcome with love not with tyranny. To pray and weep for another who is not yet ready to embrace grace is in itself a work of reconciliation. When he returns from the crusades, Francis continues his reconciling mission in prayer, weeping, and in his passion on Mt. Alverna.

Third, immediate success is not the goal of reconciliation. What Francis searches for in the heart of the Sultan is the Spirit of the Lord. This Spirit, however, cannot be manipulated. One can do all one can even to the point of risking one's life to prepare the way for the Spirit's gift of reconciliation. After this one can only surrender the desire for reconciliation, wait, pray and weep for the moment of grace. Francis knew that God was a courteous God. God's response to human hard-heartedness is ever-patient love. Francis returns to Italy to wait, pray, suffer and weep. His audience with the Sultan was only the beginning of a reconciling mission that would last the rest of his life.

The desire for reconciliation between brothers and sisters in community, between races, between ideologies, and between religions, united Francis to God's desire to love humankind. Francis's sorrow was that the Spirit of love was not loved by humankind. Desiring to be an instrument of reconciliation, Francis did all he could to promote unity and peace and then simply joined God's heart in waiting and longing. *The Three Companions* tells us that Francis was "absorbed in seraphic love and desire."²⁹ It was through "the tenderness of his compassion that he was formed into a living crucifix."³⁰

At the end of his life, Francis again felt the call to act as a reconciler. When Francis was very sick and had already composed "The Canticle of Brother Sun," the bishop of Assisi excommunicated the podestà. The podestà responded by forbidding any citizen from transacting business with the bishop. The *Legend of Perugia* says that "there was a savage hatred between them."³¹ Francis felt that it was a shame that no reconciler was being sent to the podestà and the bishop. Even though he was incapacitated

²⁹69.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹44.

from his sickness, he devised a creative attempt at reconciliation. He added the following verse to the Canticle:

All Praise be yours, my Lord,
Through those who grant pardon for love of you;
Through those who endure sickness and trial.
Happy those who endure in peace;
By you, Most High, they will be crowned.³²

Francis sends a brother to tell the podestà to go to the bishop's house with the important people of the commune. There the brothers sing the "Canticle." The podestà in tears exclaims, "For the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and of blessed Francis, his servant, I am ready to make any atonement you wish." The bishop replies, "My office demands humility of me, but by nature I am quick to anger; you must forgive me!"³³ The author of the *Legend of Perugia* adds a theological reflection worthy of notice: "All who witnessed the scene ascribed the grace so promptly given to the two adversaries to a miracle due to the merits of the saint."³⁴

To choose to be a reconciler is to choose to be crucified with Christ. To choose a spirituality of reconciliation is to dedicate oneself not to the hope of occasional success stories but to weeping over the passion of Christ. To dedicate oneself as a reconciler means that one does not give up on those whose hearts are hardened. Rather, one continues to pray, to weep and to love those who offer insults to gestures of reconciliation. Francis understood that the price of being a reconciler was to become a faithful lover. This fidelity to love includes doing all one can to encourage dialogue and respect between persons and, when this is not possible, implies joining the heart of God in weeping, longing and praying for the day when Love will be loved and accepted by all.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

At Peace With the Cosmos

A holy person in harmony with the natural world is a theme familiar in the hagiographical tradition.³⁵ The Franciscan sources abound with such stories. One of the most famous is the story of the wolf of Gubbio.³⁶

In the story Francis goes to Gubbio and experiences the terror the people have over a vicious wolf of the forest. Feeling pity for the people, he and a companion find where the wolf lives. When the wolf charges with mouth open to attack them, Francis and his companion make the sign of the cross. Power flows from this sign, and the wolf slows down and lies at Francis's feet. Francis scolds the wolf for destroying human life but realizes that the wolf too has legitimate needs. Its appetite for both animals and humans is legitimate in the natural world. The saint promises that the people in the town will no longer hunt the wolf and will provide the wolf with daily food. The wolf lived two years longer going from door to door for food.

