Choice of Life vs. Reputation for Holiness. From *Brother* Francis to *Saint* Francis¹

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1. Canonization: The Official Recognition of a Cult

pparently the process for the canonization of Francis of Assisi did not follow the procedure established in the second half of the thirteenth century. This called for an *informatio in partibus* by three commissioners, which was sent to the pope along with a *relatio*. On the basis of these, the pontiff and cardinals would meet in secret consistory to decide the outcome. Whether Francis had to undergo a canonical process in the strict sense, or whether some leeway was still allowed in the 1230s — in which case the fact that Hugolino knew Francis personally was probably a factor — does not

¹Esser: Kajetan Esser, Die opuscula des bl. Franziskus von Assisi. Neue textkritische Edition. Zweite, erweiterte und verbesserte Auglage besorgt von Englebert Grau O.F.M., Grottaferrata 1989 (Spicilegium Bonaventurianum, 13). 1Cel: Thomas of Celano, Vita prima s. Francisci, in Analecta Franciscana, X: Legendae S. Francisci Assisiensis saeculis XIII et XIV conscriptae, Quaracchi, 1926-41, pp. 1-117. 2Cel: Tommaso da Celano, Vita secunda s. Francisci, idem, pp. 127-268. L3S: Legenda trium sociorum. Édition critique. Ed. Theophile Desbonnets in AFH, LXVII (1974), pp. 38-144. LM: Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, Legenda maior S. Francisci, in Analecta Franciscana, X, pp. 557-652. LP: "Compilatio Assistensis" dagli scritti di fra Leone e Compagni su S. Francesco d'Assisi. Based on Perugia ms. 1046, 2d complete edition, revised and corrected with facing Italian version and variations, ed. Mario Bigaroni, Santa Maria degli Angeli 1992 (Pubblicazioni della Biblioteca Francescana. Chiesa Nuova. Assisi, 2). Pt: A. Potthast, Regesta pontificum Romanorum inde ab a. post Christum natum MCXCVIII ad a. MCCIV, Berolini 1874-75. SP: Le Speculum perfectionis ou Mémoires de frère Léon sur la seconde partie de la vie de Saint François d'Assise. Ed. Paul Sabatier and A.G. Little, Manchester 1928-31 (British Society of Franciscan Studies, 13, 17).

matter here. We simply wish to recall that on July 19, 1228, Gregory IX officially recognized the cult of Francis of Assisi and extended it to the universal church.²

Only a few decades earlier, in the context of his desire to assert the primacy of Rome, the pope had claimed for himself the Right of Canonization. The interventions of Innocent III were decisive. Between 1199 and 1203, the papal chancery published five letters of canonization in his name. The letter for the empress Cunegunda left no room for misunderstanding. It stated that the sublime iudicium by which the cult of a saint was judged worthy of universal celebration came solely from the successor of Peter and vicar of Christ on earth.

By a careful choice of cults according to the changing religious needs of the time, the church could propose for Catholic veneration saints whose values and virtues would challenge those of the reform movements. Some of the latter were regarded by the church as barely orthodox, if at all. The institution of canonized sanctity can also be seen as an attempt to bring back to the church individuals who had joined such movements. This was the Innocent III's conscious and far-sighted plan.⁵

It has often been pointed out how well the Christian proposal of Francis fit into the context of the religious demands of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The rapid increase in the number of brothers proves how

²For a description of the processes of canonization from their beginning to their classic form, see A. Vauchez, La sainteté en Occident au derniers siècles du Moyen Age d'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques, Rome 1981 (Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 241), pp. 39-67. This book is now available in a revised and enlarged edition, with a list of corrections and bibliography updated to 1987. On the canonization of Francis and some of his other contemporaries, see R. Paciocco, Da Francesco ai "catalogi sanctorum." Livelli istituzionali e immagini agiografiche nell'Ordine francescano (secoli XIII-XIV), Assisi 1990 (Collectio Assisiensis, 20), pp. 25-47. Still basic in this area is the work of M. Bihl, "De canonizatione s. Francisci," in AFH, XXI (1928), pp. 467-514. For the text of the letter of Francis's canonization, see Bullarium Franciscanum Romanorum Pontificum. Ed. J. H. Sbaralea, I, Rome 1759, pp. 42-44.

³For Homobonus of Cremona (April 12, 1199: Pt n. 573), the empress Cunegunda (two letters, both from April 3, 1200: Pt n. 1000, Pt n./), Gilbert of Sempringham (January 30, 1202: Pt n./), Wulstan of Worcester (April 31, 1203: Pt n. 1900). For these letters of canonization and also for the positions of historians on the pope's reservation of the right of canonization, see Paciocco, Da Francesco ai "catalogi sanctorum" pp. 26-35.

⁴Cum secundum evangelicam veritatem, April 3, 1200. Edition in J. Petersohn, Die Litterae Papst Innocenz III. zur Heiligsprechung der Kaiserin Kunigunde (1200), in Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung, 37 (1977), 1-25.

⁵Paciocco, Da Francesco ai "catalogi sanctorum" pp. 35-47.

⁶See G. G. Merlo, Tensioni religiose agli inizi del Duecento. Il primo francescanesimo in rapporto a tradizioni eremitico-penitenziali, esperienze pauperistico-evangeliche, gruppi ereticali e istituzioni

eagerly his message was received. This is true despite the fact that the calculations have proven to be questionable since the numbers in the sources are derived from the Bible.⁷

