

**The Communication of Franciscan Spirituality:
Appropriating Francis of Assisi's religious insights**

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ABSTRACT

The Communication of Franciscan Spirituality: Appropriating Francis of Assisi's religious insights

Richard L. Boileau
Concordia University, 2004

It is generally understood that the spirituality of Francis of Assisi is a life-long journey of religious conversion, which begins with an experience of God's love and proceeds through an ongoing commitment to living each day authentically in accordance with gospel values. Through a deliberate and explicit use of Lonergan's transcendental method for enabling theology that is sound and meaningful, this study endeavors to receive the *poverello's* own authentic communication of his spirituality by appreciating the historic context in which his messages were conceived, crafted and conveyed. Moreover, it indicates the merit of using this same carefully honed methodological approach to communicate Francis' numerous religious insights to our own contemporary culture in a manner that is both relevant and compelling.

FRANCIS OF ASSISI HAD BROUGHT FORTH
ONTO THE WORLD A SUN. (DANTE)

Dedicated in joy and love to my sons,
Philippe, Nicolas and Tristan,
who gave to me the meaning of Psalm 127.

With gratitude to the Faculty of Theological Studies, Concordia University.

I wish to acknowledge the personal guidance provided
by three learned and inspiring Franciscans: David Flood, St. Bonaventure University;
Ramona Miller, Franciscan School of Theology, Berkeley, California;
and Laurent Gallant, Newman College, Edmonton, Alberta.

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PREFACE

The radical decision that Francis of Assisi took with regards to the meaning of the Christian Gospel during the opening moments of the 13th century created a whole school of spirituality that has transcended the centuries as “the richest of all, incontestably one of the most beautiful, and one which has most decisively left its stamp on the history of the Church.”¹

Few of the Christian tradition, other than Jesus himself, have been the subject of as much speculation as Francis of Assisi: More books and articles have been published about him than any other figure in Christian history.² No one has been more closely associated with Jesus: “It seems...that there was never anyone...who resembled more the image of Jesus Christ and the evangelical form of life than Francis.”³ No one has had a larger spiritual family: Franciscans have made up the largest religious order in the history of Christianity, even without counting those communities that were spawned over time by its various members.

While Francis has changed innumerable lives, perhaps no one has been so frequently trivialized by popular devotion. Still, judging from available evidence, the historic Francis is a much more impressive and inspiring figure than the one portrayed in countless pious images. The challenge in our own age, therefore, is to come to know Francis historically despite these myths and the difficulties in understanding an age so remote and foreign to our own socio-political categories; to understand the true meaning

¹ Martial Lekeux, “Franciscan Mysticism” in William J. Short, *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999), 17.

² “According to the Smithsonian bibliography, more lives have been written of him than of any other person.” – Richard Rohr, *Hope Against Darkness: The Transforming Vision of Saint Francis in an Age of Anxiety* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2001), 109. Hereafter *Hope*.

³ Pope Pius IX, Encyclical “Rite Expiatis” quoted by Pope Paul VI in the preamble to the revised Rule for Secular Franciscans promulgated in 1978. *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (Chicago: Franciscan herald Press, 1979), 2.

of that heritage; to make sound judgments about its relevance to our own times; and to remain authentic while applying his insights to our own lives.

Appropriating his legacy and allowing it to change our lives is important, but it is not enough. As Christians, we are invited to “Repent, and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15), but also we are called to spread the good news of salvation (Rm 10:14). Francis gave us the foundation and the tools for doing so efficiently and effectively: “Already at an early date, Pope Honorius III pays tribute to the Friars Minor in that everywhere, *after the example of the Apostles*, ‘they spread abroad the seed of the word of God.’”⁴ I believe that Francis’ legacy still has much to teach us about the communication of gospel values.

As a Secular Franciscan and a Permanent Deacon who often endeavours to preach about Christ’s teachings from a Franciscan perspective, I am aware of a need to develop - for my own use - more effective approaches for communicating the essence of Francis’ spirituality in our own time and culture. As a first step, therefore, it was important for me to gain a better grasp of what impact the Gospel had on him and how this affected his communication to those who heard him preach as well as those who are guided to this day by his response to Jesus’ simple yet compelling invitation: “Follow me”.⁵

To understand Franciscan spirituality requires a degree of familiarity with its founder and with the culture in which he operated. Francis lived in changing times, as we do today. His genius was to interpret the traditional elements in his surroundings in a new way.

The word ‘new’ recurs frequently in the comments of early observers of the Franciscan movement. Francis himself seemed to many in his day a new kind of Christian, one that did not fit easily within the categories of his day...creating a new

⁴ “Cum dilecti filii (11 June 1219), I, 2b” in Cajetan Esser, *Origins of the Franciscan Order* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1970), 218. Hereafter *Origins*.

⁵ Matt 9:9; Mk 2:14; 8:34; Lk 5:27-28; Jn 8:12; 1 Pet 2:21; Rev 14:4.

‘form of life’, as he called it, different from the prevailing monastic and canonical forms then in favor.⁶

Gregson has highlighted the ways in which great teachers, such as Buddha, Jesus, Confucius and Mohamed introduce newness (to which I would add the name of Francis despite the fact that the *poverello* would surely protest).

First, these great teachers were originators of meaning and values....The past became “new” to their visions. They did not give new answers. They raised new questions....Second, most of what they taught was in the form of stories or parables, which are particularly effective and striking ways to reveal values, their principle concern. Their interest, then, was not primarily discursive truth....Third, their own lives were the best narratives, the best stories to reveal the depth of their own characters and to give evidence of the goodness, the beauty, and the rightness of what they stood for.⁷

So the twofold question that I address here is this: “How did Francis of Assisi communicate his spirituality and how can we do so authentically today?” But while the latter part of the question is the focus of my conclusion, it is the former that concerns the main body of the thesis: in essence, the formulation of his religious conversion.

When I was professed as a Secular Franciscan 15 years ago, I thought I could not love Francis more. After all, he had been responsible for my return to regular practice of the Catholic faith. When I walked the hills and valleys around Assisi 10 years ago and encountered the spirit of the *poverello* at the pathways and withdrawn sanctuaries less frequented by tourists, I loved him even more. Five years ago, when I resolved to anchor all my preaching in the solid foundation of Franciscan spirituality, I was sure then that I could not love him more deeply. And when I took the decision to write this thesis about him, I was sure that my love for him now towered well above the timid attachment I had

⁶ William J. Short, *Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999), 21. Hereafter *Poverty and Joy*.

⁷ Vernon Gregson, *The Desires of the Human Heart: An Introduction to the Theology of Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 95. Hereafter Gregson *Desires*.

previously felt. The difference each time, of course, had to do with getting to know him better. Most Christians and people of other religions and even many atheists will agree that to know him is to love him. As I have come to know him better for who he must really have been - historically, stripped of devotional clichés - my respect for him has grown exponentially.

I take no credit for this discovery. To a great extent, the credit belongs to a Jesuit, Bernard Lonergan, whose method for doing theology exposed me to the need, as well as the tools, for understanding historically even something as elusive as spirituality. Since then, I have discovered rich sources of information produced by scholars to whom I am deeply grateful.⁸ Yet, we know that despite the brilliance of Francis' insights, to follow him is not to imitate him. In fact, Francis did not imitate Jesus entirely. In effect, Francis did masterfully what Lonergan argued is the right process for doing good theology, first by appropriating a religious tradition historically and then by mediating between it and the contemporary culture authentically. That's what Francis did in relation to Jesus, and that's what we are called to do in relation to Francis, a historic man whose sanctity transcends all time ...a holy man who taught us what it means to believe in the Gospel and to love with a pure heart.

The world may not have needed another reflection on Francis of Assisi, but as a Franciscan communicator, I did. I needed to conduct an investigation that would help me to convey his spirituality to my contemporaries, not on the basis of pious myths but on an

⁸ While the tradition of historical research begins with the earliest biographies, it was not until the late 1970s that the main source for understanding the spirituality of Francis became his own writings: "With the exception of *The Later Rule* and *The Testament*, little attention was paid to the writings of Francis that we now realize clearly reveal his spirit, such as *The Admonitions*, the exhortation to the faithful, or the letters to his brothers. Instead focus was on works such as *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* or, in a more serious vein, Saint Bonaventure's *Major Legend* or the works of Thomas of Celano." – *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University, 1999), v. 1. *The Saint*: 35. Hereafter *Early Documents*.

authentic reception of his struggles and his insights. I needed something that would help me to understand and receive the very essence of his legacy in a manner that enabled me to make sound judgments about the value of that heritage for our own post-modern times, and that would be the foundation upon which I could rest reasonable decisions about how his life should change our own.

The spirit of Francis lives today in a dynamic tradition we call Franciscanism. I am painfully aware that just as interest in the diminutive icon of simplicity continues to grow – judging from the number of new publications that appear each year – the number of those who actually follow him into religious life is sharply declining. I remain convinced, nonetheless, that he has much to say to our world about what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, just as I believe that it will take the most ingenious strategies and the best honed skills of professional communicators to mine meaning below the superficiality of “easy” spirituality in order to render that meaning comprehensible, accessible and compelling, and to significantly affect the attitudes and behaviors of citizens of the Third Millennium.

Not only do I believe that the spirituality we call Franciscan is suited to our times, I also believe that it is necessary for our times. It must be dusted off and heralded for its vitality because its genius is to testify to the enduring wisdom of the living Word. It is necessary because so many young people today are of the mind that Francis was before his conversion. It is necessary because so many faithful Christians, albeit well meaning, do not live the Gospel and carry it confidently into “the marketplace”. Sadly, our world, like that of Francis, is fractured by selfishness and shackled by fear. The fraternal love and true joy of Francis, therefore, are both of another era, another land and another

culture, and of our own. This belief was aptly phrased in a recent survey of religious life (not by a Franciscan author!): “If God someday granted to his Church the religious order of the future, in the direction toward which so many are already oriented, it would no doubt bear the traits of the spirituality of Francis of Assisi.”⁹

⁹ Pierre Lippert, S.J. “Un modèle de bonté: François d’Assise”, *Bonté, Vertu d’aujourd’hui et de demain* (Aubier, 1946): 105-112.

INTRODUCTION

I do not pretend to be or aspire to become a Lonergan scholar. I have been engaged these past two years, however, in modestly using Lonergan's methodology in the enterprise of searching for a contemporary language with which to speak of the rich spiritual heritage of Francis of Assisi. This thesis is the result of a journey that consisted in appropriating this heritage by trying to be as faithful as possible to Lonergan's transcendental method and his presentation of the functions that constitute genuine and reliable theological effort for the purpose of successfully mediating between a religious tradition and a cultural matrix.

The study that follows is divided into three parts. The first, which serves as background, consists of two surveys: (1) Lonergan's Transcendental Method that underpins my consideration of Francis' spiritual tradition, and (2) a review of some appropriate definitions of spirituality. The second part looks at the process of religious conversion as experienced by Francis in light of Lonergan's eight functional specialties: (1) Research; (2) Interpretation; (3) History; (4) Dialectic; (5) Foundations; (6) Doctrines; (7) Systematics; and (8) Communication. The third part points to the possible application of this process in relation to our own communication of Franciscan spirituality.

The genius of Francis was not to invent a dramatically new religious institution, as is often assumed to be the case¹⁰, but to experience in these changing circumstances new data as well as old data newly presented, and then to understand these in new ways that were faithful to Catholic tradition yet represented a force for renewal. His creative way of decoding the manifold expressions of divine revelation was indeed innovative and,

¹⁰ Movements based on the practice of evangelical poverty had been around for some time by early 13th century, a fact that will be elucidated further on.

consequently, appreciated by a broad range of people. What we find in Francis is a good example of how new meaning is derived.

I approached this project with the conviction that it would be important to find as many varied sources as possible to develop a full view of the historical context in which Francis operated and also that this range of sources would assist in filtering out bias and validating information. For these reasons, I used sources from distinct categories in the hope of ensuring accuracy. These were Franciscan sources as well as non-Franciscan sources and consisted of primary as well as secondary sources from the 12th and 13th centuries, and scholarship from the last few decades. Primary Franciscan sources included English translations of the writings of Francis of Assisi and those of his contemporaries, which were scrutinized in order to address the challenge that is “a matter not of understanding the object or the words but of understanding the author himself, his nation, language, time, culture, way of life, and cast of mind”.¹¹ Non-Franciscan sources were used to authenticate Franciscan sources, and encompassed studies focused on the period leading up to Francis’ own time, including references to official Church and civil documents. Devotional literature, or hagiography, was not directly considered because it is often not predicated on generally acceptable method for doing history, but I did indirectly consider some popular legends inasmuch as they might contain insights that would merit more rigorous investigation.

Lonergan’s *Method in Theology* was used explicitly in structuring the investigation because I understood that it would enable me to sort through, order and better understand mounds of literature in search of verifiable historical information about who Francis was

¹¹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 160. Hereafter *Method*.

initially, about why and how he was transformed over time, about why he taught what he did to those who gathered around him and about what his legacy is in our own time.

In asking all the relevant questions with regards to his religious experience, understanding, judgment and decision, one is drawn to the changing aspects of his socio-economic environment. In exploring what Lonergan meant by intellectual, moral and religious conversion, one relates this progressive process to his manifest commitment to continuous conversion as the *sine qua non* of religious life. Finally, when one asks questions about his spirituality in relation to the functional specialties, it is a relatively simple matter to attribute insightful moments of Francis' life to the operation of each specialty running from his unique experience of natural and social phenomena as well as religious life and teaching; to his resolution of conflicts and contradictions, and the subsequent change in his foundational convictions; to his communication of this experience and understanding by word and action. For someone wanting to communicate Francis of Assisi's spirituality, understanding Francis' spirituality through the grid of the eight functional specialties is only the beginning. In order to communicate effectively and authentically, the communicator must now use these findings to begin a more personal journey – a new process to reconcile what he has learned with what he is living in his own time, taking carefully into account the context for understanding in the audience that he intends to influence. And, despite what has been written previously about the need for efficacious verbal language, it must be pre-supposed that strategies for effective communication of Franciscan spirituality will inevitably involve action that is coherent with the words uttered and written: To “walk the talk”, as it were.

Finally, this work was approached with humility in the face of questions to which answers were not forthcoming because of information gaps in the historical framework surrounding this enigmatic figure. Reflecting on the paucity of solid data, Crowe provided some comfort, though not referring to Francis directly:

We Christians have little “understanding” of self-sacrifice, in the sense of an empirical theory that explains how things function...there simply is no generally accepted grasp of how the values emerging from faith actually work to turn around a declining culture.¹²

¹² Frederick E. Crowe, *Approaching Lonergan's Idea* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 7.

PART I: BACKGROUND

(a) Lonergan¹³'s Transcendental Method

Before applying Lonergan's method to the life and spiritual legacy of Francis of Assisi, we would do well to review some of the basic aspects of this approach, which is not so much a cognitional theory but more a concrete charting of the data of consciousness itself: "I conceive (method), not in terms of principles and rules, but as a normative pattern of operations with cumulative and progressive results".¹⁴ Lonergan's method, therefore, was "concerned with objectifying the human subject's actual cognitional process".¹⁵ Being alert to one's own cognitional process is what Lonergan called "self-appropriation"¹⁶ and it is not the same as looking at oneself as one would a specimen in a laboratory but must be done in context of a living experience. Consequently, objectivity for Lonergan was in effect critical and transparent subjectivity.

The term "transcendental" is applied because of the progressive nature of this process: a system of striving for higher levels of consciousness, "a mounting from a fixation with the world of immediacy to the world filled with meaning and permeated

¹³ "Bernard Lonergan was born on 17 December 1904 in Buckingham, Quebec, Canada. In 1922 he entered the Society of Jesus. After a two-year novitiate and two years of classics at Guelph, Ontario, he proceeded to England for philosophical studies at Heythrop College (1926-1929) and a "general degree" from the University of London (1930). For the next three years (1930-1933), he taught at Loyola College, Montreal. He then went to Rome, where he studied theology at the Gregorian University and was ordained a priest in 1936. Entering the doctoral program at Gregorian University, he received an S.T.D. in 1940 after he completed his dissertation on St. Thomas Aquinas' thought on operative grace, which was published as a series of articles in *Theological Studies* in 1941 and 1942, he taught at Loyola College, Montreal, from 1940 to 1946. From 1947 to 1953, he was professor of theology at Regis College, Toronto; from 1953 to 1965, professor of theology, Gregorian University. A series of studies he did about the concept of *Verbum* in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas appeared in *Theological Studies* from 1946 to 1949. In 1957 *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* was published; in 1972, *Method in Theology*. He died 26 November 1984." - Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup, "Preface: Transforming the Wasteland", *Communications and Lonergan: Common Ground for Forging the New Age*, xviii. Hereafter *Common Ground*.

¹⁴ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University Press, 1999), 14, footnote. Hereafter *Method*.

¹⁵ Carla Mae Streeter, "Glossary of Lonerganian Terminology", *Common Ground*, 326.

¹⁶ *Method*, 282.

with value. It has to do with the struggle toward the authentic human functioning identified with knowledge and choice.”¹⁷ Of particular importance in understanding Lonergan’s method in general and its application to this study in particular is how he perceived consciousness or intentionality. It is to this that Lonergan related the eight functional specialties that he saw as comprising the work, not only of theology, but of other disciplines as well.

Lonergan thought of human beings as coming to know through progressive levels of consciousness. The first level is experience to which he urged us to be attentive. Upon this basic human activity rests the entire process leading to real self-actualization. On this level are situated the sensory operations as well as remembering and imagining. The second level is understanding, which requires us to be intelligent in the operation of inquiring, imagining, understanding, conceiving and formulating.¹⁸ The third level is judging for which being reasonable is the operative precept as one reflects and determines the sufficiency of evidence: “reflecting marshalling and weighing the evidence, judging.”¹⁹ The fourth level of consciousness is deciding, which demands that we be responsible in the choices we make and in the actions we undertake to breathe life into our decisions: “deliberating, evaluating, deciding, speaking, writing.”²⁰ The apex of this ascent is mystery, the state of being in love: “We fall in love. And it need not always be preceded by knowledge, especially when our falling in love is initiated by, and has as its term, a Transcendent Mystery that we do not and cannot apprehend.”²¹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Method*, 6.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Robert M. Doran, “Foreword: Common Ground”, *Common Ground*, xiv.

The following table illustrates the relationship between the eight functional specialties and the four levels of consciousness or intentionality, and previews the manner in which these will be applied to Francis of Assisi’ religious insights.

Lonergan’s Cognitive Process Applied to Francis of Assisi <i>(To be read from bottom left, up and across, then down to bottom right)</i>		
Functional Specialties <i>Appropriating a Tradition</i> <i>(Meaning of the Gospel)</i>	Levels of Consciousness or Intentionality	Functional Specialties <i>Mediating between Tradition and Contemporary Culture</i>
4. Dialectics → <i>Conflict leading to conversion</i>	Fourth: Deciding Responsibly	↓ 5. Foundations <i>Development of Form of Life</i>
3. History <i>Discernment within church</i>	Third: Judging Rationally	6. Doctrine <i>His new priorities</i>
2. Interpretation <i>Culture affecting his knowing</i>	Second: Understanding Reasonably	7. Systematics <i>His early rule & admonitions</i>
1. Research ↑ <i>His experience of religion</i>	First: Experiencing Attentively	8. Communication <i>His Testament</i>

Another term that had special significance for Lonergan and to which he assigned much importance was the word “meaning”, which he divided into four “realms”: common sense, theory, interiority and transcendence. All of these he related to consciousness, as he understood that term. Through the reading of this thesis, it will become evident that Francis operated in each realm in various circumstances.

We have had occasion to distinguish such differentiations of consciousness as the resolution of common sense into common sense and theory and the further resolution of common sense and theory into common sense, theory, and interiority....As consciousness differentiates into the two realms of common sense and theory, it will give rise to special theoretical questions concerning divinity, the other of the universe, the destiny of mankind, and the lot of each individual. When these three realms of common sense, theory, and interiority are differentiated, the self-appropriation of the subject leads not only to the objectifications of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding, but also of religious experience....It is this emergence that is cultivated by a life of prayer and self-denial and, when it occurs, it has a twofold effect, first, of withdrawing the subject from the realm of common sense, theory, and other interiority into a “cloud of unknowing” and then of intensifying, purifying, clarifying,

the objectifications referring to the transcendent whether in the realm of common sense, or of theory, or of other interiority.²²

Essentially, the goal of doing theology ought to be the appropriation of a religious tradition or spirituality, which comprises someone else's spiritual insights, historically and authentically, and to then mediate between that appropriation and the particular culture in which we intend to explain, adopt or refute it, which will almost inevitably call for the development and use of a new set of tools for effective communication.

Lonergan's view of doing things historically supposes that there is "a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results"²³, in which "culture is conceived empirically, as contingent and changing."²⁴ We are, therefore, urged to avoid the static categories, preferring what he called "authenticity".

His constant emphasis on authenticity served to impose conditions of "honesty, integrity, attentiveness to experience, and overcoming distorted communications through faithfulness to his five 'transcendental' or 'self-affirming' precepts: Be Attentive, Be Intelligent, Be Reasonable, Be Responsible, and Be in Love."²⁵ Streeter defined authenticity as a "precarious and ever-developing state (that) depends on long and sustained faithfulness to the transcendental precepts", and added, "The human being achieves authenticity through self-transcendence"²⁶.

Finally, a few words about "intersubjectivity", which will inform our consideration of Francis as a communicator: "Meaning is embodied or carried in human intersubjectivity, in art, in symbols, in language, and in the lives and deeds of persons....Prior to the 'we'

²² *Method*, 265f.

²³ *Method*, 13ff.

²⁴ James Sauer, *A Commentary on Lonergan's Method in Theology* (Ottawa: The Lonergan Website, 2001), 3. Hereafter Sauer *Commentary*.

²⁵ *Common Ground*, xviii

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

that results from the mutual love of an 'I' and a 'thou', there is the earlier 'we' ..."²⁷ From it wells up a deep desire to break free of self-preoccupation and to find meaning in a broader reality or higher level of consciousness. Farrell suggested, "advanced writing is intersubjective, because writers draw on meanings, and values they have received from others."²⁸ By acting attentively, intelligently, reasonably, responsibly, and in Love, therefore, the communicator of religious values assists in the progress and development of society because within him intersubjectivity collaborates with authenticity to create new horizons of understanding and new categories of meaning.

The genesis of common meaning is an ongoing process of communication, of people coming to share the same cognitive, constitutive, and effective meanings. On the elementary level this process has been described as arising between the self and the other when, on the basis of already existing intersubjectivity, the self makes a gesture, the other makes an interpretive response, and the self discovers in the response the effective meaning of his gesture. So from intersubjectivity through gesture and interpretations there arises common understanding. On that spontaneous basis there can be built a common language, the transmission of acquired knowledge and of social patterns through education, the diffusion of information, and the common will to community that seeks to replace misunderstanding with mutual comprehension and to change occasions of disagreement into occasions of non-agreement and eventually agreement.²⁹

What Lonergan implied is that all good theology goes through these stages of consciousness and the functional steps or specialties that rest upon them – whatever particular theologians might choose to call these levels and steps. By contrast, any endeavor that is either inauthentic (e.g., interpretation of data without adequate consideration of biases) or incomplete (e.g., skipping from doctrine to communication) is inherently flawed or poor theology.

²⁷ *Method*, 57.

²⁸ "Writing, the Writer, and Lonergan", *Common Ground*, 25.

²⁹ *Method*, 357.

(b) Defining Spirituality

To consider the communication of spirituality, we must determine what is understood by that term. While definitions of spirituality abound, I am inclined to favor here those that embody Lonergan's method, such as this one advanced by Schneiders: "The experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value"³⁰. Among other things, it alludes to several key Lonergan concepts: Experience, consciousness, integration, self-transcendence and value. Indeed, the second chapter of *Method in Theology* deals specifically with the object of conscious intentionality at the responsible level, the human good, concrete and progressive developments and then makes use of skills, feelings and values to create meaning. Ultimately, as this definition supposes, the purpose of spirituality is to move toward moral self-transcendence by using our knowledge of good in the judgment of value.

