

## The “Sins” of the Young Francis

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“I ‘peccati’ del giovane Francesco”

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Shortly before he died Francis dictated his *Testament*.<sup>1</sup> It is a text of prime importance, “which can never be overrated,” and it must be our starting point if we are to understand “the motives from which Francis lived out the religious experience of his conversion.”<sup>2</sup> In that text Francis said that the principal moment of his conversion was his meeting with lepers—a group that, until then, he had been very careful to avoid—and that he regarded his previous behavior as sinful:

The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>On the editorial processes this writing underwent, see F. Accrocca, “Il Testamento di Francesco: l’eredità di un’immagine,” in idem, *Francesco e le sue immagini. Momenti dell’evoluzione della coscienza storica dei Minori (sec. XIII-XVI)*. Afterword by J. Dalarun (Centro Studi Antoniani, 27), Padua 1997, 15-35.

<sup>2</sup>G. Miccoli, “La proposta cristiana di Francesco d’Assisi,” in *Francesco d’Assisi. Realtà e memoria di un’esperienza cristiana* (Einaudi Paperbacks, 217), Turin 1991, 49 [English trans. *Greyfriars Review* 3:2 (1989) 127-72].

<sup>3</sup>“Dominus ita dedit mihi fratri Francisco incipere faciendi poenitentiam: quia cum essem in peccatis nimis mihi videbatur amarum videre leprosos. Et ipse

“When I was in sin.” We would like to know more from Francis about his youthful experience, but the account is terse and spare, totally intent on stressing the importance of the divine initiative in his life. The biographers were faced with this silence and were forced, in their works, to fill in the lacunae in the account. A reader unaware of the complex set of problems that gave rise to the various writings may well remain puzzled if he attempts to compare them. What better subject, then, for a column such as this, whose purpose is to encourage a correct reading of the sources?

### The Young Francis: Two Different Portraits

Two sources in particular seem to contradict themselves completely in describing Francis's youth: the *Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano (better known—although incorrectly—as the *First Life*), written immediately after Francis's canonization,<sup>4</sup> and the *Legend of the Three Companions*, written largely before 1246.

Thomas paints a black picture of the future saint's childhood and youth:

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Dominus conduxit me inter illos et feci misericordiam cum illis. Et recedente me ab ipsis, id quod videbatur mihi amarum, conversum fuit mihi in dulcedinem animi et corporis; et postea parum steti et exivi de saeculo” (Test 1-3; FF 110). These are important statements for understanding the nucleus of Francis's religious proposal, a fact stressed by R. Manselli, *San Francesco* (Biblioteca di cultura, 182) Rome 1980, 42-47; idem, “San Francesco dal dolore degli uomini al Cristo crocifisso,” in idem, *Francesco e i suoi compagni* (Bibliotheca seraphico-capuccina, 46), Rome 1995, 183-200; G. Miccoli, “La cristiana proposta,” 52-53; see also idem, “Un'esperienza cristiana tra Vangelo e istituzione,” in *Dalla 'Sequela Christi' di Francesco d'Assisi all'apologia della povertà*. Atti del XVIII Convegno internazionale. (Assisi, 18-20 ottobre 1990) Spoleto 1992, 3-40. Kajetan Esser, on the other hand, labels them differently: see K. Esser, *Origini e inizi del movimento e dell'ordine francescano*, Milan 1975, 196-201. I am citing the sources according to the *Fontes franciscani*, [FF], edited by E. Menestò and S. Brufani and by G. Cremascoli, E. Paoli, L. Pellegrini, Stanislaw da Campagnola. Critical apparatus by G.M. Boccali (Medioevo francescano. Texti, 2), S. Maria degli Angeli-Assisi 1995, respecting the internal divisions (paragraphs and verses) of this same edition.

<sup>4</sup>On the *Life of Saint Francis*, see R. Paciocco – F. Accrocca, *La leggenda di un uomo chiamato Francesco. Tommaso da Celano e la Vita beati Francisci*, Istituto teologico S. Bernardino-Verona. Settimana di studi francescani, 31 agosto-6 settembre 1997 (2), (Tau, 9), Milan 1999; R. Michetti, “La Vita beati Francisci di Tommaso da Celano: storia di un'agiografia medievale,” *Franciscana* 1 (1999) 123-235; F. Uribe, *Introducción a las hagiografías de san Francisco y santa Clara de Asís (siglo XIII y XIV)*, (Publicaciones Instituto Teológico Franciscano. Serie Mayor, 30), Murcia 1999, 71-92.

In the city of Assisi, which is located in the confines of the Spoleto valley, there was a man named Francis. From the earliest years of his life his parents reared him to arrogance in accordance with the vanity of the age. And by long imitating their worthless life and character he himself was made more vain and arrogant.<sup>5</sup>

He continues by describing, in more general terms, the "wicked custom" that was very common among those who liked to boast that they were Christians: they bring up their children right from the cradle in a dissolute manner. No sooner do the babies start to babble—exclaims the hagiographer, horrified—than they teach them shameful and detestable things. And when the time of weaning arrives they even compel them to do lewd things, to the point that no one dares to act or speak honorably any more. For this reason, when they reach adolescence they give themselves over to every kind of debauchery, even exaggerating—in their telling—their own clumsy actions. They seem afraid of being ridiculed if they keep themselves pure.<sup>6</sup> These, emphasizes Thomas, were the teachings in which Francis was brought up until he was twenty-five years old, miserably wasting his time.<sup>7</sup> He advanced beyond his peers in vanities, endeavoring to surpass others in wit, curiosity, songs and fine clothes. He wanted to be first in everything, even in practical jokes: "Since he was very rich, he was not greedy but extravagant, not a hoarder of money but a squanderer of his property, a prudent dealer but a most unreliable steward. He was, nevertheless, a rather kindly person, adaptable and quite affable, even though it made him look foolish."<sup>8</sup>

In the *Legend of the Three Companions*, on the other hand, the tone of the account is different. In the first place, all accusations against his parents

<sup>5</sup>IC 1, 1 (FF 317): "Vir erat in civitate Assisii, quae in finibus vallis Spoletanae sita est, nomine Franciscus, qui a primaevae aetatis suae anno a parentibus secundum saeculi vanitatem nutritus est insolenter et ipsorum miseram vitam diu imitatus et mores, vanior ipse atque insolentior est effectus."