By canonizing Francis, the church was recognizing and approving a gospel movement that, despite its non-institutional origins, had pledged obedience and unconditional fidelity to Rome in the person of Francis and his brothers. Francis was becoming a saint of the highest rank — according to the Catholic pattern, as it were — just as his choice of life had been concretely expressed in the words life according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. Not that the two are incompatible, only different. But if these two formae or patterns are sufficiently compatible to share at least some elements, still the canonized Francis of Mira Circa Nos is certainly very different from Francis the brother and his following of Christ. I say this not merely to emphasize the obvious difference

ecclesiastiche, Torre Pellice 1984, now in idem, Tra eremo e città. Studi su Francesco d'Assisi e sul francescanesimo medievale, Assisi 1991 (Medioevo francescano. Saggi, 2), pp. 33-92. Idem, Religiosità e cultura religiosa dei laici nel secolo XII, in L'Europa dei secoli XI e XII fra novità e tradizione: sviluppi di una cultura. Proceedings of the 10th International Study Week, Mendola, August 25-29, 1986, Milan 1989 (Publications of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. Miscellanea of the Center for Medieval Studies, 12), pp. 197-215; G. Miccoli, Chiesa, riforma, vangelo e povertà: un nodo nella storia religiosa del XII secolo, in idem, Francesco d'Assisi. Realtà e memoria di un'esperienza cristiana, Turin 1991 (Einaudi Paperbacks, 217), pp. 3-32, bibliography updated from a paper read at Piacenza, 17 February 1983, for the symposium I Francescani in Emilia, published in Storia della città, 26-27 (1984), pp. 33-43. On the recent work by Giovanni Miccoli, see G. G. Merlo, Su e oltre frate Francesco, in Nuova rivista storica, LXXVI (1992), pp. 531-52. I wish to thank Giovanni Miccoli for the ideas he shared with me during an exchange of letters after the publication of my book Da Francesco ai "catalogi sanctorum."

According to the calculations of Theophile Desbonnets, De Pintuition à Pinstitution. Les franciscains, Paris 1983, p. 57 (but see the author's note 8, p. 165), the rate of growth from 1209 to 1219 was more than 80%. This means that membership in the fraternitas, and later the Order (it was during these crucial years that the Franciscan movement was absorbed into the institutional church) almost doubled each year. But see the comments of Merlo, Su e oltre Francesco, p. 541 and n. 49. On the beginnings of Franciscan recruitment it is interesting to read L. Pellegrini, Storia e geografia del "reclutamento" francescano della prima generazione, in I compagni di Francesco e la prima generazione minoritica. Proceedings of the 19th International Study Symposium. Assisi October 17-19, 1991, Spoleto 1992 (Proceedings of the Symposia of the International Society for Franciscan Studies and the Inter-University Center for Franciscan Studies. New series, 2), pp. 3-29.

See G. Miccoli, La proposta cristiana di Francesco d'Assisi, now in idem, Francesco d'Assisi. Realtà e memoria, pp. 33-97 (also in Studi Medievali, 3rd Series, XXIV, 1983, pp. 17-73), especially pp. 72-84, and also idem, Un'esperienza cristiana tra Vangelo e istituzione, in Dalla "sequela Christi" di Francesco d'Assisi all'apologia della povertà. Proceedings of the 18th International Symposium. Assisi October 18-20, 1990, Spoleto 1992, (Proceedings of the Symposia of the International Society for Franciscan Studies and the Inter-University Center for Franciscan Studies. New series, 1), pp. 3-40. For other views on the relationship between Francis and the Roman Church, see R. Paciocco, La proposta cristiana di Francesco d'Assisi e la Chiesa, in Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia, XL (1986), pp. 134-40. See also the comments of G. G. Merlo, "Intorno a frate Francesco: uomini e identità di una nuova 'fraternitas,'" in I compagni di Francesco e la prima generazione minoritica, pp. 313-38.

between institutional sanctity and the gospel witness of the man from Assisi. Rather I wish to point out the purpose and nature of the official act that created Francis the saint. This act, a permanent part of the Franciscan heritage, recognized the universal (catholic) holiness of a man who little by little was assuming the role of founder of a religious order.

2. A Choice of Life

The Testament of Francis is a concise, yet dense human and spiritual memoir. Writing shortly before his death, Francis looks back, revisiting and rethinking the events of his past in light of the present. The Testament is an important (and much-used) piece of evidence for his choice of life. It begins with a mention of penance, his contact with lepers, prayer, faith in the church and its ministers who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church. The church and its priests alone administer what can be seen corporally in this world of the Son of God. Next comes an important passage in which Francis is anxious to point out that, once the fraternity had taken shape, it was God who revealed to him what to do: to live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. This, the central point of departure, is found everywhere in Francis's writings. 10

The following of Christ found concrete expression in minority. This included poverty and the renunciation of power, possession and riches. These were accompanied by preaching, made credible by the status of the preacher, who himself was one of the *pauperes*. The type of charitable work and almsgiving characteristic of traditional monasticism were rejected. Since Francis

Even a list of the basic bibliography would be too long, as is evident when research shifts from the biographies to the writings of Francis. Still fundamental is the interpretation of E. Grau, "Die neue Bewertung der Schriften des hl. Franziskus von Assisi seit den letzen 80 Jahren," in San Francesco nella ricerca storica degli ultimi ottanta anni, October 13-16, 1968, Todi 1971 (Symposium of the Center for the Study of Medieval Spirituality, 9), pp. 33-73. See also L. Pellegrini, "Francesco e is suoi scritti. Problemi e orientamenti di lettura in alcuni recenti studi," in Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia, XXXVI (1982), pp. 311-31. For the Testament, see especially the comments of G. Miccoli, La proposta cristiana, pp. 41-56, and — not only for this writing of Francis, but also for reflections of a broader nature — O. Capitani, Verso una nuova antropologia e una nuova religiosità, in La conversione alla povertà nell'Italia dei secoli XII-XIV. Proceedings of the 27th International Historical Symposium. Todi October 14-17, 1990, Spoleto 1991 (Proceedings of the Todi Academy and the Center for the Study of Medieval Spirituality. New series, 4), pp. 447-71.

