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## The Privileged Religion of Saint Francis of Assisi

By

Edmund Weber

### *Preliminary Remarks*

The popularity of St. Francis (1182/3-1226) in our days is overwhelming. He has become a modern hero - not only of Catholics but also of Protestants, non-Christians and even atheists. Nevertheless, the question may be raised whether the modern portrayals of St. Francis do justice to the historical person. In order to get a more solid answer we will analyze various documents which were approximately known to and approved by St. Francis himself, particularly his *Testimony*, his *Song of Brother Sun*, the *Unapproved Rule*, the *Approved Rule*, the *Admonitions*, and the *Letter to the Faithful Ones I*.<sup>[1]</sup> We will not even use the legendary reports of his disciples. From the very beginning the devotees of St. Francis made of him a typical convert. This biographic mutilation has remained en vogue until today.<sup>[2]</sup> - In his *Testimony* he tells his real story in a few brief words: "While I was in sins it appeared to me extremely bitter to look at the lepers. And the Lord himself brought me among them and I gave alms to them. When I was leaving them that what appeared bitter to me was to me exchanged for (converted into) sweetness of the soul and the body. And afterwards I stopped for a moment and then I left the world."<sup>[3]</sup> Therefore, his life can be divided into three periods: 1) the life in 'sin' or the 'world'; 2) the short period of

the conversion, of a short stopping and of the leaving the 'world'; and 3) his existence outside the 'world'.

### *The 'World'*

In the time of St. Francis the lower citizens, *cives minores*, predominantly ruled his birthplace Assisi (Umbria).[4] The higher citizens, *cives maiores*, had to compromise with these newcomers. The bishop of the city and district of Assisi represented the other power in the town. As a feudal lord the pope had considerable influence. The castle above Assisi was already conquered and the German commander together with his soldiers had been thrown out. The rising class of lower citizens produced as artisans the material goods, organized as merchants the trade and controlled as community the political power. St. Francis's father, Pietro Bernadone, a wool draper, belonged to this rising social class. Therefore, St. Francis grew up with every opportunity of advancement. A worldly career and economical success were put into his cradle. - Nevertheless the mentality and life of St. Francis was severely shattered - not by his choice, but by chance. His life was abruptly driven into a direction diametrically opposed to the basic values and aspirations he shared with his fellow citizens. The life of this sunny boy of rich and successful people suddenly took an inexplicable new turn. - From his *Testimony* it is very clear that as a young man St. Francis had never been a wanton playboy. Quite the reverse: he was a very pious and strict Catholic, even a morally rigorist one. The *Testimony* reveals that his Catholic conscience prompted him not only to give alms to the lepers but to force himself to repress the horrible aversion and disgust he felt looking at their shocking appearance. However, unable to spontaneously feel any attraction to the lepers or other loathed creatures he deliberately suppressed the opposite emotion of disgust. He mobilized his will as all pious Catholics who were scrupulous to a fault used to do. Such heroic self-conquest before his conversion even earned him a double religious merit: St. Francis fulfilled the divine commandment of Christian charity by giving donations (material alms) and beyond that by suppressing his disgust (psychic pains). Therefore he was in reality a moral hero - before his conversion! - After his conversion he interpreted this first period of his life as 'being in sins' or 'world'. [5] In his eyes the lives of secular people are dedicated to the principles of acquiring, maintaining and defending property, and handing it down to legally begotten heirs. The basic principle of the secular's behavior is to appropriate perishable people and things in order to satisfy a senseless desire for the 'world'. The essence of the 'world' is property. The 'world' believes: by property, by appropriating creatures, a human being should and can attain perfection on earth. St. Francis, however, did just the opposite telling his followers these three rules: "The rule and life of these brothers are as follows: to live in obedience, in chastity and *without any property*" [6]. St. Francis identified 'ego ipse', Myself, as the actual lord of the 'world'. After his conversion he described his new relationship to this lord: "Whoever is a true poor in the spirit hates *him-*