There is insight in this simple story. Francis begins by recognizing that a problem exists. A situation with nature is seriously hampering the lives of the people of Gubbio. Moderns impressed with their manipulation of nature tend to deny natural imbalances.

Secondly, Francis and his companion go out to meet the wolf armed with the sign of the cross. This is not a magic hex, but is rather the sign of lives devoted to a reconciliation born of faithful love. Francis and his companion have contemplated the passion of Jesus; the reconciling power of Jesus flows through them. The natural world instinctively senses those who respect creatureliness as a divine gift.

Although Francis rebukes the wolf, it is the townspeople of Gubbio who are called to conversion. By presenting the wolf as his friend, Francis enables the people to give up their fear. Embracing another creature or person as a friend is often key to the process of Franciscan reconciliation.

³⁵See William J. Short, O.F.M., "Hagiographical Method in Reading Franciscan Sources: Stories of Francis and Creatures in Thomas of Celano's *First Life*" (58-61), in *Laurentianum* 29 (1988): 462-95 and in *Greyfriars Review* 4:3 (1990) 63-89.

³⁶Fior 21.

The townspeople can give up their arms, their violence, when they experience the wolf as one who can be trusted.

The people of Gubbio must learn to share their resources. Francis's solution is simple. The wolf is eating people because it is hungry. If the wolf were not hungry, it would have no need to eat people. The people of Gubbio apparently could afford to feed the wolf. Francis's poverty is a reconciling element. Because he has no need to store up supplies, he can help the people of Gubbio understand how greed is blinding them. The destruction of the natural world is the destruction of themselves.

Francis's reconciliation with the natural world is perhaps expressed most clearly in "The Canticle of Brother Sun." God is to be praised through all of creation. The sun gives light, and its radiant beauty is for Francis a likeness of God. This sun, which shines on the good and bad alike (Matt 5:45), reflects the love and fidelity of God's reconciling love.

Francis sees himself in union with all of creation and expresses this communion in terms of brother and sister/male and female. The "Canticle" contains three pairs: Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Wind and Sister Water, and Brother Fire and Sister Earth. This harmony between humankind and creation and between male and female reflects the inner harmony of Francis. Franciscans understand themselves to be united with all of nature—sun, moon, wind, water, fire and earth—and while inviting all of creation to praise, reconcile the polarities of their own psyches.³⁷

Sickness and death are part of the cycle of creation. Francis recognizes that no living person can escape death. The *Legend of Perugia* tells of the trial Francis endures before giving birth to *The Canticle of Brother Sun*. Francis's eyes cannot bear the light of the sun and so he remains inside a little cell made of mats. There are many mice in this cell, and Francis finds it impossible to eat, sleep or pray in peace. Feeling sorry for himself, he begs for the grace to endure his trials in peace. In prayer the Lord tells Francis to "live in peace as if you were already sharing my kingdom."³⁸

³⁷This is the thesis of Eloi Leclerc O.F.M. in his *Le Cantique des Creatures ou les Symboles de l'Union*, (Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1970). trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, *The Canticle of Creatures: Symbols of Union*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977.

³⁸LP 43.

Thus, Francis learns to praise God while experiencing the beauty and joy of creation and while enduring its limitations. In all things one must learn to praise God.

Reconciliation: An Invitation to Joy

Before his death, Francis struggles to reconcile within himself the embrace of joy in the midst of sickness and emptiness. True to his Lady Poverty, he now struggles to love her faithfully until the end. The *Legend of Perugia* says that as Francis grew closer to death, he found great interior and exterior joy in all creatures, so much so “that his spirit seemed to live in heaven and not on earth.”³⁹ His *Canticle of Brother Sun* was a way to express this movement of prayer that was happening within his soul. Yet the *Legend* also says that Francis often had the brothers sing the *Canticle* for him “to comfort his soul and ward off discouragement in the midst of his grave and serious infirmities.”⁴⁰

Apparently Francis’s joy in light of his approaching death is a bit too effervescent for the tastes of some of his brothers. Brother Elias comes to him with the suggestion that perhaps he might lay aside the joyful singing and think a bit more about the reality of death. Francis tells Elias that indeed there was a time in his life when he did contemplate death “day and night.” Now however, was not the time to think of death; this was the moment of reconciliation. Francis finds that his journey with Lady Poverty is ending in joy. Stripped of all other loves and lovers he can rejoice in nothing other than the Most High.⁴¹ Francis is joyful because God alone is his joy.

