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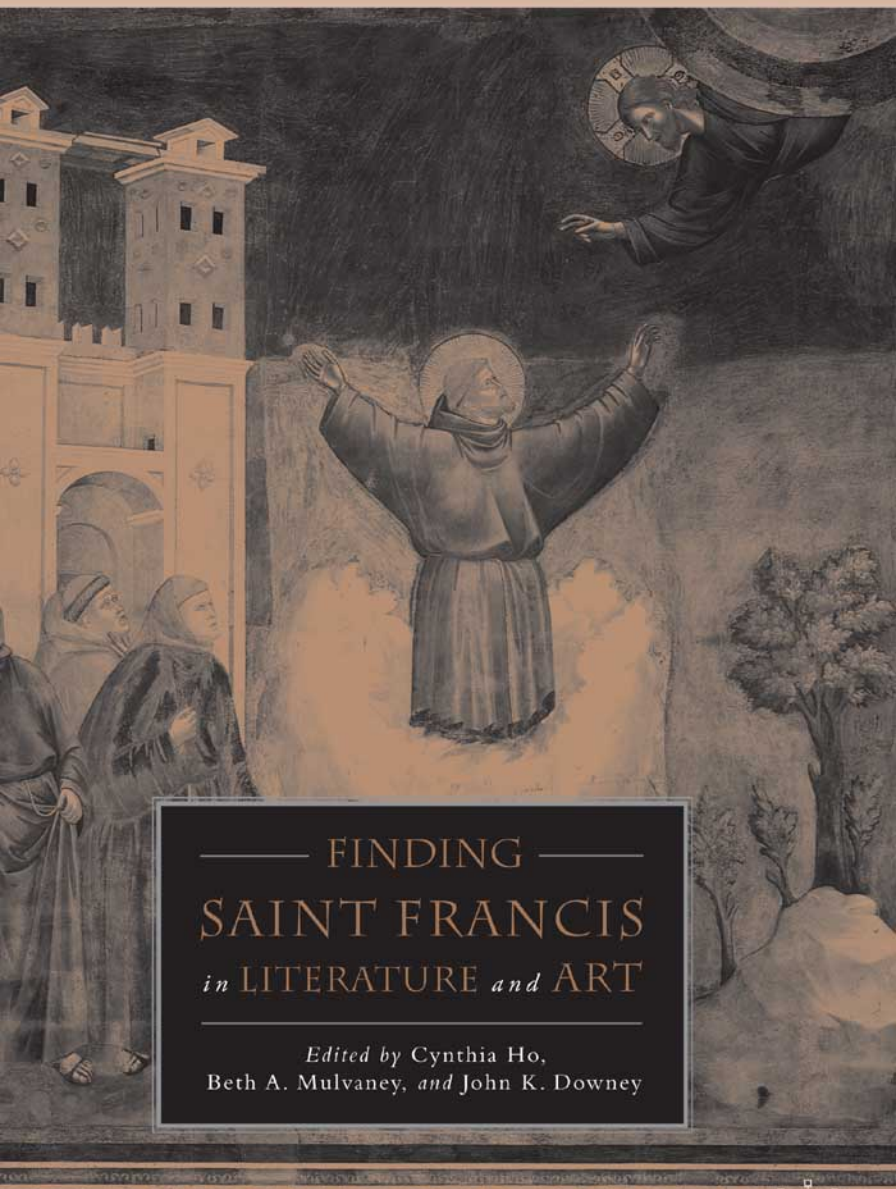

FINDING SAINT FRANCIS *in* LITERATURE *and* ART

Edited by Cynthia Ho, Beth A. Mulvaney, *and* John K. Downey

THE NEW MIDDLE AGES

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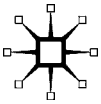

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EDITORS' PREFACE

One of the most powerful and charismatic figures to emerge during the late Middle Ages was St. Francis of Assisi, a man who transcends particular religious beliefs and practices, and continues to stir imaginations despite more than seven intervening centuries. Who was this man? Why does Francis of Assisi capture our attention? This thirteenth-century Italian wanderer wanted nothing more than to be an insignificant poor man, *Il Poverello,* and yet he has worked his way into the imagination of Western culture. In times of personal and economic confusion, he rejected his own social and economic privilege; in times of conflict and war, he called for reconciliation and the transformation of relationships; in times of dishonesty and indulgence, he called for humanity and simplicity. The story of Francesco di Bernadone continues to inspire a variety of books, films, paintings, poetry, and plays—not to mention a stream of religious and secular pilgrims. But how do they know him?

We find Francis through various forms of story and memory. It is our intent here to offer help in opening up these sources. These essays provide a toolbox of sorts. The authors demonstrate how the tools of various intellectual disciplines can be used to examine what we now know about the story of St. Francis in his own era and how we can appropriate that story for our own times. This critical opening-up of the artistic and textual narratives of Francis of Assisi contributes to our cultural memory by reflecting on the continuities and changes in our engagement with *Il Poverello.*

In the following essays we travel with Francis into various contexts. The story of Francis has been continually reclaimed, rediscovered, and reinvented. Introducing the basic story, historian William R. Cook begins by inviting readers to share his scholarly passion for Francis of Assisi; indeed for Cook as for countless others, finding Francis is very much a biographical trajectory. The chapters in Part I focus on some of the earliest sources of our narrative memory, and those in Part II examine the continuity and metamorphosis of the Francis narratives in later generations of art, music, philosophy, and theology.

Almost any memory of Francis of Assisi can be traced to the early texts and stories about him, especially as Bonaventure collected and redacted them. Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* or *Life of Saint Francis* is the seminal text out of

which the memory of Francis emerges. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Bonaventure was largely responsible for the survival and the impact of the story of this man, Francis of Assisi—who was, after all, only one of many wandering reforming holy men in this period. The chapters in Part I honor this influence as they consider how Francis is remembered in medieval texts and painting—especially in the Assisi frescos. Beth A. Mulvaney takes us into the famous *Crib at Greccio* fresco in Assisi. She asks how the new appeal to illusionism found in the Assisi frescoes serves to enhance the devotional experience of a viewer, how this imagery mediates between the physical and the spiritual. Janet Snyder continues this line of inquiry by looking more broadly at how the "devices" used within individual scenes model the Franciscan spiritual experience for a pilgrim. Mahmood Ibrahim looks for the treatment of "the other" in several artistic presentations of Francis preaching to the Sultan. Rodger M. Payne examines the similarity between heremetic traditions in south-central Italy of the eleventh century and the later development of Franciscan ideas and practices. He analyzes two legends about saints and wolves comparing the eleventh-century hermit, St. Amico to St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio. This first part ends with an essay by John V. Apczynski on the role of Bonaventure in our memory of Francis. He highlights how the theological structure imposed by Bonaventure in his retelling of life of Francis of Assisi lays the groundwork for the subsequent readings of his life and works.

But the future of Francis is also the future of retelling and representing his story in other genres and religious climates. The chapters in Part II focus on Francis remembered in new contexts. We begin with Franciscan missionary work in the "New World." Felix Heap and Jesús J. Gonzales examine the art and artifacts found in Mexico and the American Southwest. Cynthia Ho looks to the late sixteenth century's counter-Reformation piety, discussing pilgrimage shrines created in the Piedmont region of Italy. The final four chapters move into the contemporary period. John McClain shows how Olivier Messiaen's opera about Francis communicates the saint's spirituality in an avant-garde musical vocabulary. Janet McCann reviews several recent biographies and discovers vastly different ways of telling the story of Francis. Playwright John Bowers reflects on how drama can represent Francis to a new generation. Francis's special relationship with nature grounds John Hart's call for a new society in which our political, economic, and religious institutions recognize that life on earth is a life in an interrelated and interdependent community. In the final essay, John K. Downey argues that contemporary political theology offers a helpful intellectual idiom for the mystical-political spirituality of Francis.

St. Francis of Assisi has always seemed an inexhaustible focus of popular and scholarly writing because his life and teachings resonate in so many areas—theology, spiritual autobiography, cultural diversity, history, literature, art, and economics. The essays in this book are intended for a range of readers. They are written by scholars in various disciplines with

an eye to providing some sense of how the memory of Francis comes down to us.

Interdisciplinary scholarship requires not only imagination but practical support. The Humanities Program at the University of North Carolina in Ashville provided many of us with the means to meet and present papers at their conference on *St. Francis and the Traditions of Spirituality: Multidisciplinary Approaches*. We also wish to thank Meredith College which graciously provided a grant for the editors to meet in Raleigh. Finally, we are grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for sponsoring a seminar on *Francis of Assisi and the Thirteenth Century*. Most of us first met in Italy that summer of 2003 under the direction of Bill Cook, of SUNY Geneseo. In many ways this book is a continuation of his enthusiasm for scholarship and conversation.

A Note on References

The articles in this collection generally use citations to standard verse numbers in English. This opens the argument to a wider public. Most references—except when authors needed the Latin or another translation for clarity—are to the three volumes of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents. Vol I, The Saint; Vol. II, The Founder; Vol. III, The Prophet,* ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999–2001). These new translations contain all of the texts from the first 150 years of the Franciscan tradition (c. 1250–1355). Since finding Francis is a variation on biographical reclamation, readers may also find it helpful to know the major biographies which underlie claims about Francis. The oldest biography of Francis is *The Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano (1229). Celano followed his first life of Francis with a second life, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* (1247). These lives, sometimes called *The First Life* and *The Second Life*, were taken up and redacted, along with many other stories in Bonaventure of Bagnoregio's *The Major Life of Saint Francis* (1266). Scholars often refer to this influential work with its Latin title *Legenda maior.* References to these texts usually use the universal verse or chapter numbers for Franciscan materials rather than the particular pagination of any one edition; we have chosen to follow that convention.

Without a doubt, the best images of the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi are found in the spectacular volumes documenting the church as a historical monument: *Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi*, 4 vols., *Mirabilia Italiae* 11, ed. Giorgio Bonsanti (Modena, Italy: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, 2002). A more affordable guide has been produced using some of the same (but smaller) images: *La Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi*, ed. Gianfranco Malafarina, trans. Heather Mackay and Mark Roberts (Modena, Italy: Franco Cosimo Panini and Assisi: Casa Editrice Francescana, 2005). An easily found volume with good illustrations is Luciano Bellosi, *Giotto* (Florence, Italy: Scala Books; [New York:] Distributed by Harper & Row, 1981).

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FINDING FRANCIS: AN INVITATION

William R. Cook

More than thirty years ago, I made the decision that I would devote my scholarly career to the study of Francis of Assisi and the Franciscans. After three books and numerous articles about things Franciscan, I constantly tell myself that pretty soon I am going to have something worthwhile to say about Francis! I say that only a bit tongue-in-cheek. Francis is a hard person to figure out. When I read a new biography of Francis, almost a full-time job it sometimes seems, I usually put it down and ponder that while I certainly learned something, the author did not take into account something without which it is impossible to know Francis profoundly. Whether the particular life of Francis I have just read is a comic book or a multi-volume study of some 2,000 pages, I sense something missing, a certain lack of the essence of the man.

Francis never has ceased to startle me. Until very recently, I thought I more or less understood what Francis was doing in Egypt during the Fifth Crusade and what the results were of that sojourn. Then I read J. Hoeberichts' *Francis and Islam* and had to go back almost to square one.[1] Just when to some extent I thought I had developed a new and coherent understanding of this topic, I pick up Michael Cusato's provocative essay, "Of Snakes and Angels: The Mystical Experience Behind the Stigmatization Narrative of 1 Celano" about the document preserved in Assisi containing the blessing of Brother Leo and find myself once again back at the drawing board.[2] When will this end? Never, I realize. In fact, I have even reluctantly concluded that not only will it not end but that I do not want it to end.

Every historian dreams, I think, of having the chance to interview the object of his or her study. While doing my dissertation on a fairly obscure Hussite theologian many years ago, my fondest dream was to get to spend an afternoon with him and ask him some questions to fill the historical record as well as to get a sense of what sort of a fellow he was. I even spent some time in an obscure cloister in Prague's New Town where records suggest he was buried, hoping perhaps to get some sort of understanding of him that I could not wring out of his many treatises on Eucharistic theology; alas, if there was Peter Payne karma there, it escaped me.

I have, of course, read and reread the Franciscan sources. These come primarily in the form of stories. Some authors, most obviously Bonaventure, have selected, arranged, narrated, and interpreted individual stories within a sophisticated conceptual framework. In other cases, we have little more than collections of what we would call anecdotes. I suppose every student of Francis goes through a period dominated by the quest for the historical Francis; mercifully I have lost this passion, although to some extent it is impossible for a historian not to ask the "did this *really* happen?" question.

It is hard to imagine a Franciscan scholar who, at some level of consciousness, has not hoped for an epiphany while sitting quietly at San Damiano or walking through the forest around La Verna or pondering in the cave/chapel at Greccio. While I have walked those walks and knelt those kneels, some of my most helpful insights into the person of Francis have come not from praying where he prayed or reading the standard texts that provide us with knowledge of this man's life, but from standing before certain of the countless works of art that present Francis to millions each year both in situ and in museums from Assisi to Siena to Hannover to Oxford to Williamstown to Pasadena and to so many places in between. In fact, my niche as a Franciscan scholar has been to organize and interpret a particular body of Franciscan art, the early works created in Italy, to an audience of scholars and to some extent to a world of Francis lovers.[3] I even wrote the epilogue to a book about the Franciscan art created by a modern and rather peculiar Australian artist named Arthur Boyd.

Every teacher knows that the primary way that one continues to learn is not by re-reading sources and keeping up on the scholarship, as important as those two activities are. Rather, it is in teaching that one remains fresh and open. I have had the privilege of teaching Francis of Assisi to my own undergraduates at SUNY Geneseo in the context of several courses as well as in courses solely devoted to studying *Il Poverello*. However, I have also taught Francis to Franciscan friars and sisters, to Trappist monks, to inmates at a maximum security prison, to groups of CEOs from around the world, to the customers of The Teaching Company, and to a wide range of church groups. In the preparation that precedes each presentation, the interaction with the audiences, and the thinking that follows such activities, I have become a better interpreter of Francis of Assisi.

I have been afforded the opportunity by the National Endowment for the Humanities to direct seminars in Italy about Francis for both high school and college teachers. On six occasions, I brought fifteen school teachers to Tuscany and Umbria to study and discuss the life of Francis. In 2003, 2006, and 2008, I assembled extraordinary collections of university scholars in several academic disciplines in Italy for more research-focused seminars. This book contains some of the fruits of the 2003 seminar. At the risk of sounding clichéd, the teacher has become the appreciative student of his students.

Let me begin with a story. My late mother, whose years as a widow were spent in an apartment less than a mile from my home in Geneseo, New York,

heard a knock on her door one morning before she had gotten cleaned up and dressed. It turned out to be her priest, dropping by for a visit. As she told the story, her first inclination was simply to call through the door and tell him to come back at another time. After all, she reasoned, she really shouldn't be seen in her pajamas and without her wig. Then she changed her mind, opened the door, and greeted him with: "Come on in. What you see is what you get!"

About the tenth time my mother told me that story, I realized that she was also describing Francis of Assisi. He was simple in the most profound way. What Francis presented is who Francis was. A minor story in the Franciscan corpus illustrates this point. Francis suffered great pain from spleen and stomach problems, especially in winter's cold. One of the brothers urged Francis to sew a piece of fox fur inside his habit, but for a time he refused. Finally he agreed. A piece of fox fur was to be sewn onto the inside of his habit. However, a similar piece of fox fur had to be sewn onto the outside of the habit so that everyone would know about the comfort he allowed himself. Thomas of Celano got it right when he proclaimed at the end of this tale: "Oh, the same in word and life! The same outside and inside!"[4]

Over the years, I have thought a great deal about how this little story informs us about Francis's life and about his success. Marcus Borg on several occasions likens the way people experienced the historical Jesus of Nazareth with the way people responded to Francis of Assisi. People recognized that Jesus and Francis were spirit-filled people. How did people perceive this quality in these men? With Francis at least, I think part of the answer is that Francis was completely genuine, open and available to those he encountered.

About a decade ago, I was a major party candidate for the U.S. Congress (that you have not seen me on C-Span tells you the result of that election), so I have had my time among political types. One of the ubiquitous questions that folks in the political realm ask about any statement a candidate makes is, "what did that person *really* mean?" In other words, what is the hidden agenda? Why did candidate A speak yesterday about a particular issue? What is she *really* interested in? Why did candidate B *really* appear at a particular place or with a particular person? Surely it was not for the reason he gave.

Now, imagine that someone comes along about whom it is inconceivable even to ask the "*really*" question. How completely disarming that person is! Whether it is Francis sewing a piece of fox fur on his habit or explaining in one of the world's most important interviews, between him and Innocent III, why he wants approval to establish a new order, Francis was overwhelming in his simplicity and straightforwardness. When we are thinking about how the meek and simple man from Assisi had scholars and cardinals and ordinary folk flocking to him, we need to think of him having that piece of fox fur sewn on the outside of his habit.

What I am saying in the long passage above is that we need to bring the knowledge we accumulate as scholars to our examination of Francis. But

we also need to bring our own stories to the table. If indeed doing history is in some real sense participating in a dialogue between the past and the present, then that dialogue is expanded and enriched when it is a wide-ranging discussion among a group of people with different academic and personal stories. That is a good description of this book.

The outline of Francis's life is rather clear, despite all the caveats that scholars have alerted us to about the historicity or specific context of even the best known events. Francis was born in the Umbrian hill town of Assisi in 1181 or 1182 (we know that he was forty-four when he died on the evening of October 3, 1226 but do not know his birthday). His father was a wealthy cloth merchant. He had a childhood and adolescence of privilege, and his parents were indulgent toward young Francesco. He was sociable and generous and even prodigal. Because of stories he knew as well as the political situation of his time, he dreamed of knighthood.