*self*".[7] Therefore Lord Myself shouldn't get any property from the brothers: "They shouldn't appropriate anything to themselves".[8] - It is the secular mentality which produces the so-called Lord Myself. The heavenly creator has nothing to do with that monster. Nevertheless, as a lord, Myself has the right to require obedience from his fellow men. The ethics of Lord Myself demands from the seculars the abuse of the original creation. If everything has to be sacrificed to the Lord Myself as the seculars think, then God's creation is useless. If it does not become one's own property, then it is without any value. The 'world' accepts creation only after having it transubstantiated into the property and belongings of Lord Myself. - The primary characteristic of the 'world' is a longing for the uppermost property, the earthly living itself, in the sense of an everlasting, 'world'-enjoying and functioning body. Psycho-physical existence, and unlimited power and capacity for appropriating and using human beings, animals and goods - these, according to the 'world' are the requirement and of a valuable human existence. Therefore, and this is quite logical, poverty, disease and death are mortal enemies of the 'world'. Particularly the lepers exposed the lie and untruth of the basic assumption of the 'world' - their slowly rotting bodies demonstrated that life can't become our property, no matter what else we appropriate. Therefore, the lepers, shamelessly revealing the uselessness of appropriating worldly goods, were excluded by the hierarchy of Assisi in a regular ceremony of exclusion.[9] They had to live far away from the city in a leper hospital. However, the leprosarium enjoyed protection and defense from the city administration and was richly endowed with funds from alms-giving people; the seculars didn't want to see the living contradiction to their basic presumption at any cost - they were ready to pay and organize at great lengths to keep the lepers out.[10] This attitude denies the simple and basic fact that creation is not human property. It is not the purpose of creation to be subject to human exploitation. All creation is as free as human beings. The very nature and essence of it, including death, disease and prosecuted and suffering people [11] is solely to praise God. The secular transubstantiation of God's creatures is nothing but a perversion of God's own work into what St. Francis called the 'world'. - Even after he left the 'world', St. Francis never raised doubt as to whether he had been a good Catholic; and he always defended the normal Catholic path to eternal salvation. Obviously there was no contrast between being a pious or even strict Catholic on the one hand, and 'being in sins' and belonging to the 'world' on the other. He was convinced that the followers of the 'world' would go to hell if the Roman Church didn't offer salvation from eternal death. St. Francis never challenged the spiritual authority of the clergy following the Roman rite. He accepted that the Roman Church neither demanded an absolute Christian life for eternal salvation nor promised the highly moral Christians a happy life on earth. St. Francis never questioned this moderate stance of the hierarchy; in fact, he defended this interpretation not only against heretics, but also against the Church's highest dignitaries.[12] In contrast to many sects, the Roman Church tolerated Christians being under the rule of concupiscentia, the irreversible de-

sire for a satisfying, eternal, secular life. Her particular office consisted in establishing a Catholic conscience, which allowed these secular ambitions to be seen in relative terms inwardly, and in offering sacramental help outwardly, redeeming in this way the hellish consequences of sin. St. Francis saw all Catholics earning eternal redemption through sacramental and moral service as heirs of eternal salvation equal in rank with himself, even if they lacked his evangelical life experience.

### *The Conversion*

The next period of St. Francis's life - how he was converted to the extra-secular life, and how he left the 'world' - is related as follows in his *Testimony*: One day he went to the Assisi leprosarium and gave alms to the lepers as pious Catholics used to do. Usually St. Francis experienced a bitter taste looking at the lepers. This is very understandable. The attitude of Lord Myself toward creation is founded in the assumption that only those objects were acceptable, i.e. consumable and digestible, which could be interpreted as useful for permanent secular enjoyment. Anything drastically opposed to this, such as poverty, leprosy or death, is experienced as shocking and stops the regenerative activity of the organism. Thus the normative secular image of the lepers was sent through St. Francis's secular eyes to his mental system. Ruled by Lord Myself, the mind interpreted the image correctly as a horrible one threatening the illusions of everlasting earthly existence. Because of this deceit, St Francis, as organism, reacted with aversion. However, as the mind of St. Francis wasn't totally fixed by the imagination of Lord Myself, he ordered his organism to produce the bitter principle, re-stimulating an appetite which had been blocked by a disgusting experience. This reaction proved him of good mental and bodily health. He could go on living as normally as ever. One day [13], however, while looking at the lepers, the bitter taste was suddenly exchanged in his psycho-physical system for (converted into) a sweet one.[14] In other words, in the leprosarium of Assisi the secular image of the lepers vanished into nothing. Looking with his physical eyes at the lepers he suddenly felt an unknown and extreme attraction which provoked an overwhelming, inward greed. - Through his new vision of the lepers, he obviously realized their aura, their divine beauty and attraction. The radiating aura of the lepers made him like a moth which, unable to withstand the radiating light in the night, flings itself into the burning fire. Through the ecstatic explosion of his libido towards the lepers, St. Francis as a human being threatened to dissolve himself into a depersonalized status. In order to survive as an autonomous earthly person, the outburst of libido and over-appetite had to be reduced. As he was a person of good mental and bodily health, his sane organism produced in the stomach a sweet substance which immediately reduced the over-appetite. Just as the bitter substance stimulates the appetite, the sweet substance suppresses it. By reducing the power of libido and appetite, the sweetness [15] prevented a total loss of relative autonomy. St. Francis says in the Testi-