<sup>6</sup>IC 1, 2-12 (FF 318-19).

<sup>7</sup>IC 2, 1 (FF 320): "Haec sunt misera rudimenta, in quibus homo iste, quem sanctum hodie veneramus, quoniam vere sanctus est, a pueritia versabatur et fere usque ad vigesimum quintum aetatis suae annum tempus suum miserabiliter perdidit et consumpsit."

<sup>8</sup>IC 2, 2-4 (FF 320): "Immo super omnes coetaneos suos in vanitatibus male proficiens, inceptor malorum et aemulator stultitiae abundantius exsistebat. Admirationi omnibus erat et in pompa vanae gloriae praecire caeteros nitebatur, in iocis, in curiosis, in scurrilibus et inanibus verbis, in cantilenis, in vestibus mollibus et fluidis: quia praedives erat, non avarus sed prodigus, non accumulator pecuniae sed substantiae dissipator, cautus negotiator sed vanissimus dispensator; homo tamen humanius agens, habilis et affabilis multum, licet ad insipientiam sibi."

disappear. Although they constantly reprimanded their son for his spendthrift habits, because they were rich and loved him very much, they did not want to upset him, and so they tolerated this behavior of his.<sup>9</sup> By inclination Francis seemed “naturally courteous in manner and speech and, following his heart’s intent, never uttered a rude or offensive word to anyone. Moreover, since he was such a light-hearted and undisciplined youth, he proposed to answer back those speaking to him rarely in a brusque manner.” Because of this, his reputation had become so widespread “throughout almost the entire region” that those who knew him believed he was destined to have a great future. In short, all those natural gifts were like so many stepping stones by which he came to grace. Finally he said to himself: “You are generous and courteous to those from whom you receive nothing except passing and worthless approval. Is it not right that, on account of God who repays most generously, you should be courteous and generous to the poor?”<sup>10</sup>

How can we explain such a difference between the sources? And where does the truth lie, since Francis says of himself that he was living in sin, while the biographies seem to contradict each other? We can only say that a reader who is not an expert in Franciscan questions may well remain confused (we are referring to young people attracted to Franciscan spirituality, to men and women still in initial formation, to nuns, sisters or friars not that well initiated into the complex problems connected with the relationships of interdependence among the sources). We shall try, then, to understand how such an obvious disagreement could arise and what may have been, when all is said and done, the true face of the young Francis.

### Thomas of Celano: A Master of the Hagiographic Genre

Thomas, as we have said, most likely completed his work between 1228 and 1229, certainly before 1230. In 1906 Édouard d’Alençon noted that a Paris manuscript containing the *Life of Saint Francis* contained, at “fol. 282, col. 4”, a *notula* saying that the work had been approved by Gregory IX

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<sup>9</sup>L3C 2, 4-5 (FF 1396).

<sup>10</sup>L3C 3, 1-3 (FF 1396-97): “Erat tamen quasi naturaliter curialis in moribus et in verbis, iuxta cordis sui propositum nemini dicens verbum iniuriosum vel turpe, immo, cum sic esset iuvenis iocosus et lascivus, proposuit turpia sibi dicentibus minime respondere. Unde ex hoc fama eius quasi per totam provinciam est adeo divulgata ut a multis qui cognoscebant eum diceretur aliquid magni futurus. A quibus virtutum naturalium gradibus ad hanc provectus est gratiam ut diceret ad seipsum conversus: ‘Ex quo largus et curialis es apud homines a quibus nihil recipis nisi favorem transitorium et inanem, iustum est ut, propter Deum qui largissimus est in retribuendo, pauperibus sis curialis et largus.’”

on February 23, 1229. But d'Alençon cautioned that this was a later addition.<sup>11</sup> In any case, that the work was completed before 1230 seems clear from the fact that it contains no reference to the transfer of Francis's remains from the church of St. George to the new basilica built in his honor, a transfer that took place precisely that same year. Unlike Thomas, Julian of Speyer's *Life of Saint Francis*, written just a few years later (1232-35), described the event with an abundance of details.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore—another revealing point—while Julian borrows Thomas's words to describe Francis's care for lepers, he omits any reference to the *Testament*.<sup>13</sup> In fact on September 28, 1230, Gregory IX, who had been asked by the brothers to resolve certain doubts that had arisen during the General Chapter, published the bull *Quo elongati*,<sup>14</sup> in which he decreed:

And so, wishing to remove all anxiety from your hearts, we declare that you are not bound by the *Testament*. For without the consent of the brothers, and especially of the ministers, Francis could not make obligatory a matter that touches everyone. Nor could he in any way whatsoever bind his successor because an equal has no authority over his equal.<sup>15</sup>

Such a declaration opened the door once and for all for the Friars Minor to take part in the Church's pastoral ministry (in his *Testament* Francis had

<sup>11</sup>S. *Francisci Assisiensis vita et miracula, additis opusculis liturgicis, auctore Fr. Thoma de Celano*, Rome 1906, XLI. According to the Quaracchi editors, first among them M. Bihl, the *notula* is to be accepted as it is, since the copyist would have borrowed it from his archetype: "amanuensis gallicus P per se nosse non poterat. Ergo adnotationem illam ex archetypo suo descripsit" (*Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* X, Quaracchi 1926-1941, *Praefatio*, XIV).

<sup>12</sup>Iulianus de Spira, *Vita S. Francisci* 75-76 (FF 1094-1095).

<sup>13</sup>IC 17, 1-3 (FF 348): "Deinde vero totius humilitatis sanctus amator se transtulit ad leprosos, eratque cum eis, diligentissime serviens omnibus propter Deum, et lavans putredinem omnem ab eis, ulcerum etiam saniem extergebat, sicut ipse in Testamento suo loquitur dicens: 'Quia cum essem in peccatis, nimis amarum mihi videbatur, videre leprosos, et Dominus conduxit me inter illos, et feci misericordiam cum illis.' In tantum namque, ut dicebat, aliquando amara ei leprosoꝝ visio existebat ut, cum tempore vanitatis suae per duo fere millia eminus ipsorum domos respiceret, nares suas propriis manibus obturaret." LJS 12, 1-3: "Post haec humilis sui contemptor, et iam se ab hominibus contemni contemnens, ad leprosos se transtulit. Quibus devotissime serviens, et eorum humiliter ulcera lavit, sanieque detergere non abhorruit. Antea tamen huiusmodi in tantum despexerat, quod non solum illos e vicino, sed et eorum domos e longinquo prospiciens, nares manibus obturaverat" (FF 1034-1035).