Schneiders' definition is one that is useful in this study for the following reasons:

1. It is predicated on experience: Spirituality is authentic and fruitful once it is rooted in a personal experience of God's love. Without it, doctrines and other intellectual considerations of faith are often partial, ephemeral and not applied to everyday life: "In recent decades, there has been a paradigm shift in the general approach to theology towards a greater reflection on human experience as an authentic source of

³⁰ Sandra Schneiders IHM, lecture at the Jesuit School of Theology, Fall, 1995, in Keith Warner, *The Franciscans: A Family History* (Loretto, Penn.: Institute for Contemporary Franciscan Life – St. Francis University, 1997), 1-10. Hereafter Warner *Franciscans*.

divine revelation.”³¹ Indeed, Gregson’s own exploration of religion as spirituality “develop(s) the experiential basis of Lonergan’s theological position.”³²

2. It bridges the chasm that “classicism” (the static notion of truth as permanently fixed, external to ourselves and objectively observable) dug between spirituality and social practice. As Sheldrake pointed out, “the period from the 12th century onward in the West saw a process of development in the approach to the spiritual life which may be characterized as one of separation and division.”³³

There was, first of all, a division of spirituality from theology, of affectivity from knowledge. Secondly, there was a gradual limitation of interest to interiority or subjective spiritual experience. In other words, spirituality became separated from social praxis and ethics.³⁴

3. It deals with God as ultimate value. For Lonergan, “religious experience...is living at the stage of surrender to the Transcendent.”³⁵ “Religious self-transcendence is experienced before it is...explicitly known. It is a call, perhaps only dimly recognized, to a fearful but fascinating mystery...a profound and dynamic movement toward an unknown holiness.”³⁶

Without faith the originating value is man and the terminal value is the human good man brings about. But in the light of faith, originating value is divine light and love, while terminal value is the whole universe. So the human good becomes absorbed in an all-encompassing good.³⁷

³¹ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 33. Hereafter Sheldrake *Spirituality and History*.

³² Vernon Gregson, *Lonergan, Spirituality, and the Meeting of Religions* (Langham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 59. Hereafter Gregson *Spirituality*.

³³ Sheldrake *Spirituality and History*, 44.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Gregson *Spirituality*, 62.

³⁶ Ibid. 67. Citing *Method* pp. 106-107, 113, 123, 340; pp106, 341-42; pp29, 278, 341-342.

³⁷ *Method*, 116.

In the process of describing spirituality more than defining it, Gregson wrote, “What is meant is that vista of human intentionality, that transformation of the self, which opens to what is beyond the self, the absolutely Transcendent.”³⁸

4. Finally, striving toward the ultimate value is perhaps the safest and surest way of fostering progress and avoiding decline: “Self-transcendence promotes progress. The refusal of self-transcendence turns progress into decline. As progress is cumulative...so decline is cumulative.”³⁹

Progress proceeds from originating value, from subjects being their true selves by observing the transcendental precepts, Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible....But precepts may be violated. Evaluations may be biased by an egotistic disregard of others, by a loyalty to one’s own group matched by hostility to other groups, by concentrating on short-term benefits and overlooking long term-costs.”⁴⁰

Spirituality that we call Christian is, in its simplest expression, a way of following Christ. It is the manner in which we accept to follow him in discipleship. According to Sheldrake, “spirituality is a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and in the context of the community of believers. Spirituality is, therefore, concerned with the conjunction of theology, prayer and practical Christianity.”⁴¹ The fact that authentic spirituality must be grounded in a believer’s experience as opposed to static or objective categories is certainly also evident in his presentation of the historical dimension of spirituality:

There is the personal assimilation of salvation in Christ by each person within changing historical, cultural and social circumstances that demand new approaches to Christian conduct...specific spiritual traditions are initially embodied in people rather than doctrine and grow out of life rather than from abstract ideas.⁴²

³⁸ Gregson *Spirituality*, 75.

³⁹ Sauer *Commentary*, 83.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Sheldrake *Spirituality and History*, 52f.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 33.

Indeed, any consideration of Christian spirituality, either one's own or that of another, is "essentially about what it is for a whole human life to be lived in the 'place' defined by Jesus."⁴³

If Christian spirituality is a *way* of following Christ, variations arise that, while remaining faithful to Christ, emphasize different characteristics of his life and teaching. One could either attribute this to our limited capacity for absorbing the totality of his sacred reality, or to the fact that different people will quite naturally ascribe slightly different meanings to shared events. One of the earliest inclinations we have of the nature of Franciscan spirituality is an account attributed to one of Francis' closest friends, Brother Leo. In it are revealed as active ingredients humility, simplicity, poverty and prayer.

The most holy father was unwilling that his friars should be desirous of knowledge and books⁴⁴, but he willed and preached to them that they should desire to be founded on holy Humility, and to imitate pure Simplicity, holy Prayer, and our Lady Poverty, on which the saints and first friars did build. And this, he used to say, was the only safe way to one's own salvation and the edification of others, since Christ, to whose imitation we are called, showed and taught us this along by word and example alike.⁴⁵

Likewise, it is clear that Francis intended the imitation of Christ to be inspired by his Holy Spirit: "Let them pursue what they must desire above all things: to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working."⁴⁶ Among other things, this rule reveals the

⁴³ Rowan Williams, "To Stand Where Christ Stands", *An Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, Ed. Ralph Waller and Benedicta Ward (London" SPCK, 1999), 3.

⁴⁴ Those less familiar with Franciscan tradition should note that the study of theology soon became acceptable and much worthy scholarship is attributed to prominent members of that order, but the concern persisted that such intellectual pursuits must never be allowed to undermine the practice of humility, simplicity, poverty and prayer, however those terms may have been understood over time. In fact, Francis expressed this sentiment himself in a brief letter to Anthony of Padua: "I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers provided that, as is contained in the Rule, you 'do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion' during study of this kind." – *Early Documents*, 107.

⁴⁵ "Speculum Perfectionis", ed. P. Sabatier, *Collection d'études et de documents sur l'histoire religieuse et littéraire du moyen âge*, I (Paris, 1898), 72, in John Moorman, *A History of The Franciscan Order: From Its Origins to the Year 1517* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968), 3.

⁴⁶ "The Later Rule", *Early Documents*, 105.

primacy of one of three core aspects of his spirituality, according to Armstrong and Brady, namely that it was trinitarian, as well as ecclesial and fraternal.⁴⁷

For our exploration of the spirituality of Francis of Assisi in particular, the significance of Schneider's definition is especially important. For the reader's convenience, we recall it here: "The experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption but of self-transcendence toward the ultimate value."

1. This definition's foundation in human experience resonates with what we understand to be the starting point of Francis' moral, religious and intellectual conversion.

Indeed, "specific spiritual traditions are initially embodied in people rather than doctrine and grow out of life rather than from abstract ideas"⁴⁸, but perhaps most radically by this man who struggled to make sense of the collision between the secular world of immediacy and the religious world of values.

2. The desire for integration is what I perceive to be the heuristic⁴⁹ of Francis' quest for meaning. My sense is that he had experienced what Dunne called "the split soul"⁵⁰,

⁴⁷ *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, Ed. Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius Brady (New York: Paulist Press, 1982, 11ff. Hereafter *Works*.

⁴⁸ Sheldrake *Spirituality and History*, 33.

⁴⁹ Lonergan referred to the heuristic function this way: "Every inquiry aims at transforming some unknown into a known. Inquiry itself, then, is something between ignorance and knowledge. It is less than knowledge; else there would be no need to inquire. It is more than sheer ignorance, for it makes ignorance manifest and strives to replace it with knowledge. This intermediary between ignorance and knowing is an intending, and what is intended is an unknown that it to be known." – *Method*, 22.

⁵⁰ Dunne presented a compelling argument for spiritual integration in an expose of what he terms "the split soul", which is essentially the dialectic/foundations development of trying to actualize religious values while responding to ubiquitous pressures exerted by the secular society that surrounds us. He posits that this presents a cognitive dilemma that is resolved by default in favor of "the world" unless a deliberate effort is made to give precedence to religious values. Tad Dunne, *Lonergan and Spirituality: Toward a Spiritual Integration* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985), 3-6. Hereafter *Dunne Spirituality*.

and that this raised for him dialectical problems that burned inside him in the manner that made Augustine “restless”.⁵¹

3. According to Lonergan, “Christian conversion is making Christ the way and life of authenticity. Jesus is self-transcendence personified, incarnated, divinized.”⁵²

Pointedly, Gregson added, “The unrestricted of Christ’s love is the life that all people hunger to enjoy. The cross of Christ is the law of redemption, the way that conversion passes on to putting one’s body and spirit on the line for authenticity and self-transcendence.”⁵³ More than anyone, I think, this aptly describes Francis who was called by Pope Pius XI *alter Christus*.⁵⁴

4. Francis’ life was marked by zealous and uncompromising intentionality, and he understood in his own manner that meaning is made of conscious living, is formed by value, and is animated by a desire for self-transcendence, the purpose of which is to authentically be in Love.

Gregson offered perhaps the most intriguing and probably the most helpful perspective on spirituality by suggesting that it can be used almost interchangeably with religious conversion.

I use the word, spirituality, in addition to, and sometimes in preference to, religious conversion....Religious consciousness – spirituality or religious conversion – is a praxis, an engaged human state....It is an engagement with the absolutely Transcendent, which liberates one to engage, to respond to, and to create and transform the world of finite value, the world of persons, society, civilization....Lonergan’s understanding of what is basic to religion then approximates what is called spirituality. It is surrender to the Transcendent, with the consequent transformation of subjectivity.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Allusion to “The thought of you stirs him (man) so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.” – Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book One, I, 1, tr. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 21.

⁵² Gregson *Desires*, 73.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Pope Pius XI, *Rite Expiatis*, 1226. Consulted online catholic-forum.com.

⁵⁵ Gregson *Spirituality*, 75f.

A spiritual person, therefore, is someone who is drawn and responds to the higher values of the human good. Essentially, Francis did, albeit with singular persistence, what any sincere Christian is invited to do, namely to believe in the Gospel and to live in accordance with its precepts. What is unique about his spirituality, therefore, is its emphasis on a particular cluster of precepts but clearly that has been enough to inspire millions to follow Christ in the footsteps of Francis.⁵⁶

Of the various definitions of Franciscan spirituality available, I favor the one proposed by Foley, Weigel and Normile, and will use it as the principal reference for this thesis.

To live the Gospel according to the spirit of Saint Francis in communion with Christ poor and crucified, in the love of God, in brother/sisterhood with all people and all creation, participating in the life and mission of the Church, in continual conversion, in a life of prayer – liturgical, person, communal –, as instruments of peace.⁵⁷

This articulation of Franciscan spirituality seems to summarize the principal elements contained in the vast collection of literature about Francis' spiritual theology and the legacy of the tradition that he spawned. In many ways, it is too broad, since it does not adequately reveal the great attention Francis focused on living like Jesus according to the Gospel⁵⁸, but it does aptly situate his insights regarding creation, community and church

⁵⁶ I use this expression cautiously since Francis often referred to following in the footsteps of Jesus and would not have us divert our attention from that purpose. Meanwhile, we would do well to avoid saying that we do so in the manner of Francis since our task is to be authentic and conscious of our times and culture. In some ways, it can be said that the footsteps of Francis only to serve to confirm that the path we follow is the course that Jesus established.

⁵⁷ Leonard Foley, Jovian Weigel and Patti Normile, *To Live as Francis Lived: A Guide for Secular Franciscans* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000), 17f. Hereafter *Guide for Secular Franciscans*.

⁵⁸ The identification of Franciscan spirituality with the spirituality of Francis of Assisi is fully intended throughout this thesis. While a natural evolution in its practice has occurred during the past 800 years, periodically including instances of both development and decline, the key reference has remained its central figure, Francis, with Clare, Bonaventure and others presenting various elucidations: "Franciscan spirituality describes that approach to God and life in the world characterized by the values and behaviours that have their foundation in the religious experience of Francis and Clare of Assisi and the movement begun by

to which he was faithful, even when their behavior seemed at variance with his understanding of Gospel values.

them.” - Michael Blastic, “Franciscan Spirituality”, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, Ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 408.

PART II: HOW FRANCIS APPROPRIATED A RELIGIOUS TRADITION

(a) Research: Francis' Experience of Religion

According to Lonergan, research is the awareness of experience and the unavoidable first step in a rigorous pursuit of meaning. It is the most basic level of knowing and the conscious or intentional state of being attentive to what is occurring around and within us. Not only are sensory details important, so also is the thoughtful consideration of how our own mind works. This is the only way to counter bias and other distortions that creep into our attempts to know and understand. Awareness of how we process data is just as vital as our consideration of the data being processed: “ It is central to Lonergan’s thought that the data of consciousness, or how the human mind works, be part of the theologian’s “data” as he or she goes about theological research in the data available to the senses through reading and personal experience.”⁵⁹

* * *

Francis was born in the small but bustling Umbrian town of Assisi in 1181 or 1182.⁶⁰ As will be indicated in subsequent chapters, this was a pivotal place and these were pivotal times. By all accounts, he experienced life at the crossroads with tremendous intensity. Though his formidable zest was initially directed to the grand and public realms of commerce and chivalry, he would eventually turn this characteristic enthusiasm inward in pursuit of meaning, agonizing over such daunting challenges as the place of Gospel values in daily living. Signs of this dilemma would have emerged, though probably unconsciously at first, from the early years of his life. His mother, Lady Pica, of a distinguished French family, was said to be a pious person. In sharp contrast to her

⁵⁹ *Common Ground*, 328.

⁶⁰ Scholars do not all agree on Francis’ year of birth. Some biographies identify it as 1181 and others as 1182. Consequently, a few biographers present both dates as I have done here.

gentle manner, his father, Pietro di Bernadone, was an ambitious and successful textile merchant who was rather more exuberant. During the course of his various expeditions to purchase fine fabric, he often journeyed to France.⁶¹ It was his love of this country that caused Pietro to nickname his newborn son Francesco.⁶²

As a child, Francis attended the parish church of San Giorgio, where he learned to read and write Latin⁶³, though scholars have determined, judging by the quality of his own writings, that his grasp of it was somewhat rudimentary. As a young man, he was popular and enjoyed drinking and singing with friends. Because of the considerable wealth to which he seemed to have easy access, he could be extravagant in entertainment.⁶⁴

As he grew up, Francis would have observed the exercise of tremendous power, sometimes directed to noble or, at other times, to destructive ends. Four important buildings in Assisi were the icons of this power.⁶⁵ The first was *La Rocca*, a fortified castle (“symbol of the Lombard-Frank-German feudal aristocracy”⁶⁶) that was occupied by a German count until it was destroyed by local burghers in 1198. The second was the *Duomo*, or cathedral, which was the symbol of the ecclesial power of the bishop, exercised in the manner of feudal lords. The third was the *Mercato* and *Piazza*, at the

⁶¹ “Pietro Bernadone, an exceedingly rich cloth merchant, will be one of those drawn to the fair in Champagne to buy *panni franceshi* (the finest French and Flemish fabrics), and other textiles woven in Flanders, Holland, England, Brabant... Assisi was especially well situated for this commercial traffic, being on a road that would today be called a main artery of communications. It linked Rome and France, and therefore was called Strada Francesca.” – Arnaldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, tr. Helen Moak (New York: Crossroad, 1981). 39f. Hereafter Fortini *Francis*.

⁶² One could make the case that his mother’s decision to have him baptized Giovanni (John) was a prophetic act as there have been numerous comparisons made between Francis and John the Baptist.

⁶³ William R. Cook, *Francis of Assisi* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 23. Hereafter Cook *Francis*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Raphael Brown, *The Roots of St. Francis: A Popular History of the Church in Assisi and Umbria Before St. Francis As Related to His Life and Spirituality* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), 141.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

center of the city, which “personified a new class of prosperous and ambitious merchants.”⁶⁷ And the fourth was the *Palazzo del Commune*, or city hall, where Pietro di Bernadone would file a grievance against his son in 1206 before appealing to the bishop.⁶⁸

Not content with prospects of joining the family business, Francis dreamed of a yet more glamorous career as a soldier and eventually a knight. Fantasies of knighthood led the young man to take up arms on at least two occasions. The first, at age 20, was in a battle against citizens of the nearby town of Perugia.⁶⁹ But instead of winning the coveted crown of victory, he was captured and spent a lonely year in an inhospitable dungeon cell.⁷⁰ After being ransomed by his father, the demoralized young man came home in poor health. His illness persisted for a year, during which time he came to realize that the prospect of joining his father in the lucrative cloth business no longer satisfied him. Yet his dreams of knighthood persisted. In the spring of 1205, he eagerly joined the forces amassed to oppose in Apulia certain German princes.⁷¹ Again, Francis’ flare for extravagance came to the fore. With his father’s financial support, he was outfitted with magnificent armour and set off for glory but had only reached Spoleto before sensing a

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶⁹ An excellent and detailed account of the events and conditions leading up to this conflict can be found in “Assisi War with Perugia” – Fortini *Francis*, 148-155.

⁷⁰ II Celano 4 in *Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 364. Hereafter *Omnibus*.

⁷¹ Cook *Francis*, 34. Though Celano (I, 7) mentions Apulia as the location of a dream that changed the course of Francis’ military career, some earlier chronicles state, including a chronology prepared by Omer Englebert and Raphael Brown which appears in *Omnibus*, that he was actually responding to the call of Pope Innocent III for a Holy Crusade against the Saracens. In the more recent anthology of early documents edited by Armstrong, Hellmann and Short we find this note, “Apulia is located in the southern part of the peninsula. It is the place where Walter of Brienne, head of Innocent III’s papal militia, was fighting against Markwald of Anweiler, seneschal of the German Empire. The latter claimed tutelage over the young Frederick II, who had been entrusted to the pope.” - *Early Documents*, 185n.

sudden divine call to turn back. He then aborted his plans for worldly knighthood and entered a period of deep personal reflection.

What followed was a dramatic series of life-transforming experiences, the sequence of which is not entirely clear. Among the early biographies/hagiographies, scholars accord much favour to *The Legend of the Three Companions*, believed to be penned by three people who knew Francis well. In it we find this sequence⁷²: (1) Francis was imprisoned during a battle with Perugia; (2) A few years after being ransomed by his father, still wanting to become a knight, he journeyed south only to be halted by a disturbing dream at Spoleto; (3) Thinking this to be the call of God, he then returned to Assisi, only a day's ride away, but he soon resumed his former practice of high living; (4) As this left him increasingly unsatisfied, he began to practice almsgiving; (5) After meeting a leper and being transformed by that experience, he began to visit a leper hospital; (6) Soon, he began to pray with increased frequency in quiet and withdrawn places, presumably to sort out the confusion in his mind; (7) during this time, he had a religious experience in the church of San Damiano, which he then began to repair; (8) Finally, this behaviour so upset his father, that he imprisoned him. When his son escaped, Pietro Bernadone sought restitution for what Francis had sold, precipitating the event before the bishop at which Francis stripped himself of his father's possessions and of his former life.

⁷² Warner *Franciscans*, 3-6. Pazzelli presented the following variation on Francis' transformation; "These are the steps; his imprisonment in Perugia, which put an end to the dreams of a rosy future and opened to him the doors of reflection; his return to a city still divided by hatred among factions, ready to take up arms once again' his sudden recognition of the miserable plight of the poor which must have been a sword piercing his spirit, already touched from on high; his attempt to escape to southern Italy with a military expedition interrupted by the "mysterious" voice at Spoleto; the direct and voluntary experience of his pilgrimage to Rome and of what it meant to be truly poor and to have to beg alms; his upsetting yet revealing encounter with the leper, and finally, the message of the Crucified at San Damiano – Raffaele Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order* (Chicago: Franciscan herald Press, 1989), 80. Hereafter Pazzelli *Francis*.

Over time, Francis' attitudes and opinions were shaped to varying degrees by his experience of the conflicting spiritual, political, and ecclesial currents that were prevalent at the close of the 12th century: "His own writings show acute awareness of these movements as well as an appreciation of both the scriptural and liturgical texts. He readily incorporated, synthesized and reconciled much of what was considered by many as impossibly fragmented."⁷³ One such experience that is generally overlooked in stories about Francis is his exposure to the penitential movement. Oftentimes, when seeing references to him as the "penitent from Assisi", people assume that Francis literally invented that movement. In fact, as Pazzelli has carefully documented, the movement had been around in one form or another since the 3rd century, from imposed penance and then voluntary penance, to penitential legislation and the Carolingian reform after the year 700, to the rise of the *donati* and "oblates", and onward into Francis' own time.⁷⁴ We have no evidence of his actual exposure to penitents, but we do have an appreciation of what being one meant. Far from being a mere association, it created a distinct identity for persons involved. In effect, it was because Francis was a penitent that his father could not appeal to civil authorities for restitution, though we have evidence that he tried to do so.⁷⁵ A penitent was for all practical purposes "a man of the cloth", with the effect that the bishop was the legitimate authority to which his father now had to direct his petition.⁷⁶

⁷³ J.A. Wayne Hellmann, "The Spirituality of the Franciscans", *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages & Reformation*, Vol. II. Ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 32.

⁷⁴ Pazzelli offers what is perhaps the best survey of the history of the penitential movement in the book referred above, which bears the subscript: "The Franciscan and pre-Franciscan Penitential Movement".

⁷⁵ Fortini *Francis*.

⁷⁶ According to Celano, Francis, following the decision become a penitent while on the way home from a business trip to Foligno where he sold everything he had, which actually belonged to his father, including the horse he was riding, stopped at San Damiano and explained his decision to the "poor priest" who declined to accept the money. – *Early Documents*, 189f.

There was nothing sudden about Francis' transformation. He inched intentionally, though perhaps reluctantly, toward a lifestyle diametrically opposed to the dreams of his youth. In his painful yet perseverant quest for meaning in his life, Francis prayed a lot and sought guidance from Scripture.⁷⁷ In his *Testament*, he would later clearly identify the Gospel as the inspiration for his form of life, so it is fair to assume that his experience of it had a significant affect on him. There is no way of knowing what its influence was prior to his commitment to follow Christ in strict fidelity to what he found in the Gospel, but it is evident from his various writings that he was deeply marked by numerous passages that convey the words and actions of Jesus. This is all the more remarkable when we consider that it is unlikely he ever read or even consulted the Gospel the way we do today, with the whole Bible or New Testament in one bound edition.⁷⁸ What he spoke from was probably his recollection of pericopes proclaimed in the liturgies that he attended.⁷⁹ It was only in churches that he would have had access to full biblical texts. Manselli, for instance, echoed the popular belief that it was in a church that Francis and his first companions used the officially proscribed practice to discern the will of God for the nascent order by randomly opening the Gospel three times, each time revealing a

⁷⁷ Cook *Francis*, 24f.

⁷⁸ Francis did eventually have a Reader, which contained 220 different Gospel passages. It can be found in "The Breviary of St. Francis" at the *Protomonastero de S. Chiara* in Assisi. "The last 55 folios first existed separately as a Gospel book, before being bound together with the Breviary in 1257-8 and entrusted by Brother Leo to the abbess of the Poor Clares of Assisi, Blessed Benedicta (+1260), and to her successors." - Laurent Gallant, "L'Evangeliaire de Saint Francois d'Assise", *Collectanea Franciscana* 53 (1983), 22.

⁷⁹ For instance, Celano recounted, "One day the gospel was being read in that church about how the Lord sent out his disciples to preach. The holy man of God, who was attending there, in order to understand better the words of the gospel, humbly begged the priest after celebrating the solemnities of the Mass to explain the gospel to him. The priest explained it all to him thoroughly line by line. When he heard that Christ's disciples should not *possess gold or silver or money, or carry on their journey a wallet or a sack, nor bread nor a staff, nor to have shoes nor two tunics*, but that they should preach *the kingdom of God and penance*, the holy man, Francis, immediately exulted in the spirit of God. 'That is what I want', he said, 'that is what I seek. This is what I desire with all my heart.'" - *Early Documents*, Vol. I, 201f.

verse about the nature of discipleship and the call to evangelical poverty.⁸⁰ But it was his keen observation and his near-perfect memory regarding the details of incidents and quotations recounted in Gospel narratives that seems so awesome to us today. His citation of them was extensive⁸¹ and his insight into their meaning was many times innovative. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Francis' attention focused explicitly upon the Gospel. Perhaps he did have access to books but that these contained only the four Gospel accounts, or perhaps it was his intuition to resolve the confusion created by different styles of religious behaviour prevalent in his time. For whatever reason, he would eventually choose, as will be demonstrated in subsequent units, to follow the example of Jesus rather than that of the apostles, a decision that would have surprisingly dramatic consequences.