At about age twenty, Francis fought for Assisi in a battle with its larger archrival to the west, Perugia, and was captured and held for ransom, perhaps for about a year. After his return to Assisi, he found himself changed, although he still had a desire for becoming a knight. Francis aborted a plan to try his hand at knighthood by serving under a military captain, Walter of Brienne, employed on behalf of the pope in southern Italy. Returning to Assisi, Francis began, we might say, to reevaluate his life plan. Things that once would have fulfilled his desires, including success in business and knighthood (not necessarily mutually exclusive goals in Italy), began to appear to him less fulfilling, although he still pursued the former. No doubt, many of his friends were puzzled by Francis's abandonment of his quest for knighthood and perhaps a waning enthusiasm for the cloth business. After all, they may have reasoned and explained to Francis that they would love to trade places with Francis and have his future before them.

For a time, perhaps a couple of years, Francis looked for new roads to happiness while still living at home and working in the family business. He spent time alone in prayer on Monte Subasio, perhaps in caves now incorporated into the Franciscan hermitage called Le Carceri. It is clear from looking forward in Francis's life that he found joy and consolation and experienced God's presence in intense one-on-one experiences with his Lord.

One day while Francis was manning the family cloth store, a beggar entered and asked in God's name for alms. Young Francis was annoyed, or perhaps he wondered whether having this smelly and grubby fellow in the store might be bad for business. Anyway, he threw the beggar out. However, he began to consider what he had done, perhaps in light of his prayer experiences or a recently heard gospel or sung psalm at mass. He realized that he would have been more kind to the beggar had that poor man beseeched him in the name of some great secular lord. Maybe all that knighthood stuff was still not completely abandoned! Francis went after the beggar and presented him with a gift and pledged never to reject the cry of the poor again.

At some point, Francis journeyed to Rome as a pilgrim. Although we have only one story about this trip, it is, I think, revelatory of what Francis was like at the time. He prayed at the shrine of St. Peter and had such a deep experience that in gratitude he threw some coins through a metal grate over the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles. This is what merchants did then and what their successors (almost all of us?) do now—show gratitude, even for things spiritual, with a monetary gift. However, the story does not end at the tomb. On an impulse, Francis traded clothes with a beggar outside what we today call Old St. Peters, and began to beg. There Francis experienced some sort of joy that had not come with the coin tossing inside.

For folks my age, this story might remind them of John Howard Griffin's experience of "becoming black" in the South in the 1960s, recalled in his *Black Like Me*. Or, many remember Atlanta mayor Andrew Young living on the streets for a couple of days. After all, Francis only begged for a day and then returned to Assisi, either in his original clothes or at least to where there were new clothes waiting for him. I think there was an element of what Griffin and Young did in Francis's gesture. But what is so surprising in the story in Rome is that Francis found joy as a beggar. My guess is that he was clueless about *why* he experienced joy that day. Later in his life, after having chosen a mendicant life, he will recognize it to be in identifying with the poor and naked Christ. I doubt that he could have articulated that on his journey back to Assisi and to the security of mom and dad and the store.

Francis soon got it into his head that God might be asking him to fix crumbling churches. This began at a ramshackle shell of a church just down the hill from Assisi dedicated to St Damian. There is no reason to challenge the way thirteenth-century writers explained this. While praying alone one day in San Damiano, Francis experienced a call to rebuild the church. Pretty soon, he added two other wrecked churches to his list including one dedicated to the Virgin and known as the Little Portion or Portiuncula. As usual, Francis threw everything he had into this enterprise, collecting building materials and doing the manual labor himself, quite a breach of conduct for one of his social and economic status.

More profoundly, Francis had a life-changing encounter (perhaps several) with a leper. We know this without a doubt, for Francis recalled his experiences with lepers as he lay dying in Assisi in 1226. The dictated statement known as his *Testament* contains almost the only autobiographical details that we find in Francis's writings. And it begins with lepers. To use a vanishing English word, Francis was perhaps something of a prig. We are told that in fact whenever Francis came within two miles of a leprosarium, he hyperbolically held his nose to avoid the stench of rotting flesh. One day he encountered a leper, taken by surprise we might assume. After some hesitation, he gave the leper some money and a kiss. Francis was indeed becoming a new man.

It is worthwhile noting that these important events I have narrated are all one-on-one encounters. Whatever the importance of attending church, developing one's relationship with God in these public places and formal

settings has a lot of potential distractions, be they a lovely tune or a stranger or someone's new cloak. Similarly, it is easy to fall back on stereotypes and clichés in dealing with beggars and lepers. And Francis and his friends must have walked by San Damiano or the Portiuncula dozens of times without noticing or being saddened by their state of disrepair. However, Francis encountered God *alone* at San Damiano. He encountered God while praying *alone* in Subasio's caves. He came face to face with *a* beggar in his shop and on the porch of St. Peters in Rome. He had a one-on-one encounter with that leper. It was in these stark encounters that Francis became integrated into the Body of Christ and became one with all of God's creation, for what mattered was not what separated Francis from these "others" but how he was a part of them and their stories. Is it any wonder that later on Francis would talk to birds and negotiate with a wolf?

It has always been tempting to look at great conversions in history and point to a dramatic moment—Paul on the road to Damascus or Augustine reading Romans while in a garden. In that mode of thinking, biographers and even Bonaventure in the thirteenth century pointed to a specific event as the moment of conversion. The leading candidate for moment of conversion is Francis stripping before his father and the bishop of Assisi. For one thing, it makes a great picture, whether it is a fresco in Assisi or the lengthy scene in Zeffirelli's film *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. Interestingly, this is not what Francis himself points to in his *Testament*, for he mentions "leaving the world" shortly after his dramatic encounter with a leper. However, for Bonaventure, writing ca.1260, it is after the renunciation of family and inheritance in the presence of Bishop Guido that the visions of the cross appear as a part of Francis rather than outside him.

To argue which moment is the one of conversion is to miss the point. Several events which occur in the next few years of his life clearly suggest that in fact conversion is ongoing. Paul reminds the Corinthians that not everyone who runs in a race receives the prize (I Cor 9.24) and only at the end of his life did he talk about having crossed the finish line (II Tim 4.7). Two indicators of Francis's continuing conversion, one fairly obscure and one famous, will demonstrate this point. While Francis was living at San Damiano following his renunciation in front of the bishop, the priest there, recognizing the wealth and prominence of the family Francis came from, prepared special food for him. Francis came to the realization that he could not live the life he had chosen and still be pampered with special food. Thus, he took a begging bowl and set off to get his supper one scrap at a time. At first, Francis was repulsed by what was, after all, a bowl of slop. However, in light of his understanding of the poverty of the Incarnate Word of God, Francis ate it with delight—the bitter became sweet!

Francis spent his early years following that dramatic renunciation of his father rebuilding churches and living as a hermit. At mass on the feast day of Matthias at the Portiuncula, Francis heard the gospel in which Jesus commissioned the apostles with a set of instructions that began, "Take nothing with

you on your journey." Francis heard this as a personal call and took off his leather belt and his sandals. Equally important, he found his vocation to preach the good news, since that was the work of the apostles par excellence. Francis's call was not just to rebuild churches but to rebuild the Church, and this revelation at the mass of Matthias was an important stage in Francis's understanding of his call.

Within a short time, other men from Assisi and places nearby came to join Francis. The more we think about this fact, the more extraordinary it is. After all, every society has its oddballs and recluses, some holy and some not. But most do not gather followers. Two principal factors are at work here. First, we must never leave out of any equation the charisma of this man Francis. Second, Francis was creatively addressing dramatic changes in the world he lived in. We are, I hope, far removed from any notion that nothing happened in the Middle Ages and that somehow Clovis and Francis could sit down for a friendly and comprehensible chat because they were, after all, both medieval men. Still, it is easy to miss just how quickly things were changing in Italy at the beginning of the thirteenth century and how those changes were manifest to many at the time. The great fortress above Assisi had been attacked and dismantled in 1198, following the death of the Emperor Henry VI, when Francis was about sixteen. The pope at the beginning of the thirteenth century was the dynamic Innocent III, elected at age thirty-seven that same year.

Less keyed to a date, the money economy was changing all sorts of relationships and habits. As the cynical Sienese poet Cecco Angiolieri proclaimed a century later, money is better than family because money will never be unfaithful. And everything is for sale—fine clothes, prestige, even sex. As cities grew, poverty became more intense as more people were cut off from gathering food in the countryside, and poverty also became highly visible. As New Yorkers or Chicagoans or Florentines know today, even the wealthiest and most protected people cannot block out the sight of the poor. Although many "respectable" people then and now sidestepped, ignored, or even harassed the poor, their visibility and perhaps even apparent omnipresence were bound to touch some, especially those who claimed to be followers of the one who proclaimed, "Blessed are the poor."

I must pause for another story. A few years ago, I took a group of inner city high school kids, mostly boys, to visit a Trappist Abbey as part of a social studies enrichment program I developed at SUNY Geneseo. After a monk made a presentation, one of the boys could hardly wait to ask his question: How do you guys do without sex? The monk gave a good and, for me, anticipated answer. When we returned to the college and discussed our trip, I realized that most of the guys were truly distressed about the monk's answer. It was not that they were unable to conceive of someone deciding to live without sex; they conceded that someone may make that decision, but they assumed that it would make the celibate man tense and unhappy. What bothered them was not that this monk had chosen to live without sex but that

he was relaxed and happy about it! At some level of consciousness, what they were troubled by was that this monk was living proof that sex did not equal satisfaction and happiness. Now that blew their minds!

I think Francis's life repairing churches and his begging for building materials and his eating the scraps from his begging bowl in and of themselves did not shock or challenge other young men in Assisi. After all, there are all those saints' lives they had heard and there were hermits and monks near Assisi. It was the Francis who walked along rubbing two sticks together as if they were viol and bow and singing songs. It was the Francis who proclaimed that his meal of slop was indeed sweet tasting. Francis's life meant that money and social status did not define happiness since Francis had given up those things and was happier than ever. No wonder some thought Francis mad; we still tend to call "mad" those who challenge our most basic understandings of the way things are.

Nikos Kazantzakis expressed this quality of Francis in his novel *Francis of Assisi*. The narrator, Brother Leo, could force himself to eat slop or to sleep with a rock for his pillow, but he did not find the joy in all those privations as Francis did. Leo and others may have struggled later, and indeed Francis's life remained a struggle. However, Francis's joy must have been part of the magnetic attraction for Bernard of Quintavalle and Giles and the others who soon came to join Francis on the plain below Assisi.

I always think of Henry V's description of "we few, we band of brothers" in Shakespeare's play of the same name as I imagine those early friars working and praying and preaching and sleeping in barns and unused ovens and bathing in the river. Some thought they were saints, others that they were mad. Perhaps both groups were right. In an Italy "infected" by Cathars, it became necessary to seek some official status for this group of penitents from Assisi, as they described themselves. With some help from Bishop Guido, who had wrapped his mantle around the naked Francis a few years earlier, those penitents went to Rome, met with Pope Innocent III (a long-shot) and received official though somewhat couched approval for their order (really a long-shot).

One of the most interesting stories of the Franciscan legend is the discussion the friars (sporting their new tonsures!) had as they journeyed home, north to Orte and then toward Narni and up the Spoleto valley. The topic of conversation was, "what do we do now?" When we read the story of Innocent III's approval of the rule, a rule that no longer survives but that we can to some extent reconstruct, we assume that there was a basic plan in place. Apparently not. A central part of their discussion on the way home was whether they would live an essentially eremetical life or whether they would live "in the world." At least for Francis, this would hardly be the last time he asked this question. We should consider two factors. First, Francis found consolation and joy in prayer. We can trace this to those lonely times on Monte Subasio when he was still living with his parents and running the family store. Second, the major figures of sanctity that Francis encountered

in art or in the commemorations in the church calendar were either ecclesiastical officials, bishops in particular such as Saint Rufinus, first bishop and patron saint of Assisi, or holy monks and hermits. Some, like Saint Martin of Tours, were both. No doubt too when people in Assisi talked about holy men and women of their own day, they thought of monks up the mountain on Monte Subasio, nuns in one of several convents below town, or hermits (Francis had donned hermit's attire after his renunciation before his father and Bishop Guido). With all of that in Francis's head, it would be hard not to ask the question about whether it is best for them to live as hermits.

However, there was also the fact that neither Jesus nor the apostles lived lives removed from the world. Of course, Jesus had periods of withdrawal from the world, both lengthy (forty days in the desert) and brief. Still, to use a phrase from the account in the synoptic gospels of the Transfiguration, Jesus always came down from the mountain. Assuming that the early Franciscan sources are correct that there were twelve friars who journeyed to Rome to meet with Innocent, it cannot have escaped Francis and his companions that they were in some way a new band of apostles. The resurrected Jesus is rather clear in the gospels that the apostles were to go into the world to preach the good news to the ends of the earth. Francis's journey to Spain, his failed attempts to sail to the land of the Sultan, and his famous successful journey to Egypt in 1219 make clear that Francis heard Jesus' call to the apostles as his own, and to a certain extent Francis's preaching to birds and other non-human creatures can be understood as part of Francis's apostolic call because in Mark's version of Jesus' commission, he told them to preach to all *creatures*, not just people.

After receiving Innocent III's approval of the order, Francis lived about sixteen more years. I am going to follow Bonaventure's plan in discussing those sixteen years. After narrating Francis's life until this time, he abandons chronology until the last two years of Francis's life and instead dwells on themes that he compiled from incidents that occurred during these years. In addition, even in the earliest accounts, many of the stories of Francis's life after the early years are not dated and hence cannot be confidently woven into a narrative. All biographers guess where they fit, and some are better guessers than others. We do have a few firm dates—for example, Francis receiving Clare into the vowed life in 1212; his arrival in Egypt in 1219; Francis's composition of two rules, the one of 1221 never enacted and the one of 1223 approved in November of that year by Honorius III; and the glorious event of the Christmas Crib at Greccio in 1223. After discussion of some of the great themes we find in Francis's life between 1210 and 1224, I will return to a bit of narrative from the time of the Stigmatization until Francis's death in 1226.

The good news and the bad news for the Franciscan Order is that it grew astronomically. By the time Francis died, there were friars in the Holy Land, there had been friars martyred in Morocco, and there were houses or at least missions of friars throughout western Christendom. Most of the principal

cities of Italy had communities of friars in Francis's lifetime including obvious ones such as Florence and Siena but also penetrating all the way through the peninsula, or as Dante might say, throughout the land surrounded by the moat and the wall. Many of these men no doubt shared the zeal and ideals of the original band of brothers. However, increasingly, men were joining at least in part because of their admiration for Francis (or for the reputation he had) and because the Franciscan Order was new and different and exciting since its members were not tied to a place. The friars must have been perceived as the movers and the shakers of their era, and what twenty-year-old does not want to be a part of that sort of organization? One thinks of the following of young men that the ancient mover and shaker Socrates had in the Agora of Athens. Many of those young men who became friars were probably not as ready to leave *everything* behind as Francis had been. It is relatively easy to leave behind a lovely cloak or favorite pair of shoes or even a family inheritance than certain social habits or, as Francis himself mentioned, learning, as least insofar as people treated it as a possession.

By the time Francis died, the Franciscan brotherhood consisted of men with different goals and tendencies; these were not yet divided into clear factions, but tensions were present. First, there were men who sought to live precisely as Francis lived; they included most of the original band of brothers who were often nostalgic for the good old days and saw deviations from the early pattern of their life as wrongheaded or wicked. There were also men who never understood what Francis was asking of them and others whose zeal for the kind of perfection Francis fiercely sought eventually waned. Then there were the "organization men." They wanted an order that would be useful to the Church and were willing and even anxious to develop ministries and lifestyles that did not closely match the way Francis lived his life. It is important to point out that all the friars loved and admired Francis. The question was what it meant to wear his habit and to belong to the Order of Friars Minor.

Preaching penance and winning hearts was friars' work that Innocent III had encouraged. It is also possible to see Francis and his brothers doing "on the ground" work to promote the reform agenda of Innocent III's Fourth Lateran Council. Popes and cardinals were aware of potential problems that existed with this fairly undisciplined band of brothers and wanted Francis to have control over his followers and actively advance the Church's agenda. The leaders whom Francis got to know personally, especially the much maligned Cardinal Ugolino (later Gregory IX), loved Francis with a deep and genuine love that some scholars ignore or downplay (they often do the same with Brother Elias). I am willing to believe that from the day Francis died until Ugolino's own death in 1241, there was not a day he did not pray to Francis for help and intercession and guidance. But Ugolino also had a job to do, first as cardinal protector of the Order and later as pope.

Francis was in fundamental ways incapable of dealing with the complexities of a large order and the multiplication of its tasks within the Church.

He did not deal consistently well with those who were lukewarm in living out their vocation and vows. He had great compassion for personal weakness, once getting up in the middle of the night to share a meal with a brother who was having trouble enduring the fasts and privations of the brotherhood. However, when friars wanted any sort of privilege or property (e.g., a breviary in order to recite their offices), he was usually uncompromising.

With the exception of Francis's first (often called the primitive) rule, which consisted primarily of passages from scripture, he was not a lawgiver saint in the mold of St Benedict. His spontaneity often was at odds with the qualities of a lawmaker. The friars were supposed to follow the gospel precept of giving away their worldly goods to the poor and not to their own kin when they left the world. But if a new recruit named John gave his ox to the poor, it would have broken up a team that the family used. For Francis this was a no-brainer—give the ox to your family. Similarly, this same Brother John called to Francis from a field he was plowing. Francis simply welcomed him as a brother—no mention of a probationary period or formal reception into the brotherhood.