mony: "to me (it) has been exchanged for (converted into) sweetness", describing by these words correctly and concisely a preventive psycho-organic process.[16] Thus he was able to survive as a human being, enjoying life with *sora nostra matre terra*, i.e. Mother Earth and the rest of creation beyond Lord Myself and dissolution.[17] - St. Francis's new private religion can be seen as a continuous production of sweetness in the face of all original creation. Seeing God's creatures as such, in their very nature, which he described in the *Song of Brother Sun*, he realized the needlessness of producing the bitter principle. On the contrary: All of creation was extremely attractive, as God was the all-attractive - so that it was the production of sweetness that became absolutely essential. - It is no wonder, then, that the exchange and conversion led to St. Francis' amazing ability to see with his corporal eyes even the Son of God made visible by the priests in the Holy Eucharist.[18] St. Thomas Aquinas - teaching that the corporal eyes were unable to see in the Eucharist the Son of God himself, since he was encrypted by the outward appearances of the sacrament and that therefore faith as a self-assuring work was necessary to perceive the alleged invisible one - couldn't share this experience.[19] According to St. Thomas only the angels and saints in heaven, participating in the clarity of the divine intellect, could see *supranaturalia*, i.e. the supernatural things.[20] Obviously, through his conversion St. Francis received this *beatus intellectus*, i.e. heavenly vision or the divine *claritas*, i.e. clarity on earth - seeing not only the supernatural qualities of the Son of God in the sacrament but the supernatural ones of creation too. He saw with his physical eyes the lepers and all of creation in its original clarity.[21]

### *The Life outside the 'World'*

After this, the third period of St. Francis's life began. He realized more and more that lepers aren't victims of sin or deplorable or dangerous people, but just the reverse: they are the most beautiful blossoms in God's garden of creation. The new vision of the lepers opened the doors to the extreme radiating character of all creatures including poor and sick people, even death, pain, prosecution and disease. Their dangerous and destroying attraction could be moderated only by the compensating production of sweetness. Through the emotional aura-shock in the leprosarium of Assisi St. Francis could spontaneously live according the evangelical model.[22] There was no longer any need to oppress feelings of aversion. Moral heroism had become superfluous.

### *Sister Bodily Death*

The basic criterion of St. Francis's new cosmo-social ethics changed from the principle of Lord Myself's advantage to the principle of praise-worthiness of the *Altissimu*, the Most Highest One. In the *Song of Brother Sun* St. Francis quotes all parts of creation through which the "Most Highest and Almighty Good Lord" [23] wants to be praised. He quotes sun, moon, stars, wind, water, fire, earth,

forgiveness, and human beings suffering disease and oppression as praiseworthy creatures and very surprisingly *la morte corporale*, i.e. the bodily death. St. Francis experienced bodily death not as the destruction of the creature, as its enemy, or as justified punishment for original sin but as itself a praiseworthy and praising part of creation. About bodily death he sings: "You may be praised, Mylord, by our Sister Bodily Death, from her no living being can escape".[24] - The death of the body isn't the enemy of human beings; it is their sister - she is included in the community of their existence, she belongs to their God-given nature.[25] Anticipating his death, St. Francis saw his most beloved one, his sister, called Bodily Death, coming and embracing him with the most intensive love on earth. Like the lepers, Sister Bodily Death was radiating her God-created light and therefore provoking an extreme attraction to St. Francis. Following Lord Myself, the secular culture had lost this joyful experience of the original creation which Sister Bodily Death belonged to. - St. Francis understood why Sister Bodily Death is justified in taking away bodily life. Within the brother-sister-relation the sister is the proprietor of life. This idea reflects the culture of the sorority where the sisters possess everything and the brothers have no property to hand down. - The sentence "from her no living man can escape" [26] means that nobody can escape her with the life he got at birth. Sister Bodily Death, the legal proprietor of everybody's life, has lent that good for a little while only. According to the original creation Sister Bodily Death comes at the last moment, only taking back what the human being had got on loan. St. Francis became aware of the fact that life isn't anything he could sacrifice to Lord Myself, that life couldn't become his property. Giving up that illusion he experienced the loss of earthly life as an extremely erotic and libidinous process. Therefore, that loss was under no circumstances a liberation from a 'bad world' as the Cathars and many Catholics believed; it was rather the most intense realization of earthly existence. St. Francis realized that the Altissimu created Sister Bodily Death, desiring to be praised even for that wonderful creature. The doctrine that bodily death was a result of imperfect matter or punishment for original sin therefore verged on blasphemy in his eyes. - The basic experience of St. Francis started with taking pleasure in looking at the mutilated and purulent bodies of the lepers and ended with the integration of Sister Bodily Death into that new pleasure - as its highest level.