Another experience that would change the course of Francis' life was the fact that he charismatically attracted others to join him in the hope of sharing his new form of life. First there were a few, among them the wealthy Bernard of Quintavalle, the priest Peter Cattani, and later Clare, born in nobility.⁸² Soon there would be many: "Not only men,

⁸⁰ From Bonaventure's *Major Legend of Saint Francis*, we learned, "When morning had broken, they went into the church of Saint Nicholas, and, after they had prepared with a prayer, Francis, a worshipper of the Trinity, opened the book of the Gospels three times asking God to confirm Bernard's plan with a threefold testimony. At the first opening of the book this text appeared: *If you will be perfect, sell all that you have, and give to the poor.* At the second: *Take nothing on your journey.* And at the third: *If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* "This is our life and rule", the holy man said, ' and that of all who wish to join our company. Go, then, if you wish to be perfect, and carry out what you have heard.'" – *Early Documents, Vol. II, 544. The Anonymous of Perugia (1240-1241)*, recounting "The Beginning or Founding of the Order and the Deeds of Those Lesser Brothers who were the First Companions of Blessed Francis in Religion", stated, "So they went to one of the city's churches. Upon entering it, they fell on their knees and humbly prayed: 'Lord, God, Father of glory, we beg you in your mercy, show us what we are to do.' After finishing the prayer, they asked the priest of the church who was there: 'Sir, would you show us the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.' And, since before this happened none of them knew how to read very well, when the priest opened up the book, they immediately found the passage..." This earlier account then lists the three passages referred to above by Bonaventure. – *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸¹ In fact, some dismissed his first rule as nothing more than a long, run-on series of sacred verses, so great was his confidence in the singular merit of Scripture as the most reliable guide to discipleship and salvation.

⁸² Clare of Assisi joined Francis on Passion Sunday in the year 1212.

but also women and unmarried virgins were fired by the brothers' preaching and, on their advice, entered the prescribed convents to do penance."⁸³ From every indication, recruiting others to join him and providing leadership to hundreds and then thousands of followers was certainly not part of his original plan. It figuratively sent him back to the drawing board. For this reason, there are few landmark moments in Francis' experience of the Gospel as weighty as his hearing in Christ's call to preaching in the Gospel of Matthew:

Go and preach, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is near! Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin-diseases, and drive-out demons. You have received without paying, so give without being paid. Do not carry any gold, silver or copper money in your pockets; do not carry a beggar's bag for the journey or an extra shirt of a stick. A worker should be given what he needs.' (Mt10: 7-10).

Francis was working in the little church of St. Mary of the Angels at the time, the one he would later call tenderly his "little portion" (*Portiuncula*). It was the Feast of Saint Matthias, February 24, 1208, that he felt these verses touch his heart, and "embarked on the life of a poor itinerant preacher proclaiming a message of penance and peace."⁸⁴ Indeed, it was his experience of this Gospel that compelled him to strike out for the Middle East to engage in missionary activity. In 1212, he attempted to go to Syria but was shipwrecked along the way. Soon after, he set out for Morocco but became ill en route. Finally, in 1219, he encountered in Damietta the Sultan of Egypt, Malik-al-Kamil, an event that would deeply mark him, his brothers and the spirituality that was to become

⁸³ "Legend of the Three Companions XIV: 60", Margaret Carney, *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi and Her Form of Life* (Quincy, Ill.: Franciscan Press, 1993), 33.

⁸⁴ *Works*, 4

his legacy: “As he immersed himself ever more completely in the Gospel experience, Francis emerged as a paragon of Christian vision and behaviour.”⁸⁵

With time, Francis would develop an impressive though hard-earned balance between prayer and action. His primitive hermitage experience and his experience of apostolic action would combine to create a new form of spirituality that would become the movement’s trademark.⁸⁶ In effect, Francis carried the hermitage into public places and the public into his hermitages: “The eremitism of Saint Francis and his followers is deeply evangelical and remains always open to the world, while recognizing the need to maintain a certain distance and perspective.”⁸⁷ Being in the world but not of the world was Francis’ principal paradigm for public ministry, according to the example of Jesus as revealed in the Gospel (cf. John 17: 14-15). The consequences of this balance were not insignificant. His attitude toward work, which he pursued diligently, was a direct reflection of it. In his rule, he counseled against idleness, just as the apostle Paul had: “Whoever does not wish to work, neither should he eat.” (2Thes3: 10).⁸⁸ Work was for Francis not only a desirable badge of service but also of a mark of freedom. Assisi was detaching itself from feudal forms of social organization that had prescribed work done

⁸⁵ Laurent Gallant, *Francis of Assisi: Forerunner of Interreligious Dialogue?: Chapter 16 of the First Rule Revisited – a Contribution to Ongoing Research*, a self-published monogram. Gallant provided an intriguing interpretation of Francis’ conduct in his encounter with the Sultan and an equally fascinating assessment of its impact on the Early Rule: “With regard to the Saracens, (Francis) definitely rose above the self-righteous judgmental mentality of his time and proposed that, for the Christians at least, the secret of their relations to Saracens and to believers of other faiths is not to focus primarily on their own Christian faith, on their own Christian religion – nor, for that matter, on the faith and religions of the other-, but rather on the working of the Spirit of God in other Christians and others.”, 10.

⁸⁶ For an excellent exploration of this theme, see Martino Conti, “Hermitage and Evangelization in the Life of Francis” in Andre Cirino and Josef Raischl, *Franciscan Solitude* (St. Bonaventure, N/Y/: The Franciscan Institute – St. Bonaventure University, 1995), 1231-127.

⁸⁷ Thomas Merton, “Franciscan Eremitism” in Roy Gasnick, *The Francis Book* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1980), 48. Hereafter Merton *Eremitism*.

⁸⁸ “The First Rule of St. Francis”, Art. 8 of the early rule. Tr. Paul Schwartz and Paul Lachance. David Flood and Thaddee Matura, *The Birth of a Movement: A Study of the First Rule of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1975), 75. Hereafter *Birth*.

for the benefit of the *maiores* and was now developing ones for the benefit of the community and of the city's popular leaders, known as the *minores*: "The expanding economy of these years depended on people who were ready and able to work.... We know that Francis and his brothers were ready to work, for they said so themselves and then dealt with the problems arising from work."⁸⁹

Even as Francis lived and preached the Gospel, his own communication of its central events became experiences that precipitated further developments in his spirituality. Perhaps the best example of this is his re-enactment of the Nativity scene at Greccio, cradled in the Rieti valley south of Assisi. The year 1223 was a difficult year for Francis. There were considerable tensions within the brotherhood, principally between those who would live according to the precepts of evangelical poverty as Francis explained them and those who would adopt a style of living more consistent with the prevalent monastic model of the times. As he returned from Rome, where he had met Church officials to consider the revisions recommended by the curia (an event some would agree weighed heavily upon his spirit), he stopped to visit an old friend, John, a man of good reputation and means. He asked his friend to organize a Christmas liturgy to illustrate the poverty and simplicity of the Incarnation. What he caused, certainly without intending to do so, was the beginning of the now-familiar tradition of constructing nativity scenes in our homes and churches around the world. What he observed was a concrete manifestation of what it meant for Christ to enter human history, and that experience filled him with inexpressible joy and consolation. Christmas at Greccio was a living out of Francis' fixation on the humanity and divinity of Jesus in the context of his relations with Mary

⁸⁹ David Flood, "Franciscans at Work", *Franciscan Studies* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute – St. Bonaventure University, 2001), 23. Hereafter Flood *Work*.

and Joseph as evidenced in the Gospel, which he viewed as more fundamental than the life of the apostles after the death of Christ as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles. If the reenactment of Christ's birth was a key milestone experience in the completion of his spirituality, the stigmata which recalled his beloved Lord's passion and death, and which occurred on Mount La Verna, in Tuscany, not quite a year later, was an event of corresponding magnitude: "On September 14, 1224, while Francis was immersed in a long period of prayer, he received the stigmata, which he carried until his death."⁹⁰

In the course of shaping his spirituality into a final rule of life that could be shared by his brotherhood, Francis was also greatly influenced by his experience of the Gospel as interpreted in the wide-sweeping ecclesial reform of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and subsequent papal bulls. The magnitude of this massive event, which addressed burning concerns such as "various heresies, growing disrespect for the church and its leaders and minister, the reform of the church's episcopacy and priests, the reform of eucharistic practice, and the initiation of a new crusade to the Near East",⁹¹ calls to our minds Vatican II, which in turn allows us to imagine how deeply Francis must have been moved by this watershed event.

Often portrayed as a romantic dreamer, Francis was actually a pragmatic man who never ventured very far from the need to find concrete answers to life's primordial questions by using the materials found in his immediate environment. His spirituality was not spawned by highly evolved theological principles; rather he "felt that the starting

⁹⁰ *Works*, 4. – It would be inappropriate, however, to suggest or understand that Francis' reverence for the crib and cross and his insightful attention to the circumstances of Jesus' birth and death overshadowed his appreciation of the importance of Christ's Resurrection. Indeed, in his *Office of the Passion*, there is explicit reference to it. For instance, "the verses of None, the hour of Christ's death on the cross, express, in the words of the psalmist, Christ's attitude. While they express the depth of depression, the last six verses also express the hope of the resurrection." – Footnote to the Office, Psalm VI, *Early Documents I*, 146.

⁹¹ William R. Hugo, *Studying the Life of Francis of Assisi* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1996), 139. Hereafter Hugo *Francis*.

point of his conversion and reversal of values was his realization of the existential fact of the human condition as common to each person, and that over each person loomed the possibility of an identical fate.”⁹² Evidence suggests that he was extremely observant and attentive to the minutest details of his surroundings. He was a person who based much of his understanding about the central issues of life as well as his judgments about their relative importance and his decisions about how to integrate these into his own life on the most basic of materials: his own observations and experiences, his own data of sense and of consciousness. Ironically, the man who tradition would receive as an eccentric dreamer was in effect a practical man, bold and perseverant, but with a poet’s sensibility for deriving meaning from data that others would overlook and an idealist’s audacity for daring to live authentically according to the insights that these would yield, no matter the cost.⁹³

* * *

Francis’ careful attention to his own experience of religion can be regarded as consciousness at the most basic level, in regards to the categories elucidated by Lonergan. He would then interpret this awareness as understanding that would later open onto new and exciting possibilities and serve as the solid ground upon which would be constructed a form of life to which others would soon be drawn.

⁹² Raoul Manselli, “The Spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi”, *Greyfriar Review* 3:1 (1989), 44.

⁹³ “(Francis) was a marvelous poet – not a romantic poet, but an ontological poet, a poet of essence, one capable of grasping the sacramental message echoing from all things.” – Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 213. Hereafter Boff *Poor*.

(b) Interpretation: Faith in Culture

Interpretation, as Lonergan understood the term, calls on the full range of one's intellectual capabilities but specifically concerns the understanding of data, not to settle what was written, which is the work of research, but to settle what was meant. The challenge of interpretation is highlighted by the fact that differences between cultures help account for the fact that different people often attribute different meanings to the same data. Debate around the subject investigated is, therefore, helpful if not essential because it creates a constant and productive interplay of questions and answers that compensates at least to a degree for biases unconsciously held: "The meaning it seeks to uncover in these sources is determined by their historical context, their particular mode and level of expression, and the circumstances and intent of their authors....Both in theology and in other fields, interpretation has to do with hermeneutics."⁹⁴

* * *

Francis' understanding of his various experiences would have been inevitably and significantly colored by the circumstances of his life and times. For that reason, if we truly wish to become aware of the operations of his mind and heart, we must take the time to place ourselves in the socio-religious climate of his time as much as possible. We know that Francis grew up in relative affluence, but the particular content and routine of his family life are largely unknown to us. We can only make assumptions of what life must have been like for the young Francis based on historic but generic information about family life in Assisi at the end of the 12th Century. Similarly, while we know about some of the milestone events of his life, we are obliged to investigate the prevalent climate of his socio-political and ecclesial environment in order to develop plausible theories about

⁹⁴ *Common Ground*, 323.

why he understood things the way he did, and why he made the judgements and decisions he did. Without this context, we cannot reasonably and responsibly appropriate the spiritual tradition we call Franciscan.

Franciscan spirituality emerged from a particular historical context. To better understand it, we will take into account (1) social change facing medieval Italy at that time, including population expansion, increased trade, and the shift from an economy based on the barter⁹⁵ system to one based on money; (2) political tension, such as those exerted by new forms of social organization; and (3) religious pressures present in Southern Europe during the 12th and 13th centuries, especially in regards to the penitential movement as well as the ubiquitous challenges to orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

(i) Social change

Francis was born as the earlier culture of feudalism was giving way to new forces. Merchants asserted themselves as a new social class, with money and trade replacing barter and subsistence agriculture. Meanwhile, improved roads opened the possibility of travel.⁹⁶

The eleventh and twelfth centuries probably marked the period of sharpest change, but as early as the tenth century there had begun the process which transformed northern and central Italy from a sparsely populated and under-developed region, characteristically early medieval with its vast ecclesial estates and its huge areas of swamp, marsh and forest, into the crowded and economically evolved Italy of the Renaissance. The most fundamental change was in the size of population, which is estimated to have doubled between the 10th and 14th Centuries.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Little wrote of a move from a “gift” economy to a profit economy, and explained the conversion of “treasure into yet another form of treasure is typical of the gift economy that flourished in the centuries following the Germanic migrations. The exchange of treasure for building materials and labour in the second instance, however, signals new modes of thought and behaviour upon the very threshold of the eleventh century.” Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y. Cornell University Press, 1978), 3. Hereafter Little *Economy*.

⁹⁶ *Poverty and Joy*, 25f.

⁹⁷ David Waley, *The Italian City-Republics* (New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), 14. Hereafter Waley *Republics*.

As a result, there were corresponding changes in economic systems that could safely be characterized as revolutionary. This period witnessed an explosion in trade, the spawning of small businesses, the emergence of professions such as that of notary, and a dramatic adjustment in banking and credit arrangements.⁹⁸ What emerged, was a new class known as the *minores*, which students of Franciscan literature often assume to mean the poor and the marginalized of society. In fact, Waley demonstrated that they were actually craftsmen and town-dwelling peasants⁹⁹, in contrast to the *maiores*, who were landowners, and included the princes of the church. Such *minores* had actually begun to gain a degree of autonomy as “the great ecclesial estates accumulated in Lombard and Carolingian times had broken up, leaving vassals to enjoy the actual possession of the now valuable land and its produce.”¹⁰⁰ The power of commerce soon became such that merchants (*mercatores*), along with warriors (*milites*), developed into a privileged class of its own.¹⁰¹ But everyone did not welcome the newfound role of the *parvenus*: “The seigniorial estates decay as the merchants assert their supremacy...based on money. They constitute a new and heterogeneous class, turbulent, very much occupied with buying and selling, jealous, vain.....The two classes, merchant and lords, are locked in a struggle.”¹⁰²

According to Short, the crusades were also hugely important in the development of social change. In their wake, knights streamed through Italian towns. Traveling minstrels sang of their great deeds and writers glamorized their life in epics. The crusades’ more sinister legacy, however, was leprosy, which also spread throughout the region. Fortini

⁹⁸ *Republics*, 15

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ “A 1203 document in the communal archives of Assisi defining the responsibilities of the commune for offences committed against the privileged classed ranks the *milites* (warriors) and *mercatores* at the same level.” – Fortini *Francis*, 38.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

has discovered disturbing details about the wretched manner in which lepers were set aside as scapegoats for their deep-seated fear of this ravaging disease: “There were several hospitals for lepers in Assisi territory at the time of Saint Francis; but record and communal statutes make it clear that it was San Lazaro of Arce (renamed Santa Maria Maddalena in the fourteenth century) that played so large a role in the life of Saint Francis”¹⁰³

The defense of the weak and the suffering, which was one of the principle duties of the initiate (knight), did not apply to lepers. Francis himself, who was moved by the appeals of the poor and did not hesitate to take off his rich clothes and give them to an impoverished lord, would not conquer the disgust aroused in him by that dark house of death... He sent alms to the patients by asking others passing along the road to deliver them, for he did not dare go close to the place.¹⁰⁴

(ii) Political tension

With social and economic change underway, political change was inevitable but slow to follow: “European commerce came to maturity well in advance of the state, and as a result nurtured a particularly unrestrained aggressiveness.”¹⁰⁵ In fact, one must go back as far as the 5th century to trace the beginnings of breakdown in the authority that had been prevalent since the classical period. From that time, up to the 10th Century, there had been a gradual reduction in the influence of public institutions and the nature of political control was recast by events such as the conquests and settlements of Goths and Lombards: “It is a sign of the weakening of central authority in the early middle ages and of the discontinuity in institutions that the principal heir to political power in the town was the bishop.”¹⁰⁶ With time, the distinctiveness and relative sovereignty of cities grew,

¹⁰³ Fortini *Francis*, 207

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 207f

¹⁰⁵ Little *Economy*, 8

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 12

and with the emergence of autonomy, “a certain municipal patriotism existed....Border disputes over diocesan frontiers began to involve town populations.”¹⁰⁷

The process of replacing Episcopal authority then gave rise to the birth of communes (in effect, city-states), whose character actually goes a long way toward accounting for elements of Franciscan spirituality. Francis was born “as the rural, feudal model of political organization was being replaced by (a) new form of free association of urban men. Rather than swear allegiance to a specific person such as a duke or baron, men in commune pledged themselves to the good of the city.”¹⁰⁸ But the rise of communes also had a dark side, one that was deeply disturbing to the young Francis. The speed with which the commune rose to dominance was a recipe for an almost permanent conflict that fanned the flames of division between people who had long suffered the vagaries of class-based systems. It may be the juxtaposition of these two outcomes that gave Francis the greatest impetus for the development of the form of life that he would eventually adopt. On the one hand, we see in his rule of life evidence of concern for the common good, which is expressed in a rich tradition of concrete works firmly anchored in his concept of universal brotherhood. On the other hand, he would choose to avoid the excesses of the new social order, in part, by his proscriptions regarding work: “Their notion of work...differed from the Assisian notion of work.”¹⁰⁹

In whatever places the brothers find themselves for work or service, let them under no condition take charge of accounts, stores, or supervise the service institutions, (nor are they to accept any obligation which might cause scandal and harm their souls,) but let them be (*minores* and) subject to all alongside whom they labour.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 13

¹⁰⁸ Warner *Franciscans*, 2-7.

¹⁰⁹ Flood *Work*, 24

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 25

(iii) Religious pressure

Social, economic and political changes brought about by the eclipsing of the long-established feudal order by commerce, communes and allegiance of citizens to new sets of interests and new classes of citizens and institutions could not but impact on the church itself, on its own interests, people and institutions. The monastic tradition, which reflected earlier notions of feudalism with monks swearing obedience to the person of the abbot, was still an important part of the landscape. But major landmarks such as the reform initiated at Cluny in 910 and at Citeaux in 1098 already had begun to point the way to change. So it was that a new social order would continue to militate in favor of a new ecclesial order just as it had at times painfully precipitated a new political order.

The period from the 12th Century onwards in the West saw a process of development in the approach to spiritual life which may be characterized as one of separations and divisions. There was, first of all, a division of spirituality from theology, of affectivity from knowledge. Secondly, there was a gradual limitation of interest to interiority or subjective spiritual experience... (and) there was a separation of spirituality from liturgy, the personal from the communal, expressed most graphically by a new attention to the structures of personal prayer and meditation.... Through these divisions and separations, an interest developed in specific experiences and activities: prayer, contemplation and mysticism.... A more internalized, personal religious practice... demanded a new specialized language.¹¹¹

According to Landini, much of this pressure for change was eventually harnessed and channeled through two towering ecclesial reforms: Gregorian, which led to clerical centralization, and conciliar, with the convocation of Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.¹¹² The church was obliged to align itself to two major vectors of change. The first was internal and resulted from the fact that the hierarchy could not stave off criticism,

¹¹¹ Sheldrake *Spirituality and History*, 44

¹¹² Lawrence C. Landini, "The Historical Context of the Franciscan Movement", Lazaro Iriarte, *Franciscan History: The Three Orders of St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1979), 561ff. "Interpretations of Franciscan history... will vary. Some may see social conflict as the thread ruining through an almost 800 years-old history. Others may tell the story of the movement against the dynamic tensions within the Church between charism and institution" - Ibid. 557.

particularly regarding the excesses of clergy, without jeopardizing its credibility and its legitimacy. The second was external and came from the profit economy, which “raised acute problems involving impersonalism, money and moral uncertainty.”¹¹³

Finally, it is useful to consider Francis’ decisions in light of preoccupations of the day concerning unorthodox beliefs and practices. Numerous preachers and reformers spread anxiety among the population. Such confusion goes a long way toward explaining why Francis assigned so much importance to fidelity to the Holy See and respect for priests, despite the concerns that he no doubt shared with so-called heretical Christians who endeavored authentically, if naively, to lead Christ-centered lives. The Cathars, for instance, “constituted a loose amalgamation of sects, established in various parts of Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries....The most important factor concerning these various individuals and groups was doctrinal.”¹¹⁴ Calling themselves the “Pure Ones”, they were in fact dualists. Meanwhile, the Humiliati started as an informal grouping of lay people and later sought to become an officially sanctioned order of the church, with three forms of life – canonical, monastic, and lay. They “claimed to follow the model of apostolic simplicity in their own lives”¹¹⁵ and wore undyed clothing as a sign of humility, but it was their eagerness to preach publicly – without authority – that got them into difficulty with the church: “(They) sought the approval of Pope Alexander III in 1179...(but) he expressly forbade them any more secret meetings and warned them severely against ever again presuming to preach in public”¹¹⁶ Finally, the Waldensians who began in Lyon, France, following a severe famine, contrasted the ways of wealth and

¹¹³ Little *Economy*, 19.

¹¹⁴ Little *Economy*, 134ff

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 113ff

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

poverty. Waldes was a wealthy cloth merchant (as was Francis' father!) who experienced a religious conversion sometime during the 1170s in which he was seized with this familiar passage in scripture, "If you wish to go the whole way, then go and sell everything you have, and give to the poor" (Matt. 19:21).¹¹⁷ He began to preach the Gospel and was at first accepted by the Church. Known as "Poor Men of Lyon", they challenged the wealth of the Church, but "despite blistering criticism of corrupt and incompetent clerics, (Waldes) upheld the instinct value of the duly ordained, properly sacerdotal ministry."¹¹⁸ His opposition to the wealth and corruption of some clergy, nonetheless, caused the movement's downfall. Surely sympathetic to the underlying attitudes that animated these grassroots movements, Francis would prudently insert approved doctrinal teaching into the Rule of Life that he proposed.

The appended table entitled *Francis of Assisi's Life and Times*, that I developed from numerous sources for the convenience of the reader, highlights some of the significant events and trends that would have influenced Francis' understanding of Gospel values. Facts such as these, painstakingly scrutinized by dedicated modern scholars in whose debt we are today, allow us to begin the process of carefully extracting from the cloud of pious mythology a historical figure, a 13th Century Italian male penitent raised in comfort but challenged by numerous shifts in the social and political landscape, in order that we may now give shape to the exciting new applications of his rich legacy in ways that are better suited to our own time. Though I am certainly not the first or best able to understand Francis historically, I count myself among those eagerly laboring to transform

¹¹⁷ Translation provided by Little, Ibid.121.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 120ff

this relatively new knowledge into fresh blossoms of Franciscan spirituality: as it were, fragrant *fioretti* for a post-modern age.

* * *

By reasonably interpreting the data of religion in order to find meaning, Francis proceeded to the second level of consciousness, preparing the way for making rational judgments about how his experience of religion should affect his overall outlook on life.