¹⁰In addition to the work by Miccoli cited in the preceding note, and his La "scoperta" del vangelo come "forma vitae" nelle biografie francescane: le aporie di una memoria storica in difficoltà, in Francesco d'Assisi. Realtà e memoria, pp. 148-89, see also O. Schmucki, La forma di vita secondo il Vangelo gradatamente scoperta da S. Francesco d'Assisi, in L'Italia francescana, LIX (1984), pp. 341-405.

himself shared the lot of the *pauperes*, he could not be a dispenser of charity and alms, only a recipient.¹¹

Minority was expressed through preaching, and it was in this contact with his audience that Francis's choice of life found a reception. We must remember that Francis's preaching was not based on academic formation, considering what we know about his ecclesiastical preparation. The revelation (1208/1209) that led him to read and seek an explanation of the gospel passage about the sending of the apostles (he knows very little Latin), 12 is recounted for the first time in the biography by Thomas of Celano (composed between 1228 and 1229 by order of Gregory IX). 13 For the narration of this episode in the other biographies, see Desbonnets, *De l'intuition*, pp. 12-20. After this experience, Francis's preaching was characterized by extreme simplicity. It was a proclamation of peace. Moreover, it was aligned with and supported by one of the chief goals of the first fraternity — the practice of minority. And so all behavior became preaching. 14

It was certainly not a question of taking exemplary deeds from the lives of others and offering them as examples. According to *Admonition* VI, it is inconceivable that a brother should want to receive glory and honor by recounting the concrete accomplishments of others (significantly, the text has recounting, not preaching). Such a thing, were it to happen, would only be cause

¹¹Besides the titles already mentioned, I should mention another book — not always kindly reviewed — whose expressions are rather "strong" but always stimulating to read: David Flood, Frère François et le mouvement franciscain, Paris [1983] (People of God), especially pp. 35-43 (Chap. I, 8-9: Une question d'identité; L'identité franciscaine).

¹²Concerning Francis's formation, see A. Pratesi, "L'autografo di s. Francesco nel duomo di Spoleto," in San Francesco e i francescani a Spoleto, Spoleto 1984, pp. 17-26, especially p. 24; A. Bartoli Langeli, "Le vadici culturali della 'popolarità' francescana," in Il francescanesimo e il teatro medievale. Proceedings of the National Study Symposium San Miniato, October 8-10, 1982, Castelfiorentino 1984 (Library of the "Miscellanea storica della Val d'Elsa," 6), pp. 41-58, especially p. 56; R. Rusconi, "Cultura e scrittura in Francesco d'Assisi: a proposito degli autografi," in Actes du Colloque franciscain de Bonifacio (September 20-21, 1982), Bonifacio 1982, pp. 51-68.

¹³1Cel 22: "But when on a certain day the Gospel was read in that church, how the Lord sent his disciples out to preach, the holy man of God, assisting there, understood somewhat the words of the Gospel; after Mass he humbly asked the priest to explain the Gospel to him more fully. When he had set forth for him in order all these things, the holy Francis, hearing that the disciples of Christ should not possess gold or silver or money; nor carry along the way scrip, or wallet, or bread, or a staff; that they should not have shoes, or two tunics; but that they should preach the kingdom of God and penance, immediately cried out exultingly: 'This is what I wish, this is what I seek, this is what I long to do with all my heart.'"

¹⁴R. Rusconi, "La predicazione minoritica in Europa nei secoli XIII-XIV," in Francesco, il francescanesimo e la cultura della nuova Europa, ed. I. Baldelli and A. M. Romanini, Rome 1986 (Acta Encyclopaedica, 4), pp. 141-65, especially pp. 143-44; Bartoli Langeli, Le radici culturali, p. 58. See also Raoul Manselli, "Il gesto come predicazione per san Francesco d'Assisi," in CF, LI (1981), pp. 5-16.

for shame. 15 Let them preach by their deeds, says chapter XVII of the Earlier Rule, not boasting or delighting in themselves, not even in the words they speak or the works they do. For it is God who provides the words and accomplishes the works; nothing belongs to us except our vices and sins.

This is followed by an extremely important passage on holiness. It is no accident, I think, that it comes at this point in the Earlier Rule. The preaching described in this chapter represents the complete and total externalization of a gospel ideal embodied in a choice of life. For that reason, preaching is also the moment when manifestations of this ideal can be transformed — in the minds of the hearers — into signs of holiness. ¹⁶

Let all the brothers, therefore, beware of all pride and vainglory. Let us guard ourselves from the wisdom of this world and the prudence of the flesh (Rom 8:6). Because the spirit of the flesh very much wants and strives to have the words but cares little for the activity; it does not seek a religion and holiness in an interior spirit, but wants and desires to have a religion and holiness outwardly apparent to people. They are the ones of whom the Lord says: Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward (Mt 6:2). The Spirit of the Lord, however, wants the flesh to be mortifed and looked down upon, considered of little worth and rejected. It strives for humility and patience, the pure, simple and true peace of the spirit. Above all, it desires the divine fear, the divine wisdom and the divine love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let us refer all good to the Lord, God Almighty and Most High, acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him, from whom all good comes, for everything. May He, the Almighty and Most High, the only true God, have, be given, and receive all honor and respect, all praise and blessing, all thanks and glory, to whom all good belongs, He who alone is good (see Lk 18:19).17

The type of preaching described here reminds us of the conditions imposed on lay preachers by Innocent III. In his approval of the *Propositum Vitae* of the *Humiliati*, June 7, 1201, he stated that under no circumstances could the laity preach on faith or the sacraments. These topics were reserved to the clergy.

¹⁷Esser, pp. 392-93. See also ibid., p. 301 (Fragmenta alterius Regulae non bullatae). See also Admonitions V, XII, XVII, XIX, XXVIII (ibid., between pp 105-18).

¹⁵Adm VI: "Let all of us, brothers, consider the Good Shepherd who bore the suffering of the cross to save His sheep. The Lord's sheep followed Him in tribulation and persecution, in shame and hunger, in weakness and temptation, and in other ways; and for these things they received eternal life from the Lord. Therefore, it is a great shame for us, the servants of God, that the saints have accomplished great things and we want only to receive glory and honor by recounting them" (Esser, p. 110).

¹⁶On the Earlier Rule, see David Flood, Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder, Werl Westf. 1967. For the origin of the text, see David Flood, W. van Dijk and T. Matura, La naissance d'un charisme. Une lecture de la première Règle de saint François, Paris 1973 (Présence de saint François, 24), pp. 23-84.