### *Lady Poverty*

After having lost any aversion for creatures like lepers and having rediscovered the original love to Sister Bodily Death, St. Francis changed the earthly kingdom. Before his conversion he followed Lord Myself, but then he fell into the kingdom of 'domina paupertas', Lady Poverty, who rules the dominion *extra saeculum*, i.e. outside the so-called 'world', the other-'world' on earth. But this change didn't mean any ascetic penance and torture - because St. Francis experienced even cruel poverty as joyously as looking at the lepers or the embarrass-

ment of Sister Bodily Death.[27] - The feudal ruler of original earthly creation is not the devil or the pantocrator but 'domina paupertas cum laetitia', i.e. Lady Poverty spending fertility and richness to her followers.[28] This is obviously the logical consequence of St. Francis understanding of creatures. If these are God's works than they are even in their bodily appearance perfect and intended by the creator himself. Creatures are a priori perfect and without any deficit. It is worldly or secular perception which is deficient. The lepers are as such perfect beings. Disease, poverty and death are fundamental attributes of perfection. But secular culture has constructed its own very exclusive but terrifying idea of perfection: sane, rich and always living. - Remembering the real experiences of St. Francis, the culture of fertility and richness spending Lady Poverty is very convincing: What does a human being who calls Lady Poverty his mistress and bodily death his sister need? What secular goods should a human being who produces libido-cooling sweetness when looking at lepers desire? Following his Lady Poverty, who gave him the greatest wealth - the joy of poverty - St. Francis rejected all secular possessions such as houses, money, protection, self-defense and procreation. The basic motivation of worldly culture - "to have more"[29] - had vanished after his conversion completely. As the very base of a perfect life on earth material poverty has become the highest distinction and honor in the kingdom of Lady Poverty. Therefore everybody lacking material goods, suffering extreme deprivation etc., belongs per se to the kingdom of Lady Poverty.[30] - Consistently, even material charity had become useless. It can't make the earthly life of human beings happier because nobody is happier than those living in deepest poverty. Abolishing pauperism is only a strategic aim of the 'world' in order to destroy the reign of Lady Poverty, the only chance of original happiness. Anyway, doing charitable work to gain supernatural merits is over. St. Francis declared all alms the genuine property of the poor inherited from Lord Jesus Christ. Through dealing out alms, the almsgiver couldn't achieve any merit because he didn't give up his property; he only gave back what legally didn't belong to him.[31] - St. Francis experienced, as we have seen above, that life in material poverty doesn't mean real suffering. Just the opposite happened to him: in the face Lady Poverty, a boundless joy broke out of his body and soul. Therefore the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came down to the earth, incarnating himself, to enjoy together with his holy mother Mary the earthly fertility, richness and happiness of Lady Poverty - pleasures he couldn't get in heaven.[32]

### *The Brothers*

St. Francis understood his new life as a personal privilege granted by his feudal Lord Altissimu. Therefore he didn't propagate his experience as a new model which should be compulsory for everybody. Without having had the same realization of St. Francis in the leprosarium of Assisi, the imitation of that model was not possible, nor could it be attained by voluntary decision. Why, then, did he

accept 'fratres', i.e. brothers without demanding the same inner conversion? In his *Testimony* St. Francis answers this question very clearly. His lord granted him the privilege of brothers: "And afterwards the Lord has granted me concerning brothers".[33] These people were part of his fief. Therefore they never could imitate him or become even his vassals. They were like human belongings to a fief - slaves belonging to St. Francis's *dos*, granted to him by his feudal Lord as a feudal donation. The voluntary entry of the brothers into the order is only allowed if there is a divine inspiration; but it's most important to notice the reception didn't include any demand for St. Francis' basic experience. No psychosomatic conversion was asked for. The *Regula non bullata* demanded according to the customs and laws being in force in the reign of Lady Poverty only the return of one's so-called property to the legal proprietors, the poor people.[34] To become a Franciscan friar there was no need to have the beatus intellectus of angels and saints in heaven. Belonging to his fief, the brothers (and sisters) of St. Francis were enabled not to become followers of St. Francis, but of Lady Poverty. Brotherhood or sisterhood required neither internal conversions or convulsions nor seeing the aura of lepers and of the whole creation.

### *Concluding Remarks*

#### *Summary*

Neither his conversion nor his new life in poverty was chosen by St. Francis himself. There is no evidence for a personal and voluntary decision. In his *Testimony* he always and emphatically uses the phrase: "The Lord has granted me". The feudal lord granted the beginning of his new life, the church-buildings, the priests and theologians, the brothers, etc.[35] - We have seen: *sora nostra morte corporale*, i.e. Our Sister Bodily Death is a loving sister who owns one's bodily life. *La morte secunda* [36], i.e. the second or eternal death, however, is a very dangerous lady who rules over those who stay in the *peccata mortali*, i.e. mortal sins, ignoring the will of God.[37] - All human beings have fallen into mortal sins. Through the Dominus, i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ they all received redemption.[38] - The Roman Church has to maintain and secure this new freedom from 'Lady Second Death' through her priests and theologians.[39] - The priests have to serve the holiest body and blood and the theologians the holiest words. In this way, even St. Francis and his brothers get *spiritum et vitam*, i.e. spirit and life, the elixir for eternal life. According to him, only the Roman Church could preserve from the reign of Lady Second Death. Therefore, even if the Roman priests were uneducated and immoral, or even if they persecuted him, he would nevertheless ask them for the Holy Communion and the Holy Words.[40] - Beyond his desire to get eternal salvation through priestly administration, he was mostly interested in the clergy because of its capacity to make the Son of God visible on earth. That he could see the corporal Son of God really and directly with his corporal eyes was reason enough to ignore even the worst behavior of