(c) History: Francis' Judgements Regarding Religion

Lonergan ascribed to the functional specialty of history a distinct meaning that may be conceived as a chain of events that create a pattern or a coherent narrative that make sense of various occurrences. According to this view, several such histories can and do coexist. Once research data has been interpreted, we proceed to the functional specialty of history in order to sort through the evidence by applying the cognitional operation of judgement. The meaning of experience once understood, judgements must now be applied to decide what sense to make of this pile of interpreted data or information: "History as a functional specialty is a judgment precisely of what is going forward in the data of the past uncovered and understood."¹¹⁹ Critical history, which Lonergan advocated, is heuristic (advanced by questions), ecstatic (carrying the historian from his own perspective to that of other times), selective (relevant in relation to the nest of questions), critical (aiming to establish the facts), constructive (organizing relevant questions for effective resolution), reflective (open to new discoveries), and judicial (making affirmations about the past).¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ *Common Ground*, 322.

¹²⁰ *Method*, 188ff.

* * *

What did Francis intentionally choose to carry forward from his understanding of religious experience? How did this choice shape his decisions about the course of his life?

In a way, we can argue that he selected wisely from the best of both worlds, the old and the new. Indeed, the path his spirituality would follow or, if you will, his sense of the true continuity or history and development of Gospel meaning would begin at the crossroad of knighthood and brotherhood, of knightly duty and the post-feudal freedoms exercised for the good of all. In effect, Francis redefined for a new age the higher values of chivalry.

Knighthood was the ideal of his youth and, in some respects at least, the lens through which we can better understand the decision he would later take in the course of his conversion. In youth, he sought fame, honour and privilege, not through wealth, but through worthy deeds. Through his conversion, he sought to dedicate himself and sacrifice himself, in the best tradition of chivalry, to Lady Poverty, in defense of Christ-centered values and with noble regard for the dignity of humanity and creation. His manner would be courtly, but rather than that of a combative and privileged knight, it would be that of a troubadour, a minstrel, and a fool for Christ. For this reason, it was natural for him to distance himself from the style of the *nouveau riche*, like his father, whose designs were, in his view, less noble and capable of less magnificence and whose manners were less coherent with Gospel values as he understood them.

Though it was the flowering of a previous era, chivalry's day was only beginning to dawn in the time of Francis: "The young Francis had spent many an hour listening to

troubadour poetry, and had yearned to become a knight.”¹²¹ With singular insightfulness, Francis would migrate from the externally imposed duties of feudalism to the internally and voluntarily self-imposed duties of knightly duty to higher Christian ideals and values.

Brotherhood, meanwhile, would integrate Gospel values with the newfound freedoms that hard-working individuals were seeking. He could relate to the cry of collectivities that sought the common good, not according to restricted forms of living, but according to the liberating model that Jesus provided. Clearly, these would have huge implications for his decisions regarding religion, particularly on how he would view evangelical movements and his place in a hierarchical church. The convergence of knighthood and brotherhood was not an original ideal. This was the time during which great legends emerged, including the Arthurian legend the hallmark of which was the round table, which served as a poignant contrast to the elongated rectangular table with a clear head and a clear seating arrangement that marked the ascending and descending power structures that prevailed. The round table heralded an era of fraternity among honorable men who shared a common fidelity to an ideal rather than a lord. While we have no direct evidence that Francis was familiar with this story in particular, the fact is that “stories of Arthur and his knights had...traveled as far afield as Italy is proved by the Arthurian carvings on the north doorway of Modena cathedral (early 12th century).”¹²²

Conveniently, the convergence of knighthood and brotherhood, “implicitly recognized differences in status while promoting...horizontal relationships of mutual respect....Francis sees it working between three levels of the cosmic hierarchy: between

¹²¹ Roger Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 69. Hereafter Sorrell *Francis*.

¹²² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1962 ed., s.v. “Arthurian Legend”. It is indeed noteworthy that in the *Assisi Compilation* (1244-1260), we find this statement attributed to Francis: “These brothers of mine are my knights of the round table...” – *Early Documents II*, 208.

God and humanity, between humans, and between humankind and the rest of creation.”¹²³

Cortesia with God involved a magnanimous, self-denying effusion and bounty, a form of condescending love to those both just and unjust, chosen and unchosen. This it merits being “the sister of charity.” God’s *cortisia*, his largesse and special consideration for creation, allows humanity to take freely and with self-respect from God’s bounty, whether it be in gaining provision directly from creation, or in honorably requesting others to share their excess from the divine bountifulness. This is a chivalric justification of the medieval belief that almsgiving reflected well upon both the donor and the receiver, as well as being a legitimating of the proper human use of creation.¹²⁴

Later in his life, the blending of these two traditions would be wonderfully expressed in the famous legend of Francis’ Sermon to the Birds, “the first and most dramatic incident that illustrated the deeply productive effect of the interaction of aesthetic and evangelical ideals in Francis’ attitude toward creations.”¹²⁵ Near the end of his life, long after his conversion and the radical appropriation of the traditions of knighthood and brotherhood, Francis would illustrate his understanding of how the two sets of values merge in his awesomely mystical yet amazingly concrete *Canticle of the Creatures*.¹²⁶

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
And no human is worthy to mention Your name.
Praised by You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
Especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.

¹²³ Ibid., 72.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 72f.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 59.

¹²⁶ *Early Documents*, 113f. (Italics used by the editors.) “Chronologically, there are three stages to consider in the development of this poetic praise of God, each of which reveals a side of Francis’ vision of God, creation, and the human soul. Francis’ companions tells us of the composition of the first part of this piece, verses 1-9, in which the saint sings the praises of creation in glorifying God. While suffering immensely from his physical infirmities, he announced: ‘I wish to compose a new hymn about he Lord’s creatures, of which we make daily use, without which we cannot live, and with which the human race greatly offends its Creator.’ A short while later, after hearing of a quarrel that had broken out between the civil and religious authorities of Assisi, Francis asked the brothers to go before them singing these verses, but added two more, verses 10-11. He composed the final verses 12-13 in his deathbed. Verse 14 may well be a refrain used after each verse of the entire Canticle.” – Ibid.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
And bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praised be You, My Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
In heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
And through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
Through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
Who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
Through whom You light the night,
And he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
Who sustains and governs us,
And who produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be you, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
And bear infirmity and tribulation,
Blessed are those who endure in peace
For by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
From whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will.
For the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
And serve Him with great humility.

* * *

Being a man of integrity, Francis would transform into action his rational judgment about the experience of religion that he had come to understand in the context of his immediate surroundings. Having been reasonable in judgment, he would have been responsible in deciding how to change his life in a fashion that would be consistent with his new outlook.

(d) Dialectic: Road to Conversion

Loneragan saw dialectic as the operation at the fourth level of consciousness, which reveals the need to make responsible decisions based on rational judgements. As noted in the previous unit, Lonergan conceived history in a fashion that suggested the existence of numerous “histories”, each having the potential of conflicting with others. The responsible resolution of overt or latent conflicts, he argued, results in intellectual, moral or religious conversion: He defined intellectual conversion as “a radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge.”¹²⁷; moral conversion as “changes in the criterion of one’s decisions and choices from satisfactions to values.”¹²⁸; and religious conversion as “being grasped by ultimate concern. It is otherworldly falling in love. It is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations.”¹²⁹

* * *

Dialectic would not have been lost on the inquiring young Francis. The Episcopal schools of his day “served the rational and impersonal goal of training students to develop their intellectual capacities...through emphasis placed in the training of dialectic. The distinctive mode of teaching and learning was the disputation.”¹³⁰ Consequently, he would have embraced, though perhaps with some trepidation, the challenge of conflicting understandings and the call to conversion that would ensue, rather than shrink away.

¹²⁷ *Method*, 238.

¹²⁸ *Method*, 240.

¹²⁹ *Method*, 240.

¹³⁰ *Little Economy*, 26.

This chapter will describe the onset of conversion in Francis: (1) his insights regarding the nature of brotherhood as oriented toward intellectual conversion; (2) his encounter with lepers leading to moral conversion; and (3) his decision to repair the church of San Damiano as a sign of religious conversion. Each of these gave rise to internal conflicts that presented him with the need to make difficult choices about the form his life would then take.

Francis is sometimes portrayed as a mystical figure who descended to the Christian world with fully formed tablets of truth, revealing in an instant and without effort the fullness of a spirituality that suited his own circumstances as well as our own. This view is an enormous disservice to the man who struggled so courageously and honestly to find meaning over the course of his entire adult life and worked humbly at its integration into the reality of his own existence, enabling us through his writings, meagre as they may be (a form of poverty) to discover the significance of his insights in our own times and to our own lives. Most persons, even those who have only the faintest idea of who Francis of Assisi was, understand that his religious journey was one of seeking God in all things, a sometimes-romanticized quest for the meaning of life. This heuristic quest lured the spiritual pilgrim into a radical recovery of the biblical meaning of conversion and of what it means to “Take your cross and follow (Jesus).” (Mk 8:34) Francis’ unique blending of values from two eras, his marriage of the heroic principles of knighthood with the commercial social structures of the post-feudal economy would have created disturbing conflicts within his mind and heart. The tension that ensued would have haunted him relentlessly until he would find a satisfactory resolution.

(i) Brotherhood: Intellectual conversion

Braced by a newfound sense of belonging to a collectivity rather than a hierarchy, Francis' fascination with emerging social organizations would have afforded this adventurous young man an opportunity to adopt this new lens when gazing curiously at what surrounded him. Through it, he would no longer view authority and knowledge as fixed structures, and, certainly, no longer would he view them as designed for the sole benefit of an earthly leader or lord. No longer would he view the people in this new world order as immovable fixtures with immutable roles and rules. He would begin to see how people can freely assemble to achieve great things, and that future possibilities would be at once exciting and frightening, giving rise to good and evil, depending on the values with which one conceived and seized those possibilities.

(ii) Lepers: Moral conversion

In the opening part of the *Testament*, that Armstrong and Brady call “an autobiographical reflection”¹³¹, Francis declared what change resulted from an encounter with lepers:

“While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them.”¹³² Then comes the sentence that signifies that this encounter developed into a major conversion experience and evidence of a key insight: “And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body.”¹³³ This was for Francis an epiphany experience and the beginning of a new way of understanding that would affect his judgments and key decisions about how to live out his faith: “And afterward I lingered a little and left the

¹³¹ *Works*, 154n.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 154.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

world.”¹³⁴ Scholars agree that Francis accorded this event singular importance by placing it at the top of his *Testament*. It is generally seen as the single most powerful occurrence of his conversion: “It was an experience that changed the way he looked at life. In the end, Francis experienced something with the lepers. He and they became friends. The intensity of their experience leads Iriarte to characterize Francis’ time with lepers as his novitiate.”¹³⁵ Consequently, all early biographers include accounts of this life-altering event, though with noteworthy variations one from another. It is, therefore, necessary to compare these to get a sense of what is factual and what is embellishment in these reports.

Accounts of Francis’ Moral Conversion with Lepers				
<i>Celano, First Life</i> (1228-1229)	Julian of Speyer, <i>Life of St. Francis</i> (1232-1235)	<i>Legend of Three Companions</i> (1241-1247)	<i>Celano, Second Life</i> (1246-1247)	Bonaventure, <i>Major Life</i> (1260-1263)
		Francis was riding and met a leper	Francis was riding and met a leper	Francis was riding and met a leper
			Felt a need to overcome disgust	Felt a need to overcome disgust
		Dismounted to give coin & kiss the hand	Dismounted to kiss the man	Dismounted and kissed the man
			Leper stretched out his hand	Leper stretched out his hand
			Francis put money in it, kissed it	Francis put money in it, kissed it
		Francis rode off	Francis rode off, looked back	Francis rode off, looked back
			The leper had disappeared	The leper had disappeared
Francis went to live among lepers	Francis went to live among lepers	Francis went to live among lepers	Francis went to live among lepers	
“...washing all foulness from them”	“...humbly washing their sores”	Gave each money, kissed their hand	Gave each money, kissed their hand	

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Hugo *Francis*, 104.

Hugo proposed that “the most dependable version of the story is to be found in Celano’s first life and secondarily in that of Julian of Speyer. Their accounts are short, sparse, eminently believable, and without any trace of the influence of miraculous tampering.”¹³⁶

Francis could not be certain what would be the ultimate outcome of the changes operating within him: “During the initial stages of his conversion, Francis did not understand what was happening”.¹³⁷ Indeed, his conversion, of which penance was the first utterance, was a decision to defer to the will and wisdom of God rather than his own. Penance was not to his way of thinking about “beating yourself up”, but about turning your life around, the true meaning of *metanoia*. Actions such as “practicing mercy among the lepers, having faith in churches, priests and the Eucharist, receiving brothers, and working with his hands”¹³⁸ were part of the act of turning around. Like prayer, fasting and almsgiving are what the Catholic Church now calls out “expressions of inner conversion”¹³⁹, rather than conversion *per se*¹⁴⁰, acts of mortification were not for Francis the end of penance but merely the means. In the end, what Francis realized was that to follow Jesus as we are called to do is to make deliberate choices between different courses of action at the cognitive level of deciding by use of the higher values of the human good and eventually the transcendent as the highest value of all. This orientation or conversion forces a decision away from operating on the basis of egotism or limited group bias: “Being responsible includes basing one’s decisions and choices on an

¹³⁶ Hugo *Francis*, 102.

¹³⁷ Warner *Franciscans*, 4-10.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-4.

¹³⁹ The outer sign of penance in Francis’ time was the wearing of the Tau cross, a Greek letter drawn from the Book of Ezekiel (9:4) to symbolize how those who repent will be spared by the angel of death.

¹⁴⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ottawa: Publication Service of the Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops, 1994), 307f.

unbiased evaluation of short-term and long-term costs and benefits to oneself, to one's group, to other groups."¹⁴¹ Research into the form of life adopted and proposed by Francis points clearly in this direction; hence, the need to do penance: "Not only is penance fundamental to Francis' following of Jesus, but it is foundational for all those who follow his spirituality. To be a penitent captures the very essence of what it means to be Franciscan."¹⁴² For this reason, Esser bluntly declared: "All of Franciscan spirituality comes from the idea of penance (metanoia)."¹⁴³ "Even the renunciation of extreme forms of penance as a means to spiritual joy was the result of a wearisome journey, both culturally and experientially."¹⁴⁴

Pazzelli listed the steps on Francis' agonizing journey toward conversion as these: "his imprisonment in Perugia;...his return to a city divided by hatred;...his sudden recognition of the miserable plight of the poor;...a military expedition interrupted by the "mysterious" voice at Spoleto; the experience of his pilgrimage to Rome; his upsetting yet revealing encounter with the leper; and, finally the "mysterious" message of the Crucified at San Damiano."¹⁴⁵ But the religious experiences that marked two milestones on Francis' journey toward conversion, indeed two episodes that stand out as key turning points, are his encounter with lepers and Christ's call from the cross at the nearby church of San Damiano.

¹⁴¹ *Method*, 53.

¹⁴² Warner *Franciscans*, 4-16.

¹⁴³ Kajetan Esser, "Love's Reply", translated by Ignatius Brady (Chicago : Franciscan Herald Press, 1963) in Pazzelli *Francis*, 103. Esser is one of the pioneers in Franciscan studies, and has contributed a great deal to our understanding of early documents.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁴⁵ Pazzelli *Francis*, 80.

(iii) San Damiano: Religious conversion

The religious conversion that began at San Damiano was “a struggle to discern God’s will”¹⁴⁶ for his particular life: “The remainder of his life was spent consciously or unconsciously responding to that command.”¹⁴⁷ The best evidence we have of his desire to have a clear sign of God’s will, in the midst of social turmoil and moral confusion, is the prayer he uttered on that occasion: “Most high, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me, Lord, a correct faith, a certain hope, a perfect charity, sense and knowledge, so that I may carry out Your holy and true command.”¹⁴⁸

While Francis accords his encounter with lepers a prominent place in his *Testament*, he has provided no written record of his time at San Damiano. This is likely significant for, while the former reference is clearly based in fact that is verifiable, the latter may not be. While we can accept as fact his repairing churches, in conformity to that call to “repair (Christ’s) house...(which was) all falling down”¹⁴⁹, there appears to be no irrefutable evidence of an external voice coming from the crucifix itself, as reported in various biographical accounts. Nonetheless, we can accept that the prominent tradition does reveal a basic truth about Francis’ call to transform the church. The small stone structure at San Damiano was in disrepair, evidently suffering from years of neglect, “threatening to collapse with age”.¹⁵⁰ He repaired it physically, but the great merit of this incident was that this gesture also symbolized the healing that he was to bring to the broader Church community, which was afflicted by numerous corruptions, errors and

¹⁴⁶ *Works*, 103

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Bonaventure, “Major Life”, *Omnibus*, 640.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

scandals. While Francis initially understood the divine message to mean a rebuilding of the physical church, his subsequent mission squarely rested on its spiritual renewal.

The story of Francis' encounter at San Damiano is related principally in four early accounts of his life: Celano's First Life, thought to be written in 1228; the Legend of Three Companions, 1246; Celano's Second Life, 1246 or 1247; and Bonaventure's Major Life, 1260 or 1262. Each embellishes the story a bit more by adding details of questionable accuracy, as the table below clearly illustrates. Yet there is little doubt that something significant happened at San Damiano – something that would affect the course of his religious conversion.

Accounts of Francis' Religious Conversion at San Damiano			
<i>Celano, First Life (1228-1229)</i>	<i>Legend of Three Companions (1241-7)</i>	<i>Celano, Second Life (1246/7)</i>	<i>Bonaventure, Major Life (1260-1263)</i>
	Francis was walking near the church.	Francis was walking near the church.	Francis was passing by the church.
	An inner voice bade him to go in and pray.	Led by the spirit, he went in and prayed.	He felt urged to go in and pray.
	He knelt before the image of the crucified Saviour.	He fell down before the Crucifix in devout supplication.	He knelt before the painted image of the Crucified.
	A tender, compassionate voice called him to repair God's house.	He heard a voice calling him by name, saying that he should repair God's house.	He heard a voice from the cross telling him three times to repair God's house.
After gaining freedom from his father, Francis undertook to restore the church of St. Damian.	He responded: "Gladly I will do so, O Lord."	From then on, he was marked by compassion for the crucified.	He devoted himself to repairing the ruined church.
			He sold cloth to pay for the repairs.
	On leaving he found the priest sitting outside and gave him money from his purse.		He saw the priest on his return, gave him the money and asked to live there.
			The priest agreed to let him stay but refused the money.
			Francis threw away the money.

The significance of the story of Francis at San Damiano is that it illustrates the fact that Francis' conversion typically transported him to the ultimate level of consciousness, namely to religious conversion. He experienced the profound and transformational feeling of "being in love in an unrestricted fashion"¹⁵¹. We believe that in matters of faith, Francis acted attentively, reasonably, responsibly and decisively. For Francis, the freedom that he exercised by choosing to spend time at San Damiano gave him the capacity to move toward something positive and meaningful. This was not flight from a world that might have disappointed him but more an intentional act of responding to love with love. Judging from Celano's account, Francis' experience of divine love; his experience of value as articulated in the Gospel; and his experience of seeing the church that housed the painted symbol of Christ's self-emptying love falling into ruin and disgrace combined to provoke him into decisive action.

The "voice" talked about in this familiar story was, at minimum, an insight. If it was not an external and objective experience of divine will, it was at the very least a objectification of his personal experience, which prompted an awakening of his consciousness regarding the role of Church in the expression of God's love. He can be said to have judged from that moment that God's house - and later, metaphorically, the faith community of God's people - could no longer be allowed to fall into disrepair. The historical reality of this voice is the cry for reform that was to be loudly proclaimed through the language of social, political and economic changes already underway and which would be heard more particularly in the religious realm at the Fourth Lateran Council.

¹⁵¹ *Method*, 105.

Most of legends we read about Francis deal with conversion in some fashion or other, and attribute to it a central importance. Indeed, one may state with confidence that the spirituality of Saint Francis cannot be known without a thorough appreciation of his experience and understanding of penance or conversion. Moreover, one cannot situate or appreciate this transformation, essentially or historically, without knowledge of Francis as a 13th century Italian penitent, for this was key to his self-understanding. Indeed, he accorded this pivotal if protracted experience a place of honour in the spiritual testament written near the end of his life, making it his very first reference: “The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way...”¹⁵²

During the early period of his conversion, Francis struggled to discern the will of God. The story of Christ speaking to him from the Crucifix at San Damiano depicts very dramatically the change that operated within him. This resulted in an insight so illuminating that it set him on the course on which he would persevere for the rest of his life, all the while refining what he understood to be Christ’s command. The Prayer before the Crucifix captures the essence of the yearning of the year in which he sought so diligently to find meaning, sensing in his heart that Christ was the gate: “Most high, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me, Lord, a correct faith, a certain hope, a perfect charity, sense and knowledge, so that I may carry out your holy and true command.”¹⁵³ Hugo reports, “Many believe that this prayer was once written on cloth hanging in front of San Damiano’s altar and that it may have been inspired by a liturgical prayer.”¹⁵⁴ Regardless of its origin, it suits our saint to a tee. While it may have

¹⁵² Francis of Assisi, “Testament”, *Works*, 154. This sentence begins a passage sometimes referred to as “remembrance”.

¹⁵³ *Works*, 103.

¹⁵⁴ Hugo *Francis*, 113.

been on cloth or on paper, it was surely on his heart and on his lips. Moreover, it is clear that with or without the presence of an audible voice, the Byzantine crucifix had an awesome effect on Francis. Gallant and Cirino have established a fascinating link between the minutest details of miniatures contained on the painted figure and Francis' moving "Little Office of the Passion".

Day after day, as he prayed his Little Office, Francis hears his Hero recall: Holy Father, zeal for your house has devoured me (PsF 5:9).¹⁵⁵ This constant reminder certainly helped him grasp the full scope of the invitation he had heard in the little chapel of San Damiano... The house to be repaired was not only the material building, but the whole Church, and beyond it, all of humanity, and finally, all of creation.¹⁵⁶

This incident was in effect a development of the conversion underway in his pivotal encounter with lepers. He had come to see these wretched outcasts as Christ-figures. Consequently, "Francis began to pray more and more. And not only did he pray in solitary places, he also prayed in churches."¹⁵⁷

As he knelt before a crucifix in the decaying church of San Damiano just beneath the walls of Assisi, he heard Christ speak to him. Francis heard this call not from the image of a Christ who ruled the universe but from a Christ with nails in his hands and feet and a lance wound in his side. That Christ was quite like the leper, who was disfigured and the object of scorn and ridicule.¹⁵⁸

Repairing disfigured churches¹⁵⁹ became a concrete expression of his consciousness growing from the visible to the invisible by adding the wounds of the crucified mystical body of Christ in his vision. It was in these experiences (encountering lepers and repairing churches) that Francis found the merit of the evangelical life adopted by

¹⁵⁵ Refers to "Psalm Five" in Francis' Little Office of the Passion, section 9 which comments on Jn 17:11 and Ps 68:10.

¹⁵⁶ Laurent Gallant and André Cirino, *The Geste of the Great King: Office of the Passion of Francis of Assisi* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2001), 27.

¹⁵⁷ Cook *Francis*, 36.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵⁹ Francis is understood to have also repaired San Pietro de la Spina and St. Mary of the Angels, affectionately known as "Portiuncula", "the little potion". – Warner *Franciscans*, 3-11.

mendicant friars as distinct from the apostolic¹⁶⁰ life of monks, and of identifying with the Christ who suffered and died because of his unconditional love for us and was raised in glory because of the Father's absolute love for his Son: "He was serving Christ in helping to rebuild his house, where he was present under the species of bread and wine. It was Christ who was the centre, Christ who was his source of joy. When he imitated Christ, he found joy."¹⁶¹

* * *

Shifting from introspection to self-awareness, from personal satisfaction to value and from focus on self to centering on God, the total conversion that resulted from Francis' frank and diligent journey through a maze of questions and answers and the questions raised by those answers would have left him a confused and perhaps even disillusioned young man had it not been for his willingness to persevere through the next reasonable step, namely to reflect on the foundations of his evolving belief system and, through careful understanding and evaluation of the past, on what he had become by the choices he was making.