Another example of this quality of Francis is a famous story from Celano as Francis lay dying in Assisi. *The Treatise on the Miracles of Saint Francis* reports that Lady Jacoba dei Settesoli arrived with a burial cloth and some sweets that Francis liked (what does that fact do to our image drawn from other texts that Francis never ate anything that tasted good and that was neither slop nor topped with ashes?). The brothers did not want to let her into the privileged space of the friars because of her gender. Francis, hearing what was going on, told the brothers to let "Brother Jacoba" in. In this instance and in the case of Brother John, I picture Cardinal Ugolino, a trained canon lawyer, nodding his head when he heard these stories and wanting to say to Francis: These are wonderful things to do, Brother, but you just cannot do things like that! Francis would not have understood him very well.

Not only did the Franciscan Order grow, but the Franciscan *movement* blossomed. In 1212, young Clare Offreduccio snuck away from home and joined Francis and the brothers at the Portiuncula. Although Francis was hardly the continuous guide for the feminine branch of Franciscanism, he certainly was its inspiration. A few years ago I crossed paths quite by accident in Assisi with a friar I had met years before. We talked about Francis and Franciscan scholarship. He quickly pointed out to me that the most exciting Franciscan research and discoveries in his life as a friar concerned Clare, showing her to be quite an original creator of a way of life and not just the female flip side of Francis. He is certainly right. However it is useful to remember that Clare's genius manifests itself in large part through the creation of a way of life for women rooted in Francis's example and charisma.

Although scholars differ with one another about how the Third Order developed, it is important to mention this part of the Franciscan family. First we must remember that the first friars understood themselves to be a movement of lay penitents. Second, early Franciscan sources refer to the movement

as a "threefold army," consisting of friars, sisters, and a lay movement. Third, Francis and his followers did not have to create *ex nihilo* a third order movement, for the Humiliati had previously formed such a group. After taking into account all of the doubts about the precise nature of the movement during Francis's life, it is important to say that there was a demand from some laypeople for a form of Franciscan life that they could participate in and that Francis and the friars offered them such a way to live out their desire for it.

Francis was a preacher. If the friars were to be a band of apostolic men, then preaching would have to be their central activity. Jesus was rather clear in calling the apostles to preach, "to the ends of the earth." Peter preached immediately following the descent of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost. The first martyr, Stephen, was a vehement and uncompromising preacher. Yet with all of the source material that we have for Francis's life, we have no text of a sermon that he preached. However, there are a few things we can say about Francis the Preacher. First, he primarily preached outside the liturgy of the mass. The most famous exception to that was at Greccio in 1223 when, as a deacon, he read and preached the gospel at the famous mass with the crib and ox and ass.

Sometimes Francis preached in churches, but many of his sermons were outdoors, typically in a town's main square. Francis preached from the heart; he preached penance. Some version of "Come back to the Lord" must have been on his lips countless times. According to a rare non-Franciscan source, Francis preached to people using a vocabulary and style that was chosen for his audience. Thomas of Spalato tells us this when describing a sermon Francis preached in Bologna. Once when Francis preached to Clare and her sisters at San Damiano, he spoke not a word but sprinkled ashes over himself. We assume, probably rightly, that Francis incorporated gestures and songs and perhaps even some play acting into his sermons. After all, he was bold to proclaim himself a fool for Christ and never worried about appearing ludicrous to his audiences.

Francis's preaching knew no bounds—literally. In the Bardi dossal, a painting of Francis made about 1245 containing twenty stories from Francis's life and posthumous miracles, there are three preaching stories placed together in the lower left portion. Although the events narrated in the painting are in rough chronological order, these three stories come from very different periods of Francis's life. The stories, in the order presented, are Francis preaching at Greccio at Christmas 1223, Francis preaching to the birds at Bevagna (undated but probably early in Francis's ministry), and Francis preaching to the Sultan in 1219. Together, these represent the range of Francis's ministry—to his fellow Christians, to all of God's creatures, and to "the ends of the earth." With regard to the sermon to the birds, it is important to note again that Christ's commission to the apostles at the end of Mark's gospel is to preach to all of the earth's *creatures*.

There is a dimension of Francis's preaching that is often overlooked. Let me begin with a story. A Dominican approached Francis about a passage in

Ezekiel 3 that in essence says that those who do not rebuke a sinner will be held accountable for that person's sins. The Dominican was troubled because he did not in fact rebuke each sinner he saw. He claimed to have studied many commentaries, but they did not help him understand how he could be saved without constantly rebuking everyone around him. Francis explained that people who live upright lives are in fact constantly rebuking sinners without saying a word. The Dominican left comforted and edified. Thomas of Celano wrote that Francis made a tongue of his entire body. That says everything that needs to be said. Francis's *life* was in fact a sermon, his most articulate and profound.

Sometimes, scholars describe Francis as someone who "vernacularized" or "democratized" Christianity and Christian culture. If we use these terms in quite general senses, I agree. If we think about formal preaching within a liturgical context during Francis's time, we will recognize the limits of those words. Usually the preacher began with a verse of scripture and explicated it. Many sermons preached were based on models produced far away from most of the pulpits around which the laity were gathered. We know that many local priests were not well educated and in many cases barely literate. Although the sermon was the only "vernacular moment" of the mass, it must often have been unedifying and barely intelligible. Francis was not a priest and not a learned man. His sermons, again normally preached outside, were of a different sort. They were zealous and must have addressed the immediate concerns of the folks he preached to. When Bernardino of Siena in the fifteenth century preached for hours in the Campo in Siena, peppering his sermons with stories of where he had been, addressing the day-to-day concerns of listeners, inserting a joke, and making spontaneous asides, he was certainly acting in the spirit of Francis.

Francis's focus on Christ crucified and an experiential approach to coming to know Jesus were not unprecedented. A good deal of Cistercian theology of the twelfth century had this double focus. However, that approach to Christianity was practiced in the cloisters of Cistercian abbeys and was part of Latin culture. How or whether Francis came into contact with strands of Cistercian theology, we do not know. They may have trickled down to him through sermons he heard or conversations he had with men much more learned than he was.

The famous story of the Christmas Crib at Greccio is the best example of Francis as a vernacularizer of the Christian tradition. Ewert Cousins has created the useful term "the mysticism of the historical event" to describe what Francis sought to do at Greccio.[5] He was helping people to *experience* and not just to commemorate God-become-human. While the experience of God in what we call the mystical tradition was an important part of the Christian heritage in Francis's time, people mostly associated it with years of training for the experience of God. It was the goal of world-renouncing monks. The event at Greccio made the experience of God an achievable goal for all Christians. Instead of stripping away the material world in a quest for the

immaterial, it used material props as a means to the experience of divinity. I believe that the Fourth Lateran Council's proclamation of the doctrine of transubstantiation is also part of the reason for Greccio. Christ was really present under the form of material bread and wine and therefore present to all Christians who were, after all, required to receive the Eucharist at least once a year. When we think of Francis as someone who consciously sought to carry forth the teachings and reform of Lateran IV, we are more likely to understand Greccio at least in part as a creative way of doing just that. I once overhead a conversation between a priest and a Catholic laywoman at a cocktail party: the priest was talking of mystical things, and the woman said that all this sort of thing was out of her league. The priest responded: "All Catholics are mystics; we are a mystical people." That Jesuit was having a truly Franciscan moment!

That Francis of Assisi has a great influence on how Christians today experience and understand the created world—nature—is obvious. I write this while looking out the window of my house at a statue of Francis adorning my garden, and it is hardly the only one in my village in Western New York. If we simplify Christian attitudes toward creation as being either derived from Genesis 1 (subdue the earth) or Genesis 2 (take care of the garden), then clearly Francis tips the scales significantly toward the latter.

There is sometimes a tendency to see Francis as a medieval Dr. Doolittle, at least imagining that he speaks, "elephant and eagle, buffalo and beagle." I think this image misses who Francis is and what he contributes to the Christian tradition on this issue. Francis's sermon to the birds is remarkably like Francis's sermons to people. He calls the birds to do what God intended them to do—to praise God. I do not for a minute think that Francis wondered whether birds around Bevagna understood Umbrian. The translation was up to God. Francis simply called birds to do what they were created to do. Francis calls humans in exactly the same way—to be what God intends us to be, creatures made in God's image and likeness. Given the reality of sin, we must therefore begin with returning to God.

Sources tell us that when Francis stripped naked before the bishop of Assisi, he said something to this effect: "I used to say my father Pietro Bernardone but now I can freely say Our Father in heaven." Let us assume that the thought, if not the precise words, were part of that dramatic moment. In some ways, Francis spent the rest of his life living out the implications of such a statement. Consider this logic: if God is my father because he created me and God also created birds and rocks, then, having the same parent, the birds and the rocks and I are siblings. Now, how do we properly treat siblings? One can imagine Francis thinking about the need to encourage siblings to act as they are supposed to. Is that not what Francis does in his sermon to the birds and presumably, if the sources are correct, sermons he preached even to flowers?

My last point about Francis and the created world returns to a point I made about the Christmas Crib at Greccio. Francis used the props of manger, straw, ox, and ass to lead us to the experience of God. Bonaventure tells

us that for Francis, all created things were vestiges, footprints of God, and from them we are able to come closer to God. To quote Bonaventure, "In beautiful things [Francis] contuited beauty itself."[6]

Let us look at the intimacy Francis sought with God by noting a passage in Thomas of Celano's second life of Francis. He tells us that Francis thought of God as Judge, Father, Friend, and Bridegroom.[7] This is a daring progression. It is not particularly difficult, I think, given the imagery of scripture, to think of God as Judge and as Father. A glimpse at Matthew 25 and at the Lord's Prayer is enough to imprint these ways of conceiving of God on a believer. Friend is more daring. If we think of classical works about friendship, most notably Cicero's "On Friendship," or the twelfth-century Cistercian Aelred of Rievaulx's Christianized version of Cicero, "On Spiritual Friendship," we are reminded of the openness and the comfortableness that exist in a true friendship. Cicero tells us that friends may be of a different age or social status, yet in friendship there must be a certain equality between the friends; friendship is not hierarchical, even in a hierarchical world. God's humility in becoming human allows us to experience God as a friend, for, to use Paul's words, God emptied himself for us.

God as Bridegroom is even more daring. Here we move to a deeper kind of intimacy and mutual revelation and mutual giving. After all, in the Christian view of marriage, traceable to Genesis 2, the two become one. Francis's ways of conceiving of God do not, of course, amount to Francis's deification. As one comes to know God as Friend and Bridegroom, God does not cease to be Judge and Father. Francis's multifaceted understanding of his relationships with God is quite striking and makes some of the "quirkier" stories about him intelligible.

In recent years, we have had to do some serious thinking and thinking again about Francis's visit to Sultan Malik al-Kamil in present-day Egypt in 1219. First, it has always been assumed that the early biographers are correct in asserting that the primary purpose of Francis's foray into the lands of the Sultan was to achieve martyrdom. That, for example, is how Bonaventure contextualizes the story in his *Legenda maior.* It is important to remember that in all likelihood, Bonaventure, who adds new material on this topic to what he received from the works of Thomas of Celano, probably talked to one of Francis's companions on that journey, Brother Illuminato.

However, the immediate pretext for Francis crossing the battle lines to visit the Sultan was his horror at what was taking place on the Christian side during the Fifth Crusade. Furthermore, Francis's behavior in the Sultan's presence, as much as we can reconstruct it, hardly reads like a denunciation of Islam that would no doubt be the easiest way to achieve martyrdom, as five friars demonstrated a year later in Marakkesh in Morocco. So we need to be hesitant about considering Francis's time with the Sultan solely in terms of a quest for martyrdom.

In addition, we are perhaps somewhat trapped by the surviving visual images of Francis before the Sultan. Just about every image except for the

earliest one (the Bardi dossal of ca.1245) shows Francis pointing to a fire; he has challenged the "priests" of Islam to enter the fire and was prepared to do so himself—a thirteenth-century update of Elijah and the priests of Baal. Starting with the fresco of this story in the Upper Church in Assisi (early 1290s), the Muslim clerics are shown ignominiously slinking away from this challenge. Even if we trust our written sources that Francis issued such a challenge, it is important to remember that there was never a fire built. The visual image is a hyped version of the story designed to see Francis's purpose before the Sultan as being an in-your-face challenger of Islam and seeker of martyrdom.

In 1986, Pope John Paul II called religious leaders from throughout the world to Assisi for a day of prayer; the group photo in front of the Portiuncula is wonderful! Less remembered was a day of prayer in Assisi in early 2002 that focused on Christian-Muslim relations. Were the leaders of the world's religions willing to come to Assisi if the saint of Assisi was the sort of man we see in the fresco inside the Basilica? A few years ago, a friar who spent many years in Pakistan wrote a book about Francis and Islam that challenged the idea that Francis primarily went to meet the Sultan in order to become a martyr and that he conducted himself in the way that is so often depicted. Hoeberichts provides a new reading of texts such as Francis's *Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples* (1220) and his *Earlier Rule* (1221). He suggests that Francis learned as well as taught at the court of the Sultan, that he was impressed with the reverence they showed to their holy book, that he liked the calling to prayer, that he conversed with the Sultan rather than preached at him. There is also a tradition recorded in Jordan of Giano that Francis prohibited friars from reading in chapter the account of the death of the Franciscan friars in Morocco, where they had directly challenged Muslims and threatened them all with hellfire. This passage is problematic and can simply be read as Francis rejecting the praise he received in the account and not wanting the friars rejoicing in other friars' suffering, but I suspect that Francis may not have wanted the martyrs' methods of spreading the Good News to become the norm for his brothers.

I think it is fair to say that whatever Francis's reasons were for going to Egypt, he returned to Italy a changed man. Whatever he thought of the crusades before his arrival in Egypt, we can be confident that he was appalled not just by the crusaders' conduct but also by the idea that this is the correct Christian approach to the "other." He must have felt compassion for the many who suffered so greatly at the hands of an army dedicated to the Prince of Peace.

Francis the peacemaker profoundly understood what that blessed task is about. He no doubt both learned and practiced peacemaking with the Sultan. From what he wrote after he returned, it is clear that peacemaking involves mutuality. One assumes that the Sultan learned from Francis; certainly Francis learned from his experience among Muslims. I am reminded of what Thomas More wrote three hundred years later about his mythical Utopians.

When ships from Europe had been blown all the way to Utopia, the people there immediately learned all of the best qualities of the Europeans and incorporated them into their own culture. On the other hand, More speculates, if Utopian ships had ever been blown to the coasts of Europe, there is no record of them. To summarize, the Christian culture of Europe did not easily recognize how much it can learn from other cultures. Francis, as I pointed out above, took home several specific ideas. Peacemaking requires that each side understand that both sides have much to teach and much to learn.

Francis also recognized that peace comes only when the fundamental causes of violence are addressed. In the important story of Francis and the wolf of Gubbio—I believe that the story is genuinely Franciscan although I do not know to what extent it is historical—Francis recognizes that the original cause of the wolf's behavior was hunger. Hence the peace that Francis brokers between the wolf and the townsfolk of Gubbio includes sufficient food for *Frate Lupo*. Without that, the peace simply will not hold.

In peacemaking, Francis understood that it is important to be creative or, as we often say today, "to think outside the box." Once when Francis was quite ill, he learned of a bitter dispute between Assisi's bishop and podestà (roughly equivalent to a mayor or, perhaps better, city manager). These two men were hard-nosed political types. How did Francis attempt to broker a peace between these two? He composed a new verse for his *Canticle of the Creatures* about pardoning and had a brother get the two together for a performance of the song. Francis did not open talks between the two sides but rather made a bold and unusual move to reconcile bishop and podestà. It worked.

Having looked at some of the important themes of Francis's life as a "lesser brother" and his ministry to all of God's creatures, we must turn to the event that in some real way brought all the strands of Francis's life together—the experience at La Verna and the reception of Christ's wounds. Sometimes people refer to Francis's life as his own passion that led to his reception of Christ's wounds at La Verna. There were many things on Francis's mind and heart as he journeyed north from Assisi to La Verna in the summer of 1224; certainly at or near the top of the list is what had happened to that simple and merry band of brothers. However, Francis must also have been burdened by his knowledge that the Church on earth was a far cry from the Church Triumphant, to use Augustine's term. And the continuing ideology and practice of crusading, which he knew experientially from his trip to Egypt, must have been a great burden. Whether Francis knew it or not, his trek to La Verna was to be his own *Via Crucis*, his time there his own Agony in the Garden and Passion. Francis had 'put on Christ' when he renounced his family and put on a cross-shaped habit. He had received his call to rebuild the Church from Christ on the cross at San Damiano.

Perhaps we can share a bit in the experience of Francis at La Verna by looking at the drawing Francis made on a scrap of parchment after his reception of the stigmata at La Verna. Still preserved in Assisi, the drawing is of a Tau-

shaped cross. It is likely that this form of the cross became dear and personal to Francis because its origin, Ezekiel 9, was the text on which Innocent III's sermon opening the Fourth Lateran Council was based. Francis and his followers, for almost a decade, had been working to carry out the reform program of the Council. In that time, what had Francis and the Council achieved? Many of the abuses and failures of the Church before Lateran IV were surely still alive and well. The text of Ezekiel is a call for repentance, the center of Franciscan preaching since the beginning. Those who repented were marked with the Tau and would be passed over by an avenging angel of death. Had Francis and his brothers succeeded in bringing some of those Catholics who were merely going through the motions back to lives of piety and service? In one sense the answer was clearly "yes," as the numerous stories of conversion and the growth of the Franciscan movement testify. On the other hand, Francis cannot but have noticed the all-too-worldly world all around him and even creeping, as we have seen, into his Order.