the priests. - St. Francis obviously experienced the Lord's privilege of the visio beatifica, i.e. blessing, enriching and happy-making sight of God, already on earth - a blessing which according to the doctrine of the Roman Church being was only possible in heaven. - St. Francis followed the Roman Church as a true son but in a particular way. His relation to her can be called inclusivism because he included the Church in his personal religion. - This surprising ecclesiology had its origin in his experience of his relation to God. God revealing himself to St. Francis as a feudal lord invested his feudal vassal with the churches, priests and the sacraments as his personal feudal tenure. - St. Francis's feudalisation of the Roman Church, or holding her in fee, explains his aggressive rejection of heretics. In attacking the Church, the heretics attacked his own feudal tenure. - The destruction of his feudal tenure would rob him of the protection from the Second Death and of the unique chance of the visio beatifica on earth: to physically look with his eyes at the sweet Son of God in the Eucharist. - St. Francis understood the Church hierarchy as his personal feudal fee. Therefore it was his servant and he its lord. As lord he had the right to receive the feudal rent. Under any circumstances, therefore, he couldn't allow the heretics to eliminate this hierarchy; otherwise they would have deprived him of the fruits and taxes his servants had to pay: the church buildings for praying, the Eucharist for seeing the Son of God and all the other sacramental services for his eternal life. - St. Francis saw his new earthly life as an individual privilege given to him by his Lord Altissimu. Regarding eternal salvation, he used like all the other Catholics the service of the Roman Church. All brothers had to confess their sins to the priests; only in cases of emergency could they confess to a non-clerical brother.[41] After confession they had to consume the body and blood of Lord Jesus Christ while remembering the words of the Lord: 'Who eats my flesh and drinks my blood gets eternal life.'[42] Therefore he threatened all brothers with exclusion if they did not live as Catholics, following the commands and revering the rites of the Roman hierarchy [43] - Never questioning the sacramental system he was highly interested in realizing his privileged *earthly* life within the body of the entire Catholic community, including the Catholic seculars. - This strict order to obey the hierarchy was due to the fact that the Roman Church belonged to the privilege his Lord had granted him. Not to use the Church in a correct way, according the Roman rite, would have meant destroying the most important feudal fee which the Lord had given to him. This feudal fee, the Church, included the obeisance of the people. - This inclusive understanding of the necessity of the Roman hierarchy for his own and his brothers' eternal salvation explains his requesting the pope to legalize his way of earthly life. - Asking the hierarchy for approbation, St. Francis accepted the different ways to heaven which the Roman Church offered to her followers.

*Madonna Chiara on the track of St. Francis*

It is undoubted that there have been and still are people having taken and taking part in his shocking experience of leprosy and death as God's topmost creatures.[44] Saint Claire of Assisi (1194-1253) called by her contemporaries Madonna Chiara was one of them. Cardinal Ugolino declared her a saint on earth. Therefore, she could like St. Francis see the original creation in the clarity of divine intellect. Her famous vision revealed her strong desire which could according to her visionary experience only be satisfied with the sweet milk of her mother St. Francis and her ability to see with the help of the golden "boccha", i.e. opening of St. Francis's "poppa", i.e. nipple the whole in all clarity.[45] Like St. Francis an intoxicated lover of Lady Poverty and full of "amore della povertà" [46], she forced even the popes Innocence III (1189-1216) and Gregory IX (1227-1241) to grant and to confirm her 'privilege of poverty', i.e., the right to follow that Lady unconditionally.[47]

### *St. Francis's Attraction Today*

The open and secret promises of the modern civilization, liberation from material poverty, disease and death, are being called more and more into question. These promises have revealed themselves as a means to destroy creation. Nature is abused as a means for illusionary and unnecessary life plans, the social system produces hatred controllable only by weapons of mass destruction, and the average person, terrorized by these trans-creational ambitions, loses her ability to live and die in a honest way, i.e., by giving up the fanatic illusion of self-creation. Perhaps St. Francis's privilege to experience poverty, leprosy and death as attributes of divine beauty that is, the realization of visio beatifica on earth, may strongly and unconsciously attract modern people. There may be a hidden but energetic yearning for a culture which in accordance with the original state of creation has given up all aggressive and illusionary ambitions and constructions which are euphemistically called modern civilization.

#### Notes

[1] Francois d'Assise, *Ecrits*, Paris 1981 (= *Ecrits*). The Latin titles of the single texts are: Testamentum, Canticum fratris solis sive laudes creaturam, Regula non bullata, Regula bullata, Admonitiones, Epistola ad fideles I.