¹⁶⁰ The appended table indicates a shift from "*vita apostolica*" to "*vita evangelica*". Esser noted, "in the writings of St. Francis himself, the "*vita apostolica*" recedes almost completely into the background. In one place, it is true, the Apostles are mentioned incidentally as models for the poor life of the Friars Minor (Regula Non Bullata 9), but Francis still speaks preferably and exclusively of the life according to the Gospel." – *Origins*, 212.

¹⁶¹ Cook *Francis*, 39.

PART III: HOW FRANCIS' SPIRITUALITY TRANSCENDED HIS CULTURE

(a) Foundations – The Development of His Form of Life

Foundations bears many of the characteristics of dialectics. For instance, both struggle to discern the best course among evidently defensible meanings attributable to the events of history. So the challenge is to differentiate the two. Whereas dialectics looks back at what we have appropriated, foundations is a reflection on the new horizons that we have chosen and arrived at in our search for truth and value in the first mediating phase of theology¹⁶² and, therefore, looks forward from whom we have become by the choices we have made through our careful understanding and evaluation of the past¹⁶³: “Foundations is the identification and selection of the framework in which the functional specialties of doctrines, systematics, and communications will have meaning and effectiveness.”¹⁶⁴ Through foundations, “we show, indeed create, our character.”¹⁶⁵ Foundational reality, as distinct from its expression, is conversion.¹⁶⁶ The expressions themselves will vary according to the authentic experience, understanding and judgement of individuals and communities: “There is needed in the theologian the spiritual development that will enable him to enter into the experience of others and to frame the terms and relations that will express that experience.”¹⁶⁷

* * *

Penance produced in Francis a dramatic broadening of horizons and elevation of consciousness. That was because he approached intellectual conversion, moral

¹⁶² Saeur *Commentary*, 268.

¹⁶³ Gregson *Desires*, 100.

¹⁶⁴ *Common Ground*, 320f

¹⁶⁵ Gregson *Desires*, 101.

¹⁶⁶ *Method*, 267.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 290.

conversion and religious conversion with the willingness to find God in all things and all people, and the courage to align his life with his evolving outlook on the meaning for himself of faith and love – to “walk the talk” in peace and joy¹⁶⁸. Francis avoided esoteric theology or apologetic theories and relentlessly sought to make decisions that were concrete and authentic when faced with contradictions and dark spaces between daily life, church life and the Gospel life.

This study examines four courses of action that he chose in regards to the Gospel in relation to the faith of his family, the religion of his community and the church that gave form and expression to these. We will focus on his reflections and decisions concerning (1) priesthood; (2) brotherhood; (3) the role of the magisterium; and (4) other elements listed in the definition of Franciscan spirituality mentioned in the introductory section of this thesis.

(i) Decision to not be ordained a priest

Francis’ decision to not become a priest must be viewed from at least two angles. First, he does not appear to have felt a call, at least initially, to life within hierarchical structures of the church: His first impetus was to personal conversion, then came the formation of brotherhood to deal with those that God had sent, and only later - mostly out of obedience - did arise the question of forming an institution. Second, the life and privilege that clergy enjoyed was not compatible with his view of penance.

He did not at all want to become a cleric or a priest. That would have entailed his entrance into a social group that was well ordered, well normalized, well protected...He had not renounced his father, his business, his secure work, his social

¹⁶⁸ Lonergan remarked that “the gift of God’s love, spontaneously reveals itself in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control” – *Method*, 266.

rank, only to gain another position that was still more prestigious and no less secure.¹⁶⁹

The call to living the Gospel in the footsteps of Jesus Christ was of paramount importance for Francis. Without disparaging the call to priesthood or monastic life in others, he vigorously pursued a life in union with Lady Poverty, the mirror of Christ. Consequently, he understood his call as being “to give witness to the Gospel by having nothing and being nothing, by living on the social and geographical margins of urban Italian society”.¹⁷⁰ Perhaps too, having lived a life of privilege and prestige, he feared getting too close to familiar categories for fear that he might succumb to temptation and fall into less desirable habits that he saw in some church officials. Surely he understood how compelling is their lure, and how power can corrupt - how difficult it is for the rich man to enter into heaven, wealth being understood broadly to encompass all forms of power and privilege. Regardless of the reason or combination of reasons for Francis’ decision not to be ordained a priest, there is abundant evidence that he fully integrated this decision into his spirituality. In his various writings, in contrast to hundreds of references to the term “brother”, we find comparatively few to clergy: priests, 32; clerics, 28; religious, 14; pope, 9; bishop, 8; prelate, 7; apostolic see, 2; canons, 2; cardinals, 1; roman curia, 1.¹⁷¹ Clearly, he did not count himself among the ranks of clergy: “The relative richness of the vocabulary when it is a question of designating the personnel of the Church is striking when the one who is speaking calls himself ‘simplex et idiota’, that

¹⁶⁹ Raoul Manselli, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 62. Hereafter Manselli *Francis*.

¹⁷⁰ Warner *Franciscans*, 8-4.

¹⁷¹ Thaddee Matura, “The Church in the Writings of Francis of Assisi” trans. Helen M. Eckrich, OSF, “L’Église dans les écrits de Francois d’Assisi”, *Antonianum* LVII (Jan-Dec, 1982), 94-112 (Eckrich translation does not specify page numbers). Hereafter Matura *Church*.

is, a man without intellectual formation.”¹⁷² There is ample indication to suggest that he was neither simple-minded nor ignorant. While his schooling was not advanced, he was astute in observation, sound in judgment and able in communication. But this self-understanding of *simplex et idiota* suited him by giving him sufficient freedom to operate authentically in fidelity to Christ and His Church without the inevitable constraints of existing categories. Rather, he settled upon simple evangelical brotherhood.

(ii) Decision to start a new brotherhood

Francis’ spirituality is not fully comprehensible without an appreciation of why he put so much emphasis on fraternal life¹⁷³. Among other things, he saw in his brothers a divine sign about how he was called to live his faith¹⁷⁴: “...the Lord gave me brothers...”¹⁷⁵ In fact, it appears that the arrival of these brothers struck Francis, who seemed inclined to a more solitary form of penance, as an unexpected manifestation of his true vocation. Soon brotherhood became his hermeneutical lens and the horizon in which he understood the Gospel and applied its teachings to his own life: “The Lord himself showed me that I should live according to the holy Gospel.”¹⁷⁶ To some degree, Francis’ interpretation of Scripture as a call to fraternal living was conditioned by his surroundings. The establishment of Assisi as a city-state breaking away from the feudal system happened before Francis’ conversion but its effect was clear. The emerging economic order

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ In his modest corpus of writing, he used the word “brother” and its derivatives 306 times. - Warner *Franciscans*, 6-4.

¹⁷⁴ “Faith is knowledge born of religious love...Catholic tradition has tended to deal with faith as authoritative knowledge contained in doctrines...Lonergan has moved below the common sense and theoretical realms in which such a faith is usually located to focus on the gift of divine love...When faith (self-transcendent falling-in-love) expresses itself to a common culture, it transvalues (re-prioritizes) human concerns. When moral conversion (value) is coupled with religious conversion (faith), there is a shift from the human being (person) as the originating and terminal value to the originating value of God (as good) and the terminal value is the universe (as good).” – Sauer *Commentary*, 133-134.

¹⁷⁵ “Testament”, *Works*, 154.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.,

witnessed tradesmen beginning to gather into guilds. A sense of the strength found in solidarity was beginning to surface in all aspects of society, no less so for Francis than for Assisi's tradesmen. While he sought to find his true place in a new social order, he intentionally avoided reference to rank in establishing the brotherhood, in contrast to the class system in which he found so much injustice. Among the salvific characteristics of true fraternal living, Francis found the quality of genuine compassion. His was to be a community of equals bonded by a genuine caring for each other: "How great was the love that flourished in the members of this pious society!"¹⁷⁷ There is evidence of this affection, among other sources, in his *Rule for Hermitages*: "Those who wish to live religiously in hermitages should be three brother or four at the most; two of these should be mothers and they many have two sons or at least one."¹⁷⁸ Warner suggests that his model was the relationship of Jesus, Mary and the early disciples¹⁷⁹, "which is slightly different than the prevailing monastic understanding which was based on the First Century Church of the Apostles."¹⁸⁰ We can assume that Francis did not feel called to this *ecclesiae primitivae forma*, with its assured security, but to affirm what he believed to be the true and radical poverty of Jesus. In the process, he appears to have incarnated the relational qualities expressed in a passage in Matthew's Gospel: "Everyone who does the will of his Father is my brother, sister and mother."¹⁸¹ (Matt. 12: 50).

Further evidence of the centrality of brotherhood in Francis' spirituality and self-understanding can be found in perhaps his most original work, *The Canticle of The*

¹⁷⁷ Celano, "First Life", chapter 38. *Omnibus*, 260.

¹⁷⁸ Francis of Assisi, "Rule for Hermitages" *Works*, 147.

¹⁷⁹ Warner points to *regula non bullata* 9,5: "And He was a poor man and a transient and lived on alms, He and the Blessed Virgin, and His disciples", *Works*, 117.

¹⁸⁰ Warner *Franciscans*, 6-9.

¹⁸¹ It is worth recalling here verse 52 in Francis' *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*: "We are brothers when we do the will of His Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt 12:50)", *Works*, 70.

Creatures, written near the end of his life. In it, he identifies all of creation as one large family, in union with the Holy Trinity, the ultimate form and meaning of relationship: “Francis, therefore, understood himself as a brother: a brother to Jesus, a brother to those in his fraternity, and a brother to all Creation.”¹⁸² From this evidence, we may conclude that one of the key foundations of Francis’ spirituality was his insight that, at least for him, “spiritual direction” comes not so much from a “master” but from “living out one’s calling to be brother and sister”.¹⁸³

It is quite understandable, therefore, that Francis would want to lead a fraternal and Gospel life within a particular horizon, and it is not entirely surprising that he deliberately chose to live that life under the authority of the Pope, despite his disappointment with some aspects of church life. Rather than operate negatively in regards to excesses and laxities in the church, he chose to operate positively in fidelity to Christ’s Gospel and to the pope that he felt Jesus had designated to lead new generations of his disciples. Consciously or otherwise, Francis must have wanted to guard his fraternity from the temptation to evolve into a protest movement. This would have entailed further temptations, each with its own risk of stubbornly resisting official church teachings and its own opportunity for deviating from truth out of pride and self-sufficiency. Francis intentionally chose, therefore, to align himself with the Pope, to pledge the obedience of his brotherhood to the Holy See, and to ask papal permission for his form of life.

He knew that the risk of error outside the parameters of the church was significant, as were the consequences of its condemnation. He witnessed first hand the devastation caused by unauthorized reform movements. While choosing not to become a priest or a

¹⁸² Warner *Franciscans*, 6-11.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 6-14.

monk, he also decided “to avoid all confusion of his movement with others, such as the Waldensian, with which it could be confused”.¹⁸⁴ To make the distinction clear, Francis devoted part of his Testament to a testimony of respect and devotion for priests, despite the fact that he was often disappointed by their attitude and behaviour¹⁸⁵, even those chosen to help form his new brotherhood.¹⁸⁶ He also knew of the position of Cathars.

The very early years of the thirteenth century, which happen to coincide with Francis’ conversion, mark beyond any doubt the high point of the rise and spread of the Catharist heresy. Indisputable sources make it clear that the heresy had reached Umbria before the beginning of the century, including the valley of Spoleto of which Assisi was one of the gems”.¹⁸⁷

Among other things, Cathars exhibited a profound distaste for the idea of Eucharistic realism. Knowing this makes it relatively easy to understand why Francis integrated so explicitly the official prescriptions of the Fourth Lateran Council regarding the Eucharist into his own writings.

(iii) The role of the magisterium

For Francis, submission to the authority of the Pope was not only strategically wise to ensure that he could continue without ecclesial obstructions on the path to which he felt called, but also it was a spiritual imperative. It flowed in part from his devotion to the cross that he must have seen at times as the church itself.

Rather than to openly oppose the movement raised by Francis (as had been done often in the past in regard to the Waldensian and the Humiliati), this institution busied itself in protecting it, in order to use for its own ends, not without modifying it radically and stripping it of its uniqueness and of its controversial essence. Francis was conscious of this; his heart and flesh are crushed by it. However, in spite of scattered

¹⁸⁴ Manselli *Francis*, 67.

¹⁸⁵ “At this time, the clergy, often mediocre, ignorant, even scandalous, was the object of the virulent criticism of all reformers’ movements. Francis speaks of the intellectual and moral situation which was often deficient: “even if...they are sinful,” Adm XXVI, 1; “if they are sinners,” Ep Fid II, 33; “I do not wish to consider sin in them,” Test, 9; “pitiful priests of this world,” Test 7.” – Matura *Church*.

¹⁸⁶ Manselli stated “We can imagine that Guido helped, comforted, and counselled him, but not in a way that would satisfy Francis on a spiritual level”, Manselli *Francis* 69.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

attempts to protest, he bowed in obedience and accepted this mutilation of his intentions, with a sense of death in his soul.¹⁸⁸

In time, the movement became more an ecclesial institution than the *poverello* had first intended. There is no doubt that he initially intended a lay movement, living without ecclesial privileges. Yet his determination to remain faithful to the Holy See remained steadfast throughout.¹⁸⁹ For Francis, the Church provided the safest guarantee of fidelity to the Gospel. It incorporated all of the mysteries of Catholic faith and presented concrete evidence of God operating among his people. In explaining its importance to Francis, Matura referred to it as “space of faith and of evangelical conversion, ...place of the presence of the Son of God, ...the criteria of true faith, ...norm of conduct”.¹⁹⁰ The ultimate expression of this reality was the Lord Pope, to whom Francis promised “obedience...and reverence”¹⁹¹ Once again, we find in Francis the remarkable wisdom of someone who was sensitive to the complex demands of social, ecclesial and Gospel life, and yet found a system for bringing harmony to these often-divergent horizons without doing violence to anyone. With disarming simplicity, he courageously blazed a trail that others would follow precisely because he was so very authentic. His solution was neither opportunistic nor simplistic; rather it revealed the fullness of life and the abundance promised by the Saviour whom he strove so ardently to follow in uncompromising fidelity and love.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Matura *Church*.

¹⁸⁹ Matura demonstrated that Francis’ ‘doctrines’ on the church are contained in documents that span the entire period of his writings. Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” - Matt. 10:10b.

*(iv) Other constitutive elements*¹⁹³

Other decisions taken by Francis are noteworthy as well in that they began to characterize his evangelical movement. Some of these included:

1. To live the Gospel: In his Testament, Francis recounted the basis on which his fraternal life was established. He claimed to have received the command to embrace the Gospel as a virtual rule of life from no less an authority than God himself: “When God gave me some friars, there was no one to tell me what I should do, but the Most High himself made it clear to me that I must live the life of the Gospel.”¹⁹⁴
2. In communion with Christ poor and crucified: Francis’ spirituality was unequivocally and unabashedly Christocentric: His peace was Christ’s; his joy, the Lord’s infinite love for him. But it was the texture of that union with Christ that so appealed to his contemporaries as it does to us today. For Francis, Jesus’ humanity was palpable. That made the love of the Father *who so loved the world that he sent his only son* (Jn. 3:16) a matter of personal relationship and affection. That made the gift of his Son’s birth into abject poverty such an incomprehensible act of unconditional love that he would marvel at it at Greccio three years before his death. It made the Son’s passion and death on the cross an unfathomable act of compassionate concern for the salvation of so undeserving a creature as he thought himself to be. Francis’ union with Christ had become so complete as to enable him to find satisfaction only in the poverty and cross of his saviour: “I, little brother Francis, wish to live according to

¹⁹³ Refers to the definition outlined in “Defining Spirituality”.

¹⁹⁴ “Testament”, *Works*, 154f.

the life and poverty of our most High Lord Jesus Christ...and to persevere in this to the last.”¹⁹⁵

3. In the love of God: It is worth noting here that what marked Francis’ spirituality in a searing way was his passionate love of God, granting equal attention to God the Father, creator of all things and source of all good; to the Son, both Lord and brother to the mightiest and the least of all creatures; and to God’s Holy Spirit of Love and Truth.
4. In brotherhood and sisterhood with all humanity and all creation: His Cantic to the Creatures is evidence of an amazing insight that would transform Francis’ worldview. It is at once as soothing as a sonnet and as disturbing as a clap of thunder, urging us to transform our own self-understanding in relation to God and all things created by God: “When Francis referred to *Brother wolf*¹⁹⁶ or *Sister water*¹⁹⁷, he was not just using a clever rhetorical strategy. He means those titles quite literally. The implications are quite extraordinary for one who takes his brotherhood seriously.”¹⁹⁸ At the same time, it should be noted that despite all of the care and concern that he exhibited toward the smallest of God’s creatures, Francis’ interest in them stemmed principally from the fact that “they represented moral qualities and teachings, and they also helped lead (him) to a greater understanding and experience of the Father he shared with them.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ “Francis’ Last Will for St. Clare”, *Omnibus*, 76.

¹⁹⁶ Probably refers to legend of “how St. Francis tamed the very fierce Wolf of Gubbio”, in *Little Flowers of St. Francis*, in which Francis brings a peaceful solution to the practical problem between the frightened residents of the town of Gubbio and the wolf that threatens their safety. – *Omnibus*, 1348ff.

¹⁹⁷ Almost certainly refers to *the Cantic to the Creatures – Early Documents*, 113ff.

¹⁹⁸ Cook *Francis*, 53.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

5. Participating in the life and mission of the Church: In his Testament, Francis wrote, “And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way and say: ‘We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, in all your churches throughout the whole world and we bless you because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.’”²⁰⁰ It is also evident from his various writings that he was preoccupied by the need to maintain orthodoxy in the practice of the new movement’s charism. Note has been made elsewhere of how, for instance, documents of the Fourth Lateran Council influenced the formulation of his rule.
6. In continual conversion: Esser has demonstrated that all of Franciscan spirituality comes from the idea of penance or *metanoia*.²⁰¹ It is a process more than an event, a process that is ongoing. In this regard, Francis’ active participation in the penitential movement reminds us of Lonergan’s insight into the nature of not only religious conversion but intellectual and moral conversion as well. To become a penitent was to accept that *metanoia* is fundamentally a way of life.²⁰²
7. In a life of prayer: After his conversion, Francis’ natural inclination seems to have been oriented toward the contemplative life: “He cultivated the contemplative life in his own soul by...periodic retreats to hermitages.”²⁰³ Prayer was so foundational for Francis that he struggled for a time with the question of whether he should pursue a life of prayer exclusively or in combination with apostolic action. He came to understand his vocation to be one of prayer in action. Referring to the return of the

²⁰⁰ *Early Documents*, 124f.

²⁰¹ Cajetan Esser, “Love’s Reply”, Raffaele Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 103. Hereafter Pazzelli *Francis*.

²⁰² Pope John Paul II echoed this view in addressing contemporary secular Franciscans: “Heirs of that great movement of evangelical life which the *poenitentes de Assisio* embraced, learn to live your vocation...as brothers and sisters of penance with an enlightened sense of conversion and of continuous renewal.” – Dedication in Pazzelli *Francis*.

²⁰³ Dacian Bluma, “Franciscan Life of Prayer”, *The Cord* 13 (1963), 52.

early friars from Rome where they had received verbal approval of their fledgling community, Celano noted that, “It was his custom to divide the time given him to merit grace and, as seemed best, to spend some of it to benefit his neighbors and use the rest in the blessed solitude of contemplation.”²⁰⁴ Celano concluded that Francis’ life was itself a prayer.²⁰⁵

8. As instruments of peace: Francis wrote in his Testament, “The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say: ‘May the Lord give you peace.’”²⁰⁶ It is clear from these and other words, as it is from his actions and from the fruits of those efforts, that peacemaking was an integral part of his apostolate. It is an association that is often made today²⁰⁷ and one that is simply expressed in the motto of secular Franciscans: “Peace and Goodness”.

* * *

His authentic quest for the practical meaning of Gospel values led Francis onto new horizons, preparing him for the next leg of the journey wherein clear statements of his beliefs could be phrased and proclaimed, leading ultimately to the conversion of others.

²⁰⁴ *Early Documents*, 261.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 310.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁰⁷ October 27, 1986, the leaders of all the major faith traditions gathered at the great Basilica built over the tomb of the *poverello* to pray for peace. I often wonder if any other venue could have incited people from such disparate, sometimes bitterly divided, religious categories to rally in pursuit of an ideal that so profoundly touches the heart of each human being, regardless of time or place: “The broad assemblage was set in Assisi in honor of St. Francis, the simple Umbrian friar whose life exemplified humanity’s quest for peace.” (*Time*, Nov. 10, 1986, 79) In her 1979 Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, Mother Teresa of Calcutta had already set the stage for this wondrous event: Referring to the religious order that she founded, Mother Teresa said, “We pray this prayer (of St. Francis) every day after holy communion because it is very fitting for each one of us.” – Germain Kopaczynski, “Peace in the Vision of St. Francis of Assisi”, *The Cord* 37, 1987, 262. Hereafter Kopaczynski *Peace*.

(b) Doctrines – His New Priorities

From among various foundational principles that result from the proper operation of dialectic, key doctrinal statements can be articulated: “The statements that doctrines express are judgments of fact and judgments of value.”²⁰⁸ But doctrine is not the end of the theological journey, as some might suppose. They are “but the skeleton of the original preached message....When introduced successfully to a culture, doctrines have a greater possibility to develop according to that culture.”²⁰⁹ It can be said that effective communication of faith principles is dependent to a very great extent upon the methodical organization of doctrine as the application of judgement just as it can be said that doctrine to be externalized meaningfully and to bear fruit within a community of believers must, before it is communicated, pass through the application of understanding in the subsequent function of systematics.

* * *

Several doctrinal statements can be declared to underpin the belief system we associate with Francis and Franciscanism. Here, we consider some of these:

(i) God is good.

The first principle for Francis was the truth behind John the evangelist’s revelation that God is Love (1Jn4:8). But it was the inherent goodness of God - perfect and gratuitous - that Francis chose to emphasize. This reality eventually took on gargantuan proportions. It was for him the pervasive and all-encompassing truth. No other aspect of God’s existence so stirred Francis into joy and anguish that the profound realization that God so

²⁰⁸ *Common Ground*, 319.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

loved him that he sent his son to reveal himself fully and, ultimately, to die for his mistakes. This would be communicated concretely at Greccio and La Verna.

There is, then, a Franciscan doctrine in accordance with which God is holy, is great, and above all, is good, indeed the supreme Good. For in this doctrine, God is love. He lives by love, creates love, becomes flesh and redeems, that is, he saves and makes holy, for love. There is also a Franciscan way of contemplating Jesus...in his human love.²¹⁰

The fact that God's love was manifest in his infinite goodness resulted in his coining the phrase we associate with Secular Franciscans to this day: Pax et bonum, "peace and all goodness".²¹¹

(ii) Voluntary poverty is the privileged path that disposes us to his goodness.

There is no Franciscan charism without poverty and no real knowledge of that charism without an appreciation of what it meant to him. Indeed, it is the thread that provides continuity in eight centuries of Franciscan tradition.²¹² Poverty, however, was not an end in itself but a privileged means, the ultimate purpose of which was union with Jesus:

"When Francis embraced Lady Poverty, he found himself wrapped around the Crucified,

²¹⁰ Pius XII, *Guide for Secular Franciscans*, 14.

²¹¹ There is no direct evidence that Francis actually used this expression himself but it has been closely associated with him all along. *The Legend of Three Companions* (1241-7) stated, in reference to Francis' habit of using the Scriptural phrase "May the Lord give you peace!". "It is certainly astonishing, if not miraculous, that this greeting of peace was used before his conversion by a precursor who frequently went through Assisi greeting the people with 'Peace and good! Peace and good!'. It seems plausible that, as John heralded Christ but withdrew when Christ began his mission of preaching, so too, like another John, this man preceded Francis in using the greeting of peace, but disappeared when he appeared." – *Early Documents II*, 84.