<sup>14</sup>On this, see H. Grundmann, "De Bulle *Quo elongati* Papst Gregors IX," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 54 (1961) 3-25.

<sup>15</sup>Ibidem 21, rr. 35-38 (FF 2731).

enjoined his brothers not to ask for any letter or privilege from the Roman Curia, for any reason).<sup>16</sup> The choice, even though it met with strong resistance, was fully shared by Thomas, who would have had a hard time putting much emphasis on the *Testament* after promulgation of the papal letter. Thus the *Life of Saint Francis* must have been written prior to that date, and so the information conveyed by the *notula* in the Paris manuscript seems credible.<sup>17</sup>

In his *Prologue*, Thomas states that he had received orders to write from the Pope. This sort of thing did not happen often and can be explained only if we remember, besides the total allegiance promised by Francis and his followers to the Pope and to the Roman Church, the tremendous importance Gregory IX assigned to the new mendicant Orders for reform of the Church.<sup>18</sup> In the same *Prologue* the hagiographer, declaring that truth would be his guide and instructor, says that he tried to set forth, insofar as he was able, though with unskilled words, what he himself had heard from the mouth of Francis and what he had been able to learn from trustworthy and esteemed witnesses.<sup>19</sup>

Thomas was not on close terms with the saint for a long period of time. Perhaps he was a member of that group of men, some literate and some nobles, who around 1215 were received into the fraternity at Saint Mary of the Angels.<sup>20</sup> From Jordan of Giano we learn that he was part of the second mission to Germany in 1221, holding the office of custodian at various times in different places and even becoming, for a time, vicar of the Province of Germany.<sup>21</sup> Thomas was probably not in Assisi when Francis died, but he was almost certainly there the day of his canonization, which he

<sup>16</sup>Test. 25-26 (FF 123).

<sup>17</sup>See also J. Dalarun, *La Malavventura di Francesco d'Assisi. Per un uso storico delle leggende francescane* (Fonti e ricerche, 10), Milan 1996, 69-70 [English trans. *The Misadventure of Francis of Assisi*, St. Bonaventure, NY, 2002].

<sup>18</sup>On this, see F. Accrocca, "Alter apostolus. Per una rilettura della *Vita beati Francisci*," in R. Paciocco - F. Accrocca, *La leggenda di un uomo chiamato Francesco*, 165-94.

<sup>19</sup>1C *Prologue*, 1 (FF 315): "Actus et vitam beatissimi patris nostri Francisci pia devotione veritate semper praevia et magistra, seriatim cupiens enarrare, quia omnia quae fecit et docuit, nullorum ad plenum tenet memoria, ea saltem quae ex ipsius ore audivi, vel a fidelibus et probatis testibus intellexi, iubente domino et glorioso papa Gregorio, prout potui verbis licet imperitis, studui explicare."

<sup>20</sup>1C 56, 6; 57 (FF 420-21).

<sup>21</sup>*Chronica fratris Jordani*, ed. H. Boehmer (Collection d'Études et de Documents, 6), Paris 1908, 22-23, 32, 33 (FF 2345, 2358, 2360).

describes with an abundance of details.<sup>22</sup> Thus his personal memories could have covered only a limited number of years. He certainly knew the saint's writings, traces of which can be seen in his work. He received considerable help from "trustworthy and esteemed witnesses."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps he also had access to written sources (certainly the miracles that were read out during the canonization were written down), but it seems certain, as Roberto Paciocco has convincingly shown, that he could not have used the testimony of Francis's companions. It was this absence that caused a "lack of data and narratives" and "produced a lacuna in the account," especially in the second part of his *Life*.<sup>24</sup>

With his excellent knowledge of Scripture and the rules of the *cursus* (which gave a rhythmic pattern to prose writing), Thomas showed remarkable literary abilities. The *Life* is unquestionably of a high caliber in this regard. Thomas re-interpreted Francis's experience in light of the great hagiographic models of the past. Here he appeals to the Augustinian model to explain his black picture of the saint's youth. In other words, drawing inspiration from the *Confessions*, Thomas seems to have stressed the debauchery of Francis's youth in order to celebrate his conversion even more: from a great sinner to a great saint, thus celebrating the work of grace and the mercy of God. But I think—and I hope I have succeeded in

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<sup>22</sup>1C 123-126 (FF 534-43).

<sup>23</sup>1C *Prologue*, 1, 1 (FF 315).

<sup>24</sup>R. Paciocco, "Sublimia negotia." *Le canonizzazioni dei santi nella curia papale e il nuovo Ordine dei frati Minori* (Centro studi antoniani, 22), Padua 1996, 124; but see, in more detail, 120-27. Paciocco sees this absence filled by the testimony of those who, about twenty years later, would hide behind the testimonial formula "We who were with him" (see 127-36). A single example that confirms Paciocco's suggestion: the eye sickness that affected Francis after his return from the Holy Land, which got notably worse in the last years of the saint's life. In the *Life of Saint Francis* Thomas makes no mention at all of the operation Francis had; but in 1247, in the *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*—better known, although improperly, as the *Second Life*—he uses (see 2C 166, 3-15: FF 752) the precious and detailed testimony of the companions (see AC 86, 4-22: FF 1595-97). Likewise, while the *Life* barely mentions Francis's arrival in Rieti (where he had gone to be treated by an eye specialist) and says nothing else, in the *Remembrance* 92 (FF 679), using again the testimony of the companions (see AC 89: FF 1602), Thomas tells about the poor woman from Machilone to whom Francis gave a mantle and twelve loaves of bread. Both the episodes in the *Assisi Compilation* (for which see R. Manselli, "Nos qui cum eo fuimus." *Contributo alla questione francescana* [Bibliotheca seraphico-capuccina, 28] Rome 1980, 119-33, 137-43 [English trans. in *Greyfriars Review* 14 (2000) Supplement] are accompanied by the testimonial formula "We who were with him."

showing—that Thomas's model was Paul, that Paul who, let us not forget, said that he bore the marks of Christ on his body (see Gal 6:17).<sup>25</sup>