A clear illustration of Francis’s understanding of this reconciling and peaceful joy is in a writing dictated to Brother Leo on “True Joy.” What does true joy mean for Francis? The expansion of the Order? No. The entrance of important people into the Order? No. That the brothers convert the infidels and cure the sick? No. Brother Leo asks: “What then is true joy?” Francis responds:

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

³⁹51.

⁴⁰64.

⁴¹Ibid.

and keep striking my legs, and blood flows from such wounds. And all covered with mud and cold, I come to the gate and after I have knocked and called for some time, a brother comes and asks: 'Who are you?' I answer: 'Brother Francis.' And he says: 'Go away; this is not the proper hour for going about; you may not come in.' And when I insist, he answers: 'Go away, you are a simple and a stupid person; we are so many and we have no need of you. You are certainly not coming to us at this hour!' And I stand again at the door and say: 'For the love of God, take me in tonight.' And he answers: 'I will not. Go to the Crosiers' place and ask there.' I tell you this: If I had patience and did not become upset, there would be true joy in this and true virtue and the salvation of the soul."⁴²

The story is familiar to Franciscans. True joy is the task of a lifetime. Francis's "If" introducing "If I had patience . . .," seems to imply that he, too, found patience in such matters difficult.⁴³ The parable of "True and Perfect Joy" calls one to a poverty and to a minority which demands a radical gift of self and a mature self-possession. The story presupposes that one has experienced and accepted oneself as a unique and gifted person. In giving oneself over in love of Lady Poverty, one needs to be gradually purified of expecting even the basic respect one would expect from one's brothers and sisters in community. Lady Poverty so strips Francis that he learns to rely on the love of God alone.

One is truly in love with God when one is comfortable with who one is before God despite the acclaim or the disdain of others. This truth is set forth simply and clearly in the opening lines of Admonition XIX:

Blessed are the servants who esteem themselves no better when they are praised and exalted by people than when they are considered worthless, simple and despicable; for what persons are before God that they are and nothing more.⁴⁴

When one looks at the Gospel, it seems that the most difficult aspect of following in the footprints of Jesus is the surrender of Calvary. It certainly is true that to embrace the cross with generosity is no small matter.

⁴²"True and Perfect Joy" in *Francis and Clare*, 165-66.

⁴³See André Jansen, O.F.M., "The Story of True Joy; An Autobiographical Reading," *Franziskanische Studien* 4 (1981): 271-88. See also *Greyfriars Review*, 5:3 (1991) 367-87

⁴⁴*Francis and Clare*, 33. Inclusive language mine.

However, Francis suggests that the embrace of the joy of resurrection, the embrace of the Kingdom of God already present, requires even more courage and grace. Perhaps this is true because every embrace of joy is an embrace of Calvary. Reconciliation is discovered in the midst of the joy which flows from the depths of Calvary's pain and sorrow. Reconciliation is the Spirit's gift of believing, hoping and loving, even as a brother or sister offends one, knowing that if one perseveres in love, God will create community from the depths of one's tears.

Because Francis was able to understand the action of God in the reply of the Brother Porter, he focuses his parable on the mystery of true joy rather than on the disgrace of an indigent brother. Francis understands that in every dark moment there is a grace. Even though the darkness may be overwhelming, Francis had a gift of discerning the grace to be found in the darkness.

Franciscan joy is a choice. It is a mature choice offered to those who have risked embracing hardship for the sake of the Gospel of Christ. It is not a choice simply to embrace hardship for the sake of hardship. Rather, it is the choice to see differently—to speak and to sing the reconciling vision of the Kingdom to others. It is the choice to suffer and to rejoice knowing that the reconciliation of joy and sorrow within the heart of a saint is the truest source and sign of reconciliation on earth.