The second and more perplexing part of Francis's drawing is what is usually interpreted as a human head at the base of the cross. Traditionally, this has been identified as the skull of Adam, although other proposals have been offered. If it is, Francis, not a trained artist, has taken a common detail found in crucifixions. The skull refers both to the place where Christ was crucified, Golgotha, the place of the skull, and to the Pauline idea of Christ as the new Adam, who in his humility and death, undid the pride and punishment of Adam. Michael Cusato has argued that there are reasons to identify the head at the base of the cross with Sultan Malik al-Kamil. If he is right, we see just how profound Francis's experience in Egypt was and the compassion Francis felt for the Sultan and his subjects at the hands of the crusaders led by a Roman cardinal!

Francis came down from La Verna marked with Christ's wounds. He bore those wounds just a bit more than two years, until his death at the Portiuncula in October 1226. Even in his spiritual and physical agony—the wounds of Christ were hardly the only cause of his suffering—Francis lived as he had before. He was eager to preach and to spend time with lepers, although we do not know how much of either he was able to do. He recognized that he still had not got to the finish line of the race he ran for Christ. He composed that loveliest of poems, his *Canticle of the Creatures* at a time he could not see any of them. I always think of G. K. Chesterton's wonderful insight about Francis when he was cauterized in Rieti in an attempt to relieve the eye pain and blindness. As the fire heated the iron rod that would be placed on each temple, it would have been easy for Francis to cry out in anger at his cruel fate. Yet, he courteously asked Brother Fire not to hurt him. As Chesterton put it, if life is a work of art, here was a true masterpiece!

For someone as ill as Francis, he moved around a lot. He was in Siena in the spring of 1226 for more medical care for his eyes. Then Elias took him to Le Celle near Cortona before finally taking him home, albeit in a circuitous route to avoid capture by those who wished for Francis to die in

their territory, to Assisi. Even then, Francis was "confined" to the palace of Bishop Guido because of fear he would be snatched from the extramural Portiuncula. Finally, he was returned to his favorite spot on earth; and there he rendered his spirit to God. He was forty-four years old.

This is not the place to tell the history of the friars or the cult of St Francis. Most of the essays that follow explore some piece of that complex and continuing story. However, it is important for readers to be acquainted with the root of that enormous Franciscan tree. Those who do not know Francis are certainly not going to grasp what his followers were doing.

Whatever Franciscan thing a person is studying, it is vital to know Francis and the historical context of his life. It is important to know the sources for the life Francis. Among the additional resources for finding Francis are the visual images of Francis produced in roughly the century following Francis's death.

I will be brief in introducing this topic. First, Francis himself responded to images, most notably the crucifix at San Damiano through which Christ spoke to the young man. Francis also created a small devotional image, the drawing he did for Brother Leo shortly after receiving the stigmata when still on La Verna.

Second, there has been a more or less continuous argument since shortly after Francis's death about the appropriateness of Franciscan churches containing beautiful and expensive panel paintings, frescoes, and stained glass windows that present St Francis. From the horror of Brother Giles when he discovered the Basilica and its decoration, to constitutions of the Order limiting works of art in Franciscan churches, to the images and cycles of Giotto to Piero della Francesca to Giovanni Bellini, the debate has continued. Let me share four thoughts. First, it is a real and open question whether the cycles of Francis's life really capture the essence of Francis. For example, only one panel and no fresco of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries shows Francis with lepers despite the importance his encounters with lepers had in his conversion. Second, the friars made a conscious decision, a very different decision than the Dominicans made about their founder, to present Francis visually to those who worshiped in their churches. Third, it is easy to think that Francis would be the first to criticize the images of him. However, Francis never criticized the images of saints that abounded in the churches in which he worshiped and preached. *Saint* Francis and his role in the Church is quite different from *Brother* Francis preaching along the highways and in the *piazze* in Italy. Finally, we must realize that many more people know something about Francis from seeing images of him than from reading any of the wonderful books about him. More than two million people a year visit the Basilica today. How many of them would know anything about Francis had they not been awed by the beauty of the Basilica and its medieval decoration?

As a reader, you are in for a treat as you begin to explore facets of the Franciscan experience through the vision and hard work of those who have written the pieces that follow. Enjoy and be edified.

Notes

1. J. Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997).
2. Jacques Dalarum, Michael F. Cusato, and Carla Salvati, *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi: New Studies, New Perspectives* (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2006), pp. 29–74.
3. William R. Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi in Painting, Stone and Glass from Earliest Origins to 1320 in Italy*, Italian Medieval and Renaissance Studies 7 (Florence: Olschi, 1999).
4. Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul,* 130.
5. Ewert H. Cousins, "Francis of Assisi: Christian Mysticism at the Crossroads," in Steven Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 163–90.
6. *Legenda maior* IX, 1.
7. Celano, *Remembrance*, 95.

PART I

FRANCIS IN MEDIEVAL TEXT AND PAINTING

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CHAPTER 1

STANDING ON THE THRESHOLD: BEHOLDER AND VISION IN THE ASSISI *CRIB AT GRECCIO*

Beth A. Mulvaney

Entering the Upper Basilica of San Francesco at Assisi, one crosses a literal and symbolic threshold. Shrouded by the soft penumbra gathered below the stained glass windows, the frescoes forming the canonical cycle of Francis's life unfold to reveal a remarkable break from earlier medieval imagery. The Upper Basilica of San Francesco, as the motherhouse of the Franciscan Order, defines contemporary views of *Il Poverello* and the brothers who followed him. Colorful painted decoration covers every structural surface extending from the base of the walls to the soaring vaults overhead, wrapping the visitor within a completely Franciscan material world, an ironic and paradoxical twist to Francis's original vision.

Prominently placed on the lower nave walls, the pictorial design of the St. Francis cycle is strikingly different from the Old and New Testament cycles located above in the recessed areas surrounding the tall lancet windows. Although completed as part of two different campaigns, the difference in designs is meaningful.[1] The twenty-eight scenes from the life of Francis appear within an elaborate painted architectonic framework, analogous to a shallow loggia or porch. Individual scenes are discretely framed by a red border and divided from each other by monumental twisted columns. Appearing immediately above the continuous fictive tapestry that gently undulates along the lower wall, the device of the loggia-like frame bordering the Francis images implies a kind of passageway between the space of the beholder and the depth of the frescoes. From this vantage a viewer peers beyond the frame, as through a window or the openings of a loggia, at the unfolding events of Francis's life. This visual structure contrasts the Old and New Testament design directly above the Legend of St. Francis. Although the biblical cycles use decorative patterns to surround individual scenes, the effect is more like

a series of tapestries laid flat against the wall surface. In addition, the upper walls are set back several feet from the lower nave walls, functionally forming the gallery within the nave elevation, while the frescoes' comparative distance from the viewer also figuratively underlines the sense of past history displayed in the Old and New Testament cycles. In contrast, the elaborately constructed framework of the St. Francis cycle acts as a spatial intermediary between the physical nave space and the illusionistic pictorial space implying a sense of temporal present-ness in which the beholder becomes intimate witness to, and perhaps participant in, the unfolding events. Many of the images from the Francis cycle are spatially designed to actively invite the viewer into the represented space and time.

Stepping into the soaring and profusely decorated interior space of the Upper Church of San Francesco (figure 1.1), a visitor might turn to the right and look up to find the *Crib at Greccio* a wondrous image that inscribes an invisible and shifting threshold marking the difference between Medieval and Renaissance approaches to space and vision. Framed by the architecturally detailed moldings above and below with fictive columns on either side, the beholder's view mirrors that of the depicted women who stand at an opposite threshold gazing through an opening in the *tramezzo*, or choir screen, just below its molding. These women peer into the chancel from one opening, while the fresco's beholders peer into it from another. Framed by that doorway, one woman alone in the crowd stands on the threshold, as if to suggest viewing should be an *individual* experience for each beholder. This essay will probe more deeply the implications of that individual experience by examining the suggestive spatial and iconographic choices in the *Crib at Greccio* (figure 1.2) and its formal and thematic relationship(s) to the *Verification of the Stigmata* (figure 1.3) and the *Mourning of the Clares* (figure 1.4). While not part of a consecutive narrative grouping, these three scenes share a particularly Franciscan approach to the abstract and divine by appealing to the beholder's imagination through invoking the concrete and material as well as the more human realm of feelings and experiences. In each of these scenes, the artist summons the viewer's sense of temporal present-ness by using binary oppositions (of front/back, presence/absence, occupied/empty, three-dimensional/two-dimensional) that appeal to physical experience, and also imitation and performance, which model the Franciscan, more personalized approach to spiritual apprehension and devotional practice.[2]

Like the other scenes of Francis's life, the *Institution of the Crib at Greccio* is drawn from Bonaventure's *Legenda maior,* the 1266 official biography of Francis paraphrased in Latin *titulae* (or inscriptions) on the wall below each scene.[3] Bonaventure's text informs the reader that Francis obtained permission from the Pope to celebrate the memory of the Nativity, "in order to arouse devotion":

> He had a manger prepared, hay carried in and an ox and an ass led to the spot. The brethren are summoned, the people arrive, the forest amplifies

> with their cries, and that venerable night is rendered brilliant and solemn by a multitude of bright lights and by resonant and harmonious hymns of praise. The man of God stands before the manger, filled with piety, bathed in tears, and overcome with joy. A solemn Mass is celebrated over the manger, with Francis, a levite of Christ, chanting the holy Gospel. Then he preaches to the people standing around him about the birth of the poor King, whom, whenever he means to call him, he called in his tender love, the Babe from Bethlehem. A certain virtuous and truthful knight, Sir John of Greccio, who had abandoned worldly military activity out of love of Christ and had become an intimate friend of the man of God, claimed that he saw a beautiful little child asleep in that manger whom the blessed father Francis embraced in both of his arms and seemed to wake it from sleep. Not only does the holiness of the witness make credible the vision of the devout knight, but also the truth it expresses proves its validity and the subsequent miracles confirm it. For Francis's example, when considered by the world, is capable of arousing the hearts of those who are sluggish in the faith of Christ...[4]

The Assisi fresco representing the *Crib at Greccio* radically departs from the description supplied by Bonaventure. Rather than surrounded by the forest at Greccio, a monumental *tramezzo* or choir screen spans the entire width of the image. During the middle ages *tramezzi* were erected to separate the sacred and lay areas of a church.[5] Marcia Hall's study of Santa Croce in Florence shows that the *tramezzo* provided a way for the friars to pass from the monastery to the choir without being seen. Learning from late medieval sources, including Durandus, the late-thirteenth-century authority on ritual and the Church, Hall asserts that the chancel was divided hierarchically: the clergy occupied the immediate area around the altar, the friars the secondary area of the choir and during the mass male Christians might be permitted to cross over the *tramezzo* into the choir while women and those not baptized were relegated to the nave outside of the sacred area.[6] Indeed, this is precisely what is pictured within the *Crib at Greccio* where the Assisi visitor cleverly has been transported behind the *tramezzo* to the sacred area of a church. Just as Durandus described, some devout laymen stand near the threshold of the chancel entrance, in front of four friars who are elevated by the raised steps of choir stalls, their mouths open in song. In the foreground, the dramatic reenactment planned by Francis takes place. Cloaked in the robes of a deacon, the Saint kneels beside a manger placed in front of the altar where two other tonsured friars in priest's garments conduct the service. Forbidden to cross over the threshold of the *tramezzo*, the women are clustered within its doorway. Peering through the opening created by the painted framework, the Assisi visitor, by implication, "stands" in the chancel, an area that a *tramezzo* would have made invisible to a layperson in the nave. From this unexpected viewpoint, one that replicates the position of a friar, the beholder of this fresco is offered a most privileged position: an unobstructed view of the moment when Francis reaches into the crib to embrace the awakened child.

At the end of the thirteenth century, this is an astounding viewpoint rendered and offered by the artist—in effect, revealing a spectacle from "behind the scenes." Not only is the beholder led behind the *tramezzo*, but also offered the opportunity to gaze all around the sacred space and contemplate this panorama. On the left, the interior of an empty pulpit is partially visible, including its access stairway. Centered above the *tramezzo*'s doorway opening is a monumental crucifix shown in perspective, its unseen painted face leaning forward toward the nave, away from the chancel; it is held in place by a chain connected to a tripod support firmly planted on the cornice. Like the pulpit, only the reverse side of the crucifix is visible, yet its distinctive silhouette serves to identify it. Its flatness is made more apparent by the shaded cross-bars and battens of its supports. With its obverse unseen, its function as a devotional object fades. From this point of view, which yields a meticulous scrutiny of its construction, its physical making is emphasized as a material object of mechanical representation; its inanimate nature contrasts the very human nature of Francis below.

Stepping over the threshold into this unexpected setting, we are shown a variety of elements from fundamentally different and distinct points of view. The pulpit is silent, the crucified Christ a ghostly outline. While an unusual view is rendered, always implicit is its more familiar binary opposite: the viewer has experienced the public space of the nave, the painted cross, the occupied pulpit. The women clustered within the *tramezzo* doorway, stand at this juncture between front and back, inside and outside, peering into the chancel toward the dramatic reenactment of the nativity, mirroring the position of the visitor standing in the Upper Church. The object of these gazes from within and outside the fresco is Francis, who kneels in the painted chancel lifting a baby from a manger. Shown in profile, Francis faces the covered altar and holds the swaddled infant just above the crib. He and the child gaze intensely at one another, seeming to share a psychological connection. Equally dramatic is the foreshortened head of the layman who looks down onto Francis and the child; he represents the knight mentioned in Bonaventure's text, who "affirmed that he saw a little Child" awakened by Francis. The knight's blue garments are depicted with bright, reflective surfaces to mark him visually as transfigured and enlightened by his experience of what he saw.[7]

The altar is perpendicular to the nave and turned in a gentle oblique angle into depth, thus permitting us to see what transpires in front of it. Tightly surrounding the altar are friars and at least one other layman. Francis and three other friars are dressed in clerical garments; Francis wears the vestments of a deacon and the foremost friar wears the chasuble of the priest. The remaining four others, standing in the background parallel to the *tramezzo*, are dressed in Franciscan habits and have their mouths opened in song. Just to the left of the raised lectern, in an area behind Francis, stand a larger group of laymen dressed in an array of carefully differentiated garments. Some scholars have proposed that the fresco represents the recreation of

Francis's Greccio sermon, which took place yearly in the Lower Church of San Francesco.[8] In fact, as many have remarked, the marble choir screen that once divided the lay and liturgical spaces of the Lower Church, bears some physical resemblance to the one represented in this fresco. In short, the fresco displays a wealth of detail, extraordinarily rendered, including the most current liturgical furnishings within a distinctively Franciscan and Umbrian arrangement of the choir area.[9]

This ahistorical appeal to the sensibility of a "witness" and/or "participant" within the drama is characteristic of the Franciscan experiential approach to devotional practice.[10] Our ability to understand these practices in the late Middle Ages is aided by *The Meditations on the Life of Christ*, a text written by a friar for a Poor Clare nun.[11] This exhaustive text follows the chronology of Christ's life and is interwoven with directives on proper meditation of the holy events as well as exhortations to imagine the sights and sounds of the events described, as well as the feelings of those involved in them. Repeatedly, throughout the *Meditations*, the author advises his reader to "see," to "behold," to "look" at the scene he is describing, appealing to her imagination through visual imagery. He is outlining a practical guide to meditation that depends on a vivid amplification of the gospel narratives, often asking the reader to imagine herself present at the event. The reader is told to look closely at participants, to imagine their feelings and reactions to circumstances. The text, like the St. Francis cycle in the Upper Basilica, employs familiar sights or locations that appeal to the imagination of the reader allowing her to be "present" at the event while also bestowing a kind of witness-like authority on the description. For instance, in the *Meditations* the author describes the Virgin's distress at being unable to locate the twelve-year-old Christ before she finds him in the Temple with the Elders. He tells of her search in the neighborhood and appeals to the reader's realm of experience by observing that, as there is more than one route between Siena and Pisa, the Virgin searched alternate routes between Jerusalem and Nazareth.[12] This narrative device also is one used in the frescoes, found not only in the *Crib at Greccio*, but also in other scenes, perhaps most notably in the first scene of the cycle, *Francis and the Simple Man*, which places the still-extant Temple of Minerva as a backdrop to the protagonists of the drama. Besides using the familiar to engage the reader, the *Meditations* also uses vivid description and explicitly commands the reader to imagine herself present at the event described. For example, in recounting the Sermon on the Mount, he instructs his reader:

> Therefore look and reflect on the Lord Jesus humbly seated on the ground on the summit of that mount among the disciples surrounding Him. . . .And, as I said before in the general discourse, always try to look at the face of the Lord, and look also at the disciples as they gaze on Him with reverence, humility, and all intentness of mind, listening to those marvelous words and committing them to memory. . . .Take pleasure in these meditations, as

> though you could see Him speak, and approach Him; perhaps you will be called to stay with them at the Lord's bidding. When the sermon is finished, watch the Lord Jesus descend together with the disciples, speaking familiarly with them; and as they walk on the road, see how this group of simple people follows, not in careful, orderly fashion, but like chickens following the hen, so that they might better hear Him, each one trying to come close to Him.[13]

Particularly noteworthy in regard to the *Crib of Greccio* is the encouragement by the author of the *Meditations* to assume several kinds of "viewpoints" within the Sermon on the Mount narrative. The painter, like the writer, approaches the *Crib of Greccio* in a typically Franciscan approach, persuading the beholder to experience the event as concretely as possible and from multiple perspectives.