Although it has already been pointed out elsewhere that Thomas's account is not merely the result of a "moralistic amplification"<sup>26</sup> of the statements in the *Testament*,<sup>27</sup> it is nevertheless true that his text is strongly conditioned by the use of established hagiographic models. In that sense, he accentuates the dark tones "with an insistence that seems intentional in addition to being demanded by the documents."<sup>28</sup> A few years later, Julian of Speyer would grasp "the essence of Thomas's lesson,"<sup>29</sup> explicitly recalling in the *Prologue* to his *Life of Saint Francis* that several times, for a particular pedagogical-spiritual purpose, the sacred Scriptures themselves recount the weaknesses of some of the holy people (*infirmi sanctorum*). He recalls the case of Peter who denied Christ, of Paul who persecuted the Church, of Matthew who was a publican before he became an apostle and evangelist, of Magdalene who was possessed by seven demons.<sup>30</sup> He continues:

Therefore, as we begin to narrate briefly the various deeds of Francis, the glorious confessor and Levite of Christ, we will first set forth certain of his weaknesses, so that when his final manner of life, which we cannot fully or worthily explain, is compared to his early life, the Author of his conversion may be splendidly praised by all, the proper humility of the innocent

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<sup>25</sup>F. Accrocca, "Alter apostolus," 198-215, to which should be added the later clarifications offered in Idem, "Francesco e il demonio. La guarigione della donna di Sangemini," *Il Santo* 39 (1999) 232, n. 41.

<sup>26</sup>Thus R. Manselli, *San Francesco* (Biblioteca di cultura) 182, Rome 1980, 53.

<sup>27</sup>Test 1: "For when I was in sin..." (FF 110). See F. Accrocca, "Francesco formato dall'azione di Dio. 'Niente di voi ritenete per voi,'" in *Cercatori di verità. I dinamismi del processo formativo* (Orientamenti formativi francescano), Padua 2001, 61-68.

<sup>28</sup>E. Prinivalli, "Un santo da leggere: Francesco d'Assisi nel percorso delle fonti agiografiche," in *Francesco d'Assisi e il primo secolo di storia francescana* (Biblioteca Einaudi, 1), Turin 1997, 80 [English trans. in *Greyfriars Review* 15:3 (2001) 253-98].

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>30</sup>LJS *Prologue* 1.6: "Ad hoc quorundam, quos speciali meritorum praerogative Dominus privilegiare disposuit, priora quaedam in divinis eloquiis commemorantur infirma sanctorum.... Hinc Christum negasse primum eiusdem vicarium; hinc et ipsum vas electionis Christi legimus Ecclesiam persecutum; ob hoc etiam publicanus ille, qui et apostolus et evangelista vocatur; sed et illa specialis Christi discipula septem daemoniis obsessa narratur."



increased, and firmer hope of pardon given to those who have fallen from grace.<sup>31</sup>

Driven by the same ends that Julian would formally make explicit later, Thomas no doubt exaggerated the tones, especially when describing the formation system in which Francis was raised. The gravity of the previous situation could only cast into greater relief the healing power of grace, which had transformed a corrupt youth raised in sin into a new knight of Christ. According to the hagiographer, the source of the sins committed by the young Francis was his vanity.<sup>32</sup> Francis was vain, eager to excel in all things. Raised by his parents according to the vanity of the age, he grew even more vain and insolent than they.<sup>33</sup> Advancing beyond his peers in vanity, he strove to surpass them all.<sup>34</sup> His very extravagance was explained by his great vanity ("a most unreliable [*vanissimus*] steward").<sup>35</sup> But was this only because of the bad upbringing he received from his parents? Actually the *Life* ended up condemning Assisi society itself in no uncertain terms, especially the urban middle class to which Francis belonged. In short, it condemned what was the dominant class in the city.

### The Legend of the Three Companions, or the "Assisi Legend"<sup>36</sup> of Francis

It was precisely this *in toto* condemnation of the urban scene that the citizens of Assisi could not stomach. As Raoul Manselli wrote with a touch of humor:

Today we do not have stories in *The Assisi Gazette* about the flood of protests that must have come from those who had read the first chapters of Celano's *Life*. But anyone who knows anything about city life—especially in a small city like Assisi in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century—can well imagine what a ripple effect this must have caused!<sup>37</sup>

This was the environment that produced the *Legend of the Three Companions*, today rightly considered one of the most important biographies of Francis.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 8-10.

<sup>32</sup>F. Accrocca, "*Alter apostolus*," 220-26.

<sup>33</sup>1C 1, 1 (FF 317).

<sup>34</sup>1C 2, 2 (FF 320).

<sup>35</sup>1C 2, 4 (FF 320).

<sup>36</sup>R. Manselli, "*Nos qui cum eo fuimus*," 27.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>38</sup>On the *Legend of the Three Companions* see S. Clasen, *Legenda antiqua S.*

Like few others of its genre, the work manages to give a graphic description of Francis's psychological and spiritual journey, his inner emotions and his gradual victories, won through a hard struggle with himself and a tireless search for the will of God. But these facts are a recent acquisition. For a good part of the twentieth century, the *Legend* was at the center of a heated debate, during which its credibility was questioned more than once.<sup>39</sup>

The work takes its name from the letter Francis's companions wrote to the general minister Crescentius of Iesi in 1246 and which all the manuscripts quote at the beginning of the text. Yet the letter seems to have nothing to do with the writing attached to it, since the companions did not wish to write a life ("we do not intend to write a legend") and did not follow a chronological order ("we are not following a chronological order"). Rather, they limited themselves to picking some recollections at will, choosing from among the more beautiful flowers in an extremely rich field.<sup>40</sup> The end product is the result of a process of compilation that took place in several stages. What follows is an attempt to reconstruct the different stages of its composition, an attempt I offer fully aware that my conclusions are provisional in nature.