Franciscan Reconciliation: A Summary

Those who feel called to live a spirituality of peacemaking and reconciliation in the spirit of St. Francis within a violent world, may be guided by three summary observations.

First, Francis engages in the work of peacemaking and reconciliation. He embraces the leper, risks his life to meet the Sultan, mediates between the podestà and the bishop, etc. Dialogue, nonviolent intervention and common sense are core to a spirituality of peacemaking and reconciliation. Those who shun processes of mediation and dialogue fail to understand Francis's example.

Second, Francis's voluntary poverty is a reconciling element. Persons not blinded by greed appreciate their place as creatures among creatures. Material and spiritual poverty renders followers of Francis available to others and to God, and prevents them from being a stumbling block to the poor. Those who treasure poverty embrace the poor, crucified

Christ more and more completely in order to effect in their own lives the joy of having nothing other than God.

Finally, human works of peacemaking and reconciliation are not always successful. Followers of St. Francis understand that contemplative union with the crucified Christ in waiting and prayer is core to effective reconciliation. The moment of Pentecost—the moment when the confusion of Babel is united in understanding—cannot be manipulated. Knowing that the glory of reconciliation flows from the failure of Calvary, Franciscans offer their attempts at reconciliation and then surrender everything at the foot of the cross. In this prayer of passion Franciscans wait for the moment of grace while weeping over Christ suffering today in a wounded world. Here in utter poverty followers of Francis and Clare join the humble and crucified Christ keeping vigil in silent, agonizing hope. While persevering in this hope, Franciscans discover in their souls God's own Spirit which loves the brother or sister who causes insult and injury. Even in the face of evil and death, this Godly incarnate love bursts forth in a joy that must be preached, that must be sung. This joy, which delights in the love of God for all, signs the grace of Franciscan reconciliation: "That which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body."⁴⁵

⁴⁵Test 3.

Abbreviations

I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm	Admonitions	ExPat	Prayer Inspired by the Our Father
BenLeo	Blessing for Brother Leo	FormViv	Form of Life for St. Clare
CantSol	Canticle of Brother Sun	LaudDei	Praises of God
CantExh	Canticle of Exhortation	LaudHor	Praises To Be Said at All the Hours
EpAnt	Letter to St. Anthony	OffPass	Office of the Passion
EpCler	Letter to the Clergy	OrCruc	Prayer Before the Crucifix
1EpCust	First Letter to the Custodians	RegB	Later Rule
2EpCust	Second Letter to the Custodians	RegNb	Earlier Rule
1EpFid	First Version of the Letter to the Faithful	RegEr	Rule for Hermitages
2EpFid	Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful	SalBVM	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
EpLeo	Letter to Brother Leo	SalVirt	Salutation of the Virtues
EpMin	Letter to a Minister	Test	Testament
EpOrd	Letter to the Entire Order	TestSen	Testament Written in Siena
EpRect	Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples	UltVol	Last Will Written for St. Clare
ExhLd	Exhortation to the Praise of God	VpLaet	Dictate on True and Perfect Joy

II. Writings of Saint Clare

1LAg	First Letter to St. Agnes of Prague	4LAg	Fourth Letter to St. Agnes of Prague
2LAg	Second Letter to St. Agnes of Prague	LEr	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
3LAg	Third Letter to St. Agnes of Prague	RCl	Rule of St. Clare
		TestCl	Testament of St. Clare
		BCl	Blessing of St. Clare

III. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano	LegCl	Legend of St. Clare
2Cell	Second Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano	LM	Major Life of St. Francis by St. Bonaventure
3Cel	Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano	LMin	Minor Life of St. Francis by St. Bonaventure
AP	Anonymous of Perugia	LP	Legend of Perugia
JdV	Witness of Jacques de Vitry	Proc	Acts of the Process of Canonization of St. Clare
L3S	Legend of the Three Companions	SC	Sacrum commercium
		SP	Mirror of Perfection