Besides echoing the experiential devotional approach found in the *Meditations*, the ostensible subject of this fresco represents Francis's celebration of the nativity at Greccio, an event in which he imitated the gospels; the fresco also seems to suggest nativity reenactments that occurred in Assisi, perhaps in the Lower Church.[14] Although Francis's posture and role strongly recall that of Mary, certain figures within the chancel also echo, albeit faintly, other characters commonly seen in nativity or adoration plays. In this dramatic reenactment of the nativity, the layman with bowed head appears to imitate the pious and watchful role of Joseph. The singing friars might be compared to adoring angels, and the three prosperous citizens stationed in the foreground in front of the "heavenly chorus" might be compared to the three Magi. By contrast, the tonsured "celebrant" and two "acolytes" are more like adoring shepherds in their simplicity. Seen in this way, the fresco may record the friars' and local townspeople's collaboration in sacred dramas. If so, the fresco involves imitation of more than one type of imitation of sacred event. Moreover, the devout woman framed in the doorway of the *tramezzo*, by virtue of her frontal, absolutely central position and the colors she wears, is faintly reminiscent of the Virgin, particularly the Virgin as Ecclesia as she stands on the threshold of the chancel. The resemblance of figures in this fresco to nativity and adoration characters, whether intentional or coincidental, retains an indirect element of familiarity for a Greccio scene in which the accustomed setting and vantage point have otherwise been so unexpectedly inverted.

The artist employs a series of binary oppositions to summon up known experiences while also introducing an element of the unfamiliar; these binary pairings give concrete expression to the elusive spiritual presence. In the *Crib at Greccio* there is a dramatic contrast in the scene between background absence and foreground presence. The emptiness of the pulpit and the blankness of the crucifix's back are contrasted with the occupied crib and with the altar that has been turned so that it offers its face to the visitor standing in the nave of San Francesco. The bodily three-dimensionality of the altar

and its canopy contrasts with the more distant crucifix's flatness. Might the convergence of all these logically contradictory perspectives correspond to experience seen through not the bodily but the spiritual eyes, the very eyes required for our seeing so plainly the child in the crib?

A counterpoint experience is found on the opposite wall of the nave. As a viewer turns from the *Crib at Greccio* to begin moving closer to the altar, the *Verification of the Stigmata* (figure 1.3) presents a more traditional viewpoint within a church.[15] Whereas in the *Crib* the chancel was filled with participants and observers, presumably leaving the nave of the church empty, this time the action has shifted. The observers and participants are pressed together clustered at the juncture of the nave and chancel while the sacred area of the church remains an empty backdrop. Visually, the *Verification of the Stigmata* has reversed the perspective from the *Crib at Greccio*, but like the *Crib* (and the *Meditations*' descriptions of events) the beholder is offered various standpoints from which to examine the scene, ranging from a layperson, to a friar, to the knight probing the wound of Francis.

In this scene Francis's prone body lies parallel to the picture plane surrounded by officiating clergy, friars and other mourners. The officiating clergy's Franciscan habits are clearly visible beneath their vestments, reminding us of their fraternal vows and bond as well as the temporary roles they play within this service, and perhaps also those they might perform during a Passion play. A kneeling knight, his hat removed, probes the side wound of Francis to confirm its authenticity. The actual physical position of the visitor in the Upper Church overlaps with the implied viewpoint, which is respectfully rendered from the nave looking toward a much simpler rood beam or iconostasis and the apse. The iconostasis consists of a simple wooden horizontal beam supported by consoles that connect the beam to the side walls, a choice that echoes the original arrangement in the Upper Church. In the fresco, the beam holds three shaped panels: an image of the Enthroned Madonna and Child on the left, a monumental painted crucifix in the center, and an image of Michael the Archangel on the right, all presenting their painted surfaces primarily toward Francis lying below and the beholder standing in the nave. Visible behind the wooden structure is the ghostly outline of the apse, articulated by a stringcourse, the molding surround of the arch and the coffers in the apse vault. A variety of light fixtures are suspended on long cords, presumably from the ceiling, as is the forward-leaning crucifix panel, which has been identified as representing the one commissioned by Brother Elias from Giunta Pisano in 1236 that later decorated the Upper Church.[16]

In this scene the more expansive threshold appears to be marked by the body of Francis: the clergy and friars stand in the chancel while Francis and a few laypeople appear to be on the nave side, along with the beholder. The man kneeling in the foreground examining Francis's side wound was described by Bonaventure as "a knight who was educated and prudent, Jerome by name, a distinguished and famous man."[17] The knight pulls

back Francis's robe with his right hand, while fingers of his left hand probe the wound. Besides this particular appeal to knowledge gained through touch and vision, auditory and olfactory cues are present: the friars chant, the few present laymen gesture and speak among themselves, incense and tapers burn. In some ways, the kneeling knight recalls the pose and gentle touch of Francis in the *Crib at Greccio*. Just as the sight of Francis awakening the Child stirred the sluggish faith of others, so the act of the knight Jerome serves to benefit many: "While he was examining with his hands these authentic signs of Christ's wounds, he completely healed the wound of doubt in his own heart and the hearts of others."[18] In the *Verification*, the knight Jerome gains knowledge and faith through touch, while in the *Crib at Greccio*, the knight John—who alone sees Francis awaken the sleeping child—gains knowledge through sight. The *Verification of the Stigmata* summons up how Francis received the stigmata, a scene represented in the bay immediately before this one. The representation of the painted cross mounted above Francis on the wooden beam in the *Verification* becomes the visual substitution for his seraphic vision of the crucified Christ and his reception of the stigmata. Additionally, the artist evokes parallelisms to the disciple Thomas's doubting of Christ's resurrection and to the *Lamentation of Christ*, a scene represented above in the New Testament cycle.[19] These visual and thematic parallelisms among the scenes help guide the faithful observer toward the connections between Francis and Christ, encouraging meditation on their shared humility and suffering, as well as recognition of Francis as *alter Christus*.[20] Popular knowledge that Francis died on a wooden board also seems to be indicated in the fresco: Francis's thin, emaciated body lies upon a hard, cloth-covered surface. Like the *Crib of Greccio*, there are imitations of imitations in the *Verification*: the representation of the painted crucifix, a simulacrum of Christ poised above the painted Francis who fashioned himself after Christ. Two similarly dressed men, each holding a shield and positioned at the head and foot of Francis, stand on the same plane as the kneeling Jerome. While the one positioned at the head of Francis stands facing the iconostasis and the crowd of mourners, the other one faces outward and gestures to the feet (and signs of the stigmata) of Francis. Placed directly beneath the painted representation of the militant Archangel Michael, this figure appears to replicate not only the stance and gesture of the painted image overhead, but also to guard entrance to the sacred space marked by Francis's body. Additionally, the *Verification* has affinities with the *Miracle of the Crucifix*, the fourth scene of the cycle positioned on the opposite wall.[21] In that early scene, Francis knelt before a cross in an empty dilapidated church and heard the cross speak to him; in the *Verification*, the knight kneels before the dead saint, seeing in Francis the mirror of Christ. That experience before the Cross of San Damiano led Francis to rebuild the church; the knight's experience kneeling beside the saint leads toward the healing of hearts. Now that Francis has rebuilt the Church, its space is filled with the faithful. These iconographic and thematic parallels between scenes

of the cycle underscore how the individual act of viewing is used to shape devotional experience in a thoroughly Franciscan way: depending on imitation and concrete imaginative experiences to understand spirituality.

In the *Mourning of the Clares* (figure 1.4), the scene following the *Verification of the Stigmata*, a large crowd accompanying Francis's funeral cortege from the Porziuncola to Assisi has paused outside San Damiano so that Clare may bid him farewell.[22] Francis's prone body remains on the cloth-covered stretcher now moved in front of a large gothic church façade. St. Clare gently cradles him in a manner that echoes the Virgin Mary's embrace of the dead Christ in lamentation scenes. Another sister kisses his left hand while still more spill forth from the central doorway and flanking windows. Like the immediately preceding scene, this fresco strongly portrays Francis as *alter Christus* and now introduces Clare as *alter mater.* Of particular interest is the presentation of the Poor Ladies, who lived in strict *clausura* at San Damiano. Francis's death has pushed the women over the threshold that kept them invisible presences within the church. Thomas of Celano records in his first biography of Francis that the Saint's body was brought to San Damiano for Clare and her followers to mourn, and that the window or grate through which the cloistered nuns received the blessed sacrament was removed so that Clare could touch Francis in her grief.[23] The Assisi artist depicts the women stepping over the threshold in their "sorrow and joy" and in effect, Francis as *alter Christus* becomes the substitute sacrament. Above the dense crowd of citizens and brothers accompanying Francis's body to its burial is a figure climbing a tree, an obvious reference to Zacchaeus from Christ's Entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19.1–10). In death, Francis is headed to the heavenly Jerusalem represented in the fresco by the church façade.

Between these three scenes, the *Crib at Greccio*, the *Verification of the Stigmata*, and the *Mourning of the Clares*, the beholder has moved from the restricted space of the chancel to the more public space of the nave, and finally to the exterior of the church. In the *Crib at Greccio*, the alignment of the crucifix, lectern, and crib, sets up an axis of ontological hierarchy from Image to Word to Christ himself. The Franciscan "slant" of this axis is felt when one notices that it places the fullest manifestation of the Divine in the position most immediate to our own as viewers. The Greccio episode itself exemplifies the power of imitation on the collective and the individual levels. When the people replicated the scene of Christ's birth, then he indeed became manifest among them. And certainly, the more Francis imitated Christ, the more like Christ he became. In contrast to the *Crib of Greccio* where the women remained within the doorway, in the *Mourning of the Clares*, it is the sacral body of Francis that the women cross over the threshold to embrace. If in the *Crib at Greccio* the lone woman framed within the *tramezzo* doorway could symbolize Ecclesia, we now see the Church embrace Francis. Further, it is possible to infer from the Bonaventuran version of the *Crib at Greccio* that Francis and the Knight John were uniquely able to see Christ precisely because they had sought to imitate him in their lives.

Within the nave of San Francesco, the elaborate framing of the twenty-eight individual scenes marks the threshold between the physical space occupied by a pilgrim in the nave and the fictional reality of the painted scenes drawn from Francis's life. These painted representations exhibit a break from earlier medieval approaches to images because they take on the challenge of constructing the reality of the material world while also suggesting that higher truths are discernible beyond the surface of appearances. The ability of the painter to suggest a coherent spiritual and spatial realm comparable to the viewer's physical world is tied to contemporary persuasive elements contributed by authors of devotional manuals, such as *The Meditations on the Life of Christ*, literary forms such as Thomas of Celano's and Bonaventure's biographies of Francis, and the performance and influence of developing sacred dramas. Through Francis the faithful beholder is reintroduced to the known and initiated to the unseen. From this position, standing on the literal and symbolic threshold, the beholder is encouraged to imagine participating in the spiritual pilgrimage of Francs, the *alter Christus*, and also is beckoned to join him, now and forever.

Notes

1. On the issue of dating the main arguments are summarized in Thomas de Wesselow, "The Date of the St Francis Cycle in the Upper Church of S. Francesco at Assisi: The Evidence of Copies and Considerations of Method," in William R. Cook, ed., *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 113–67.
2. Elsewhere I have analyzed this fresco in great detail exploring the Franciscan approach to narrative and the complex relationship between beholder, image, and devotional practice(s). See Beth A. Mulvaney, "The Beholder as Witness: The 'Crib at Greccio' from the Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi and Franciscan Influence on Late Medieval Art in Italy," in William R. Cook, ed., *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 169–88. I am indebted to the insightful suggestions of Dr. (James) Carlton Hughes, which I have attempted to pursue in this chapter.
3. The Latin inscription for the Crib at Greccio reads: QUOMODO BEATUS FRANCISCUS IN MEMORIAM NATALIS CHRISTI FECIT PRAEPARARI PRAESEPIUM, APPORTARI FOENUM, BOVEM ET ASINUM ADDUCI, ET DE NATIVITATE PAUPERIS REGIS PRAEDICAVIT, ITEMQUE SANCTO VIRO ORATIONEM HABENTE, MILES QUIDAM VIDIT PUERM IESUM LOCO ILLIUS QUEM SANCTUS ATTULERAT. (How Blessed Francis, in memory of the birth of Christ, had a crib prepared, that hay and that an ox and an ass be brought in, and afterwards he preached to the people about the birth of the poor King. Then a knight saw the Child Jesus in the place of that child placed there by the Saint.) Today the titulae are nearly illegible. I have used the inscription and translation

found in: Bruno Dozzini, *Giotto: The "Legend of St. Francis" in the Assisi Basilica*, trans. The New School—S. Maria degli Angeli (Assisi: Editrice Minerva, 1994), p. 32. Alastair Smart also includes the Latin inscription as well as the translation, see Alastair Smart, *The Assisi Problem and the Art of Giotto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 275–76.

4. For the translated text, please consult *The Major Legend of Saint Francis (1260–1263)* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, 3 vols., Volume II: The Founder,* ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), X, 7.
5. Marcia B. Hall, "The *Tramezzo* in Santa Croce, Florence, Reconstructed," *Art Bulletin* 56 (1974): 337–40 [325–41].
6. Durandus's treatise, the 1286 *Rationale divinorum officiorum* is still considered a reliable source on church customs, rituals, and the symbolism of the church and its furnishings, see W. Durandus, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, trans. J. M. Neale and B. Webb, *The symbolism of churches and church ornaments* (1843; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1973). See also Donal Cooper, "Franciscan Choir Enclosures and the Function of Double–Sided Altarpieces in Pre-Tridentine Umbria," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 64 (2001): 51–54 [1–54].
7. See my 2005 article for a more developed reading of this figure: Mulvaney, "The Beholder as Witness," (see n. 2), pp. 186–88.
8. Pietro Scarpellini, "Assisi e suoi monumenti nella pittura dei secoli XIII–XVI," in Società internazionale di studi francescani, *Assisi al tempo di San Francesco: atti del V Convegno internazionale, Assisi, 13–16 Ottobre 1977* (Assisi: La Società, 1978), pp. 104–8; and more recently Paola Mercurelli Salari, "L'arte francescana nella Valle Reatina," in Luigi Pellegrini and Stanislao da Campagnola, eds., *Il francescanesimo nella Valle Reatina* ([Cinisello Balsamo]: Silvana, 1993), p. 168.
9. Recent findings of Donal Cooper show that Franciscan churches in the Umbria region often used a tramezzo or choir screen to create a distinct liturgical area housing the altar and choir stalls separate from the laity and the nave, see Cooper, "Franciscan Choir Enclosures," (see n. 6): 51–54 [1–54].
10. I have analyzed the spatial relationships in the Crib at Greccio and compared them to the devotional literacy found in such texts as Giovanni de Caulibus's *Meditations on the Life of Christ* and Ugo Panciera's *Trattato della perfezione della mentale azion*. Please see Mulvaney, "The Beholder as Witness," (see n. 2), pp. 169–88.
11. *The Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. and ed. I. Ragusa and R. B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Ragusa and Green believe that it originally was written in Latin, but its immediate widespread popularity resulted in its translation into different vernaculars. Once attributed to Bonaventure, the text is now given to Giovanni de Caulibus and dated to after 1346 and before 1364. Despite its fourteenth-century date, the text provides insight on late medieval devotional practices, serving as an indispensable guide to the viewing and interpretive approaches established during the thirteenth century.

On the issue of dating, see Johannes de Caulibus, C. Mary Stallings-Taney, and Bonaventura, *Iohannis de Caulibus Meditaciones vite Christi: olim S. Bonaventuro attributae*, Corpus Christianorum, 153 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), p. xi; Sarah McNamer, "Further Evidence for the Date of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*," *Franciscan Studies* 50 (1990): 235–61; Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,1996), p. 193; and Emma Simi Varanelli, "Le *Meditationes vitae nostri Domini Jesu Christi* nell'arte del Duecento italiano," *Arte Medievale* 2nd ser., 6 (1992): 137–48. For authorship of the text, in addition, see: Livario Oliger, "*Les Meditationes Vitae Christi* del Pseudo-Bonaventura," *Studi Francescani* 7 (1921): 143–83 and idem, *Studi Francescani* 8 (1922): 18–47.

12. *Meditations* (see n. 11), p. 89.
13. *Meditations* (see n. 11), pp. 151–55.
14. Assisi has long been recognized as fundamental to the development of Italian drama, see: Sandro Sticca, "Italian Theater of the Middle Ages: from the Quem quaeritis to the Lauda," in *Forum Italicum* 14 (1980): 297–99 [275–310]; and Fernando Ghilardi, "Le origini del teatro italiano e San Francesco," *L'Italia Francescana* 30 (1955): 341–52; 31 (1956): 81–87.
15. For an illustration of this painting, see the volume from the *Mirabilia Italiae* series: *La Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi*, 4 vols., ed. Giorgio Bonsanti (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, 2002), II, p. 876, Plate 1715.
16. See Dozzini, *Giotto* (see n. 3), p. 51.
17. For Bonaventure's text, please consult: *The Major Legend*, XV, 4.
18. Bonaventure, *The Major Legend*, XV, 4.
19. The *Lamentation of Christ* is located to the left of the *Crucifixion* scene. Because the New Testament cycle appears only on this wall, unfolding from the crossing to the entrance (a pattern that runs counter to the direction of the Francis cycle), the *Crucifixion* (followed by the *Lamentation*) appears diagonally above and to the left of the *Verification*.
20. For illustrations of these two bay walls (that allow you to see the St. Francis episodes below the New Testament scenes), consult Bonsanti, *La Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi* (see n. 15), II, p. 686, Plate 1371 and p. 694, Plate 1396.
21. For an illustration of this scene, please see Bonsanti, *La Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi* (see n. 15), II, p. 840, Plate 1666.
22. For this scene, consult: Bonsanti, *La Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi* (see n. 15), II, p. 878, Plate 1719.
23. Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 116.