First of all, it is necessary to keep in mind that in the 1230s there was a proliferation of hagiographic works on the Saint of Assisi. Still, the official text remained the *Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano, but it was the subject of growing criticism by the brothers, especially after the death of Gregory IX. As long as the pontiff who had commissioned the work was alive the criticisms were veiled, but later they became so open and so urgent that in 1244 the General Chapter of Geneva acknowledged its shortcomings and made a grave decision. The general minister at the time,

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*Francisci. Untersuchung über die nachbonaventurianischen Franziskusquellen, Legenda trium Sociorum, Speculum perfectionis, Actus B. Francisci et sociorum eius und verwandtes Schrifttum* (Studia et documenta franciscana, 5), Leiden 1967, *passim*; Idem, *Die Dreiegeführtenlegende des heiligen Franziskus. Die Brüder Leo, Rufin und Angelus erzählen vom Anfang seines Ordens* (Franziskanische Quellenschriften, 8), Werl in W. 1972; T. Desbonnets, "La Légende des trois compagnons. Nouvelles recherches sur la Généalogie des Biographies primitives de saint François," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 65 (1972) 66-106; L. Di Fonzo, "L'Anonimo Perugino tra le fonti francescane del sec. XIII. Rapporti letterari e testo critico," *Miscellanea Franciscana* 72 (1972) 117-483; R. Manselli, "Nos qui cum eo fuimus," 25-30; L. Pellegrini, *Introduzione a Legenda trium sociorum*, in *Fontes Franciscani, 1355-1371*; E. Prinziavalli, "Un santo da leggere," 94-97; F. Uribe, *Introducción a las hagiografías*, 191-97.

<sup>39</sup>See L. Pellegrini, *Introduzione*, 1355-69; F. Uribe, *Introducción a las hagiografías*, 191-97.

<sup>40</sup>L. Di Fonzo, *L'Anonimo Perugino*, 348-57; D. Solvi, *Aspettando il florilegio*, 66-73.

Crescentius of Iesi, in a circular letter whose text has unfortunately been lost, appealed to all those who had known Francis to send in their personal testimonies so that the lacunae noted in Celano's text could be filled in.<sup>41</sup> Among the many and varied materials found in that broad search were the memoirs sent to the general minister from Greccio by some of the saint's companions—Leo, Rufino and Angelo—accompanied by the above-mentioned letter dated August 11, 1246.<sup>42</sup>

The people of Assisi also did their part for the occasion, rightly considering themselves privileged observers for reconstructing the earthly life of their famous fellow townsman, and believing they had been unfairly mistreated by the author of what was (and would remain for the next decades) the official biography of their saint. They sent a written and orderly account of Francis's life, from his birth until around 1220 (and perhaps something else also, but it is hard for us to say anything definite). Besides the personal recollections that came in, the author assigned to do the writing also used the *Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano and the work *The Beginning or Founding of the Order* (also known—but this name, too, is incorrect—as the *Anonymous of Perugia*), which he cited almost in its entirety.

In his work, in what are now the first sixteen chapters, he deals with Francis's youth,<sup>43</sup> his conversion,<sup>44</sup> the arrival of the first companions and their form of life,<sup>45</sup> the confirmation obtained from Innocent III and the gradual institutionalization of the new *religio*.<sup>46</sup> From chapter VIII to chapter XVI he follows *The Beginning or Founding of the Order*, supplementing it at times with Celano's *Life*. His intention, then, was not to produce a new hagiographic text (lacking the miracles and events linked to Francis's death and glorification, the work did not even mention the stigmata, although

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<sup>41</sup>On this circular of Crescentius and on the Order's hagiographic policy, see D. Solvi, *Aspettando il florilegio*, 55-66.

<sup>42</sup>See the summary by E. Pásztor *Studi Medievali* 9 (1968) 252-64 (review of the volume by J. Cambell, *I Fiori dei Tre Compagni*, but in reality much more than a mere review); G. Philippart, "Les écrits des compagnons de S. François. Aperçu de la 'Question franciscaine,'" *Analecta Bollandiana* 90 (1972) 143-66; A. Gattucci, "Dalla 'Legenda Antiqua S. Francisci' alla compilatio Assisiensis: storia di un testo più prezioso che fortunato," *Studi Medievali* 20 (1979) 789-807; D. Solvi, *Aspettando il florilegio*.

<sup>43</sup>L3C, ch. I-II (FF 1395-1401).

<sup>44</sup>L3C, ch. III-VIII (FF 1402-28).

<sup>45</sup>L3C, ch. VIII-XI (FF 1429-54).

<sup>46</sup>L3C, ch. XII-XVI (FF 1455-81).

there were new dreams and visions<sup>47</sup>). More concretely, the author set out to provide an orderly body of material, useful for rewriting certain critical stages in Francis's life, especially the saint's youth, his relationship and conflict with his family and the city—in other words, those aspects Thomas had painted in such dark colors.

By its very nature, a hagiographic text, which celebrates the inflow of grace into the life of the person chosen, normally pays little attention to the various stages into which a journey of conversion is often divided. Our author, on the other hand, who has a good knowledge of language and style but is not much inclined to the hagiographic genre, described with unusual effectiveness Francis's youthful habits, his inner maturing and his difficult struggle with himself to overcome himself in situations he had not been used to in the comfortable surroundings of his father's house. In the *Legend of the Three Companions* "medieval hagiography's most obvious limitation..., its inability to show the development of consciousness, is overcome."<sup>48</sup>

The author was well acquainted with the city and the habits of the rich Assisi youth. He described with rare accuracy the workings of the civic institutions and their jurisdictions. More than any other author, he assigned a significant role to the bishop of the city with regard to discernment and the path taken by Francis. On the other hand, his work displays very little knowledge of canonical language, little aptitude for the genre of hagiography and little historical interest in certain events crucial to the early Franciscan movement (he goes so far as to combine conflicting versions). All these elements lead us to seek its author not in a Franciscan, but, as Raoul Manselli preferred, possibly in an Assisi notary<sup>49</sup> whose main purpose was to correct the strongly negative image given by Thomas of Celano, in his *Life of Saint Francis*, of the saint's youth, his family and the entire city of Assisi.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup>L3C 51, 5-8 (FF 1460): this is about the famous dream of Innocent III in which the Lateran Basilica was supported by a little man who prevented it from collapsing; L3C 56, 3-5 (FF 1465): the vision of a brother in which he seemed to see all the people of the world blind and kneeling around the church of the Portiuncula, where they were healed; L3C 63, 2-7: the famous vision of the black hen unable to gather all its chicks under its wings.

<sup>48</sup>E. Prinzivalli, "Un santo da leggere," 96.

<sup>49</sup>R. Manselli, "*Nos qui cum eo fuimus*," 30. I had picked up on this idea in "Nodi problematici delle fonti francescane. A proposito di due recenti edizioni," *Collectanea Franciscana* 66 (1996) 586 and n. 89; more recently, F. Uribe, referring to this remark of mine, said: "Accrocca picks up on this hypothesis and suggests some possibilities, by way of avenues to pursue, but he does not develop it" (*Introducción a las hagiografías*, 211).