Lay preaching should have an essentially moral thrust; it should be a word of exhortation. ¹⁸ It is within this framework, which limited the scope and content of the preaching of Francis and the early fraternity, that the *Earlier Rule's let them preach by their deeds* is situated. These words are accompanied by a series of exhortations to humility, which have disappeared in the *Later Rule* (1223). The latter's chapter IX on preaching deals mainly with canonical matters: the need for permission from the bishop and minister general, examination by the latter, approval and conferral of the office. This is followed by an admonition to brevity in preaching, whose goal is said to be the *benefit and edification of the people*. ¹⁹

But the words let them preach by their deeds also recall Francis's own conduct. Among the exhortations to humility that accompany the chapter on preaching is the precept to beware of pride and vainglory. Conscience (in interiori spiritu) is the source of exemplary deeds and a safeguard against conduct aimed at displaying one's holiness. Such conduct would be an expression, not of a religion and holiness in an interior spirit, but of one that is outwardly apparent to people.

This theme, of course, was not new; it can be found in earlier discussions of holiness. Interior and exterior holiness were always to exist in delicate balance, thus creating a holiness whose center of gravity was interiority. Outward holiness came to be associated with hypocrisy and was seen as a holiness of appearances only. During the monastic reforms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries a dispute arose between partisans of the eremetic life and those of the cenobitic life. Ivo of Chartres († 1116), writing to Rainaldus, emphasized solitudo mentis, tranquillitas conscientiae, Sabbatum cordis and ascensiones in corde. These were the necessary requirements for holiness. As such they served as a check to prevent what were proper manifestions of holiness from becoming vainglory or exhibitionism.²⁰

¹⁸R. Rusconi, "Predicatori e predicaziione (secoli (IX-XVIII)," in Storia d'Italia, Annali IV: Intellettuali e potere, Turin 1981, pp. 951-1035, especially pp. 968-73. See also idem, "Formam apostolorum." "L'immagine del predicatore nei movimenti religiosi francesi ed italiani dei sec. XII e XIII," in Cristianesimo nella storia, VI (1985), pp. 513-42.

¹⁹Esser, p. 370. See G. Miccoli, "La storia religiosa," in Storia d'Italia, II/1, Turin 1974, pp. 753-58. On the interpretation of the Earlier Rule and the progressive construction of its institutional authority, see A. Tabarroni, "La regola francescana tra autenticità ed autenticazione," in Dalla "sequela Christi" di Francesco d'Assisi, pp. 79-122.

²⁰PL 162, coll. 198-202, especially coll. 201-02: "For the seclusion of the forest or the tops of mountains do not make a man blessed if he does not have solitude of spirit, the Sabbath of the heart, tranquillity of conscience, and ascensions in the heart. Without these, all solitude is accompanied by accidia of the mind, curiosity, vainglory, and the dangerous storms of

Peter Damian reproached Teuzo for undertaking the eremitical life without the prior and necessary stability afforded by life in community. He was leaving himself open to excessive contact with the world and other people. The diatribe goes on to accuse him of being motivated by vainglory and a desire to show off his ascetical virtues. This implied that he was more interested in the opinio turbae than in the testimonium propriae conscientiae. Abelard, in his Ethics, had already clearly stated the importance of intention: For God thinks not of what is done but in what mind it is done, and the merit or glory of the doer lies in the intention, not in the deed.

Thus was laid the foundation for a process that led to conscious internalization of the spiritual life. This was in opposition to the conformity and rules considered sacrosanct by an increasingly rigid church. The same process later inspired the reaction that led large numbers of people to embrace poverty. Detachment from earthly things became the condition for the development of consensus in a renewed society.²³

A sign of this new and interior understanding of merit was the meaning attributed to axioms from Christian antiquity—such as Ambrose's affectus tuus operi tuo nomen imponit ("Your good-will gives meaning to your work"). Spurred on by Abelard, Alan of Lille and the disciples of Gilbert de la Porrée commented on these sayings. Merit was proportional to the will, and the motives of an act were what gave it meaning, value and human truth. Commenting on Abelard's know yourself, Alan of Lille spoke of the threefold book of knowledge / book of experience / book of conscience. He concluded his analysis with the formula: "The one who seeks within becomes a spiritual

temptations." On this dispute, see I. Deug Su, "La 'militia Christi' nella vita eremitica tra i secoli XI e XII," in "Militia Christi' e Crociata nei secoli XI-XIII." Proceedings of the 11th International Week of Study, Mendola, 28 August-1 September 1989, Milan 1992 (Publications of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. Miscellanea of the Center for Medieval Studies, 13), pp. 299-340.

²¹PL 145, col. 753: "Now of those who act as if there were a shortage of forests and seek solitude in the cities, what else are we to think but that they are not looking for the perfection of solitary life, but rather for applause and glory?... Nor do you judge yourself by the testimony of your own conscience, but rather according to the opinion of a flattering mob, with whom slave-like pallor on the face and just hearing the word fasting cause them to go out of their mind.... And what is there praised to the skies, hardly deserves a mention here."

²²PL 178, 644a. See F. Lottin, Psycholodie et morale au XIIe e XIIIe siècles, IV: Problèmes de morale, III/1, Louvain-Gembloux 1954, p. 311.

²³M. D. Chenu, L'éveil de la conscience dans la civilisation médiévale, Paris 1969; Italian tr. Il risveglio della coscienza nella civiltà medievale, Milan 1982, pp. 79-80. This work has some very interesting points. See also La conversione alla povertà, especially the contribution by G. G. Merlo, pp. 1-32.
²⁴See Lottin, Psychologie et morale, pp. 310-15, 320, 334-37.

person."²⁵ Finally, there was Bernard of Clairvaux who associated *cognitio sui* with humility. He emphasized how humility that springs from self-knowledge is the stable ground of the spiritual edifice. ²⁶

Despite what we said earlier about Francis's lack of academic formation,²⁷ he surely must have absorbed these ideas. By then they had become rules, so to speak, for the external expression of the faith and religious values of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Words and ideas, inserted into a moral code of behavior, could be interpreted and systematized within the context of a way of life and personal ideals. Francis was only one of the many possible examples.