CHAPTER 2

BEARING WITNESS: THE PHYSICAL EXPRESSION OF THE SPIRITUAL IN THE NARRATIVE CYCLE AT ASSISI

Janet Snyder

Entombed in the Lower Basilica of the pilgrimage church of San Francesco in Assisi are the remains of Francis Bernardone, who was canonized in 1228 just over twenty months after his death.[1] The pilgrimage church was built between his canonization and 1253, and its walls were decorated during the following century. Probably painted in the 1290s, the register below the clerestory of the nave walls in the Upper Basilica at Assisi is frescoed with twenty-eight scenes from the biography of St. Francis (figure 1.1).[2]

Close attention to how the bodies of minor personages are represented in this cycle of paintings reveals that these figures become "guides" for the inspired visitor, helping to transform past time into the present. This imaginative transformation permits these paintings to shift from functioning as a simple report of historical events, to reifying the legend of St. Francis. In the experience of the visitor, St. Francis comes to life. The work of the painter coincides with Franciscan thinking in three ways: the selection of scenes in the basilica, the formal composition of individual scenes, and the inclusion of exceptional figures witnessing the events of Franciscan legend.

Francis dedicated his life to following the words of the Gospels, giving up earthly goods and aspiring to be like Christ in a new spirituality, as an *alter Christus*. The names of Francis's early disciples were known from the Franciscan legends, so a kind of portraiture might have been intended in the frescoes in the Upper Church, though certainly no one who had met Francis was still alive when the paintings were made in the 1290s. When they had been set down, the stories of the life of Francis—both the original memories written by his companions and contemporaries and also the later

official *Legenda maior*—were *shaped* as biography, in much the same way as the evangelists had shaped the Gospels to emphasize various aspects of the life of Christ.[3] Just as today modern historical novels vivify the story with details from actual events in order to connect their readers, so the legends named many of the real people who were the companions of Francis and the real locations where incidents occurred.

Franciscan preaching placed an emphasis on empathy and on imaginative visualization. This emphasis encouraged seeing and experiencing for one's self.[4] Much scholarly attention has focused on iconography, that is, the stories told in this cycle of narrative paintings at Assisi, but the relationship(s) among the scenes deserves closer analysis. The historical events of the legend were selected carefully by the designer of the narrative scenes so the life of St. Francis parallels the Old and New Testament scenes on the upper nave walls, exemplifying the Christ-like nature of the life of Francis. On the north nave wall, for example, *The Confirmation of the Franciscan Rule by the Pope* was placed below *Isaac's blessing (confirmation) of Jacob.* On the south side of the nave, the *Death of Francis* was placed on the wall directly below the *Crucifixion* or Death of Christ. Perhaps even more remarkable evidence for Francis as *alter Christus* is the sequence of the third and fourth scenes opposite the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth scenes: in the third, Francis hears the voice of God in a dream and in the fourth, he is awake, and he hears the voice of the crucified Christ asking him to repair the church; on the opposite side of the nave, the pope doubts the wound in the side of Francis only to witness it in a dream, then in the following scene, Francis repairs the wounded body of the dying Giovanni di Lerida. The sequence represents Francis assuming the divine role presenting the vision and compelling action.

This arrangement of scenes creates the impression that the Assisi paintings represent the actual sequence of events in the life of St. Francis. The selection of events from Francis's biography for these frescoes redefines not only the legend of Francis but also the pilgrim's experience in meditation on the saint's life. The painter composed an experience to be followed by viewers of the frescoes. The visitor can observe scenes showing the life of St. Francis by traveling in real time around the Upper Basilica, beginning at the north transept and proceeding clockwise around the nave. The subtext narrative of the fresco paintings illustrates the spiritual transformations undergone by Francis and by those who knew him. The scenes are peopled by witnesses to these spiritual transformations, including popes, contemporaries, people who had never met Francis during his lifetime, and posthumous followers. The visitor has the option to modify real time. Like a reader of poetry, the pilgrim-viewer has the freedom to follow the sequence of the paintings, to invent relationships between parts of the story that face each other across the nave, to look from one scene to another, and to revisit poignant incidents. One might turn, for example, from *The Dream of Fra Agostino* to the *Dream of Innocent III* across the nave, glance ahead to the *Dream of Gregory IX,* and to turn back again.

Significantly, this painting cycle combines iconography with style—storytelling and the technique of painted representation—to convey meaning. The formal compositions of individual scenes, the figural painting style of the Upper Church frescoes, and the choice of incidents represented differ from the composition, style, and iconography used in early paintings of St. Francis and also from works made just a few years later. Each of the eight early dossals presents a large central figure of St. Francis surrounded by scenes from the Franciscan legend.[5] In each dossal the large frontal figure of St. Francis is flanked by small rectangular paintings of narrative scenes stacked one above another. The same types of posthumous Christ-like miracles attributed to Francis—raising the dead, healing the lame and the sick, and so on—were repeated by the designers of the dossals, reflecting the desire on the part of his contemporaries to confirm the sanctity of Francis. Formally, stylized, rather flat figures crowd together in a narrow zone at the base of each scene in the dossal compositions, with the participants' feet located in a band of "ground." With the economy traditionally employed in earlier Italian wall paintings such as the twelfth-century paintings in the lower Church of San Clemente in Rome, two stages of an episode from the life of St. Francis, the healing of Benedict of Nursia, for example, might be combined in a single composition.[6]

The paintings of the Upper Basilica at Assisi notably differ from the dossals on several counts. The difference in scale is tremendous, for the walls of the basilica provide huge fields for twenty-eight narrative scenes arranged around the nave while the dossals' scenes are much more intimate in size. Different stories from those in the dossals were selected for the frescoes, and some of the different compositional techniques used by the painter represent startling innovations (the concept of three-dimensional space explodes vertically as in *the Miracle of the Spring*), and all but one of the panels at Assisi show a single moment in time.[7] Further, these compositions have a new characteristic that projects Franciscan thinking and the idea of experiential spirituality: the painter has depicted the physical body of particular witnesses with a tangible specificity. This corporeality of certain figures at Assisi is extraordinary when compared with slightly later paintings such as those painted by Giotto di Bondone for the Scrovegni Chapel at Padua between 1303 and 1305.

The painter at Assisi emphasized the humanity of some of the witnesses, using chiaroscuro techniques of highlight and shadow to describe the physical, three-dimensional nature of human beings. The different character of the Assisi paintings can be easily observed in a comparison between the friars in the *Death of Francis* from Assisi and the seated apostles in the *Last Supper* from Padua. The revolutionary depiction at Padua, as Howard Davis pointed out, involves a sculptural representation of figures in indeterminate space through an emphasis of mass, volume, and gravity.[8] The painter at Assisi humanized the figures through a description of the structure of individual human limbs and bodies occupying space in known places: the piazza in

Assisi before the Temple of Minerva or the grotto on Mount La Verna. In the Upper Basilica at Assisi, the style of representation, the placement of particular figures, and a new gestural vocabulary cause the Assisi compositions to possess distinct focus; as a result, individual personages within the narrative scenes serve as guides for the pilgrim.[9]

These large-scale images of persons participating in scenes from the well-known legend provide an experience in the present tense for the pilgrim/visitor. Using highlight and shadow to define the physical body, the painter emphasized the humanity of particular individuals, described here as witnesses meant to guide the visitor. Further, the idea of personal experience of the Franciscan legend is expressed through volume and arrested movement of the physical body. In the paintings, response and behavior are modeled for the pilgrim by personages who, bearing witness, act as surrogates for the visitor. In placing the scenes just above the heads of pilgrims, the designer provided visual access and immediacy to all for compelling compositions that were structured to elicit empathetic response and imaginative visualization. In rendering the figures of the guides differently from the rest of the figures in the narrative scenes, the painter refined the visitor's visual understanding at the same time that he redefined the experience of the legend. Engaged in dynamic interactions within scenes of astonishing sacredness, these guides instruct the visitor to assume an active role in the narrative.

It is worth taking time to observe the sequence of witnesses in the twenty-eight scenes. In most of these narrative scenes, one or two of the observing minor figures are depicted with a remarkable corporeality. It is the simpleton in *Francis Honored by a Simple Man;* the knight in *Francis Giving His Mantle to a Poor Knight*; Francis is alone in *The Vision of the Palace Filled with Arms* and in *Francis in Prayer before the Cross in San Damiano;* the father of Francis and also two children in *Francis's Rejection of Earthly Goods;* the pope's companion in *The Dream of Innocent III;* two brothers in *The Confirmation of the Franciscan Rule by Innocent III;* one friar in *The Vision of Francis in the Fiery Chariot;* a friar in *The Vision of the Thrones;* Fra Silvestro in *The Expulsion of Devils from Arezzo;* one of the Sultan's advisors in *The Ordeal by Fire before the Sultan of Egypt*; the center friar in *Saint Francis in Ecstasy;* the knight, John, in the *Institution of the Crib at Greccio;* the friar in *The Miracle of the Spring;* the friar in *Francis Preaching to the Birds*; the friar at the table in *The Death of the Knight of Celano;* a listener in *Saint Francis Preaching before Honorius III;* friar Monaldo in *Saint Francis Appears before the Chapter at Arles*; Francis is alone in *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata;* a mourning friar in *The Death and Ascension of Saint Francis;* there are two episodes in *The Dream of Fra Agostino and the Bishop of Assisi,* and here, Fra Agostino looks to the apotheosis in the preceding scene; the Knight Girolamo in *The Verification of the Stigmata;* a nun behind Clare in *The Mourning of the Clares;* a monk and also seated women in *The Canonization of Saint Francis;* seated friars in *The Appearance to Gregory IX;* Giovanni di Lerida in *The Healing of the Wounded Man;* the child in *The Confession of the Woman Raised from the Dead;* and finally, the heretic in *The Liberation of the Repentant Heretic.*

Many of these persons remain unnamed in the written biographies, something that calls attention to the painter's choice to emphasize them with an extraordinary depiction. The design and placement of the individual guides alter the pilgrim's perception, which can be influenced by the compelling rhythm of their presence. Variations in the intensity of the chiaroscuro, the skill of the painters, and the depth of emotion surge and recede throughout the cycle. Guides direct attention with their eyes and use physical gestures to express recognition of the event they have witnessed in the life of St. Francis. These gestures appear in contradistinction to the conventional language of gestures generally used in thirteenth-century painting to focus attention or to indicate amazement. Four friars stand amazed in *The Ecstasy of Saint Francis* (figure 2.1).[10] While one of them raises a hand in the conventional gesture of amazement, the whole body of the friar closest to and pulling back from the *Ecstasy* is engaged in a new way: he presses down with his left hand and hunches his shoulders forward; with his right hand lifted and clenched, his whole being seems to have withdrawn with the core of his body, as if reacting to the impact of a physical blow. His weight is balanced over his right leg, his left knee is locked with the foot extended forward. In addition to the light and dark the painter used to define this friar's form, this garment appears to have been tinged with gold, and the action of pulling back is implied in the tension across the fabric of his tunic. This friar's new engagement with his whole body is momentous.

Witnesses like this one enable a visitor to transform the observation of an historical event into a present, lived experience by joining viewer and viewed in their narrative. The narrative engages present time through the tangible, physical reality of the guides, so that the visitor's experience of observation is transformed into participation: the painter collapses past and present time, heavenly and earthly realms. The combination of a more naturalistic painting style, the painter's compositions, and his depiction of such specific gestures remakes a story about Francis into a lived experience with Francis. A modern pilgrim may require periods of study to acquire access to the intended teaching and pilgrimage functions of frescoes of San Francesco, but for the fourteenth-century pilgrim, medieval receptivity to visual information was more immediate and the borders of narration and life more permeable.[11]

The witness-guides in six of the narrative scenes provide particularly compelling evidence that this cycle of paintings was intended to lead the pious pilgrim into the actual, spiritual experience of St. Francis. In the text of Chapter thirty-three of the first book of Thomas of Celano, the written narrative describing the *Institution of the Crib at Greccio* shifts from past to present tense as the narrator describes the event as it unfolded.[12] The author's change in the verb tense reflects the desire of Francis to have his audience live their Christianity in the present: if Greccio can be come Bethlehem, then any place can welcome the divine presence. In the Upper Church fresco of the *Institution of the Crib at Greccio* (figure 1.2), a cross-section of the faithful appears, which is an important feature of the devotional text

Meditations on the Life of Christ.[13] In this late medieval text there is a continual exhortation to the reader to imagine herself present at narrated events.[14] This painting at Assisi allows the visitor to imagine herself twice-present: at the Nativity in ancient Bethlehem, and at its reenactment in the thirteenth-century Italian town of Greccio. The quotidian nature of the composition provides an extraordinary immediacy. The behavior of the laymen is conventional: at least nine men in fine clothes crowd in front of two singing friars; one man, clad as an academic in a *housse,* has raised his hand in the familiar gesture of amazement; women, confined to the nave, cluster in the doorway at the center of the composition.[15] On the right side of the scene tonsured clerics gather around the altar in front of more singing friars. John, the religious nobleman who provided the crèche, is distinguished in a blue gown painted so that his body seems to radiate light, with the muscles of his arms, shoulders, and chest highlighted. Like a dossal or cloth of state, a linen altar cloth drapes the altar as a background for the crib, ox, and ass. Kneeling down center in this tableau, Francis lifts the living Christ Child: the Nativity in Bethlehem occurs in the present. Subtly glowing with recognition and compressed by the complex composition, John, the visitor's guide, models reverent behavior in the presence of this miracle.[16] The pilgrim experiences in the narrative painting that "wondrous vision" that only "a virtuous man" can see.[17] As each visitor recognizes and identifies with a guide's physical reality, the incident is melded with the present moment, providing a spiritual experience like John's faith.

Something spectacular also happens in the conception of the body in *Francis before the Sultan* (figure 3.2).[18] The combination of gesture and representation conveys the apostolic meaning of this scene. According to the legend, in declining to submit to the test proposed by Francis, the non-Christians concede the validity of Francis's claim to surrender to the will of God. Significantly, it is the Sultan's four advisors who are made more human through the artist's use of a dynamic, dramatic composition. This quartet of real people emphasizes the choices that are available to all people, including the observing pilgrim: here, the actions of turning away from the fire and moving out of the picture frame pull the visitor into the scene. The dense forms of Francis and his companion anchor the composition, centered between the Sultan and his advisors. One advisor's body draws attention with terrific twisting gestures: his left hand is concealed within his long robe while his right hand is raised. Though his shoulders are facing the direction he is moving, this advisor's face has turned back toward Francis. Perhaps "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."[19] As he steps forward, moving away from the fire, his right knee presses against the cloth of his long tunic and his left calf and heel push down. The Assisi painter used techniques that anticipate Renaissance drawings by nearly two hundred years with his use of a chiaroscuro rendering of the drawn-back hips, the relationship of the left leg and foot to torso, and the fabric caught around the turning form.[20]

Chiaroscuro was used again to define the arms and legs of the observing friar who genuflects in the lower zone of *The Vision of the Heavenly Thrones*.[21] An experience of the geometric composition relies on this initial entrance into the scene. With hand, posture, and eyes, this friar initiates a triangular line of sight: up to the winged being in the center of the vision, down to Francis's head, where it gets redirected to the Cross on the altar. Secondarily, the diagonal gesture leads to the prepared thrones in the upper part of the panel.

The composition of the *Vision of Francis in the Fiery Chariot* can be divided into quarters (figure 2.2). In the upper right quadrant, the red steed carries Francis aloft, calmly observed by three standing friars in the lower right quadrant.[22] In the opposite corner from Francis, the near-levitation of one of the four friars inside the building in response to the vision is electrifying: the split-second of his shock is made visible. His body glows through his coarse robe; his chest, arms, and knees are sculpted with an ethereal light.

In *The Chapter House at Arles* sixteen friars have assembled in a Gothic architectural interior (figure 2.3).[23] The eyes of two friars seem to be locked on the elevated Francis just inside the doorway to the cloister, but the witness who guides the visitor is the friar seated in the corner; while the standing Anthony is preaching, Monaldo glances up and is graced with the vision of Francis blessing the brothers. The Giottoesque volumetric figures of Padua are anticipated here at Assisi in the bulky, substantial, conical figure of the standing Anthony. Characteristic of the Assisi frescoes' physicality is the body of the seated Monaldo that quivers with a frisson unlike the other, unaware men in the Chapterhouse. An observer can feel thrilled and seduced by such conspiratorial intensity even among the rush of tourists at the Basilica today. Through the painting, a moment of Franciscan experiential spirituality becomes present in the pilgrim.

Individualized friar-disciples mourn *The Death and Ascension of Saint Francis*.[24] In the back views of friars weeping around the bier, the painter emphasized the rounded forms of very human buttocks, feet, and thighs beneath rough habits. Once again, the clothing of the friar in the corner appears to radiate light. Although the painter was not fully successful in illustrating every human form with anatomical exactitude, the fresco demonstrates a heightened concern with recognizable, real bodies beneath the coarse fabric of humble Franciscan tunics. These guides model reverential behavior for visitors whose pilgrimage route can descend to the tomb of Francis in the Lower Basilica. Identifying with the guides, the pilgrim joins a community of mourners, moved by the friars' wretched, physically expressed sorrow at the death of the saint. At the same time, the pilgrim's spiritual experience is tempered and comforted with a sure knowledge that St. Francis was canonized in 1228, his elevation prompted by the example of his life and the miracles celebrated in the next eight narrative paintings in the Upper Basilica.

The ultimate interaction of visitor with painting may occur when no painted "guide" appears in a scene, as when Francis appears alone in *Miracle*

of the Crucifix at San Damiano or *The Stigmatization of Saint Francis* (figure 2.4). With no one in the painting to serve as his guide, the pilgrim must take the initiative to choose to enter the scene, personally bearing witness to these transformative moments. Much as believers accept the consecration of the Eucharist as transubstantiation rather than commemoration, these frescoes may make present the legendary events. Each pilgrim may be transformed permanently by this temporal, spiritual journey with Francis through these frescoes.