<sup>50</sup>Raoul Manselli was the first to say that the *Legend of the Three Companions* can be seen "as Assisi's response to the official legend of Thomas of Celano [*Life of*

With these distinctive features, the text was sent to Crescentius of Iesi, and even Thomas of Celano used it, along with the memoirs of the companions, in writing the *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*. All this material (to which must be added testimonies and memoirs from individual persons or brothers), kept in the archives of the brothers in Assisi, was not destroyed. Later, toward the end of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the next, an anonymous editor joined the letter of the companions to this writing from Assisi (the first sixteen chapters of the *Legend*), which he filled out by adding chapters XVII-XVIII,<sup>51</sup> no doubt from a later period. The attribution of the work to the saint's companions—justified by the presence of the opening letter—, although it was the harbinger of wrong historical interpretations, nevertheless contributed decisively to the spread of this text.<sup>52</sup>

### Differences in Tone, but Substantial Agreement Between the Two Sources

Now let us look at the texts in greater detail. Both sources use the same expression to describe the inner change taking place in the young Francis: *viles cere sibi* ["to regard himself as worthless"]. We might say that from a certain point on Francis lowered the price, the value he had assigned to himself. He realized that he had valued himself too highly, that he had made an idol of himself. All those things he had loved until then and in which he had been so involved gradually began to lose value in his eyes. "He regarded himself as worthless," as I said, so much so that both the *Life of Saint Francis* and the *Legend of the Three Companions* use the same expression. The author of the legend borrows Thomas of Celano's text verbatim, but although it may be hard, at least for non-specialists, to recognize this dependence since the same phrase may be translated in two different ways, the idea remains essentially the same.<sup>53</sup>

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*Saint Francis*], which, quite frankly, had diluted many aspects of Francis's personality through its use of the great saints of the past as models. What is more, the first part of the work had presented Francis's parents as neglectful or even guilty in his upbringing, making him a young man addicted to vice. This of course made his conversion all the more impressive. But historians should not forget that these pages were condemning an entire social class, the merchants of Assisi, and were thus offensive to a good part of the city of Francis" ("*Nos qui cum eo fuimus*," 27).

<sup>51</sup>FF 1482-87.

<sup>52</sup>I have anticipated here some of the conclusions I reached in my introduction to the text of the *Legend* for the new edition of the *Fonti Francescane*, which is at press; refer to it for a more detailed and reasoned discussion.

<sup>53</sup>I will cite the two texts in immediate succession so that it will be easier to see the direct dependence of the *Legend* on the *Life*:

Thomas says that Francis, recovering from an illness, was walking about with difficulty in the house, supported by a cane. One day he went outside to take a walk, but the beauty of the surrounding countryside could no longer delight him. In fact he considered those who loved such things quite foolish, so much so that he wondered at this change.<sup>54</sup> From then on, says Thomas, he began to regard himself as of less value and to hold in some contempt everything he had previously admired and loved. But not completely, for he was not yet free from the bonds of vanity. He tried to avoid the hand of God, still promising to do great deeds inspired by the glory of the world. Full of vainglory, he decided to join an immediate expedition to Apulia.<sup>55</sup> But the Lord visited him in a dream in the sweetness of grace, and, since he was eager for success, exalted and enticed him to the pinnacle of glory.<sup>56</sup> He sent him a vision—the famous dream of arms—which Francis interpreted by purely human standards, but which forced him to turn back and return to his city.<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, for the author of the *Legend of the Three Companions* this change began to take place in Francis at the end of a sumptuous banquet, prepared at his expense after his voluntary return from the expedition to Apulia he had previously joined. During the banquet his friends had chosen him master of the feast, giving him a scepter. As he walked through the streets deep in thought, a short distance behind his companions who were singing, he was visited by the Lord and filled with such sweetness that he could neither speak nor move.<sup>58</sup> From that moment on he began to consider himself of little value and to forget those things he had previously loved, though not yet completely, for he was still held fast in the snares of vanity.

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(1C 4, 1-2: FF 324): "From that day he began to regard himself as worthless and to hold in some contempt what he had previously held as admirable and lovable, though not completely or genuinely. For he had not yet been freed from the bonds of vanities nor had he thrown off from his neck the yoke of degrading servitude."

(L3C 8, 1: FF 1403): "From that very hour he began to consider himself of little value and to despise those things which he had previously held in love. Since he was not entirely detached from worldly vanities, this change was not yet perfect."

<sup>54</sup>1C 3, 2-4 (FF 323).

<sup>55</sup>1C 4, 5-6 (FF 325).

<sup>56</sup>1C 5, 1 (FF 326).

<sup>57</sup>1C 5, 2-6 (FF 326-28).

<sup>58</sup>L3C 7, 1-4 (FF 1302).

It is interesting how both sources mention a *baculum* ("staff"). But while in the *Legend* this is the staff that Francis was holding in his hand as if it were a scepter, in the *Life* it is only a cane needed by a sick man in order to walk.<sup>59</sup> In the same way, both sources mention a visit by the Lord and the sweetness this brought. According to Thomas, this event took place before the departure for Apulia. After this vision, still interpreted by human standards, Francis returned to Assisi. But Thomas's account is not logical since it does not explain what could have made the young man turn back, seeing that he had received the vision—wrongly interpreted—with such enthusiasm. The *Legend*, on the other hand, says that Francis, who had heard God's voice earlier and set out in arms in spite of this, heard it again in Spoleto while asleep. He began to think very carefully about the vision's meaning, so much so that the rest of the night he could not sleep at all. In the morning he took his horse, turned around and set out toward Assisi.<sup>60</sup> Clearly this latter account seems more logical than the other, and there is no reason to doubt that its purpose was precisely to correct the previous one.

So Thomas believes that the sins of the young Francis were caused by the vanity that held him in its grip. Even though the tone of the author of the *Legend* is completely different, he ends up essentially confirming that judgment. The unknown author of this work describes Francis's youthful habits with unusual realism. He dressed in a showy and eccentric manner, having clothes made for him that were even more sumptuous than those befitting his social rank. In his desire for originality (and, let us be frank, for notoriety at all costs) he would have the most expensive material sewed together with the coarsest cloth onto the same garment.<sup>61</sup> As we can see, it is not all that original to take a pair of expensive new jeans and deliberately make tears in the knees or near the back pocket, like many young people in the affluent (and often bored) West; or, better yet—as was the style a few

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<sup>59</sup>(1C 3, 3: FF 323):

"When he had recovered a little and, *with the support of a cane*, had begun to walk about here and there through the house in order to regain his health, he went outside one day and began to gaze upon the surrounding countryside with greater interest."