I have spoken of values grounded in life according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel and have stressed Francis's exhortation to boliness in an interior spirit rather than outwardly apparent to people. My intention was to recall his choice of life and reflect on how its necessary expression and inevitable manifestation called for conscious validation. His existence was to be totally one with his thoughts, words and deeds. Holy deeds, yes, but only if conscience first validated them as being in accord with the Christ of the gospels. That meant, in this case, the manner in which the gospel message that had re-emerged in the twelfth century was embodied in Francis and lived by him. It was not my intention to stress the newness of the appeal to interiority or the role of conscience in the dialogue with God. These are also found in monasticism. Rather I wished to show that Francis's conscience could reach God only through the mediation of his neighbor. The religious message became not only prayer but action that was true. It was lived witness and concrete preaching. No room was left for discrepancies between conscience and gospel, gospel and life, life and example.

²⁵Chenu, *Il risveglio della coscienza*, p. 67f. For some reflections on Christian Socratism that are still of interest, see E. Gilson, *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, Paris 1948, pp. 1-16.

or interest, see E. Grison, Lespin at a passophe measter, and 1 kg, pp. 1 2647 wish therefore that before everything else my soul should know itself, because not only usefulness but right order demand this. Right order, since what we are first of all is what we are in ourselves; and usefulness, because this knowledge does not inflate but rather humbles us and thus provides a basis on which to build. For unless there is a durable foundation of humility, the spiritual edifice has no hope of standing.... For how can it [the soul] escape being genuinely humbled on acquiring this true self-knowledge, on seeing the burden of sin that it carries, the oppressive weight of this mortal body, the complexities of earthly cares, the corrupting influence of sensual desires; on seeing its blindness, its worldliness, its weakness, its embroilment in repeated errors; on seeing itself exposed to a thousand dangers, trembling amid a thousand fears, confused by a thousand difficulties, defenseless before a thousand suspicions, worried by a thousand needs; one to whom vice is welcome, virtue repugnant?" Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermones super Cantica canticorum. XXXVII. Rome 1958 (S. Bernardi opera, 2), p. 7. See also idem, pp. 9-18 (Sermo XXXVII).

²⁷See Bartoli Langeli, Le radici culturali, pp. 55-58, and also the other works cited in footnote 8.

In addition to Francis's own writings, we find evidence for this in several episodes recounted in the biographies. There was the sermon at the hermitage of Poggio Bustone where Francis publicly confessed that he had eaten food prepared with lard because of his infirmity.²⁸ There was his command that he be dragged with a rope about his neck through the streets of Assisi while he publicly confessed that he had once again eaten meat.²⁹ Or when he was sick, he did not want to patch the inside of his habit with the skin of a fox — in order to protect his spleen and stomach from the cold — unless a similar skin were sewn to the outside as well, "to show people that there is a skin hidden inside too."30 There was also the time when he was beaten by devils — whom he refers to as the Lord's policemen. They had punished him for neglecting his duty to give good example, for while his brothers were suffering hunger and tribulations, living in small humble houses and in hermitages, he had accepted lodging in a tower. Thus his lapidary comment to Brother Leo: "The people have great confidence in me and regard me as a saint; now, as you see the devils have thrown me out of my prison!"31

Here, through the practice of public confession, he constantly strives to validate his public and private behavior. He manifests everything without distinction, according to his intention, which is stated explicity only in the Legend of Perugia and the Mirror of Perfection. But it is completely in line with what he says in other terms in his own writings and what we read in the biographies, both official and unofficial: "Before God, in the hermitages or in the other friaries where I stay, I want to live as if people were watching me. Since they take me for a saint, I would be a hypocrite if I did not live the life befitting a saint." 32

3. Francis: Brother and Saint

After his canonization, July 19, 1228, Francis's reputation as a saint began to spread to places that had not been touched by his preaching or that of his followers. Some places had heard of the new Order but not its founder — or, if they had heard of him, did not consider the fact worth recording. Indeed,

²⁸2Cel 31, p. 207; LP 81, pp. 230-32; SP 62, p. 173.

²⁹1Cel 52, p. 40; LM VI, p. 582f; LP 80, pp. 226-30.

³⁰2Cel 130, p. 206f; see also LP 81, pp. 226-28 and SP 62, p. 174.

³¹LP 117, pp. 384-92 (the citation is from p. 392) and SP 67, pp. 189-93. (See also the more succint accounts in 2Cel 119-20, pp. 200-01 and LM VI 10, p. 586, which lack the saying quoted in the text.)

³²LP 81, p. 226 (see SP 62, p. 174).

what the chronicles and non-Franciscan witnesses have to say about the beginnings of the Franciscan Order is concerned exclusively with the new religious institute. They show little or no inclination to spend much time on Francis.³³ The only thing that appears to pique their interest is the Damietta episode and the presence of Francis in the crusaders' camp.³⁴ It would take canonization to make him a "star" in the eyes of the Catholic world.

Jacques de Vitry, one of the outstanding ecclesiastics of his time and a careful observer and chronicler of its religious events, mentions Francis in one of his letters. But this is in connection with Damietta.³⁵ In his *Historia Occidentalis*, he speaks at length about the Friars Minor, situating the birth of the Order within the eschatological framework of salvation history. But he merely mentions Francis, once again in the context of the Fifth Crusade.³⁶ Others who write about the Order, but are silent about Francis, include Buoncompagno of Signa, Burchard of Ursperg, and the *Chronicles* of Monte Sereno and St. Martin of Tours.³⁷

Things begin to change after his canonization. The notary Riccardo of San Germano, in his *Chronicle* devoted to the Kingdom of Sicily, lists the canonization among the important events in the pontificate of Gregory IX. Referring to Francis, the *History of Heraclius* attributes his authority to the fact of his canonization. Francis the man has become Francis the saint.³⁸

But the non-Franciscan sources are not the only ones to record the change that came with canonization. The testimony contained in the *Chronicle* of Jordan of Giano is also noteworthy. Jordan had known Francis personally before moving to Germany. On his first trip back to Italy, around 1230, he met Thomas of Celano, who gave him some relics of Francis. Upon his return to Eisenach, Jordan was told that he could not enter by the friary door because of

³³L. Pellegrini, "Cronache e altre testimonianze non francescane," in Fonti francescane, Padua 1983, 3rd ed. pp. 1809-38. A list of all the witnesses may be found in L. Lemmens, Testimonia minora saeculi XIII de S. Francisco Assisiensi. Edited on the occasion of the 7th centenary of his death by Leonard Lemmens, O.F.M., Quaracchi 1926 (Collectanea philosphico-theologica, 3).