In the narrative cycle of paintings of the Upper Church at Assisi, scenes from the past are not merely reported; instead, familiar stories are brought to life. The paintings, beautiful in themselves, are more than decoration. The narrative cycle was a consciously organized composition in which the knowledgeable pilgrim can not only recognize ordinary people in their daily dress but also the Franciscan legends in their Umbrian locales. In the paintings, response and behavior are modeled for the pilgrim by personages who, bearing witness, act as surrogates for the visitor. Using these surrogates to experience and verify the saint's life, the artist has composed an opportunity for empathetic response and imaginative visualization. The visitor learns from these guides to assume the active role of witness, and to join them in proceeding through the narrative in the present tense. This active participation transforms the subject of the paintings so that the biography of Francis becomes part of the autobiography of the pious pilgrim.

The frescoes graphically illustrate and create essential experiences for the observer, transporting one into the present. The designer of the narrative frescoes elevates pilgrims' visits to the Basilica Shrine through an extraordinarily complex and original visualization that makes use of the habits common to the curriculum of contemporary schools to articulate meaning. "The identification of physical appearance and bearing with the character and the state of the inner life is a defining feature of cathedral school culture. . . .The body consequently is meant to be 'read.'"[25] The intersection of narrative legend and participants' recognizable human behavior provides a palpable entry into the paintings. The forms depicted in the paintings do more than tell a story—whether it's the bulk of hips, or the relationship of spinal column to pelvis and shoulder blades, or an original gesture, or the impact of miraculous events striking a real man in the solar plexus with an immediate, gut-wrenching truth. The way of the paintings in Assisi is simultaneously a temporal and a spiritual journey in which Franciscan experience materializes in a tangible integration of real witnesses, historical and living, creating a transformational encounter that is nothing short of miraculous.

Notes

1. Francis Bernardone (1181 or 1182–October 3, 1226) was canonized on July 16, 1228. The first stone was laid by Pope Gregory IX, July 25, 1228.
2. The names of the twenty-eight narrative paintings are listed in n. 9. For illustrations of the paintings in the Basilica, see *La Basilica di San Francesco*

ad Assisi, 4 vols., ed. Giorgio Bonsanti (Modena, Italy: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, 2002), II. A more accessible volume of images is *The Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi*, *Mirabilia Italiae Guide*, ed. Gianfranco Malafarina, trans. Heather Mackay and Mark Roberts (Modena, Italy: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2005).

3. For a translated text of Bonaventure, please consult *The Major Legend of Saint Francis (1260–1263)* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols., *Vol. II: The Founder*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), pp. 525–649.
4. Charles Harrison, "Giotto and the 'Rise of Painting,'" in Diana Norman, ed., *Siena, Florence and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280–1400*, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1995), I, p. 88.
5. Dossals are large panel paintings in Byzantine style; the St. Francis dossals were made between 1235 and about 1280. The eight early dossals are as follows: Bonaventura Berlinghieri, San Francesco, Pescia, 1235; Bardi St. Francis Master, Convento di Santa Croce, Florence, ca. 1245; Master of Cross 434, Museo Civico, Pistoia, ca. 1250; (circle of) Giunta Pisano, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Pisa, ca. 1255; Giunta Pisano, Sacro Convento, Tesoro of the Basilica, Assisi, ca. 1253; follower of Giunta Pisano, Pinacoteca Vaticana, The Vatican, ca. 1255; Master of the Paliotto of Peter, Museo Diocesano, Orte, ca. 1260; Guido di Graziano, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena, ca. 1280. For more information, please consult William R. Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1999).
6. In the *Miracle at the Tomb of St Clement* in the narthex of the lower church of San Clemente (1109–1115), a mother "...finds her child safe by the underwater tomb's canopied altar...and then she is shown holding the child," illustrated in C. R. Dodwell, *The Pictorial Arts of the West 800–1200* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), Figure 161.
7. A single moment in time is presented even when scene twenty-one shows the dream and the dreamer: these are two visions occurring simultaneously.
8. Howard M. Davis, "Gravity in the Paintings of Giotto," in *Giotto e il suo tempo. Atti del Congresso Internazionale per la Celebrazione del VII Centenario della nascità di Giotto* (Rome: De Luca , 1971), pp. 367–82.
9. The sequence of narrative scenes / the "*witness*"
    1. *Francis Honored by a Simple Man* / The *simpleton*
    2. *Francis Giving His Mantle to a Poor Knight* / the *knight*
    3. *The Vision of the Palace Filled with Arms / alone*
    4. *Francis in Prayer before the Cross in San Damiano / alone*
    5. *Francis's Rejection of Earthly Goods* / his father and two children
    6. *The Dream of Innocent III* / The pope's *companion*
    7. *The Confirmation of the Franciscan Rule by Innocent III* / two *friars*
    8. *The Vision of Francis Borne on a Fiery Chariot* / the *friar*
    9. *The Vision of the Thrones* / the *friar* companion
    10. *The Expulsion of Devils from Arezzo / Fra Silvestro*
    11. *The Ordeal by Fire before the Sultan of Egypt / advisor*
    12. *Saint Francis in Ecstasy* / the center *friar*

13. *Institution of the Crib at Greccio / John*
14. *The Miracle of the Spring* / the *friar*
15. *Francis Preaching to the Birds* / the *friar*
16. *The Death of the Knight of Celano* / the *friar* at the table
17. *Saint Francis Preaching before Honorius III / listener*
18. *Saint Francis Appears before the Chapter at Arles / Monaldo*
19. *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata / alone*
20. *The Death and Ascension of Saint Francis* / mourning *friar*
21. *The Dream of Fra Agostino and the Bishop of Assisi* / two episodes at the same time; Fra Agostino looks to the apotheosis in scene 20
22. *The Confirmation of the Stigmata / Knight Girolamo*
23. *Clare's Farewell at San Damiano* / a *nun behind Clare*
24. *The Canonization of Saint Francis* / a *monk*; also seated women
25. *The Appearance to Gregory IX* / seated *friars*
26. *The Healing of the Wounded Man* / Giovanni di Lerida
27. *The Confession of the Woman Raised from the Dead* / the *child*
28. *The Liberation of the Repentant Heretic / heretic*

10. *The Ecstasy of Saint Francis* is scene 12 of the cycle.
11. Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory, A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
12. Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*, X, 84–87. The Greccio episode also appears in The *Life of Saint Francis by Julian of Speyer (1232–1235)*, 52–54.
13. This text, once attributed to Bonaventure, now is given to Giovanni de Caulibus and dated to after 1346 and before 1364. For more information about the dating of the *Meditations* as well as analysis of the San Francesco *Crib at Greccio*, see: Beth A. Mulvaney, "The Beholder as Witness: The 'Crib at Greccio' from the Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi and Franciscan Influence on Late Medieval Art in Italy," in William R. Cook, ed., *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 169–88. For a translated version of the medieval text, consult *The Meditations on the Life of Christ,* trans. Isa Ragusa, ed. Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).
14. This is also true of other images of this period as pointed out by Felicity Ratté, "Representing the Commonplace, Architectural Portraits in Trecento Painting," *Studies in Iconography* 22 (2001): 102, fn. 38.
15. The garment worn, known as a *Housse*, is defined as an "outer garment with wide, short sleeves forming a cape or pèlerine, buttoned in front, with two little tabs below the neck." This long gown survived in ecclesiastic and academic circles long after fashionable young men replaced the surcoat with short garments. See François B. Boucher, *20,000 Years of Costume, The History of Costume and Personal Adornment* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1965; English translation, 1966); reissued as *Histoire du Costume en occident de l'antiquité `a nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), p. 431.
16. The radiant figures were pointed out to me by Beth Mulvaney while participants in the 2003 NEH Seminar on *St. Francis of Assisi and the Thirteenth Century.*

17. Celano, *Life*, 86.
18. *Francis before the Sultan* is scene 11 of the cycle. See also: Celano, *Life*, 57.
19. Matt. 26. 41. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."
20. For this drawing technique, see Leonardo da Vinci, *Study of drapery*, c. 1485, now in the Royal Collection, Windsor Castle, and other drawings by Leonardo.
21. *The Vision of the Heavenly Thrones* is scene 9 of the cycle; for an illustration consult: Bonsanti, *La Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi* (see n. 2), II, p. 850, Plate 1681; or *The Basilica of St. Francis*, 2005, p. 164, Plate 166.
22. *Vision of Francis in the Fiery Chariot* is scene 8 of the cycle.
23. *The Apparition of Saint Francis to the Chapter at Arles* is scene 18 of the cycle. See also Celano, *Life*, 48: "All of them seemed filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit and were so taken with the joy of salvation that they believed readily what they heard regarding the vision and the presence of the glorious father."
24. *The Death and Ascension of Saint Francis* is scene 20 of the cycle; for an illustration consult Bonsanti, *La Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi* (see n. 2), II, p. 872, Plate 1711; or *The Basilica of St. Francis*, 2005, p. 175, Plate 177.
25. See C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideas in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), pp. 9–11 (see *Mores, habitus, motus*).

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CHAPTER 3

FRANCIS PREACHING TO THE SULTAN: ART AND LITERATURE IN THE HAGIOGRAPHY OF THE SAINT

Mahmood Ibrahim

It could not have been more than a brief encounter between St. Francis of Assisi and the Ayyubid sultan Al-Malik al-Kamil sometime in the summer of 1219. But much has been written since then about this episode and its significance in the history of both the Franciscan Order and Christian-Muslim relations.[1] An eyewitness account relates that Francis did indeed make the journey to the sultan's court. When exactly it took place or what was said or what was exchanged at the time remain unclear and open to conjecture and controversy. But as an episode in the hagiography of the Saint, it gradually gained importance, especially after Bonaventure's official biography of Francis, the *Legenda maior*. As with other episodes in the life of Francis, it was elaborated as it was retold and expanded in legends, folktales, and visual representations.[2] The aim of this essay is to explore how contemporary historical events may have affected the retelling of "Francis before the Sultan" in visual and textual sources between 1228, when the first biography of Francis was written, and the end of the fifteenth century.[3]

The Historical Background

The immediate background for the presence of St. Francis in Egypt is the siege and capture of Damietta during the Fifth Crusade (1217–1221).[4] Pope Innocent III announced the Crusade in 1207, placing it under his direction and control. Preparations commenced immediately, and preachers were sent to various parts of Europe to rouse support for the Crusade. When the Fourth Lateran Council was held in 1215, plans and other relevant details were part

of the Council's varied agenda. By 1217 troops began to embark toward the Holy Land with the city of Acre, which was still under Christian control, as their destination. After a brief and inconsequential stay in Palestine, the crusaders departed for Egypt with Damietta as their target. It was argued then, by Oliver of Paderborn and James of Vitry, among others, that Damietta represented an easier conquest than Jerusalem and, furthermore, the capture of Damietta would sever contacts between Egypt and Palestine, making the recapture of Jerusalem an easier task. Furthermore, there were others in the crusader camp who argued that capturing Damietta would open the way for an assault on Cairo, the main seat of the Ayyubid realm.

The crusaders occupied a sliver of land on the west bank of the Nile opposite the well-fortified town, and on August 24, 1218, they scored their first major victory when they broke the chain that blocked the passage of ships up-river. The news of this event shocked the Sultan Al-Malik al-Adil, who was still in Syria, and perhaps led to his death shortly afterward. Within the next several months the crusaders gained control of more territory on the western bank which allowed them to tighten their siege of Damietta. In the meantime, Al-Malik al-Kamil, who was in Egypt, was proclaimed the new Ayyubid Sultan. Al-Malik al-Kamil pursued a conciliatory policy toward the crusaders, a policy characteristic of most of the Ayyubid period.[5] He offered them peaceful terms which included, according to Oliver of Paderborn, the exchange of Damietta for Jerusalem, the exchange of prisoners, and a long-term truce. There were some strong sentiments among the Christians to accept the offer, but there were equally strong voices that urged the camp to pursue the battle further, especially on the part of Pelagius, the papal legate, who assumed increasing command of the whole operation shortly after his arrival. It was in this environment of tension, rancor and debate that St. Francis and a companion (identified by Bonaventure as Illuminato) arrived sometime in July 1219.

Soon after this arrival, hostilities commenced once more and the Ayyubids scored a major victory against the crusaders at Fariskur on August 29, 1219. Several thousand Christian soldiers were killed and a further one thousand were captured. It was a bitter disappointment to those who urged acceptance of al-Kamil's offer, and especially to Francis who barely arrived to witness this setback. Despite his defeat of the Christians, Al-Malik al-Kamil renewed his previous offer of peace and the exchange of territory and prisoners. Once more, there were debates in the Christian camp. Pelagius, expecting further reinforcements from Europe, rejected the terms and argued to press on with the military campaign. An attempted coup against al-Kamil and a brief lapse of power in the ensuing confusion worked in favor of the crusaders. The beleaguered town of Damietta, whose inhabitants were reduced from eighty thousand to a mere three thousand, finally surrendered on November 5, 1219. Al-Malik al-Kamil, having reestablished his position as Sultan, renewed his offer and declared his willingness to concede more territory around Jerusalem among other strategic castles in Syria in exchange for

Damietta. Once again, despite the approval of many among the Christians to accept the offer, there were still others who wanted to carry the fight towards Cairo. But nothing was decided for the next twenty months which witnessed increasing tension and numerous squabbles among the crusaders and their leaders. Francis left Damietta during this period. He may have traveled to Palestine before heading home sometime in the spring of 1220. He did not witness the final debacle that befell the crusaders when Pelagius finally ordered the troops to move up river on July 17, 1221. This move was so poorly planned that disaster struck very quickly, and the crusaders were forced to capitulate within a month and to accept the unconditional evacuation of Damietta. The Fifth Crusade ended in total failure.

Francis before the Sultan

Sometime during the period that Francis was with the Fifth Crusade and in Damietta, he managed to visit Al-Malik al-Kamil and to deliver a sermon at his court. Most likely, this took place after al-Kamil's victory at Fariskur, especially after he renewed his offer for peace and for negotiations. According to van Cleef, al-Kamil may have been expecting emissaries from the Christian camp to negotiate his offer when Francis arrived instead. The Sultan's attentiveness is attributed to mere politeness once he realized that Francis was not the emissary he was anticipating.[6] It is the literary and visual representations of that episode that I will now examine.

The earliest reference in the Franciscan legend to the Muslims, or the Saracens as they were known then, is found in Chapter 16 of the *Regula non Bullata* (*Earlier Rule*).[7] This chapter sets out the behavior of Franciscan missionaries in Muslim territory. The Brothers were to seek permission for missionary work from their minister and if granted, they were not to engage in debates or disputes with the Muslims. Hoeberichts maintains that this rule was introduced after Francis returned from Damietta and thus was based on his own personal experience in Egypt.[8] However, there is no direct reference to that experience and, therefore, the information about the visit with the Sultan is provided by secondary retelling of the event. The earliest biography of St. Francis was written by Thomas of Celano, in 1228, barely two years after the Saint's death, and another revised version was published by Celano only four years later. About the incident, Thomas of Celano says:

> Now in the thirteenth year of his conversion, he journeyed to the region of Syria, while bitter and long battles waged daily between Christians and pagans. Taking a companion with him, he was not afraid to present himself to the sight of the Sultan of the Saracens. . .Before he reached the Sultan, he was captured by soldiers, insulted and beaten, but was not afraid. He did not flinch at threats of torture nor was he shaken by death threats. Although he was ill-treated by many with a hostile spirit and a

> harsh attitude, he was received very graciously by the Sultan. The Sultan honored him as much as he could, offering him many gifts, trying to turn his mind to worldly riches. But when he saw that he resolutely scorned all these things like dung, the Sultan was overflowing with admiration and recognized him as a man unlike any other. He was moved by his words and listened to him very willingly.[9]

For the next thirty years, the biographies of Celano remained the principle source of information about the life of St. Francis. The narrative structure of Francis's encounter with the Sultan, including the hardship and the ill-treatment encountered by Francis, his courage and dedication in fulfilling his commitment, and his disappointment at not attaining martyrdom became literary topoi repeated and elaborated by others. Basing himself on Celano, Julian of Speyer wrote a biography of Francis in 1235. However, this biography was a liturgy intended for recitation or public reading at meals when the brothers met. It was "brief, clear, direct, and formative," and, significantly, it was to meet internal needs of the order.[10] Regarding the episode under consideration, Julian says,

> But it would take too long to narrate how with great steadiness he withstood the sultan and with great eloquence he neutralized the arguments of those railing against the Christian faith. The sultan accepted him with enormous honor and offered him many precious gifts, but when the holy man of God scorned these gifts as if they were filth, the sultan himself was even more amazed at this man unlike any other, and listened more intently to his words.[11]

In agreement with Celano in various aspects, including the erroneous location of the event in Syria, Julian of Speyer, however, introduced his own language to reflect his purpose, or rather the Order's, of turning the public recitation into a call for action, "to move the figure of Francis forward toward a practical and pastoral application for Christology."[12] In the process, especially in providing the seemingly inconsequential addition of the independent clause, "and with great eloquence he neutralized the arguments of those railing against the Christian faith" he inserts the kernel of disputation as an important thematic element which was built upon in later versions as we shall see below.