²¹² "Francis of Assisi saw poverty exemplified in Christ and it becomes the Gospel value he embraces as he followed the 'poverty and humility of Our Lord Jesus Christ'. Clare embraced radical poverty to foster a life of contemplation of the poor Christ. Bonaventure taught poverty is the first step of the spiritual journey toward God. Jacopone da Todi believed that poverty was having nothing in order to possess all things in freedom. Subsequently, Spiritual Franciscan John Peter Olivi (d. 1298) and Ubertino da Casale (d. 1341) insisted that strict poverty was key to authentic living of the Rule. With Angelo of Clareno (d. 1337), poverty took on an eschatological significance necessary for the renewal of the whole Church. Later in the 15th century, the First Order Observant movement attempted to recapture and promote a simpler life of strict poverty as it was found in the tradition of the rural or more eremitical friaries. John Capistran (d. 1456) and James of the Marshes (d. 1476) were strong promoters for this renewal of poverty in the life of the First Order." - J. Hammond & J. Hellmann, "Franciscan Spirituality" in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Second Edition (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2003), 895f. Hereafter *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*.

and the brothers could not tell which was which.”²¹³ To be sure, one can make assumptions about the importance Francis accorded the practice of evangelical poverty, but it is unwise to speculate unduly about precise circumstances that led to this insight. Similarly, it may be affirmed that this tradition has had been the keystone of Franciscanism, but that – at times – its effect has been clearly divisive. Always, in my view, the disciple of Franciscan spirituality must refer to the context in which its practice emerged and developed.

To describe how the new theory of poverty made its appearance in the order, it will be necessary to describe, at length and in detail, the development of the life of the order in those crucial twenty years after the founder’s death. Almost all the changes in the way of life of the order necessarily affect the observance of poverty. If the formation of the doctrine of absolute poverty is to be understood, then these changes must be set out, and their effects on the practice of poverty detailed.²¹⁴

(iii) Humility is the grateful acceptance of God’s goodness, especially in the gift of God’s Son in Word and Eucharist.²¹⁵

In the face of grandeur, Francis chose humility. He would encourage his brothers in his early rule to do so as well: “Let us, therefore, hold onto the words, the life, and the teaching and the Holy Gospel of Him Who humbled Himself...”²¹⁶ Humility was not for Francis a pious posture or a frivolous fantasy. Rather, it was the privileged path that leads to true self-understanding and enables the building of durable communities. First, he sought to be humble in relation to God, from whom all good things come. This attitude toward God then was reflected by Francis in his attitude toward all things and all people. His model was the humility of the Incarnation, which reflected love rather than any of the

²¹³ Ibid., 294.

²¹⁴ Malcolm Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty: The Doctrine of Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan Order 1210-1323* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1998), 71f.

²¹⁵ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 896.

²¹⁶ *Works*, 129

negative characteristics that some might ascribe to humility, and its expression was harmony with and fraternal love toward all of humanity and all of creation.

(iv) Compassion is our response to his goodness.

When we are conscious of what we receive and where it comes from, we are grateful, and if we are grateful we are inclined to reciprocate. The most direct though never adequate way of doing so is by acting towards others as God has behaved toward us. Clare mentioned the two basic sources of Franciscan compassion: “In her contemplation Clare gazes in the mirror and sees Him ‘who was placed in a manger’ and Him who suffered ‘on the wood of the cross.’”²¹⁷ These events came about because of God’s compassion toward us. The response, for Francis and his followers, became compassion for the poor. It is interesting to note that while Third-Order or secular Franciscans have been less marked by the practice of poverty through the centuries, many have been exemplars of compassionate service.²¹⁸

(v) Jesus, the Incarnate Word, is at the very centre of human existence and all that we do must flows from there.

While Francis devoted equal attention to God Father, Son and Holy Spirit, an appreciation of the nature of his relationship to Jesus is probably the key to understanding and practicing his particular form of his spirituality. Whereas, in his day, the triumphant Christ was the way in which most Christians imaged Jesus, it was in the humanity of Jesus - poor and crucified - that Francis found comfort from illness and solace in troubled times. Though not alone in reaching this insight, Francis found a stable equilibrium between the humanity of Jesus and his divinity. In so doing, he enriched our

²¹⁷ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 896.

²¹⁸ “In addition to Angela of Foligno and Jacopone da Todi, St. Elizabeth of Hungary (d. 1231), St. Rose of Viterbo (d. 1252), St. Margaret of Cortona (d. 1297) and even St. Louis IX (d. 1270) were notable examples of an active compassion that embraced others in their helplessness and suffering.” – *Ibid.*

understanding of two great mysteries of faith, the Trinity and the Incarnation: “The incarnate Christ in the crib and on the cross is the central spiritual focus that captures the dynamic of Franciscan spirituality.”²¹⁹

(vi) We are brother and sister to all creation.

Because God the Father is creator of all, Francis understood himself to be brother and sister to all, as he declared so lyrically in the *Canticle of Creation*, which he wrote near the end of his life. His preaching to birds is a reflection of this; his conciliatory attitude toward the wolf that was harassing residents of Gubbio was a reflection of this; and his numerous references to animate and inanimate objects, always in reverential terms, is also a reflection of this attitude.

This insight came to him as a blessing but it also obliged him to develop a loving attitude toward people of other faiths. While he was passionately in love with Christ, the love he had for others called out of him an innovative attitude toward non-Christians in particular. He was especially concerned about the need to develop suitable language “to preach the Word of God” to people of other traditions. Indeed, he was the first to speak of “going among the infidels” in a religious rule. In the context, this meant Moslems but it revealed a heart that was disarmingly respectful of the faith of others, replacing *actio* with *passio*.²²⁰

* * *

Statements, such as those listed here, can be viewed as Francis’ distillations of Gospel values. These went to the very heart of the meaning of Christianity, at least insofar as his

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Leonard Lehmann, “Essential Elements of Franciscan Mission according to Chapter 16 in the Rule of 1221”, *Mission in the Franciscan Tradition - Spirit and Life* Vol. 6, (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1994), 35-45.

own experience of it as a received religion was concerned. From this imminently concrete manifestation of what he would have judged to be Gospel truths would have come a systemization of particular truths into a comprehensible structure of belief that would soon facilitate and foster effective and efficient communication.

(c) Systematics: Early Rule and Admonitions

Lonergan underscored the risk of confusing the work of a functional specialist focused on doctrine with that of work centered on systematics. While acknowledging the similarities and their common purpose of fostering understanding, he clarified the differences by reminding us that doctrine is more closely aligned with judgement and systematics with understanding that facilitates effective communications: “It is not the intent of systematics to increase certitude but to promote an understanding of what one is already certain about. It does not seek to establish the facts, but strives to uncover why the facts are what they are.”²²¹ Lonergan made his discussion concrete by pointing to the many understandings (systematics) of the religious phenomenon we call “salvation”: The approach to salvation that Lonergan developed “shows the creative power of systematics to be faithful to the insights of tradition, and yet to render doctrines understandable in our present context”.²²² While emphasizing the need for sound practice in the operation of dialectics and the development of doctrine, Lonergan drew attention to the possibility that divergent understandings can produce systematic forms of progress or decline, thereby drawing attention to the importance of a rigorous application of skills and knowledge applicable to this vital function.

²²¹ *Common Ground*, 329.

²²² *Gregson Desire*, 114.

* * *

In recent years, Francis' writing have been painstakingly scrutinized and critically analyzed with the result that many studies have revealed important information regarding his intentions, thereby helping us to better understand his charism and make sound judgements about its meaning for us. Twenty-eight writings are attributed to him, some very brief indeed, such as his first, *The Prayer Before the Crucifix*, but two documents stand out in this corpus to reveal his system of beliefs: The Earlier Rule, also known as *regula non bullata* or The Rule Without a Papal Seal, probably written in stages between 1209/10 and 1221; and The Admonitions (dating uncertain), which Esser called "The Franciscan Sermon on the Mount."²²³

(i) *Regula non bullata*

So strong is the link from the mind and heart of Francis to what is known as The Early Rule that Flood declared: "The history of Francis' origins has no more eloquent witness than the text of (this) rule."²²⁴ It is believed that its writing began at the inception of the order, since that is what his Testament suggested, but that it did not take the form that we have received in various manuscripts until after September 22, 1220, since "the second chapter makes reference to a bull of that date."²²⁵ A form of this rule had likely been approved by Innocent III in 1215.²²⁶ No doubt this rule emanated from the heart of Francis himself, but there is also no doubt that it was developed over time as a result of discussions held during the gathering of the first brothers: "Some passages of the *Legend*

²²³ *Origins*, 245.

²²⁴ *Birth*, 3.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16. Some studies propose other dates, e.g. "(The Earlier Rule) has its origins in the simple form of life which Francis brought to Pope Innocent III for his approval in 1209 or 1210." – *Early Documents*, 63. "The reference to Pope Innocent III (+July 16, 1216) suggests that the roots of this document are the *propositum vitae*, the primitive document, which the Pope approved orally in 1209." – *Ibid.*, 63n.

of the *Three Companions* and the *Second Life of Francis* by Celano speak of the work done on the rule at these Chapters.²²⁷ The text that we know today includes negative insertions²²⁸, elaborations and clarifications²²⁹, and elements that reflect the influence of the Fourth Lateran Council.²³⁰ These passages may not be rooted in the spontaneous thinking of Francis, but they do reflect his evolved thinking and deep concern that the rule be a useful guide for the conduct of growing numbers of adherents. Certain beliefs would have to be systematized for the good of order. The following table indicates the breadth of systems covered by this rule:

	First Rule Chapter Titles ²³¹
I	The brothers are to live in obedience, in chastity, and without property.
II	The reception and the clothing of the brothers
III	The divine office and fasting
IV	The ministers and the other brothers: how they are organized
V	The correction of brothers at fault
VI	The recourse of the brothers to the ministers and that a brother should not be called prior
VII	Ways of work and service
VIII	The brothers should not receive money
IX	Begging for alms
X	The sick brothers
XI	The brothers should neither ridicule nor disparage, but love one another.
XII	Evil looks and association with women
XIII	The avoidance of fornication
XIV	How the brothers are to go about in the world.
XV	The brothers should not ride horses.
XVI	Those who go among the Saracens and other unbelievers
XVII	Preachers
XVIII	How the ministers are to meet.
XIX	The brothers are to live as Catholics.
XX	Penance and the reception of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.
XXI	The praise and the exhortation which all the brothers can do.
XXII	Advice to the brothers
XXIII	Prayer and thanksgiving
XXIV	Conclusion

²²⁷ Ibid., 17f.

²²⁸ Flood has demonstrated that these occur in chapters four, five, six, seven and eight. *Birth*, 23-31.

²²⁹ Flood showed indicated that these are to be found in chapter nine through thirteen, *Birth*, 31-35.

²³⁰ Flood identified these influences in chapters eighteen through 20. *Birth*, 40-44.

²³¹ Ibid., 63ff. - Chapter titles appear in translation by Paul Schwartz and Paul Lachance.

The introduction of the rule is marked by four elements. The first is a clear characterization of the rule as reflective of what it meant to be a Friar Minor: “This is the way of life...”²³² The second was a recounting of the establishment of the rule: “Francis sought and won its approbation, for himself and his brothers and for his future brothers.”²³³ The third was a direct mention of pope Innocent III who died in 1216 even though the rule continued to evolve during the papacy of Honorius III. And the fourth established the structure of the order’s authority: “Francis is its head and shall have a successor. It professed submission to the pope, and so defined its position within medieval society as a subordinate religious body.”²³⁴ Chapter four “begins by establishing certain brothers as ministers and servants of the others and inviting all the friars to obey them.”²³⁵ Chapter five warned the ministers and all the brothers to be on their guard, lists cases involving sin and includes a call to show concern for those who have sinned.²³⁶ Chapter six “deals with the difficulty of continuing “Franciscan” habits of life under new circumstances...for instance the matter of bare feet in a northern clime.”²³⁷ Chapter seven showed that “their work was to satisfy their needs; when they did not suffice, they could have recourse to alms.”²³⁸ Chapter eight dealt specifically with work and “prohibits the brothers’ acceptance of money for their labour,”²³⁹ while chapter nine showed that “the friars tried to live their daily lives out of their original inspiration,”²⁴⁰

²³² Rule quoted in *Birth*, 51.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

²³⁶ *Ibid.* 31.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 23f

²³⁹ *Ibid.* 26.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

and chapters ten through thirteen dealt with the “prosaic areas of the brother’s life,”²⁴¹ such as how to deal with sick brothers, the use of harsh words and relations with women. Chapter fourteen “expresses simply the mission the brothers have in the world...and returns to high inspiration, to a presence among men in accordance with the commitment to the Gospel set forth in chapter 1.”²⁴² Chapter 15 “spells out what was implicit in chapter 14, but which, following experience, needed clarification.”²⁴³ Chapter 16 “appears here as a particular instance of the friar’s mission: their proclamation of Christ among the Saracens and other non-believers.”²⁴⁴ Chapter 17 drew attention to three concerns: that the friars remain humble; that they should have a spiritual attitude in what they do; and that they need to be faithful. Flood demonstrated that chapters 18 through 20 were the direct result of official proclamations related to the Fourth Lateran Council: “The *regula non bullata* shows no literary dependence on any one of the council’s seventy decrees; but it does show a number of material parallels to them.”²⁴⁵ Chapter 18 dealt with the need for periodic chapter meetings as the twelfth decree of the council encouraged; chapter 19 dealt with the perplexing issue of heresy reflecting the third decree’s concern about orthodoxy; and chapter 20 dealt with confession and communion as did the twenty-first decree of the council.²⁴⁶ The last three chapters were an odd mix of exhortations and testamentary reflections. The third decree of the Fourth Lateran Council had forbidden unauthorized preaching, so chapter 21 was introduced to serve as a model sermon and, consistent with Francis’ own preaching, dealt with brotherly exhortation

²⁴¹ Ibid. 35.

²⁴² Ibid., 36.

²⁴³ Ibid., 29.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. 38.

²⁴⁵ *Birth*, 42.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 42f.

rather than doctrinal questions of faith. Chapter 22 is a statement of what Francis stood for; it is an apt summary of his systematics: “(It) is a testament Francis left his brothers when, in 1219, he set out for martyrdom in the East.”²⁴⁷ Chapter 23 was divided into two parts, the first is addressed to God (“an invocation of his mystery opens onto a vision of the whole economy of salvation”)²⁴⁸ and the second was “a call to all men...to enter into the salvation God offers men, by means of faith and Gospel conversion.”²⁴⁹ The final chapter was in effect a plea for obedience to the rule.

(ii) The Admonitions

The term “admonition” can be a bit misleading. Francis used it as a gentle counsel or exhortation, not as a dire warning although he did believe these statements to reflect a true understanding of God’s will: “(T)hese twenty-eight teachings of Francis offer insights into his biblical thought and the ways in which he translated them into the ordinary experiences of daily life.”²⁵⁰ Judging by the epithets used by leading Franciscan scholars, it is virtually impossible to exaggerate the significance of The Admonitions in capturing the essence of Francis’ spirituality. Esser called it “the Magna Charter of a life in the Christian spirit of brotherhood.”²⁵¹ Others have used similarly lofty expressions: “the Franciscan Sermon on the Mount”, “a mirror of Perfection”²⁵²: “Thus these twenty-eight teachings of Francis offer insights into his biblical thought and the ways in which he translated them into the ordinary experience of daily life.”²⁵³

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Early Documents*, 128.

²⁵¹ *Origin*, 247.

²⁵² *Works*, 25.

²⁵³ *Early Documents*, 128.

Although his systematics as expressed in The Admonitions are oftentimes innovative and invigorating, and even insightful, the ideas that they contain are not always new. For instance, scholars have found traces of Augustine, Pseudo-Bernard²⁵⁴, Godfrey of Amont, and Godfrey of Auxerre in the first four admonitions. Rather, Francis' originality can be found principally in his systematization of insights both new and borrowed, as illustrated in the table below.

The Admonitions Chapter Titles²⁵⁵	
I	The Body of Christ
II	The Evil of Self-Will
III	Perfect Obedience
IV	Let No One Make Being Over Others His Own
V	Let No One Be Proud, but Boast in the Cross of the Lord
VI	Imitation of Christ
VII	Let Good Action Follow Knowledge
VIII	Avoiding the Sin of Envy
IX	Love ²⁵⁶
X	Castigating the Body
XI	Let No One Be Corrupted by the Evil of Another
XII	Knowing the Spirit of the Lord
XIII	Patience
XIV	Poverty of Spirit
XV	Peace
XVI	Cleanness of Heart
XVII	The Humble Servant of God
XVIII	Compassion for a Neighbour
XIX	A Humble Servant of God
XX	The Good and the Vain Religious
XXI	The Frivolous and the Talkative Religious
XXII	Correction
XXIII	Humility
XXIV	True Love
XXV	The Same Point

²⁵⁴ There seems to be little doubt that Cistercians influenced the thinking of Francis and the nascent brotherhood to some degree or other. Cistercians were invited to oversee the proper conduct of chapter meetings, and the early bothers and sisters heard Cistercian preachers as well.

²⁵⁵ Early Documents, 128ff.

²⁵⁶ The reader may profit from becoming acquainted with this short admonition to experience the language, tone and content of the writing: "The Lord says: *Love your enemies (Do good to those who hate you and pray for those who persecute and slander you)*. For that person truly loves his enemy who is not hurt by an injury done to him, but because of love of God, is stung by the sin of his soul. Let him show him love by his deeds." – *Early Documents*, 132.

XXVI	Let Servants of God Honour the Clergy
XXVII	Virtue Puts Vice to Flight
XXVIII	Hiding Good That It Not Be Lost

Beyond these two key features of the Franciscan canon, another passage is worthy of special attention. *Regula Bullata*, which received papal approval in the form of the bull entitled *Solet annuere*, November 29, 1223, contains another vitally important indication of Francis' basic belief system: "The very heart of his view of life seems to be summarized best in *The Later Rule*, X, 8, in which the saint encourages his followers to pursue 'what they must desire above all things: to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working."²⁵⁷

Throughout his writings Saint Francis teaches the transparent, inconspicuous, and unassuming ways of the Holy Spirit, and this teaching is expressed through the saint's concern for God his Father, Jesus his Lord and Brother, his fellow human beings, and the marvels of God's creation. He already begins to cultivate an atmosphere or environment in which the "school" of Franciscan theology of the spiritual life develops and focuses on that love, the medium of the Holy Spirit, which teaches us "to understand the gifts that he has given us" (1Cor 2:12)²⁵⁸

* * *

While both the early rule and The Admonitions are communications in their own right, I have referred to them here as concise statements that summarize his systematic theology. Upon this structure rests a range of communication activities, many of which had a major impact on his own culture as well as on many religious traditions that we have inherited.

²⁵⁷ *Works*, 11.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

(d) Communication: His Testament

Loneragan's view of communication is that it is the functional specialty of theology that transposes consciousness from the realm of theory to the realm of common sense in relating Christian doctrine to cultural reality.²⁵⁹ "It is the communication of insight or understanding to the experience of another."²⁶⁰ This occurs because it is situated on the experiential or first level of consciousness. Accordingly, it "reflects on who we are as we live in common with others".²⁶¹

With communication, we return to the basic level of experience in order to situate what we have come to know in a context that is relevant to the experience of others: "The genesis of common meaning is an ongoing process of communication, of people coming to share the same cognitive, constitutive and effective meanings".²⁶² Communication is the end of one journey, but it is also the beginning of another, for the action of communicating – with words and deeds – inevitably raises new questions that take the inquiring mind and the searching soul through a new set of operations similar to the first. Indeed, we stand before an entire range of mountains, the peaks of which are conversions that stretch beyond the horizon that we now see. It is the journey along this pilgrimage route that defines our spirituality as much as the destination. Preaching is part of a complex matrix of human interactions known as communication vital to the realization of human potential and the functioning of society, and it must be regarded as an integral part of that system.

* * *

²⁵⁹ *Common Ground*, 315. According to Streeter who wrote the glossary, communication "operates through the basic art of talking, teaching, preaching, writing, arts, gestures, etc."

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 316.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.* 316.

²⁶² *Method*, 357.

Broadly speaking, Francis' communication is a testament that takes many forms. This study explores Francis' use of four media of communication: (1) his way of living; (2) his preaching; (3) his use of drama; and (4) his writing, particularly *The Testament* itself.

(i) Evangelical living

For Francis, authentic communication could no more be detached from how he lived than the act of flying could be detached from the birds to which he preached²⁶³, and it would appear that he understood that very well: "Francis the apostolic man and Francis the mystic were not two sides or phases; they were fused."²⁶⁴ So imperative was the need to integrate the form of life he had chosen and the prayer that expressed its value with the content of his apostolic action that he admonished his brothers to preach with their very lives. They were to be not only witnesses but also evidence of the Good News, not only to human beings, but also to all Creation.

His most critical decisions would have less to do with whether or how to preach but how to live in order to preach authentically. Preaching the Gospel would have to mean being the good news to others, much as Jesus had been in his own time as he proclaimed the words contained in the accounts of the evangelists. Like the apostles, Francis preached a message that was simple: Repent and believe in the good news.²⁶⁵

Dear Brothers, let us consider our vocation, and how God, in his great mercy, called us not only for our salvation but for that of many, and to this end we are to go through the world exhorting all men and women by our example as well as by our words to do penance for their sins, and to live keeping in mind the commandments of God...Do not be afraid to preach penance even though we appear ignorant and of no account. Put your trust in God who overcame the world; hope steadfastly in him who, by the

²⁶³ Refers to a popular legend in Celano's "The Life of Saint Francis", Chapter XXI, *Early Documents*, 234.

²⁶⁴ Cook *Francis*, 84.

²⁶⁵ In the New Revised Standard Version of the bible, there are 26 verses of the New Testament that contain the word "repent" and 21 that contain the word "repentance", some specifically mentioning the need to preach repentance.

Holy Spirit, speaks through you to exhort all to be converted to him and to observe his commandments.²⁶⁶

Bonaventure carefully noted the insight Francis developed after struggling with the underlying question, which he put to those he loved and trusted: “What do you think, brothers, what do you judge better? That I should spend my time in prayer or that I should go about preaching?”²⁶⁷ He had Brother Masseo put the question to his trusted friends Brother Sylvester and Sister Clare, asking whether he should “preach sometimes or ...devote (him)self only to prayer”²⁶⁸. Brother Masseo came back with this answer: “(Christ) wants you to go about the world preaching, because God did not call you for yourself alone but also for the salvation of others.”²⁶⁹ The insight Francis received was that preaching is a paramount part of apostolic action because Jesus had done so, since “the only begotten Son of God, who is the highest wisdom, came down from the bosom of the Father for the sake of souls in order to instruct the world with his example and to speak the word of salvation to men.”²⁷⁰

While his apostolic action took many forms, perhaps his need for balance between prayer and action was most clearly manifested in his preaching. For a time, he struggled with the stress that the juxtaposition of the two inevitably imposes. But that stress was soon transformed into a singular opportunity to conform his life more fully to Christ, who was the supreme model of harmony between prayer and action, and, despite the great spiritualities that arose during the first millennium, one could argue that this precarious equilibrium had been rarely achieved.

²⁶⁶ “Legend of Three Companions”, Chapter X, *Omnibus*, 720.

²⁶⁷ Bonaventure, “Major Life”, *Omnibus*, 720.

²⁶⁸ “Little Flowers of St. Francis”, *Omnibus*, 1334.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1335.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 721.

If a significant change occurred in Christendom about the relationship between active and contemplative dimensions of life, it is probably to be traced to Francis of Assisi....(He) would go into the woods to pray alone but also rebuilt crumbling churches(...).As he ministered to lepers and began to preach, he also continued to withdraw for prayer as well as borrow the liturgical prayer of the older monastic orders.²⁷¹

In effect, contemplation and apostolic action were not for him competitive realities but absolutely complementary necessities: “Solitude opens out to the world and bears fruit in preaching...The eremitism of Saint Francis and his followers is deeply evangelical and remains always open to the world, while recognizing the need to maintain a certain distance and perspective.”²⁷²

(ii) Preaching

Francis’ preaching flowed directly from his mystical prayer, which was decidedly Christocentric. This can be asserted in two ways. First, his preaching touched, not on abstract theological ideas, but on the sacredness and wonder of creation as a mirror of God, its creator. Secondly, he focused on events in Christ’s life on earth as much as he did on his teachings. This relentless reference to Jesus as the Word made man was the natural consequence of a prayer and fraternal life centered on the humanity of Jesus. To fully apprehend this focus on the person of Christ in preaching as well as other forms of Franciscan communication, we must take a step back to examine its interior expression, namely prayer. In the realm of mystical prayer, Francis was innovative; his religious experience dramatically shaped the future of Western Christianity as a pioneer of what Cousins called “the mysticism of the historical event.”²⁷³

²⁷¹ Cook *Francis*, 78.