³⁴The witnesses are listed chronologically in G. Golubovich, Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente francescano, I, Quaracchi 1906, pp. 1-84. Bibliography and further reflections on the episode in R. Paciocco, "Sub iugo servitutis." Francesco, i francescani e la "militia Christi," in "Militia Christi" e Crociata nei secoli, XI-XIII, pp. 699-715.

³⁵ Jacques de Vitry, Lettres de Jacques de Vitry (1160/1170-1240), évêque de Saint-Jean-d'Acre. Critical edition by R. B. C. Huygens, Leiden 1960, pp. 71-78.

³⁶ Ibid., The *bistoria occidentalis* of Jacques de Vitry. A critical edition. Ed. J. F. Hinnebush O.P., Fribourg 1972, pp. 158-63.

³⁷ See L. Pellegrini, Cronache e altre testimonianze non francescane, pp. 1818-28.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 1828-34.

the precious package he was carrying. Instead they made him pass through the church, where (much to his surprise!) he was welcomed by a grand liturgical procession in honor of the relics of St. Francis. It does not matter here how the brothers learned about the imminent arrival of the relics. Rather we should note how this special welcome served to make Jordan aware of Francis's changed status. The man whom he had once known was now a saint:

And from then on Brother Jordan began to hold in greater reverence and honor Blessed Francis, whom he had seen in life and for this reason something of whose humanity had struck him.³⁹

It was the treatment reserved for the relics that opened the eyes of their bearer. At issue is the role played by Francis's canonization. A ceremony such as Jordan had just witnessed could have taken place only after official recognition of Francis's cult. Since the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), only relics approved by the pope could be exposed for veneration.⁴⁰

It has been rightly said that Francis's death, even before his canonization, was the event that made possible the transformation of his exemplary presence into a "myth of holiness that could be used in various ways and for different ends." The identity of Francis of Assisi had become "definitely that of a saint." Statements such as these have been used: 1) to prove how difficult it is to translate *life according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel* into institutional or juridical terms; and 2) to emphasize the need to bring back — historically — the experience of Francis and his companions in the concrete events and contradictions that are part of the human condition. After all, even a man regarded as a saint remains human. 41

This opens up new ways to understand Francis's experience. It also raises questions about interpretations that tend to emphasize his "difference." A successful little work by Joseph Lortz is a good example of this. He says that, in the case of Francis, categories that apply to other human beings become, as it were, transparent and even vanish. That is because Francis is as much a

³⁹Chronica fratris Jordani. Edited, with notes and commentary by H. Boehmer, Paris 1908 (Collection d'études et documents, 6), pp. 52ff. On Jordan of Giano, see the recent contribution by F. Dal Pino, Giordano da Giano e le prime missioni oltralpe dei frati Minori, in I compagni di Francesco e la prima generazione, pp. 201-57.

⁴⁰See Constitutiones Concilii quarti Lateranensis una cum commentariis glossatorum, ed. A. Garcia y Garcia, Vatican City 1981 (Monumenta iuris canonici, series A: Corpus glossatorum, 2), p. 101. Reservation of the right of canonization to the pope, insofar as it abolished particular laws in the area of cult, is linked to this decree by S. Kuttner, La réserve papale du droit de canonisation, in Revue historique de droit français et étranger, n.s., XVII (1938), 204f and 208f.

⁴¹Merlo, Intorno a frate Francesco, pp. 316ff, 338.

mystery to us as he was to his contemporaries. This interpretation would turn him into an inscrutable divine personality, irrelevant or at any rate totally different from ordinary mortals. One who attempts to reflect on such a personality runs the risk of using holiness — which is only *a posteriori* — to shed light on questions and situations that are, historically speaking, first of all human.⁴²

Thus Francis's death and canonization represent breaks in the transformation of his identity. The process of transformation had already begun during his lifetime. The image of brother was slowly giving way to the image of a saint with well-defined features (this happened after his death and concluded with his canonization), a person in the odor of sanctity, or at any rate a vir venerandus. Francis the brother must have been aware of this every time he was forced to compare himself with the image and live with it. For it was an image that was gradually being created by all who observed or knew about the example of his life.

Thomas of Celano, in his Second Life, describes Francis's captivity during the war between Perugia and Assisi. His fellow prisoners accused him of madness because he maintained his good spirits even in such bleak circumstances. Francis replied: "Why do you think I rejoice? There is another consideration, for I will yet be venerated as a saint throughout the whole world." The joy and fervor of spirit he displayed while lying sick in the palace of the bishop of Assisi may be another sign that he endorsed such a prospect and even relished it. When one of the brothers jokingly told him that after his death he body would be draped in canopies and precious silks — a sign of veneration — he agreed. 44

⁴²J. Lortz, Der unvergleichliche Heilige. Gedanken um Franziskus von Assisi, Düsseldorf 1952, p. 7: "Some of the categories with which we are familiar no longer seem to apply in his case, or they have turned into clichés... Francis is a mystery." This work, which is certainly interesting, has been translated into Spanish (1964), Italian (1973), English (1986), and reprinted in German (1976). See also Stanislao da Campagnola, Le origini francescane come problema storiografico, Perugia 1992, 2d ed., pp. 209 and 260, where he emphasizes the influence of Lortz's work on the writings of Kajetan Esser. A broad overview of studies on Francis — and also Franciscan studies in general — from after the Second World War until the present can be found in G. G. Merlo, La storiografia francescana dal dopoguerra ad oggi, in Studi storici, XXXII (1991), pp. 287-307; see also L. Pellegrini, Un secolo di "lettura" delle fonti biografiche di Francesco d'Assisi, in Laurentianum, XXIX (1988), pp. 223-50.

 $^{^{43}}$ 2Cel 4, p. 132. See also L3S 4, p. 92: "Is that what you think of me? The day will come when I shall be honored by the whole world."