(L3C 7, 3: FF 1402): "When they left the house bloated, his friends walked ahead of him, singing throughout the city.  *Holding in his hand the scepter* of their leader, he fell slightly behind them. He was not singing, but was deeply preoccupied." *Emphasis mine.*

<sup>60</sup>L3C 5-6 (FF 1399-1401).

<sup>61</sup>L3C 2, 7-8 (FF 1396): "He was lavish, indeed prodigal, not only in these things, but also in spending more money on expensive clothes than his social position warranted. He was so vain in seeking to stand out that sometimes he had the most expensive material sewed together with the cheapest cloth onto the same garment."

years ago—to sew pieces of colored material, again on a pair of expensive jeans!

Another interesting aspect of the portrait of this rich young man: the *Legend* tells us that he reserved all his attention for his friends. When he had some appointment, he would immediately get up from the table, even before he had finished eating, leaving his parents upset by his sudden departure (“thoughtless flight”: Francis’s behavior seemed rather disorderly and without regard for good manners).<sup>62</sup> It is a surprisingly human trait, with observations we would be hard-pressed to find in other hagiographic works, and in fact Thomas does not mention it in his *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, even though the latter depends on the *Legend*, often literally. The same thing must be said of the previous observation.<sup>63</sup>

And so we have a young man, concerned about himself and his image, focused on his friends and rather unconcerned about his parents, even though they were the ones who let him be what he was and spend more than his rank would allow.<sup>64</sup> A young man so generous and good-natured, but also eager to astonish people and get them to talk about him, basically not very concerned about the real problems of others. Even the generosity he reserved for the poor does not seem to flow from a conscious concern for their plight; it was more a matter of adhering to the noble behavior he had chosen, for it was by no means fitting for a young man who wished to become a noble to behave discourteously or rudely toward the poor.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>L3C 9, 4-5 (FF 1404): “For he was so accustomed to setting his heart on joining his companions when they called him, and was so captivated by their company, that he would frequently leave the table even if he had eaten only a little. In this way he would upset his parents by his thoughtless flight. Now, however, his whole heart was intent on seeing the poor, listening to them, and giving them alms.”

<sup>63</sup>This is already pointed out by Prinzivalli, “Un santo da leggere,” 99.

<sup>64</sup>The author expressly says this in L3C 2, 4-5 (FF 1396): “Because of this his parents often reprimanded him, telling him that he spent so much money on himself and others that he seemed to be the son of some great prince rather than their son. But since his parents were wealthy and loved him very much, they tolerated all these things to avoid upsetting him.” In a few lines the author describes Francis more than once as a spendthrift (2, 3: “most lavish in spending”) and a wastrel (2, 6: “When neighbors commented on his extravagance”; 2, 7: “He was lavish, indeed prodigal, not only in these things”).

<sup>65</sup>L3C 3, 3-5 (FF 1397); on this point, see the remarks of R. Manselli, *San Francesco*, 51; Idem, “*Nos qui cum eo fuimus*,” 21. Even though he was only a merchant, he would lavish alms with the greatest vanity: “He was a very flamboyant squanderer of wealth” says L3C 3, 5, but the author borrows this judgment from 1C 2, 4 (FF 320).



The *Legend* refers at different times to Francis's "courteous" behavior: "The term *curialis* is, in fact, the Latin translation in Europe, and especially in Italy, of *cortese*."<sup>66</sup> The author recalls that Francis was "naturally courteous in manner and speech."<sup>67</sup> He felt that to deny alms to a poor man would show an unbecoming lack of courtesy.<sup>68</sup> Although it may seem surprising after what we said earlier, the *Legend* is actually in full agreement with Thomas's *Life*, which it often borrows word for word. Thomas, in fact, had already told about the time when, contrary to his custom, Francis refused alms to a poor man who was asking for the love of God.<sup>69</sup> But what is more interesting is the precise information about Francis's character. Thomas says that such behavior was uncharacteristic of him, "since he was very polite."<sup>70</sup> Francis could not equal in nobility of birth the knight from Assisi who was organizing an expedition to Apulia, writes Thomas, but he outranked him in magnanimity. He was poorer in material riches, but richer in generosity.<sup>71</sup> The knight possessed riches and was descended from a noble line, but it was Francis who possessed those qualities that were the true mark of a noble soul: magnanimity and generosity.<sup>72</sup>

The *Legend* also completes the account of events as they took place. It tells us that Francis, before leaving for Apulia, had left for war against the Perugians and been taken prisoner. Because he displayed noble manners, they imprisoned him with the nobles.<sup>73</sup> He got out of prison after a year, returned to Assisi (he was a little over twenty years old) and resumed his life as before.<sup>74</sup> We cannot say for sure, but it seems plausible that the illness mentioned by Thomas<sup>75</sup> was actually a consequence of that year in prison.

<sup>66</sup>R. Manselli, *San Francesco*, 51.

<sup>67</sup>L3C 3, 1 (FF 1396); but see also L3C 3, 3 (FF 1400); 6, 1 (FF 1400). See R. Manselli, *San Francesco*, 24-26, 50-51; idem, "*Nos qui cum eo fuimus*," 27-28.

<sup>68</sup>L3C 3, 7 (FF 1397): "Preoccupied with thoughts of wealth and the care of business, he did not give him alms. Touched by divine grace, he accused himself of *great rudeness*..." Emphasis mine.

<sup>69</sup>1C 17, 6-9 (FF 349).

<sup>70</sup>1C 17, 7 (FF 349).

<sup>71</sup>1C 4, 6 (FF 325): "Poorer in wealth, he was richer in generosity." The exact same words are in L3C 5, 2 (FF 1399).

<sup>72</sup>See the astute analyses by E. Pásztor, "Tommaso da Celano e la 'Vita prima': problemi chiusi, problemi aperti," in *Tommaso da Celano e la sua opera di biografo di S. Francesco*. Atti del Convegno di studio: Celano 29-30 novembre 1982, Celano 1985, 54-55.