²⁷² Merton *Eremitism*, 48

²⁷³ Ewert Cousins, “Francis of Assisi: Mysticism at the Crossroads”, *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford University Press, 1983), 164.

Up to Francis' time, most Christian prayer had been primarily "soul" mysticism (an interior, neo-platonic, world-transcending prayer) or nature mysticism, which sought contact with God through creation. Francis synthesized the two with contemporary themes in theology, especially a devotion to the humanity of Christ ushered in by Bernard of Clairvaux. Francis did this by celebrating concrete details of the life of Jesus infusing them with spiritual energy and meaning.²⁷⁴

Francis' preaching was not only centered on Jesus, it was concise: In the Rule of 1223, chapter nine, we find these words, "Moreover, I advise and admonish the friars that in their preaching, their words should be examined and chaste. They should aim only at the advantage and spiritual good of their listeners, telling them briefly about vice and virtue, punishment and glory, because our Lord himself kept his words short on earth" At the same time, his preaching was multi-faceted; today we might even call it multi-media. He preached not only with words, but also with deeds, with drama and with art.

If Francis saw in Jesus the exemplar of authenticity, who did what he preached and preached what he did, then he could expect nothing less of himself and those brothers who also preached. His dearest wish was that no one could accuse them of hypocrisy. "They were penitents preaching penance."²⁷⁵ "(His) original intention was to live the Gospel before announcing it, to be an imitator of Christ before being a preacher, to accomplish works of penance (*facere poenitentiam*) before proclaiming them to others (*praedicare poenitentiam*)."²⁷⁶ "Francis did not employ the *modus praedicandi*, i.e., the accustomed technique of priests, but rather the *modus concionandi*, the technique used to

²⁷⁴ Warner *Franciscans*, 9-8.

²⁷⁵ Warner *Franciscans*, 10-3.

²⁷⁶ Servus Gieben, "Preaching in the Franciscan Order (Thirteenth Century)", *Monks, Nuns, and Friars in Medieval Society*, ed. Edward B. King, Jacqueline T. Schaefer and William B. Wadley (Sewanee, Tennessee: The Press of the University of the South, 1989), 4. Hereafter Gieben *Preaching*.

address civic assemblies.”²⁷⁷ This emphasis on personal testimony to his form of life and the faith that underpinned it gave rise to an uncommon style of preaching.

Francis’ way of preaching was no more like the common rhetoric of the moral exhortation or the doctrinal sermon than it was like the old genre of the homily. Technically, his preaching comes much closer to the popular discourse or harangue which was used in the local townhall or on a square of the Italian commune by the *podesta* or his opponents. This kind of popular rhetoric was called *contio* in opposition to the more learned and clerical *sermo*.²⁷⁸

Although we have no record of sermons delivered by Francis, we do have this first-hand account of his preaching at Bologna in 1222, which underscored the efficacy of his preaching: “Men and women flocked to him; it was a question of who would at least touch the fringe of his clothing or who would tear off a piece of his poor habit.”²⁷⁹ “His word was like a burning fire.”²⁸⁰

I saw St. Francis preach in the public square in front of the public palace...His discourses did not belong to the great genre of sacred eloquence, rather they were harangues. In reality, throughout his discourse he spoke of the duty of putting an end to hatreds and of arranging a new treaty of peace...God conferred so much power in his words that they brought back peace in many a seigniorial family torn apart until then by old, cruel, and furious hatreds.²⁸¹

In effect, Francis preached as though he were a captain exhorting his troops to steel their courage for the battle ahead. But instead of a battle against a human enemy, they needed to gird themselves against evil and its ally, complacency. His goal was to rally his fellow countrymen to undertake conversion and campaign for peace with the same vigour that would be needed to wage a war. Also part of his style was his arresting appearance,

²⁷⁷ Raoul Manselli, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 184. Hereafter Manselli *Francis*.

²⁷⁸ Gieben *Preaching*, 5.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁸⁰ Celano’s “First Life”, *Omnibus*, 247.

²⁸¹ Thomas, archdean of Split, “Historia Salonitanorum”, Gieben *Preaching*, 6.

his demeanour and his clothing. He used these purposefully to accentuate the dramatic tone he sought to create.²⁸²

If his style was unlike that used in standard sermons, so was the content. According to Flood, his early rule, which was started in 1209, “is without a doubt the most important document for our knowledge of the early life and the originality of the Friars Minor.”²⁸³ In it, we find two chapters that deal explicitly with preaching²⁸⁴, and both are evidently influenced by the decisions of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.²⁸⁵ The Council had imposed stringent rules about who had the authority to preach because of concern regarding the preaching of heretics.²⁸⁶ But, “the preaching which the Council had in mind dealt with questions of faith and morality, consequently with doctrinal and moral sermons, not with the simple exhortation the friars might offer as they travelled about among country-people and citizens.”²⁸⁷ To be on the safe side, this *regula non bulata* also included a sample sermon: “And whenever it may please them, all my brothers can proclaim this or a like exhortation and praise among all the people with the blessing of God...”²⁸⁸

²⁸² Manselli refers to Boncompagno of Signa, a teacher of rhetoric: “He was a contemporary of the saint and dedicated an entire book in his *Rhetorica novissima* to the art of *concionare* (declamation, haranguing)... The oratorical technique made use above all of means aimed at provoking the sensitivity and imagination of those present. For example, says Boncompagno, if someone want to advocate a proposal of war, he should show up at the assembly wearing arms. He should then roll his eyes fiercely, speak with an excited voice, flail about, and fling himself in desperation to the ground. The whole time he should be making a racket by rattling his armour and weapons”, Manselli *Francis*, 184-185.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸⁴ “He was the first to write a chapter about missionary work in a religious rule” – Warner *Franciscans*, 10-1.

²⁸⁵ Gieben *Preaching*, 7.

²⁸⁶ The Council’s third decree “had established, besides other sanctions, that ‘all those who, unlicensed or lacking a mission, without authorization by the Apostolic See or the catholic local bishop, presume to usurp the office of public or private teaching, be excommunicated and, unless they make a prompt amendment, be punished in another appropriate way.’” – *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

In the later rule, solemnly approved by Pope Honorius III in 1223, chapter nine is dedicated to preaching: “From the first sentence on, it appears that the Order is conscious of its apostolic mission, which does not depend on the authority of a bishop, though his authority must be respected”.²⁸⁹ As though to avoid controversy regarding doctrine, this article made it clear that “the friar’s sermons should concern morality and the practice of Christian life”.²⁹⁰

Emphasizing his vocation as preacher, early biographers recount his preaching to birds on the road to Bevagna, referred to earlier, as being a pivotal event in his life. Certainly, it is one of the most colourful. Here, we venture out of the realm of verifiable historical fact. While accounts of his preaching to birds are often repeated, embellishments are varied and questionable. But they do give eloquent witness to his loving regard for Creation, whether human or not, animate or inanimate, to the core of the message he conveyed, and to the attentive response that his preaching elicited, a proposition that is surely well founded.

An integral part of the mission that Francis embraced was the building and preservation of the harmony he found in Creation into the brotherhood of humanity. His self-understanding was as an instrument of the peace that God intended for the people he created in the image of the Holy Trinity. Insofar as Christ entered human history in order to bring to an anguished world a peace that is not of this world, Francis was prepared to serve that purpose, which summarizes all of the others, for it is the ultimate harvest of sowing faith, hope, love; pardon, light and joy²⁹¹: “Whenever they came to a town or

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 9.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 11.

²⁹¹ Such are the sentiments expressed in the so-called “Prayer of St. Francis”. Although not written by him, it is generally agreed to have been inspired by him, and does reflect beliefs expressed in the Admonitions.

village or castle or house, they spoke the words of peace, comforting to all, and exhorted men and women to love and fear the Creator of heaven and earth, and to observe his commands.”²⁹² “Francis loved, preached and lived peace, and one cannot understand Franciscan spirituality without an appreciation for a deep sense of peace permeating all aspects of life.”²⁹³

In essence, peace was for Francis the litmus test of Gospel living, and the fruit of love: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matt.5:9) This implied for him far more than simple self-restraint or episodic moments of respite in an otherwise hostile world. Its active ingredients were understood to be respect and compassion. It called for the humility to serve as lesser brothers and sisters in the spirit of Christ and for self-emptying. Indeed, the deliberate dedication of one’s life to peacemaking represented for Francis a type of *kenosis*²⁹⁴.

Despite reservations about his ability and worthiness to preach²⁹⁵, Francis was prepared to be regarded as a fool for Christ, poor in ability²⁹⁶, in order to accept the evangelical challenge to preach repentance and the adoption of Gospel values. Given his emphasis on building community, he could no more refrain from urging others to repent and believe in the Gospel than he could from doing so himself, for this was the basic meaning on his faith. Without calling it as such and probably never thinking of it so

²⁹² “Legend of the Three Companions”, *Omnibus*, 926.

²⁹³ Warner *Franciscans*, 12-3.

²⁹⁴ Martyrdom appears in many forms in Franciscan life and communications: “Some are martyred in Morocco; some like Giles, embrace what he calls the “martyrdom of contemplation”; some, like Francis and Bonaventure, are martyred in community; some like Clare receive the martyrdom of illness and struggle with the Church; others, by creative work in the world. All are martyred in the cause of peace, searching dominantly for the presence of Christ and a way to make that presence effective.” – Joseph P. Chinnici, “The Lord Give You Peace”, *Westfriars*, February 1985, 1. Hereafter Chinnici *Peace*.

²⁹⁵ “I am a poor and worthless religious. I have no education and I am inexperienced at speaking. I have received the gift of prayer rather than preaching.” - Bonaventure, “Major Life”, *Omnibus*, 720-721.

²⁹⁶ Judging from the efficacy of his preaching, one might assume that his modest self assessment was more an expression of religious value than the result of authentic subjectivity or critical realism!

explicitly, Francis incarnated what Lonergan called intersubjectivity as defined in the section, “Lonergan’s Transcendental Method: “By means of (meaning), reality is shared with others...It is a type of recurrence scheme grounded in intersubjectivity relations.”²⁹⁷

In essence, preaching the Gospel for Francis was inseparable from living the Gospel life. There would be no Gospel to live without the incarnate word, and the incarnate word would have no meaning if it were not communicated. The two were complementary; indeed, the two were indissociable and perhaps even indistinguishable.

(iii) Drama

It is for that reason that we must look upon Francis’ physical presentation of himself and his message as a deliberate form of communication. There is no doubt that he had an intuitive sense of dramatic style and an astute appreciation of the impact of theatrical devices. One cannot consider his dress and gestures without seeing an intention to create an effect. Similarly, one cannot fail to appreciate the far-reaching impact of so grand a gesture as his foolhardy journey across the frontiers of a holy war to embrace a Moslem prince or his dramatic re-enactment of the Lord’s Nativity, not with gold and incense, but with an ox and an ass.

To teach by example, as Francis evidently did, “requires an injection of self into one’s social context.”²⁹⁸ But his injection of self was more than mere example: “The extreme nature of Francis’ behaviour – having himself dragged naked through the streets like a criminal for having eaten a little meat while ill – led Bonaventure in the *Legenda maior* to caution against viewing his actions as exemplary.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Sauer *Commentary*, 342-343.

²⁹⁸ Hester Goodenough Gelber, “A Theatre of Virtue: The Exemplary World of St. Francis of Assisi”, John Stratton Hawley, ed. *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 15 ff.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

The onlookers were amazed at the extraordinary spectacle and...they were deeply moved, but they made no secret of the fact that they thought his humility was rather to be admired than imitated. His action certainly seems to have been intended rather as an omen reminiscent of the prophet Isaiah than as an example.³⁰⁰

Clearly, Francis' communication was dramatic. To get a glimpse into the effect he and his first followers had on the citizens of Assisi and surrounding communities, we must think not in terms of the cautious and sober presentation of the Gospel that we find in most churches today, but

...as if the friars were a kind of medieval combination of charismatic enthusiasm and the street wisdom of the Salvation Army. In such a context we may begin to imagine how the theatrical impulse...may have appealed to Francis of Assisi and his medieval followers.³⁰¹

First, we know that at this time the Franciscans in Italy were already employing scriptural plays in their evangelical efforts. Secondly, we know that, as in their use of vernacular lyric, Franciscan soon obtained the extensive involvement of laymen through the development of confraternities.³⁰²

Francis' dramatic presentation of Gospel truths poses for us who view this behaviour from afar with a problem of understanding how measured he might have been and how suitable is his communication for our own time. There is no question that he had a monumental impact on people in his day, largely due to his keen abilities in communication, but his use of dramatic gestures to create a desired effect in particular must be evaluated in light of the price he paid for that effect:

Francis of Assisi was an effective teacher who intentionally illustrated the life of virtue in his own way of living. He was a teacher in the sense that the Hebrew prophets, Socrates or Gandhi were teachers. He was a performance artist for whom drama functioned pedagogically. His life was not meant to be an example to his followers; sometimes it was a dramatic lesson, meant to be watched, not imitated. All drama is inherently a distortion of reality because it focuses the attention on one aspect of reality. Francis' dramatized life distorts the importance of poverty, but this

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 17.

³⁰¹ David Jeffrey, "St. Francis and Medieval Theatre" in *Franciscan Studies* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1983), 322.

³⁰² Ibid., 325.

is a distortion from which we may be able to learn if we are able to imaginatively identify with Francis. For Francis, asceticism was a form of obedience, and obedience a mode of knowledge.³⁰³

(iv) Writing

The early rule, which we explored in the previous unit, chronicled not only the systematic development of early Franciscans but also “the development of the movement’s linguistic culture.”³⁰⁴ As well, *The Admonitions* presented a lexicon that is key to the proper understanding of Francis’ intended message. He adopted words that had particular resonance for his culture, particularly relating to evangelical living (*operibus praedicens*), working (*opera Domini*) and good things (*bona*).³⁰⁵ To understand the mind of Francis, we must become deeply steeped into the language he used and the purpose for which he communicated:

Franciscan culture is the meaning intrinsic to Franciscan practices. It did not begin with the scriptural passages quoted in Chapter One of the *Early Rule*; it began with their practical interpretation. (We have no Gospel. We only have interpretations of the Gospel)...Francis wanted his brothers to involve themselves in what they all had said and done up to that moment, well reported in the *Early Rule*. Such involvement was an integral part of Franciscan life. And Francis gave his brothers a brace of admonitions (XX and XXI) to help them do it.³⁰⁶

But it is *The Testament* that most concerns us now as we conclude our study of Francis’ communication and the long journey that led to it. In fact, at least two documents can be generally called testaments, one being chapter 22 of his *Early Rule*, as previously indicated, and the message that Francis appears to have dictated near the end of his life. Before we begin an appreciation of it as authentic and effective

³⁰³ Laura Smit, *The Aesthetic Pedagogy of Francis of Assisi* (online www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Medi/MediSmit)

³⁰⁴ David Flood, “Why Francis Talked the Way He Did” in *The Cord* 2001, 5 (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute). Transcript from the author.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

communication, we must bear in mind Flood's caution that "we do not know how the text reached its final shape, nor do we know how it began circulating among the brothers. It belonged to the nature of the text as his parting words that Francis exercised no control over its final shape and publication."³⁰⁷

Francis seems to have intended *The Testament* to be read in tandem with the rule: "His words exemplify the brothers' relationship to the rule as we find it in Chapter Twenty-Four of the Early Rule."³⁰⁸ But, although this latter testament was clearly rooted in memories of the order's origins and the ideas expressed in the *Early Rule*, "from the first lines of the Testament on, Francis has in mind the text of 1223. By recalling history and administering a few stern corrections, he integrates a text of compromise (a canonical *regula*) into Franciscan life."³⁰⁹ Francis must have felt the dangers of division, as already some brothers were inclined toward the original charism and others toward later developments, a danger he was powerless to prevent as discussions about the rule reached an impasse at the general chapter of 1230, only four years after his death, which Pope Gregory IX tried to lift with a collection of glosses. In fact, Francis had tried to impose unity by giving legal force to *The Testament*, which was crafted as a worthy and masterful attempt to bridge differences, but he lacked the canonical authority to do so.

In *Quo elongati*, Pope Gregory first declared that he knew perfectly what Francis had in mind in wording (in legislating) the rule as he did; and then he brought into operation the culture and the language capable of clearing up the obscurities brought to his attention (more precisely, he said that the brothers had asked him for help because he knew Francis' intentions.) He treated the Testament as legally inadmissible and glossed the

³⁰⁷ David Flood, *Regulam Melius Observare* (unpublished essay).

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

reference to the Gospel into a legally manageable form. With that done, he addressed the other questions, beginning with money, handling everything in the terms of his canonical and ecclesial culture.³¹⁰

My purpose in citing this here is not to bring into question the suitability of these glosses but to underscore the fact that *The Testament* is an important communication precisely because it disturbed those who had issues with Francis' understanding and communication of Gospel meaning and value. The appeal for such glosses, I submit, had more to do with the clarity than the ambiguity of his ultimate communication. Pope Gregory's *Quo elongati* was not to be the final word on our understanding of Francis' communication. While Brother Alias dominated the order as minister general during the 1230s and discouraged discussion of the rule, contrary to Francis' explicit wishes, open debate resumed during the 1240s and has continued arguably to our own day.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

PART IV: HOW WE APPROPRIATE FRANCIS' RELIGIOUS INSIGHTS

(a) Conclusions

Despite my earnest attempt to apply Lonergan's method rigorously, my research remains partial, my interpretation is still somewhat biased and my judgments about the meaning of events in the life of Francis and the development of his spirituality and the decisions he took to resolve mental and moral conflicts is surely somewhat flawed. Yet, it is clear to me already that I am in a much stronger position to communicate the essence of his spirituality now that I have undertaken this study. It is equally clear to me that anyone wishing to communicate the spiritual insights of this 13th century Italian penitent must go through stages identical or similar to those proposed by Lonergan to avoid misleading biases and unhelpful superficialities; to reveal the richness of who he was and what he did; and to do so in a manner that will have a positive impact on our culture and the development of spiritual theology.

The purpose of this unit is to draw a few conclusions about the communication of Franciscan spirituality, both in Francis' time and in our own.

1. Though this is indeed an extreme case of stating the obvious, I think it is important to begin with the observation that Francis was a sincere, intelligent and successful communicator. The evidence we have for this is quite simply the durability of its form and content, and the constantly renewed and re-invigorated interest it has elicited for the past 800 years.
2. Without distracting from the previous point, I think it is equally obvious that there is an urgent need to clarify, redirect or amplify - perhaps a combination of all three - the signal that we have received in order that it be made fully relevant and useful for our

times. Mindless imitation of his life would be unwise, unsatisfying and unhelpful to others. Consequently, there is a need to demythologize it, not to lay it bare and render it barren, but in order to re-mythologize it in exciting and contemporary ways so that its vital truths may echo across our culture and continue to convey meaning and value well into the future.

3. The essence of his legacy is still fertile ground for the development of spiritual theology that bears fruit needed to nourish people of the 21st century. It also serves as a solid and splendid foundation upon which we can ground reasonable decisions about how our own lives can be evidence of Gospel values transcending the limits of time and space to save us from devastating effects of these barriers to conversion.
4. It would seem to be appropriate to apply to the communication of Franciscan spirituality the best practices of secular communications, provided these were consistent with the charism of the *poverello*, particularly in his openness to what is from God, gift or desire, even as these are oftentimes unplanned and unexpected. Today, we have a broader array of media available to us as well as a deeper understanding than Francis had of how even traditional communication operates. In 30 years of journalism, corporate communications and the study of communication theory, I have become aware of numerous principles and practices that enable people to achieve increased levels of authenticity and efficacy in reaching disparate audiences with key and vital messages. I have no doubt that the learning I have achieved in the secular arena can now be harnessed at the service of a particularly Franciscan understanding of spirituality for the benefit of those for whom it would have resonance. It would be appropriate, therefore, if not imperative, to apply to

Franciscan communication aimed at the highly secularized citizens of this new millennium Lonergan's insights in communication, these being very consistent with those of Francis, as I have suggested in previous units. The outcome promises, I believe, to support the church's hopes for a new era of evangelization.

5. Perhaps the most compelling aspects of Francis' religious reality, one that echoes in our own, is the balance he struck between being authentically faithful to the meaning of the Gospel, as he understood it, and fidelity to the official teachings of the church, as witnessed by his wholesale inclusion of council decrees and canons in his own writings. I am reminded of the parallels that exist between this simple and sincere post-conciliar person who prayed and preached in the shadows of both heretical and church-led reform movements and us, who dwell, worship and act in the shadow of individualism, pluralism and various church reforms.
6. Returning to Lonergan as the lens through which we have formed a fuller appreciation of how Francis communicated his spirituality, we can also get a glimpse of how we can more effectively communicate the tradition of Franciscan spirituality available to us today by drawing certain opportunities for further development. Three areas are particularly promising: writing, preaching and the use of symbols.
7. Lonergan rested much of his presentation of communication on the principle of intersubjectivity, which is a very elemental reality about how human beings related to one another: "Subjects are mutually and reciprocally aware."³¹¹ Writing must be regarded as intersubjectivity because "the image of writing as intersubjectivity clearly suggests that the writer needs to appropriate commonly known ideas from within the

³¹¹ Sauer *Commentary*, 84.

various textual communities...in order to be able to write effectively.”³¹² Farrell suggested that “advanced writing is intersubjectivity, because writers draw on meanings and values they have received from others.”³¹³ The conclusion for us is that good writing on any subject, including the communication of spirituality, requires that the writer apply to rigorously selected source material Lonergan’s due diligence tests of good research, interpretation, judgement and decision with attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility: “According to Lonergan, meanings and values ‘are authentic in the measure that cumulatively they are the result of transcendental precepts.’”³¹⁴

8. To be effective, preaching about spiritual matters must be regarded as a form, albeit distinct, of theological communication and not just a disincarnated inventory of doctrinal statements: “It is an articulation not only of the meaning to be conveyed, but of the value of that meaning for changing both the preacher and those who might hear the preaching.”³¹⁵

When a person religiously in love engages in the distinct form of communication known as preaching, we have an example of an oral evaluative hermeneutic in action. A text is being interpreted not only as to its meaning, but also to its value to transform human life....As a form of theological communication, preaching can bring a good word that not only calls for compassion but for justice. In hope, the religions and cultures of our world wait.³¹⁶

9. Finally, to be efficacious, our plan to communicate must make judicious use of symbols to faithfully convey rather than distort meaning. Too often traditional symbols are misrepresented, misused or misunderstood, particularly when they have

³¹² Thomas Farrell, “Writing, the Writer, and Lonergan: Authenticity and Intersubjectivity” in *Common Ground*, 46.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 25

³¹⁴ *Ibid.* 25.

³¹⁵ Carla Streeer, “Preaching as a Form of Theological Communications: An Instance of Lonergan’s Evaluative Hermeneutics” in *Common Ground*, 65.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

long-since lost their capacity to bear meaning in cultural circumstances remote from those in which they were first conceived. Clearly, this problem is ubiquitous, insidious and intractable simply because “the communication of the Christian vision resides most centrally in its symbols as expressed in its sacred texts. Yet these symbols are not transparent. They require both the critical examination of their meaning in the first century and the critical understanding of them in the 20th century.”³¹⁷

Catholic theology in particular has begun a thorough examination of itself in relation to culture: past, present, and especially the future. At the same time, theology has recognized that it cannot concern itself exclusively with ecclesial problems, especially those embedded in cultural contexts of the limiting past, at the expense of the rest of the world. Theology has a wider, inclusive reasonability for cultural problems as a new challenge.³¹⁸

Somehow, I feel that Francis would have understood this where he faced with the context in which we find ourselves today!