⁴⁴LP 4, p. 6; SP 109, p. 311. On the value of the biographies for reconstructing the religious universe of Francis as well as the need to exercise caution in using them, see G. Miccoli, Dall'agiografia alla storia: considerazioni sulle prime biografie francescane come fonti storiche, in idem,

These two incidents are the only ones that would lead us to believe that such was Francis's state of mind. They must be considered and evaluated not only in the light of his writings, but also in light of the sayings and the episodes reported in the biographies. They are really not enough to allow us to begin from the hypothesis that Francis's thoughts, behavior and example were directed by a project or desire for holiness. But for those who know his writings and the biographies, they are enough to make us wonder whether the linear nature of the accounts tends to simplify realities and situations that were more complex and whose conclusions were less foregone. Both episodes are used by the hagiographers to stress Francis's gift of prophecy, projecting into the future his transformation into a saint. These same writers had already witnessed this transformation and its final developments. In a certain sense, if these episodes indicate in any way an awareness on the part of Francis in this regard, they suggest it through terms such as exultation, joy or fervor of spirit. However, such terms may owe more to the context than indicate a state of mind. The genre of hagiography, perfectly suited to one who is already a saint, cannot deny his holy status a priori.

We have already mentioned Francis's hearing the gospel passage on the sending of the apostles and his word of exhortation, but we need to return to his penitential preaching. It began when he laid aside his hermit's garb, ushering in a period that saw his message assume a completely social dimension. Communion with others provided the psychological and social setting for asserting a possible "reputation for holiness" on his part. Contributing to its spread, after 1209/1210, was the approval of Francis's propositum vitae by Innocent III. Moreover, the new fraternity was becoming more and more part of the fabric of the institutional church. One of the sayings of Francis, reported for the first time in Celano's Second Life, goes back to a time when his reputation for holiness was growing:

For often when he was praised by many, he would answer with words like these: 'I can still have sons and daughters; do not praise me as being secure. No one should be praised whose end is yet uncertain.'

Francesco d'Assisi. Realtà e memoria, pp. 190-263; Desbonnets, De l'intuition à l'institution, pp. 71-83 (Appendix: Les sources franciscaines). For reflections in a different key, see L. Pellegrini, Considerazioni e proposte metodologiche per una analisi delle fonti francescane, in Laurentianum, XVIII (1977), pp. 292-313, also in the more recent Un secolo di "lettura" delle fonti biografiche.

⁴⁵The complete text of the episode in which the saying is placed may be found in 2Cel 133-34, pp. 207f.

The saying of Francis, "I can still have sons and daughters," is also found in the *Major Life*, the *Legend of Perugia* and *The Mirror of Perfection*. Bonaventure, an interpreter who carefully assembles material from the earlier biographies, maintains a delicate balance between fidelity to Francis's message, government of the Order which was in crisis, and institutional responsibilities. He glosses this saying and episode with words that could also be applied alo to chapter XVII of the *Earlier Rule* on preaching. There we saw expressed the difference between true holiness and holiness of outward appearances. Bonaventure writes:

He [Francis] often did many things like this so that outwardly he might become like a discarded utensil while inwardly possessing the spirit of holiness. He strove to hide the gifts of the Lord in the secret recesses of his heart, not wanting them to be exposed to praise, which could be an occasion of a fall. 46

The Legend of Perugia and Mirror of Perfection report this saying, with variations in syntax and terminology that do change the sense: "I am not yet as yet so secure that I might not have sons and daughters." Celano and Bonventure's when he was praised are expanded to read when he was honored and called a saint.⁴⁷

The words do not praise me are a clear refusal of veneration. This easy to understand, even from a cursory reading of the passage in chapter XVII of the Earlier Rule, not to mention our earlier discussion of the difference between interior and exterior holiness. Moreover, Francis's refusal was accompanied by a repeated desire to reshape the manifestations of holiness considered fundamental by traditional hagiography and cult. The best-known example is The Dictate on True and Perfect Joy. There the grace given by God to heal the sick and perform miracles is clearly subordinate to minority, despite the fact that it was those closest to him, his brothers, who reminded him of this. 48

⁴⁶LM VI, 3, p. 583.

⁴⁷LP 10, pp. 26f; SP 45, pp. 119f. See the reflections on this saying by Miccoli, *Dall'agiografia alla storia*, pp. 244f.

⁴⁸"A messenger arrives and says that...I have so much grace from God that I heal the sick and perform many miracles. I tell you true joy doesn't consist in any of these things."

"Then what is true joy?"

[&]quot;I return from Perugia and arrive here in the dead of night. It's winter time, muddy and so cold that icicles have formed on the edges of my habit and keep striking my legs and blood flows from such wounds. Freezing, covered with mud and ice, I come to the gate and, after I've knocked and called for some time, a brother comes and asks: 'Who are you?' 'Brother Francis,' I answer. 'Go away!' he says. 'This is not a decent hour for going about! You may not come in!' When I insist, he replies: 'Go away! You are a simple and stupid person! Don't come back to us again! There are so many of us here such as you that we have not need of you.'...I tell you this: If I had patience and

Minority was consistent with and demanded by life according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. It was the one possible element in his message that compelled him to refuse any kind of veneration. Consider, for example, his reply to Bishop Rainerio of Terni (1218-53).⁴⁹ The incident is narated in Celano's Second Life, The Legend of Perugia and The Mirror of Perfection. Francis expressed joy at finding his person and example described in terms of minority—in stark contrast to the honor that had been paid him. Others had taken this away from him, says Celano.⁵⁰ The Legend of Perugia, complementing Celano's account, explains that this happened when others were saying: He is a saint! "Thereby they attributed glory and holiness to a creature and not to the Creator."