[2] Cf. the author's German writings on St. Francis: (1) *Die Reformation des Franz von Assisi*. Festschrift für Lothar Graf zu Dohna zum 65. Geburtstag, THD Schriftenreihe Wissenschaft und Technik, Herausgegeben von Andreas Mehl und Wolfgang Schneider, Darmstadt 1989, ISBN 3-88607-069-7; (2) *Franz von Assisi und die Diakonie* [Francis of Assisi and Charity], [THEION](#) - Annual for Religious Culture, Vol. VII: Diakonie der Religionen 1, Studien zu Lehre und Praxis karitativen Handelns in der christlichen, buddhistischen, Hindu und Sikh Religion [Charity and Religions 1, Studies in Doctrine and Practice of Charity in Christianity, Buddhism, Hindu and Sikh Religions], ed. by Matthias Benad and Edmund Weber, Frankfurt am Main 1996, ISBN 3-631-48512-3). Francis Christi Vattakuzhy OFMCap.: *Go and Make Disciples from All Nations - Training in Discipleship According to Francis of Assisi*, Delhi 1995, a book which I got only when I met the author in Trissur (Kerala), is sometimes very close to the interpretation laid down here.

[3] Testamentum, *Ecrits*, p. 204: cum essem in peccatis nimis mihi videbatur amarum videre leprosos. Et ipse 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. - Some necessary philological explanations: 1) 'misericordiam feci': the expression 'misericordiam facere' is a technical Latin term which means 'to give alms'. 2) 'de saeculo': St. Francis didn't use the Latin term 'saeculum' ('world') for 'material earth' i.e. creation but for describing a particular form of human existence; this form usually means the whole of mankind including the pious Catholics. 'World' meant the dominant and ruling cultures of history. (3) 'steti': stare means here to stop, unable to move.

[4] Cf. Arnaldo Fortini: *Nova Vita di San Francesco*, 1981; Raoul Manselli: *San Francesco*, Roma 1982

[5] Testamentum, *Ecrits*, p. 204. However, as he never declared people leading 'worldly' or 'secular' lives to be lost, his interpretation was not in the least not-Catholic or even Catharistic.

[6] *Regula non bullata*, *Ecrits*, p. 122: Regula et vita istorum fratrum haec est, scilicet vivere in obedientia, in castitate et sine proprio.

[7] *Admonitiones XIV*, *Ecrits*, p. 106: Qui vere pauper est spiritu, se ipsum odit.

[8] *Regula bullata VI*, *Ecrits*, p. 190: nihil sibi approprient.

[9] The liturgy of exclusion of an leper in Assisi s. Arnaldo Fortini: *Nova Vita di San Francesco*, 1981, p. 268-271

[10] About the leprosarium of Assisi, *hospitale leprosorium de Arcis* or *hospital Sancti Lacari de Arcibus*, the documents tell us: *Dictum hospitale est sub protectione et defensione communis et populi civitatis Assisi*. The city of Assisi kept a sharp eye on the management and the welfare of the hospital and developed a very effective system of administration and control; cf. Arnaldo Fortini: *Nova Vita di San Francesco*, 1981, II, p. 259-61. Fortini shows that all the lepers enjoyed therefore a relatively high standard of living; cf. G. Keil: 'Aussatz', *Lexikon des Mittelalters I*, 1251 seq.

[11] This inclusion demonstrates the particular experience of the original creation; the included creatures aren't consequences of sin, aren't justified punishments but original elements of the praiseworthy creation. St. Thomas taught the very opposite position.

[12] Once St. Francis assured the cardinal-bishop Ugolino, the future pope Gregory IX, who felt a burning desire to live the spiritual life of the Poverello and St. Claire, that he could get salvation despite holding an hierarchical office. Unlike St. Francis the cardinal seemed to have had some questions about it; cf. Bartholomeo da Pisa: *De Confirmate*, in: Arnaldo Fortini: *Nova Vita di S. Francesco*, III, *Appendice*, 1981, p. 161. - In his letter to St. Claire the future founder of the papal inquisition was of the Catharistic opinion that the highest offices of the Church were nothing other than punishment for big sins. When telling St. Claire that he had to leave her congregation due to his worldly duties the cardinal added in explanation that he as a big sinner had to do his worldly business [*ab terrenis occupationibus*] and wasn't allowed as such to join her community of elected people. - His practical conclusion concerning his salvation was very non-Catharistic and semi-Catholic declaring his need for the particular spiritual help of St. Claire. The cardinal was convinced she would have in the Highest Judgment [*summum iudicium*] such a strong power that she could get even the biggest sinner through. Therefore he told her to take care of his salvation because only she could redeem him from all punishments [Cf. *Die Briefe Gregors IX. an die hl. Clara* [The letters of Gregory IX to Saint Claire], *Franziskanische Studien*, 1953., p. 277, No. 4). Obviously St. Claire became the real savior of Ugolino; therefore it is quite logical that he used the commendation of Jesus Christ to God simply to illustrate how he entrusted himself to St. Claire's protection.