<sup>73</sup>L3C 4, 1-5 (FF 1398).

<sup>74</sup>L3C 4, 6 (FF 1398): "After a year, when peace was restored between those cities, Francis and his fellow prisoners returned to Assisi."

<sup>75</sup>1C 3, 2-3 (FF 323).

Eager to earn the rank of knight on the battlefield (in other words, to be admitted to the ranks of the nobility), he decided shortly after that to set out for Apulia. But, as we have seen, the Lord stopped him on the way and let him know that this was not the rank he had in store for him.

So there began for Francis a period of intense struggle, with himself and with his city. We cannot go into that aspect now,<sup>76</sup> yet it is interesting to point out that the sources are in substantial agreement once again, despite the difference in approach. Certainly the change required much effort on Francis's part. Indeed, the process was painful and slow: he was still too close to Narcissus and too far from Jesus.<sup>77</sup>

### What, In the End, Are The Facts?

We ask ourselves, then, what was this "reality of sin" in the young Francis? Certainly his greatest sin was to live as if God "had never existed."<sup>78</sup> In that sense Raoul Manselli is entirely correct. But the fact that in his *Testament* Francis did not "specify certain faults as opposed to others"<sup>79</sup> does not mean, *ipso facto*, that there were no specific sins in his past. To try now—almost morbidly—to identify them would be an effort not only doomed to failure, but also vain and pointless, as would be the opposite attitude. The embarrassment of many historians who were faced with this question is a given fact.<sup>80</sup> Gratien of Paris, in his well-known history of the first century of the Franciscan Order, at first believed Thomas's statements. He was challenged on this by Hilarin Felder, one of the censors (the other was Édouard d'Alençon) who examined the book before it was sent to press, and who saw this as casting doubts on the young Francis's chastity.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup>I am planning in the near future to consider this aspect of Francis's personality, along with his severity (which is too often passed over in silence), through a systematic analysis of his writings supplemented by comparisons with the biographical sources.

<sup>77</sup>See J. M. Charron, *Da Narciso a Gesù. La ricerca dell'identità in Francesco d'Assisi*, Padua 1995 (it should be remembered that the author is dealing in the area of "psycho-history").

<sup>78</sup>R. Manselli, *San Francesco*, 49.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup>See some cases pointed out by J. Dalarun, *Francesco: un passaggio. Donna e donne negli scritti e nelle leggende di Francesco d'Assisi*. Afterword by G. Miccoli (I libri di Viella, 2), Rome 1994, 79-82.

<sup>81</sup>In the General Archives of the Capuchins there is a file related to the publication of the *Histoire de la fondation et de l'évolution de l'Ordre des Frères Mineurs au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. I will deal with this specifically another time.

I am certainly convinced, as is Dalarun, that it is very hard for a man to reach the age of twenty-five estranged from God, sinning only in intention but not carrying it out.<sup>82</sup> But even if we can guess the kind of sins he might have committed, what he actually did we cannot know, nor is it important to know. What is important for us instead is to understand how such apparent disagreement between the sources is possible. As we have pointed out, they do essentially agree on the basics, but the different genre gives the two works distinctly different emphases. Thomas is a real master of the hagiographic genre; his work was meant first of all to edify readers and hearers. For him the sins of the young Francis could not be excused by the fact that they were a common heritage widespread among the masses. For the hagiographer, a trouble shared could never be transformed into a trouble halved; it remains always and only a trouble, to be censured all the more severely because it is so widespread.<sup>83</sup> The author of the *Legend* by no means follows this way of thinking (the writer, almost certainly, is not even an ecclesiastic). Things that might have seemed to Thomas a sign of great depravity must have seemed to him trifling peccadillos not even worth dwelling on. To clarify by using a still more famous example: Would the story about the much-declaimed theft of pears by Aurelius Augustine while still a boy have come down to us if it had been written by someone other than the protagonist?<sup>84</sup> Augustine, now a bishop, is going over the events of

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<sup>82</sup>J. Dalarun, *Francesco: un passaggio*, 81: "If the leader of Assisi's most dissolute 'gilded youth,' until the age of twenty-five—and life was short in the Middle Ages—had lustful dreams, generally speaking, but never attempted to make his dreams a reality, then the creation of all the Italian religious Orders was pointless: all of medieval Italy was already a cloister."

<sup>83</sup>Manselli says this also, but even he tends to minimize the fact of the young Francis's sinful behavior: "Let us begin by pointing out that by the expression *esse in peccatis* he [Francis] he did not intend to specify certain faults as opposed to others. Rather, he was speaking of a life attached to the pleasures and rewards of the world, a life that did not explicitly ignore Christ but nevertheless functioned as if he had never existed. It was a condition of existence that moralists of that period considered and deplored as normal for the masses. The moralists repeatedly protested this attitude by proclaiming the possibility of imminent death and the universal and particular judgments. Examples are seen in the *Dies irae* and in the initial part of the *Vita prima* by Thomas of Celano, completely dominated by this motif" (*San Francesco* 49).

<sup>84</sup>As has been rightly stressed, the *Confessions* were "dictated toward the end of the century—in other words, many years after the events narrated—by an Augustine who had reflected a long time on his personal story, driven by an overriding desire to be the center of attention. And so even if the accuracy of the events he recounts cannot be questioned, the whole psychological setting cannot help but reflect the mentality of the Augustine who is narrating, very different from that of the youth of over thirty years before" (M. Simonetti – E. Prinzivalli, *Storia*

his life in the *Confessions*, being very sorry for every little sin, and he uses that theft as an example of the wickedness of children. If an author like the one who wrote the *Legend* had such an incident available, he probably would not even have considered it. And yet that theft was real, even if it was not the end of the world.

Thomas, then, exaggerates the tone, but we cannot for that reason say that everything is a product of his creation. Certainly the vain young man presented to us by the *Life* is not unlike the young narcissist of the *Legend*. A man who is 6 feet 4 inches tall can make a very different impression, depending on whether the observer is a basketball player or a short man, but this does not change the reality of his person. Not only to Thomas, but also to Francis—now come to the end of his life—his life as a youth, unmindful of God and focused entirely on himself, rightly seemed to be a state of sin, even though afterward he had spent the rest of his life speaking with God and speaking about God, in a constant struggle to attain complete forgetfulness of self.