All of this was probably annoying. It was hard for Francis to live with the kind of veneration that distorted and hindered what we earlier called his choice of life. The passages just mentioned are clear evidence of this. An episode from the *Major Legend* offers another example. Although it is based on a gospel story, it is indicative of Francis's rejection of manifestions of devotion. And even if Bonaventure's chief concern is to demonstrate Francis's likeness to Christ, his concern to show Francis's reaction to the honors paid him is also significant. It was only after distancing himself from the crowds that were pressing upon him out of devotion that Francis was able to preach:

Another time when God's servant was preaching on the seashore at Gaeta, out of devotion crowds rushed upon him in order to touch him. Horrified at such popularity he jumped all alone into a small boat that was drawn up on the shore. The boat began to move as if it had both intellect and motion of itself and, without the help of any oars, glided away from the shore, to the wonderment of all who witnessed it. When it had gone out some distance into the deep water, it stood motionless on the waves, as long as the holy man preached to the attentive crowd on the shore. When, after hearing the sermon, seeing the miracle and receiving his blessing, the crowd went away and would no longer trouble him, the boat returned to land on its own power. ⁵²

did not become upset, true joy, as well as true virtue and the salvation of the soul, would consist in this" (Esser, p. 461). See also 2Cel 145, pp. 213ff. For the miracles reported in the biographies of Francis, see Paciocco, Da Francesco ai "catalogi sanctorum," pp. 49-70. See also F. Cardini, Il segno della contraddizione e la contraddizione dei segni. Benvenuto da Gubbio, da imitatore di san Francesco a grande taumaturgo, in Studi francescani, LXXVII (1980), pp.s 253-62.

⁴⁹C. Eubel, Hierarchia catholica Medii Aevi. Ed. altera, I, Monasterii 1913, p. 285.

⁵⁰²Cel 141, p. 212.

⁵¹LP 10, pp. 24-26; see also SP 45, pp. 117-19.

⁵²LM XII, 6, pp. 612f. Apparently the memory of a similar attitude of Francis has been preserved in the thirteenth-century *Chronica XXIV generalium ordinis Minorum*, Quaracchi 1897, pp. 30f.

4. Final Analysis

It has seemed well to stress the need to go beyond the interpretive framework provided by the biographies. Their primary goal, following the canons of traditional hagiography, is to identify in each episode the steps of Francis's progressive ascent toward perfection. Some of these episodes may, in fact, indicate that Francis intended to "reject a particular model of holiness, whose onus he recognized and perhaps also its danger." Even episodes mentioned in connection with his attempts to validate public and private behavior were probably not meant to reveal hidden faults. Rather they were given as examples of his rejection of categories he wished to avoid, even though he felt they applied to him. ⁵³

But perhaps the major emphasis should be placed on Francis's desire to accentuate his humanity. It was precisely because he was human that others were able to imitate his example. Since the one imitated shared a common humanity with his imitators, the latter could live what the former had already practiced. Only a human being, not a saint, is completely imitable.

A choice of life — or a choice of holiness, if you prefer — as long as we remember the source of inspiration that permeated its interiority and guided its actions and example (according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel). If such actions and example (despite being shaped by an interiority patterned on the gospel) were nullified or diminished by the fact of being human, all the more must holiness outwardly apparent to people, considered in itself, be rooted in external manifestations. It was these that the bystanders understood — whether they were Francis's companions or the others who heard his message and his commitment to be an example.

Francis was a human being among human beings. The veneration paid him, even during his lifetime, clashed with his choice of life and desire to apply the ideals of the gospel by sharing a minority that was common to all. Precisely through this sharing did Francis become a saint. His life according to the gospel crystallized in a reputation for holiness for which he was only minimally responsible. A whole series of other factors lay beyond his intentions. After his death, and even more after his canonization, this transformation reached its final stage. Institutional holiness was coming to the fore. As a result, the essence of his life was formalized and translated into terms agreeable to the church of Rome and in harmony with the sacred foundation of an important religious order.

⁵³ See nn. 26-28 above. See also Miccoli, Dall'agiografia alla storia, pp. 244-47.

Thomas of Celano tells how a certain brother who led an apparently irreproachable life but stubbornly refused to speak was 'unmasked' by Francis. All the brothers who lived with him considered their confrere to be a man of extraordinary holiness. Francis, prefiguring in a way his character as a saint of the church, succeeded in exposing the devil's trick and convincing the brothers that their confrere's example was nothing but a sham. The proof lay in his refusal to confess, that is, make a canonical confession to a minister of the church of Rome. This had been imposed on him by his vicar at Francis's suggestion. His refusal sealed his fate: the brother left the order and donned secular clothing.⁵⁴

Francis, a man of the gospel, always remained within the church, where confession was a required practice. Thus, according to the *Legend of Perugia*, some of the brothers later ran into the unfortunate man: "He was walking all alone like a very poor pilgrim." They spoke to him compassionately, but he began to swear by his faith, "like impious people do." The pseudo-saint's final remark is lapidary. It seems to suggest the total powerlessness of one who could not or would not act differently: "Things were bound to turn out this way." 55

Celano concludes his account of the episode with the admonition, "Singularity is always to be avoided." He is tacitly applying the label mala singularitas to the stubborn silence —mala taciturnitas — of the brother who refused to go to confession. According to Peter the Chanter's Verbum Abbreviatum, a late twelfth-century summa of pastoral and fundamental theology, silence (which can also be good) is bad in four cases. An example of the latter is when it comes to confessing one's sins. ⁵⁶ Celano's remark is naturally that of a man of the church. But the same attitude on the part of Francis may indicate a certain "ecclesiasticity." He may be projecting onto the religious experiences of others — even though these could be validated by his own experience, as in the case of the unfortunate brother — categories that he felt a need and wish to respect.

We can understand, then, how even Francis's canonization, the climactic moment of his tranformation into a saint, was made possible by his promise of unconditional fidelity, obedience and total submission to the church and its ministers. This was the same Francis who had refused the veneration paid him

⁵⁴2Cel 28, p. 148. See also LM XI 10, p. 609.

⁵⁵LP 116, pp. 360-64. See also SP 102, pp. 296-98.

⁵⁶See PL 205, coll. 189ff.

while he was alive. And if the logic of the cross allowed for no limits to his submission, no matter how painful — until after he received the stigmata, during the last three difficult years of his life, and again shortly before his death ⁵⁷ — his promise of obedience could be unconditional only if it applied totally. If not, the necessary minority would be lacking. With that the course of events was already for the most part established. In truth, the contradictions were all in the events.

⁵⁷The following passage is from the *Testament* (Esser, p. 438): "Afterwards the Lord gave me, and gives me still, such faith in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them."