[13] The times before St. Francis went to the leprosarium voluntarily. This time, it was the Lord himself who brought him together with lepers.

[14] Testamentum, *Ecrits*, p. 204: text s. note 3.

[15] Libido is the power of dissolution which can be controlled by a sane organism by producing sweetness. - Cf. the story of Angela of Foligno (ca. 1249-1309) who produced sweetness after having drunk the water she had used for washing the purulent hands of a leper! (s. *Il libro della Beata Angela da Foligno*, Roma 1950, p. 53 seq. (Transl.): "We washed the feet of the women and the hands of the men, particularly of a leper whose hands were putrefying, purulent and damaged. Then we drank from that washing water. We felt such a sweetness, that we tasted during the whole way that sweetness, as if we had received the communion. I felt the greatest sweetness, as if I had received the Lord." The greatest sweetness presupposes the greatest libido. In this experience of Angela the overwhelming power of the aura of the leper is beyond doubt by the fact and her comparison compare drinking the washing water with the receiving the Holy Communion! - The experience of Angela appears different from St. Francis's because he used his eyes as the primary sense to contact God and his original creation and not his tongue or hands to taste or touch.

[16] *Testamentum*, *Ecrits*, p. 204. The conversion of St. Francis reveals that it is not possible to make a difference between soul and body, between mind and matter. The interdependence of psycho- and physical elements is obvious. The production of a physical substance ordered by the mind doesn't contradict spiritual experience at all - unless Dualism determines the theory of religion. St. Francis had a different experience: - St. Francis lost the libido of the secular *Myself*. On the other hand he didn't direct libido to himself as a supra-natural creature as Jain *sadhus*, interested only in complete introversion of their libido through radical concentration are doing and despising God and his creatures totally (Cf. Spratt, P.: *Hindu Culture and Personality*, Bombay 1967, p. 310-12). St. Francis felt a strong supernatural relational libido; his desire was directed to God and creation, preserving himself as a relative autonomous personality. In this concern he is very near to the Hindu Theists and their religious experience.

[17] Cf. *Canticum fratris solis* etc., *Ecrits*, p. 342-345. St. Francis has even libidiously re-integrated the Mediterranean Mother-goddess in his extra-secular culture qualifying her as "our sister".

[18] *Testamentum*, *Ecrits*, p. 206; his statement "God has a sweet taste" [*Epistola ad fideles I*, *Ecrits*, p. 230] it reveals the more the overwhelming attraction of the Lord.

[19] *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 76, art. .7: *Respondeo: Ab intellectu hominis viatoris non potest conspici (the Son of God in the sacrament) nisi per fidem, sicut et cetera supernaturalia; Ad primum: oculus noster corporeus per species sacramentales impeditur a visione corporis Christi sub eis existentis.*

[20] *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 76, art. 7: *Respondeo: ab intellectu beato vel angeli vel hominis, qui secundum participatam claritatem divini intellectus videt ea quae supernaturalia sunt per visionem divinae essentiae.*

[21] Disputing the possibility of seeing the Son of God with physical eyes as St. Francis is saying with his words in the *Testimony: videre corporaliter*, St. Thomas is very close to the orthodox doctrines of Cathars and Muslims. Although they had to argue with one another they all were nevertheless kindred spirits. The doctor *ecclesiae* only compromised between the iconoclastic doctrines of Cathars and Muslims on one hand and the real religion of the Catholic masses, worshippers of the material holy icons they could see *corporaliter*, on the other. He didn't deny the real corporal presence of God's Son but he denied any possibility of *videre corporaliter* God's Son on earth. His doctrine God is not visible because he hides himself, his substance, under the veil of sacramental shapes, is a direct concession to the iconoclasts and their atheist heirs. - St. Francis objected decisively any even semi-Catharic or semi-Muslim concept of divine icon; he belonged to the icon-religion realized by the eastern Christians and the Catholic masses- no matter he became the idol of the Catholic worshippers. - In the Indo-Asian cultures the difference between the iconists, iconoclasts and compromising symbolists is well known: the vast majority sees the Holy as *saguna* (being able to materialize), a minor-

ity of elitist people as nirguna (being unable to do so) and some educated people as symbol on earth (hidden behind material veils).

[22] Testamentum, Ecrits, p. 206: *vita secundum formam Evangelii.*

[23] Canticum, Ecrits, p. 342: *Altissimu onnipotente bon signore.*

[24] Canticum, Ecrits, p. 344: *Laudato si, mi signore, per sora nostra morte corporale, de la quale nullu homo vivente pò scappare.*

[25] In old cultures the deepest relation of a man is his relation to his sister. In India you know the festival and ritual of raksha bandhan: the sister has to show unconditioned solidarity with her brother. In the Middle Ages the relation of sister and brother was the most intensive relation of affection and love between a young man and a young woman.