The aim of this study has been to search in the writings of Francis of Assisi and those of biographers and historians for the best indicators of how Franciscan spirituality was communicated in the first years of the movement. This investigation employed Lonergan’s transcendental method to interpret evidence found in early documents and contemporary academic literature in order to make reasonable judgments about how we are to receive this rich tradition in a manner that allows us to communicate Franciscan spirituality authentically in our own culture. Our point of departure must, of course, be with Jesus, just as it was for Francis: “For Jesus, the disposition of genuine repentance was only possible when one took on the attitude of a child (Mt 18:3) and turned away

³¹⁷ J.J.Mueller, “The Role of Theological Symbols in Mediating Cultural Change” in *Common Ground*, 294.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 311.

from the dispositions of self-righteousness and presumption (Lk 18:10-14). The repentance that Jesus preached was good news to be received with joy.”³¹⁹ If continuous conversion, therefore, was at the heart of the spiritual life of Saint Francis, it must be so for anyone wishing to communicate his spirituality in our own culture. Indeed, conversion, as understood in the method of Lonergan, is by definition something to which we must remain disposed at all times, and it must be an authentic expression of decisions to change and progress, a transformation which begins with a religious experience, to which we are attentive, understood by being intelligent, judged by being reasonable, and acted upon by being responsible.

There are numerous parallels between the age in which Francis operated and our own. Not the least of these is the need to make a clear and deliberate choice between the secular forces of hedonism or humanism and the spiritual need to live according to tenets of the faith we profess.³²⁰ In our time as well as that in which Francis consciously sought to reconcile paradoxes and to find meaning in the midst of contradictory signs, we are called to respond to God’s love through penance: “Francis and Clare experienced different events in their lives which led them into this practice, but they agreed upon the core values of penance: following Jesus in humility, poverty, simplicity, and community.”³²¹ Indeed, all Christians are called to make sober judgements and coherent decisions about the meaning of the Gospel, and to take responsible and loving action that

³¹⁹ James J. Walter, “Repentance” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, Dermot A. Lane (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987), 875.

³²⁰ Tad Dunne presents a compelling argument for spiritual integration in a discussion of what he terms “the split soul”, which is essentially the dialectic/foundations development of trying to actualize religious values while responding to ubiquitous pressures exerted by the secular society that surrounds us. He posits that this presents a cognitive dilemma that is resolved by default in favour of “the world” unless a deliberate effort is made to give precedence to religious values. – Dunne *Spirituality*, 3-6.

³²¹ Warner *Franciscans*, 4-16.

is suited to our own particular circumstances. We all are called to consciousness in faith, to conversion in hope, and to self-transcendence in Love.

(b) Epilogue: “Let us begin...”³²²

Evidently, Francis’ communication of his spirituality has been a resounding success. Eight hundred years after he walked the dusty roads of Italy and neighboring countries, roughly clad and lacking in all things save for the virtues of faith, hope, love, and the qualities of peace, joy and compassion, we still speak of this fun-loving romantic who would become a self-effacing man of God, thrust onto the world stage by a series of disturbing insights and the conflicted circumstances that surrounded them. His charism has been celebrated and condemned. He himself has been imitated and ridiculed. Still, his communication of meaning endures.

We can learn something about what is lasting about his legacy by examining what people say and write about it today. Warner recalled our traditional association of Francis with peacemaking, preaching by example, the brotherhood of creation and the balance between prayer and action. Short pointed to the continuing relevance of these insights: the “down-to-earthness” of the experience of God; the real meaning of evangelical poverty; the spirituality of creation; and the spirituality of reconciliation. And Brunette posited that Francis’ “state of spiritual itinerancy”³²³ serves as a powerful inspiration or compass if not an actual road map for our own life’s journey of conversion.

Anyone undertaking the task of communicating these spiritual insights must first grapple with two questions. The first is whether or not it is important to do so. It is my

³²² Refers to often-quoted invocation of Francis near the end of his life, “Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord, for up to now we have made little or no progress.” – Celano, “First Life”, *Ominibus*, 318.

³²³ Pierre Brunette, *Francis of Assisi and His Conversions*, tr. Paul Lachance and Kathryn Krug (Quincy, Ill.: Franciscan Press, 1997), 92.

conviction that it is. In part, this conviction is based upon the following appreciation of the similarities that exist between his age and our own, notwithstanding the vast differences in our respective social, political and ecclesial environments. The second is this: Was Francis' way of looking at things compatible with our own?

In order to answer the first question, it is helpful to recall these similarities.

	Francis' Times	Our Times
Cry for peace	War with neighboring cities War between church & state War between Islam & Christianity	Strife between rich & poor countries Conflict between church & state Tension between Islam & Christianity
Relationship to creation	Disregard for welfare of vassals Unawareness of ecology People & nature were mere resources	Disregard for welfare of employees Neglect & abuse of ecosystems Devaluation of human & natural capital
Quest for simplicity	Struggle to survive Constant fear of disease & violence People locked into social structures	Rampant & growing stress at work Growing fear of brutal economic forces Social alienation of individuals
Church reform	Ubiquitous heretical groups Monumental impact of Lateran IV Concern about control of magisterium	Growing concerns about orthodoxy Monumental impact of Vatican II Concern about control of magisterium

(i) Relationship with Creation

When Pope John Paul II declared Francis of Assisi to be the patron saint of ecology, I doubt that anyone was surprised. His *Canticle of Creation* alone would have earned him that accolade. On the surface, it appears rustic and naive, but “when it is seen in terms of Francis’ other works and the motivation behind its composition, the poem in fact acquires indisputable claim to originality and complexity.”³²⁴

Creatures, each having autonomous worth and beauty, are yet brothers and sisters to each other, aiding each other, gladly performing their divinely allotted

³²⁴ Sorrell *Francis*, 136f.

functions....By giving creatures their due praise, people overcome their customary callous ingratitude to creatures and to God – another step toward the reconciliation and redemption of humanity envisioned by the end of the poem.³²⁵

Francis tied all things together into a single integrated worldview, which encompassed God, humankind and all things great and small created by God's own hand. He understood the intended connectedness, so it would not be surprising to find a prominent liberation theologian eight centuries later to write a book linking the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

The world and its creatures are within the human being in the form of the archetypes, symbols, and images that inhabit our interiority and with which we must dialog and that we must integrate. If violence persists in the relationships of human beings with nature, it is because aggressive impulses emerge from within human beings. These impulses indicate the lack of an inner ecology and a failure to integrate the three main directions of ecology as formulated by F. Guattari: environmental ecology, social ecology, and mental ecology.³²⁶

(ii) Cry for Peace

Scarcely anyone feels immune from conflict. As anxiety grows about the nature and frequency of distrust, disputes, aggressive behavior and armed struggles intensifies, people dream of peace. Sadly, some have already lost the ability to even dream of such a possibility, so the need for peacemakers is as manifest today as it was in Francis' time: people who bring reconciliation and healing to individuals, families, nations and the world. Peace was for him a subject of capital importance.³²⁷ His rule bade brothers to say upon entering someone's home, "Peace be to this house" and on his deathbed he said to

³²⁵ Ibid., 137.

³²⁶ Boff *Poor*, 216.

³²⁷ No account of Francis as peacemaker is complete without recalling that Francis severely disrupted the cycle of violence in his immediate surroundings by imposing on Secular Franciscan, known as Tertiaries, the following proscription: "The brothers may not receive arms to be wielded against any person, not bear them on the person. Let all refrain from taking solemn oaths, except in those instances decreed by the Pope,; namely where peace, the Fait, or a juridical oath is at stake." Because the pope had declared that Tertiaries were exempt from the oath of fealty and under the protection of the bishop, many people joined the Third Order. - Hilarin Felder, *The Ideals of St. Francis of Assisi* (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: Benziger Brothers, 1925), 292f.

them, “Go dearest brothers, two by two into all the country, and preach to men peace and penance unto the remission of their sins.”³²⁸ His method was predicated on a profound understanding of brotherhood and sisterhood, which implies true love of all created things, and respect for the inherent dignity of all of God’s children. It implied a willingness to see all things as gift from a benevolent and providential God and to let go of the fear that causes us to hoard as though these possession had the power to protect us from the real dangers in life. And, it implied the dismantling of barriers that block out the light more than they do the enemy.

Today, the charism of peacemaker is understood to take on three important forms. The first is to facilitate genuine dialogue. History would suggest that this is more difficult than it seems. Perhaps Francis would have observed that this is so because to engage in meaningful dialogue, one must pre-suppose that the dialogue partner is a brother or sister, equal in the eyes of God, with the capacity to be an instrument of his will and the capability of acting with divine grace. This is why Francis’ notion of brotherhood is so fundamental to the building up of a world order crowned by peace: the kingdom of God on earth. The second modern strategy for peace is the promotion of justice. Francis understood that to achieve peace, certain conditions had to be met. While the so-called *Prayer of Saint Francis* was not actually written by the *poverello*, it is generally regarded as being aptly steeped in his spirituality: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon....For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned...”³²⁹ Reflecting on the tradition surrounding that prayer, Boff recalled a principle that “comes from Saint Augustine:

³²⁸ Ibid., 284.

³²⁹ Leonardo Boff, *The Prayer of Saint Francis: A Message of Peace for the World Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), vii.

peace is the work of justice....(P)eace cannot be sought by itself without first achieving justice....Justice is giving to each one his or her due.”³³⁰

Today social justice represents one of the most serious challenges to the conscience of the world. The abyss between those who are within the world “order” and those who are excluded is widening day by day. The use of leading-edge technologies has made it possible to accumulate wealth in a way that is fantastic but perverse because it is unjustly distributed. Twenty percent of humankind controls eighty percent of all means of life. That fact creates a dangerous imbalance in the movement of history....(W)e are living in times of grave disequilibrium, of real war declared against the Earth, against ecosystems which are plundered, against people who are shunted aside because world capital is no longer interested in exploring them, against whole classes of workers who are made expendable and excluded; war against two-third of humankind who do not have the basic goods they need to live in peace.³³¹

Finally, the third enabler of peace is social and economic development, a role that Francis actively assumed, particularly privileging the poor.

On one hand, Francis can be offered as the exemplar of all three strategies.³³² He showed by example what it means to enter into meaningful dialogue with a Moslem sultan; he advocated on behalf of those who were exploited and oppressed; and he worked alongside the poor in order that their situation might be improved, if only modestly. Clearly tradition has caused us to receive Francis not only as a lover of peace but also as a maker of peace. Cook recalled that various episodes in his life point to that fact: Francis and Masseo stressing that friars must see the importance of peace while on the road to Siena in the *Fioretti*; driving out demons in Arezzo in accounts by Celano and Bonaventure as well as the Legend of Perugia; restoring peace in Bologna as in the writings of Thomas, archdeacon of Spoleto; and, at the end of his life, reconciling the

³³⁰ Ibid., 42.

³³¹ Ibid., 43f.

³³² The identification of Francis with peace in the modern church has virtually reached the stature of synonym. Pius XI referred to the *poverello*'s reputation in *Rite Expiatis*; Benedict XV also did so in *Sacra Propediem*; John Paul II began his papacy by calling the world day of prayer for peace in Assisi in 1986; and Mother Teresa acknowledged the saint in her 1979 Nobel Peace Prize Lecture. – Kopaczynski *Peace*, 261f.

podesta and the bishop in Assisi itself, according to the Legend of Perugia³³³: “Francis is not only a lover of peace – he was a maker of peace. He did not concern himself only with preaching the peace which should penetrate the hearts of all men; he set out to create an end to war without which his goal of bringing salvation would have been largely unachieved.”³³⁴ On the other hand, we must be cautious in our portrayal of Francis as an ideal peacemaker, particularly as we look for lessons relevant to our own circumstances. Chinnici has presented a persuasive argument to suggest that this misrepresents historic facts about what Francis did and the spirit in which he did things: “Inasmuch as we make of Francis an ideal and the peace he incarnated an ideal peace, we rob him of his history and ourselves of our freedom to act.”³³⁵ Rather, Francis offered peace as bread “to a war-torn, hungry world.”³³⁶

Martyrdom is a central motif in early Franciscan writing: Some are martyred in Morocco; some, like Giles, embrace what he calls the ‘martyrdom of contemplation’; some, like Francis and Bonaventure, are martyred in community; some like Clare receive the martyrdom of illness and struggle within the Church; others, by creative word in the world. All are martyred in the cause of peace, searching dominantly for the presence of Christ and a way to make that presence effective.³³⁷

(iii) Quest for Simplicity

Despite growing public interest in matters of religion and spirituality, a phenomenon often heralded under the banner of post-modern values, it must be recognized that we live in a very materialistic world. The acquisitive and clinging tendency that seems to fuel an insatiable appetite for power and possessions creates remarkable anxiety in our lives and provokes us to assume roles and adopt behaviors that sink us into ever-increasing depths

³³³ William Cook, “Beatus Pacificus: Francis of Assisi as Peacemaker” in *The Cord* 33 (1983), 132-135.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

³³⁵ Chinnici *Peace*, 4.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6f.

of stress. This was also true in Francis' day, albeit manifest in different forms. His spirituality, however, provided relief from the anguish of unnatural ambitions: evangelical poverty was the antidote that he prescribed. While the challenge that this spirituality poses is daunting, for which reason we are often inclined to dismiss it, it is as relevant to us today as it was to him in his day. He would have been no more eager to part with property than we would be. But it was the price that he was prepared to pay for the freedom to follow Christ rather than the ways of the world.

Following this example, living *sine proprio*, without anything of one's own, today implies the refusal to arrogate to one's self what belongs to all, because all belongs to the Creator. Everything is gift; nothing is 'property.' The gospel mandate to 'sell all and give to the poor', which Francis and Clare followed, far from being meaningless, is as urgent in our own day as it was in theirs."³³⁸

But evangelical poverty was for the *poverello* and must be for us today understood to be the means and not the end of a courageous spiritual journey focused on union with Jesus Crucified: "Poverty is never lived for its own sake, but always for the...life of the Spirit, that it brings to the world....The viable reforms always made specific expressions of poverty secondary to renewal of gospel service to the poor and union with Jesus in contemplative prayer."³³⁹ It is for this reason that we are more inclined to shift our attention from evangelical poverty, which is a value too easily misunderstood and misrepresented, to humility and simplicity.

(iv) Church reform

We live, as Francis did, in an age when divergent opinions regarding the way in which we are called to witness to gospel values in our daily lives are confronted to one another as soldiers pitted against one another on a battlefield. It seems that at such a time, his

³³⁸ *Poverty and Joy*, 129.

³³⁹ Bonaventure Stefun, "The Poverello's Legacy" in *Review for Religious* May June 2001, 286ff.

response to this tendency is becoming increasingly worthy of our attention. Francis saw in his day those who would imitate Jesus concretely as well as those who would adapt his ways, perhaps more symbolically. Francis saw those who chose a direct route to God as well as those who would place more emphasis on structures and intermediaries as the road to salvation. He witnessed trends that encouraged heterogeneity and others than stressed the need for orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

These trends are still with us today and the divisions between people and communities continue to widen. Perhaps it is no wonder that we are so attracted to a gentle figure that manifestly sought the presence of the Holy Spirit in otherness; who held deep-seated convictions but, in a genuine sense of spiritual poverty, sought to humbly apply them to his own life rather than bitterly reproach those with whom he would not agree. He truly regarded himself as the greatest sinner of all, yet a brother to all. This attitude saved him from spiritual pride and others from the toxic words and behavior that self-righteousness inevitably spews.

The second question facing us before deciding on a course of action to communicate Francis' spiritual insights to our own culture in the manner that Lonergan would appreciate is this one: Was Francis' way of looking at things compatible with our own? Certainly he was not a critical realist in the fullest sense of that expression – nor could he have been. But relative to the context in which we must situate him, it may be said that he was naturally disposed to such an outlook. His struggle with religious questions was chiefly caused by his determination to be authentic. Can we today authentically appropriate and effectively communicate his spirituality without such an attitude? I suggest that we cannot. It would be folly to simplistically imitate someone from so

foreign a culture. Yet it would be equally foolish to disregard his insights and the stunning parallels that exist between his socio-political and ecclesial environment and our own. It would be, I think, regrettable to set aside a tradition that carries with it a unique capacity to help us understand the desire that dwells within each of us, namely to find ultimate meaning and to fall in love.

The challenge is to communicate these insights with language that resonates for people today, particularly those who are unfamiliar with the expressions and even the categories of traditional religious discourse and the rituals of its celebration and worship. It is also to use the stories of Francis' life in new ways to engender passion in faith and compassion in love. It is finally to leverage genuine conversion, as Lonergan understood the term, in the hearts, minds and souls of God's people. These challenges call us to be creative in the way we present Francis, always mindful of the adaptations required, and always recalling that Francis communicated by his life more than by his words ... as Jesus had done. While Francis' form of theology can be described as "archaic"³⁴⁰, his spirituality is timeless because it continues to "elicit our wonder and to inspire our feeble attempts to follow (him) in his dedication to the 'vita evangelii Jesu Christi.'"³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ "Francis' form of theology is(...), as Thaddee Matura has put it, "archaic," in the sense that it harkens back to the richest forms of early Christian theology, such as we find in the Apostolic Fathers, before the differentiation of individual doctrines has had a chance to develop. This, in Francis' writings the many aspects of Christian belief appear together in a rich stew that can be difficult to digest for those who are more used to taking one part of the meal after another, that is, absorbing the distinctions and articulations of themes and doctrines found in most later theology. Hans Urs von Balthasar has shown how the differentiation of spirituality and theology, already at work in the late patristic period. Because a separation in the later Middle Ages – a sundering that has had unfortunate consequences down to the present. Francis archaizing theology is a good antidote to any incipient attempt to separate doctrinal insight and spiritual practice." – Bernard McGinn, "Reflections on St. Francis at the New Millennium" in *Franciscan Studies* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2000), 12f.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

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Appendix I: Francis of Assisi's Life and Times

Environment affecting his understanding of Gospel values			
Life of Francis	Period	Ecclesial Change	Socio-Political Change
	1000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Penitential movement already established but evolving</i> ➤ <i>Church was being criticized for wealth and corruption of clergy, creating a vacuum that emerging popular movements would try to fill</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Rivalry for control between church and state ongoing</i>
	1010		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Pope regained control of papal estates</i>
	1020		
	1030		
	1040		
	1050	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Roman Synod coined <i>vita apostolica</i> to describe common life.</i> 	War between Francis future birth city of Assisi & neighboring Perugia ('54)
	1060		
	1070	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Monastic life had been for centuries the dominant form of religious life</i> <p>Gregory VII elected Pope ('73), with monastic reform reaching its peak under his direction. Council of Rome ('79)</p>	
	1080	Jerusalem captured by Saladin ('87)	Pope opposed Emperor & died in exile ('85)
	1090	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Emergence of <i>Vita evangelica</i>; itinerant preachers began to appear.</i> <p>First crusade proclaimed ('95) Jerusalem captured ('99)</p>	<p>First appearance of the term <i>mercantum</i> ('93)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Commercial class, to which Francis father would belong, was already creating a new force for political and religious freedom</i>
	1100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Spirituality began to be more personal (separated from theology, liturgy and social praxis; emphasized subjective experience)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>New century more urban, and marked by increased trade and shift to cash economy from feudal system</i> ➤ <i>Italy began to emerge as a strategic location linking Europe and Asia</i>
	1110	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Cathar movement developed</i> 	
	1120		
	1130		
	1140	<p>Second crusade proclaimed ('45)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Returning soldiers</i> 	

		<p><i>introduced leprosy into European cities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>"Unauthorized" preachers caused concern about doctrinal orthodoxy</i> 	
	1150		<p>Champagne (Fr) Fair became most important market ('50)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Francis' father would later travel to France to source exotic fabrics for sale in Assisi and would become enamored with French culture, which – among other things – would give him the name Francesco and his love of French troubadour music</i> ➤ <i>Pope and Emperor held conflicting claims to the Duchy of Spoleto</i> ➤ <i>Tensions mounted between Assisi (imperial influence) and Perugia (papal influence)</i>
	1160		
	1170	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Beginnings of the Humiliati and the Waldensians</i> 	Imperial Occupation of <i>La Rocca</i> ('74-'98)
Birth in Assisi ('81or'82)	1180	Third crusade proclaimed ('89)	<p>Emperor Barbarossa reconciled with Pope Clement III ('89)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Several leprosy hospitals built around Assisi by the end of the 12th Century</i>
	1190	Innocent III elected Pope ('98)	<p>Emperor Henry IV died</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Resulting confusion allowed emergence of independent cities</i> ➤ <i>New pope reclaimed land holdings</i> <p>Destruction of <i>Rocca Maggiore</i> ('98)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Imperial rule ended; Assisi declared independence from both Empire & Papacy</i> ➤ <i>Rivalry broke out between maiores (landed nobility & ecclesial authority) & minores (free citizens, incl. artisans, traders, merchants & bankers)</i> <p>Consulate established by <i>minores</i> ('98-1212)</p> <p>Pope granted Assisi "apostolic protection" ('98)</p>

			<p>➤ <i>Significant growth in population of most cities, including Assisi</i></p> <p>Walls of Assisi expanded ('99)</p>
<p>Imprisonment ('02/3)</p> <p>Illness ('03/4)</p> <p>➤ <i>Joined crusade but turned back in obedience to "a dream"</i></p> <p>Encounters with lepers and San Damiano ('05)</p> <p>➤ <i>Conversion began</i></p> <p>➤ <i>Chose "evangelical life" (itinerancy) over prevailing "apostolic life" (monasticism).</i></p> <p>Separated from his father ('06)</p> <p>First brothers joined ('08)</p> <p><i>Earlier Rule ('09-'21)</i></p>	1200	<p>Fourth crusade proclaimed ('02)</p> <p>Oral approval of primitive Franciscan rule ('09)</p>	<p>War with Perugia began ('00)</p> <p>Battle of Collestrada (Nov. '02)</p> <p>Commune of Assisi guaranteed <i>mercatores</i> political equality with <i>milites</i> (nobility) in Pact of '03</p>
<p>Clare's profession ('12)</p> <p><i>Letter to the Faithful</i> (1st version '13-'21)</p> <p>Encounter with Sultan ('18/'19)</p> <p><i>Letter to the Clergy & Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples</i> ('19)</p> <p><i>Letter to the Faithful</i> (2nd version '19-'21)</p>	1210	<p>Fourth Lateran Council ('15)</p> <p>➤ <i>Most important ecclesial assembly of the Middle Ages gave rise to edicts below that would influence Francis' doctrinal outlook and writings</i></p> <p>Honorius III elected Pope ('16)</p> <p>Pope granted Clare historic Privilege of Poverty ('16)</p> <p>Fifth crusade proclaimed ('17)</p> <p><i>Cum dilecti filii</i> ('19)</p> <p>➤ <i>Confirmed Friars Minor as Catholic and clarified that they have been sent to preach in the world</i></p> <p><i>Sane cum olim</i> ('19)</p> <p>➤ <i>Called attention to canons 17 (Eucharist and Liturgy of Hours), 19 (care of liturgical vessels and vestments) and 20 (reservation of eucharistic bread, the scriptures and holy oils).</i></p>	<p>Assisi Charter adopted ('10)</p> <p>➤ <i>Pact championed the liberation of serfs</i></p> <p>Podestate established ('12-'15)</p>
<p><i>Letter to the Entire Order</i> ('20-26)</p> <p><i>Regula non bullata</i> ('21)</p>	1220	<p><i>Pro dilectis filiis</i> ('20)</p> <p>➤ <i>Instructed bishops to admit Friars Minor as true believers.</i></p>	

<p><i>Regula bullata</i> ('23) Christmas at Greccio ('23) Received Stigmata ('24) <i>Canticle</i> ('25) <i>The Testament</i> ('26) Death at Portiuncula ('26) Canonization ('28) Celano <i>First Life</i> ('28/29).</p>		<p><i>Cum secundum consilium</i> ('20) ➤ <i>Prescribed rules for novitiate and profession in the Order of Friars Minor.</i> <i>Manichean Treatise</i>, an Albigensian work, appeared promoting dualism ('20) Pope approves Franciscan Rule ('23) <i>Fratrum Minorum</i> ('23) ➤ <i>Instructed the church to respect excommunications of friars by their superiors.</i></p>	
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