[26] Canticum, Ecrits, p. 344

[27] The use of the term *paenitentia* in his Testimony is also unconventional; it means simply his new life on earth, outside the 'world'.

[28] Admonitiones, Ecrits, p. 114: *Ubi est paupertas cum laetitia, ibi nec cupiditas nec avaritia.* The term *laetitia* doesn't mean the subjective feeling of joy only but the objective reason of that emotion: fertility and richness, too.

[29] Testamentum, Ecrits, p. 206: *plus habere.*

[30] Logically, voluntary poverty as exercised by monks, nuns, friars is definitely not the *conditio sine qua non* of the membership of Lady Poverty's reign at all. - St. Francis was very unhappy that he had been a former rich man and not a poor one by social condition. R. Manselli, San Francesco, Roma 1982, p.68, stresses that point intensively but he nevertheless doesn't give the right explanation saying the saint complained of his voluntary decision and that he never experienced poverty as real condition. The saint, however, didn't complain of his alleged voluntary decision in favour of poverty but the possibility he had had to decide against poverty; that he could be tempted to betray his Lady Poverty. A man poor by birth and social condition could never betray Lady Poverty; he was forced by those unchangeable circumstances to remain in her kingdom as long as he lived. Manselli follows the orthodox Franciscan interpretation which actually denies the fundament of St. Francis's new existence as he tells us in the Testimony: That the Lord alone has granted him his new existence in all its details and that his conversion which made him able to use those fiefs was an absolutely passive one - he didn't contribute anything to that change. The Testimony is in this concern absolutely clear. Attributing voluntary decision to St. Francis would just reverse what St. Francis wanted to point out. - The monastic ideology of voluntary decision wants to justify the arrogant monastic decision to belong to a higher religious order than other people. Even the earliest disciples of St. Francis were of that opinion concealing only their lack of grants and conversion which their guru got from his Lord. St. Francis didn't do anything for his new existence.

[31] Regula non bullata, p. 140: *Et eleemosyna est hereditas et iustitia, quae debetur pauperibus, quam nobis acquisivit Dominus noster Jesus Christus; cf. the authors article s. note 2b.*

[32] Epsistola ad fideles I, Ecrits, p. 228: *Qui (sc. Jesus Christus), cum dives esset super omnia, voluit ipse in mundo cum beatissima Virgine, matre sua, eligere paupertam.* Regula non bullata, Ecrits, p. 140: *Et fuit (sc. Jesus Christus) pauper et hospes et vixit de eleemosynis ipse et Virgo et discipuli eius.*

[33] Testamentum, Ecrits, p. 206: *Et postquam Dominus dedit mihi de fratribus.*

[34] Testamentum, Ecrits, p. 206: *Et illi qui veniebant ad recipendam vitam, omnia quae habere poterant, dabant pauperibus.*

[35] Testamentum, Ecrits, p. 204 seq.

[36] Canticum, Ecrits, p. 344

[37] Canticum, Ecrits, p. 344

[38] Testamentum, Ecrits, p. 204: *Domine Jesu Christe, ..., benedicimus tibi, quia per sanctam crucem tuam redemisti mundum.*

[39] Testamentum, Ecrits, p. 204-206

[40] Testamentum, Ecrits, p. 204-206

[41] Regula non-bullata XX, Ecrits, p. 158

After confession they had to consume body and blood of Lord Jesus Christ remembering the words of the Lord: 'Who eats my flesh and drinks my blood gets eternal life.[40]

[42] Regula non-bullata XX, Ecrits, p. 158: Et sic contriti et confessi sumant corpus et sanguinem Domini nostri Jesu Christi ... recordantes, quod Dominus dicit: Qui manducat carnem meam et bibit sanguinem meam habebit vitam aeternam.

[43] Regula non bullata XIX, Ecrits, p. 158: Quod fratres vivant catholice: (1) Omnes fratres sint catholici, vivant et loquantur catholice. (2) Si quis vero erraverit a fide et vita catholica in dicto vel in facto et non se emendaverit, a nostra fraternitate penitus expellatur. (3) Et omnes clericos et omnes religiosos habeamus pro dominis in his quae spectant ad salutem animae et a nostra religione non deviaverint; et ordinem et officium eorum et administrationem in Domino veneremur.

[44] See above Angela of Foligno

[45] Il processo di canonizzazione di S. Chira d'Assisi, ed. by Zeffirino Lazzari. In: Archivum Franciscanum Historicum, t. XIII, 1920, p. 458: IIIa, Testimonia.29 (Sora Philippa, nun of the monastery of St. Damiano).

[46] op. cit. p. 466.

[47] Cf. Engelbert Grau: Das Privilegium Paupertatis Innozenz' III. Franziskanische Studien, 1949, vol. 31, p. 336-349. The privilege assured Madonna Chiara that she could not be forced to accept temporal possessions.