Another contemporary biography based on Celano was written between 1232 and1239 by Henri d'Avranches (d. ca. 1262). While Celano's was contemplative and Julian's was liturgical, Henri's biography was set in verse as had been commissioned by Pope Gregory IX. The value of this biography is in the dramatic retelling of the events, not in uncovering new facts or other insights. Such dramatization can be seen in the irony that while Henri correctly locates the incident in Damietta, he refers to the Muslim camp as the camp of the Persians and to the sultan as the king of the Persians. Yet, in his

dramatization Henri elaborated on the disputation theme by introducing the "Muslim Sages" in the story to test Francis's sincerity. Henri says:

> When the fair name of the holy man who was indomitable
> Under every affliction has spread through the Persian camp,
> Such was a kingly king's admiration for his great spirit
> That he gave him a great reception and offered him precious gifts.
> He, content with what he has, declines the king's
> Offer, and asks for that gift of gifts, to be given a hearing.
> So as to hear him, the king himself bid the crowd be silent
> And orders every noise to cease, while to his attendants
> He said: "Fetch me my sages; let them be the judges
> If this man's teaching be genuine, or if he is not minded..."[13]

Within barely a decade of his death, several biographies of Francis existed. And although all were based on Celano, each biography served a purpose different from the other. The information about Francis before the Sultan, among other episodes, thus became a composite of different emphases and concerns. In terms of visual representations of the Franciscan legend, the best examples are two dossals that were supposedly based on these biographies. The first and the earliest representation is a signed and dated dossal in Pescia executed by Bonaventura Berlinghieri of Lucca in 1235. This dossal contains six episodes that appear in Celano and which will become influential for much of the thirteenth century: *The Stigmatization, Preaching to the Birds, The Cure of the Girl with the Twisted Neck, The Cure of the Lepers, The Posthumous Cure of Bartholomew of Narni, and The Exorcism of a Young Woman*. Noticeably absent is the episode of *Francis before the Sultan*, even though it is mentioned by Celano. The work shows its eastern heritage, reminiscent of Byzantine portable icons and manuscript illustrations.[14]

The influence of Berlinghieri is recognizable in the next important dossal of the period. This dossal, executed by an anonymous painter around 1250 or a little later, is located in the Museo Civico in Pistoia. Slightly larger than the Berlinghieri dossal, it contains eight scenes: the six scenes found in Berlinghieri and two new scenes; *The Confirmation of the Rule* and *The Penitential Sermon*.[15] Once again, this dossal omits the episode of Francis before the Sultan. One can only speculate about this omission. Perhaps the wider significance of the event, to the Franciscan order and to the public, had not yet been fully realized. Also, no standard biography as that of Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* was available for these artists, which may account for the variations. One might also ask why it began to be represented.

Selective choices of specific episodes from the written texts are evident in a dossal executed by yet another anonymous painter, usually dated about 1245. Placed in the Bardi Chapel of the Church of Santa Croce in Florence in 1559, it bears a strong resemblance to the Berlinghieri dossal and contains the same scenes. However, it is considerably larger (234×127cm) and

includes additional scenes totaling twenty episodes. According to William Cook, some of these scenes are not found in any written source and may represent local legends.[16] For the first time, however, the Bardi dossal contains a representation of *Francis before the Sultan* (figure 3.1). The scene is depicted on the lower left corner, immediately after another famous episode, *Francis Preaching to the Birds*. The Bardi dossal scene portraying *Francis before the Sultan* is unique among the representations of this episode. Executed still within the same style of Byzantine iconography as the Berlinghieri dossal in Pescia, Francis holds a book and preaches to a throng of people, some seated and others presumably standing. A companion of Francis is standing behind him. On the far right, the Sultan, who is holding a scepter and wearing purple, is seated on a throne with a guard standing behind him. Here, Francis preaches to the crowd, represented by a series of heads and ecstatically gesturing hands. All are listening intently to what Francis is saying in a seemingly welcoming environment. There are no visible threats or intimidation. Most important, there are no signs of denigration of the presumably Muslim audience or of Islam. Since both sides are represented on the same plane, there is no challenge of one side by the other, especially by Francis. It is his presence before the Sultan that counts. There are no additional iconographic representations in this scene to suggest the sort of accomplishment that Julian and Henri added to the account. The scene is neutral as it does not depict winners or losers and, as such, there is no morally superior side. It is the closest visual depiction of Chapter 16 in the *Earlier Rule* which says, in part, that Franciscans can live "spiritually" among the Saracens and nonbelievers. The execution of this dossal seems to agree also with Celano's original description of the Sultan and the audience listening willingly. And as Celano implies, there is no specific outcome of this encounter other than that it took place.

Such neutrality will disappear in the representations that follow. New visual elements of the story were introduced to force the viewer to form values and attitudes, usually favoring Francis over his audience and Christianity over Islam. Political changes could be a contributing factor. Toward the end of the thirteenth century crusader presence in the Levant was declining due to the campaigns of the Mamluk sultan Baybars and his immediate successors Qalawun and al-Ashraf Khalil. It was the latter who finally captured Acre in 1291 to end crusader presence in the Levant altogether.[17]

In the meanwhile, important developments had taken place in the Franciscan order itself. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1221–1274) became minister general in 1256. He was commissioned by the Franciscan Council at Narbonne in 1260 to write the biography of St. Francis, which he completed during a stay at Montefalco. By 1265, on orders from the General Chapter, Bonaventure banned and ordered destroyed the previous biographies of Celano, making his the only official biography, the *Legenda maior*.[18] In his version of *Francis before the Sultan*, Bonaventure incorporates Celano's account, sometimes using similar language. But he also expands the story

to include themes introduced by Julian and Henri and shifts the emphasis to martyrdom and missionary duty, which, for Bonaventure, were essential proofs of the orthodox continuity of the Franciscan Order. Furthermore, he turned the supposed disputation described by Henri d'Avranches into an outright challenge by the inclusion of the trial by fire, a form of challenge atypical of Muslims. In embellishing the hagiography, the courage and zeal for martyrdom became the framework for Francis's journey. All of this is further supported by relevant biblical phrases. The cruelty of the enemy and their mistreatment of Francis and his companion are also repeated. Bonaventure then says:

> Finally, after they had been maltreated in many ways and were exhausted, by divine providence they were led to the Sultan, just as the man of God wished. When that ruler inquired by whom, why, and how they had been sent and how they got there, Christ's servant, Francis, answered with an intrepid heart that he had been sent not by man but by the Most High God in order to point to him and his people the way of salvation and to announce the Gospel truth. . .For the Sultan, perceiving in the man of God a fervor of spirit and a courage that had to be admired, willingly listened to him and invited him to stay longer with him. Inspired from heaven, Christ's servant said: "If you wish to be converted to Christ along with your people, I will most gladly stay with you for the love of him. But if you hesitate to abandon the law of Muhammad for the faith of Christ, then command that an enormous fire be lit and I will walk into the fire along with your priests so that you will recognize which faith deserves to be held as the holier and more certain." "I do not believe," the Sultan replied, "that any of my priests would be willing to expose himself to the fire to defend his faith or to undergo any kind of torment," For he had seen immediately one of his priests, a man full of authority and years, slipping away from his view when he heard Francis's words.

Bonaventure's account goes on to say:

> "If you wish to promise me that if I come out of the fire unharmed," the saint said to the Sultan, "you and your people will come over to the worship of Christ, then I will enter the fire alone. And if I shall be burned, you must attribute it to my sins. But if God's power protects me, you will acknowledge Christ the power and wisdom of God as the true God and the savior of all." The Sultan replied that he did not dare to accept this choice because he feared a revolt among his people.[19]

The account ends in a similar fashion to Celano: the sultan admires Francis and offers him many gifts, but the Saint refuses to accept any worldly possession. Bonaventure's narrative addition changed the value of the episode for the Franciscans particularly because of the new detail of the trial by fire, which became the standard written version of the event. Bonaventure's

biography was translated into visual form by the end of the thirteenth century in the Upper Church of the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi, where a series of twenty-eight large frescos representing the life of Francis were executed in the 1290s (figure 1.1). These frescoes, according to William Cook, follow in the same order in which Bonaventure narrated them in his *Legenda maior. Francis before the Sultan* (270×230cm) is the eleventh scene, and it figures prominently with its new color and iconography (figure 3.2).[20]

The scene is split into three parts: Francis, a halo around his head, stands near the fire and gestures towards it. He is in the center of the fresco and is the focus of attention. Illuminato is visible behind Francis, but otherwise does nothing but witness the event. To the right, the Sultan is sitting on his throne flanked by soldiers and other officials. The Sultan is gesturing toward Francis and the fire. But the objects of his "remarks" are religious figures, the "Sages," the Ulema (Muslim scholars trained in Islam and Islamic law), who are grouped near the far left. They are seen with their backs almost turned trying to flee the scene as the fire nearly laps at their heels. The juxtaposition of Francis standing by the fire and the Muslim sages "slipping away" is a powerful and effective visualization of what Bonaventure wanted to affirm: the Franciscan ideal of mission and the superiority of Christianity.

The trial by fire and the successful challenge posed by Francis were repeated by Giotto nearly two decades later when he was commissioned to produce an abbreviated fresco cycle of six scenes dedicated to the life of Francis in the Bardi Chapel of Santa Croce in Florence. Finished between 1318 and 1328, these frescoes introduce new elements in the iconography, but the message is strikingly similar.

Once again, the scene of *Francis before the Sultan* (figure 3.3) is split into three parts but the Sultan is in the center of the picture this time, although he is not the focus of attention. To the right, Francis is standing near a blazing fire and his campanion Illuminato is standing demurely behind him. Francis points to his haloed head rather than to the fire. The Sultan alone represents authority as no official or guard is around. He is seated on an elevated throne looking slightly toward his Ulema while gesturing in the direction of the fire and St. Francis. The far left is where the Ulema are clamoring to leave the room, and one may have already departed. Francis is clearly triumphant, but at the same time serene and confident. Not so with the yellow-robed member of the Ulema whose face, topped by a knotted brow, expresses anxiety. Another new element introduced by Giotto in the iconography is the black attendants one of whom gestures toward the fire and St. Francis. This adds a nuanced confirmation of the Franciscan ideal: the "lowly" attendant is reminding the master of his duties by calling him back to the challenge posed by Francis.[21] In both frescoes, the artists successfully rendered Bonaventure's account of the episode, especially in depicting the unwillingness of the Muslim Ulema to "expose themselves to the fire" indicating that Francis's beliefs are the truer of the two. This is reinforced in the Bardi fresco by the proximity of Francis to the fire and his disregard for his own safety. But if

the word and the image agree, both have moved from the neutral description of Thomas of Celano to the persuasive purposes of Bonaventure's account. Bonaventure incorporated what Julian and Henri had added in their description of the event. As a result, Bonaventure's account of the episode, and the images based on his official biography lost the neutrality depicted in the Berlinghieri dossal. The trial by fire theme, familiar only to the Europeans, became accepted as part of the encounter.

When Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–1494) depicted *Francis before the Sultan* for the Sassetti Chapel in the Church of Santa Trinita, Florence, he retained the trial by fire element but added details that introduced a whole new feature in the iconography.[22] He remained true to the basic story as depicted earlier by Giotto, ignoring several additional tales and posthumous miracles that had been circulating about Francis since the early fourteenth century. In Ghirlandaio's depiction, the landscape in the background is hardly reminiscent of the flat surface of the Nile Delta or even of a war environment where the initial encounter took place. There are other new features as well. Francis is accompanied by two Franciscan friars and at least two other "emissaries." Opposite Francis are five standing figures, two of whom appear to be Muslim clerics wearing headdresses that resemble the Sultan's. One standing figure, seen from behind, is pointing to the fire, and gazing toward one of the clerics, not at Francis. Francis's right hand touches his forehead while his left hand lifts his robe slightly to reveal his left foot stepping forward toward the flames. At the center of the scene, the Sultan sits on his raised throne while pointing to Francis, and gazes toward the Muslim Ulema who are once again turning to leave the scene. The inclusion of additional figures is not supported by the earlier written versions that originally indicated only Francis and Illuminato. However, by the second half of the fifteenth century when Ghirlandaio depicted this scene, there were more frequent contacts between Italy and the Muslim world, especially with the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. The larger crowd in the scene might represent a wider awareness of these contacts and the involvement of Franciscan and Italian support for missions to the east.[23]

Although the approved biography of Francis was established by Bonaventure, the Franciscan legend continued to evolve in popular literature that amplified his posthumous miracles. The tone of Francis's biography, which hitherto had been largely based on the Augustinian model, began to be seen as an imitation of the life of Christ himself. This much is clear in such literary works as the *Kinship of Saint Francis* and *The Conformity of the Life of the Blessed Francis to the Life of the Lord Jesus* by Bartholomew of Pisa (1401).[24] The larger-than-life legends and the posthumous miracles performed by Francis are also seen in the anonymous work written after 1337 and known as *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*.

The legend of Francis before the Sultan in *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* is elaborate and lengthy. Within one of the chapters, the author says that Francis went with twelve of his most holy companions to the Sultan of

Babylon. And, after mentioning the zeal and desire for martyrdom and the trials and tribulations before reaching the Sultan, *The Flowers* goes on to say that the Sultan

> began to have great devotion for him [Francis] both because of the constancy of his faith and the contempt of the world that he saw in him. . . .From that moment on the Sultan listened to him willingly, and he asked that he come back to him often, granting freely to him and his companions that they could preach anywhere the pleased.
>
> Having received this liberal permission Saint Francis sent those chosen companions, two by two, into various territories of the Saracens to preach the faith of Christ. He, along with one of them chose one area, and on arriving there they entered an inn to rest. There was a woman there with a very beautiful body but a filthy soul, and this cursed woman invited Saint Francis to sin. Saint Francis said to her: "I accept, let's go to bed," and she led him to a room. And Saint Francis said, "Come to me, and I will take you to a very beautiful bed." He led her to a huge fire which had been lit in that house, and in fervor of spirit he stripped himself naked and threw himself beside the fire on a spot that was red-hot and invited her to strip and come to lie with him on that beautiful feather bed. Saint Francis remained there a long time, not burning or even turning red, and that woman was dumbstruck by such a miracle, and was stricken to the heart. Not only did she repent of her sin and her evil intention, but also was converted perfectly to the faith of Christ, and became a person of such holiness that through her many souls in that area were saved.[25]

Here, the fire is no longer inserted into the account to challenge the Muslims and their faith, but to prove the sincerity of St. Francis and his rejection of sexual temptation. It is interesting to note that out of the various places associated with the episode, Syria, Egypt, and Persia, the author of the *Little Flowers* chose Babylon as the location. Babylon and its sinful association in Christian ethics thus became the venue for the challenge to sexual temptation. The miracle that he could sit so close to the fire, or in it, without being burned is a way for others, and here it is the woman temptress, to believe in him and be saved.

The trial by fire to challenge the Muslims is not necessary in this account since, according to *The Little Flowers*, the Sultan of Babylon and many in his realm converted at the hands of Francis and his companions. Regarding this conversion, *The Little Flowers* continues:

> Saint Francis, finally seeing that he could gain no more fruit in that region, by divine revelation decided to return, with all his companions, among believers. Gathering them altogether, he returned to the Sultan and took his leave from him. The Sultan then said to him: "Brother Francis, I would willingly convert to the faith of Christ, but I am afraid to do it now, because if these people learn of it, they would immediately kill

you and me and all your companions. Since you can do much good and I have to finish some things of great importance, I do not want to bring about now your death and mine. But teach me how I may be saved: I am prepared to do what you command." Saint Francis then said: "My Lord, I am now leaving you, but after I return to my country and have gone to heaven, by the grace of God, after my death, as God pleases, I will send you two of my brothers, from whom you will receive the holy baptism of Christ and you will be saved, just as my Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to me. In the meantime, free yourself from every hindrance so that when the grace of God comes to you, you will be prepared for faith and devotion." This he both promised to do and did.

Having done this, Saint Francis returned with that venerable company of his holy companions. After some years Saint Francis returned his soul to God through bodily death. And the Sultan fell ill, and waiting for the promise of Saint Francis, he had guards placed at certain passes, commanding that if two brothers in the habit of Saint Francis appeared there, they should be brought to him immediately. At that time Saint Francis appeared to two brothers and ordered them to go without delay to the Sultan and obtain his salvation just as he promised him. The brothers set out without delay and, having crossed the sea, they were taken to the Sultan by those guards. When he saw them, the Sultan was filled with the greatest joy, and he said: "Now I truly know that God has sent His servants to me for my salvation, according to the promise that Saint Francis made to me by divine revelation." From these brothers he received instruction in the faith of Christ and holy baptism. And thus reborn in Christ, he died in that illness, and his soul was saved through the merits and prayers of Saint Francis.[26]

The original episode has been turned to a successful adventure with the conversion of the Sultan of Babylon at the hands of Francis and his companions. The *Little Flowers* placed this event within the miraculous: Francis's promise to the Sultan being fulfilled by Francis's return from the dead to dispatch the promised brothers. Posthumous miracles performed by Francis were added continuously, and it is these miracles that enhanced general knowledge about the Saint at this time. Written during the fourteenth century, *The Little Flowers* contains real elements that might reflect the continuing involvement of the Franciscans in the Holy Land. The Mamluk Sultans, having taken power after the Ayyubid dynasty, repeatedly gave safe conduct to Franciscan missionaries so that they could have a presence, especially in Bethlehem and in Jerusalem. The safe conduct was renewed generally every time a new Sultan came to power.[27]

The popularity of these legends seems to have influenced Benozzo Gozzoli more than a century after they were written. Gozzoli (1421–1497) was commissioned to depict the life of the Saint in the Church of St. Francis in Montefalco, built on the site where Bonaventure wrote the bulk of his *Legenda maior.* In the scene *Francis before the Sultan* (figure 3.4) as depicted

by Gozzoli, there are several elements that render the account of the *Little Flowers* successfully. Francis is with two companions. He is holding a cross in one hand and is giving a blessing with the other. He is stepping into the fire which seems to be dying out as a result. For the first time in the visual depiction of this episode, there appears a woman, who is wearing a blue dress and gesturing in a way to indicate her belief in Francis. Such a gesture is also made by the Sultan and some of his companions who are looking at the Saint reverentially.

Gozzoli, following the *Little Flowers*, cast the trial by fire in an altogether different light than Giotto's. The trial by fire is no longer an affirmation of the superiority of Christianity over Islam but an affirmation of Francis's rejection of sexual temptation and an account of the resulting conversion of others.

The transformation of the role of the fire in visual representations is also clear in Benedetto da Maiano's marble depiction of *Francis before the Sultan*, on one side of the Pulpit in the Church of Santa Croce in Florence. Da Maiano (1442–1497) sculpted the pulpit a couple of decades after Gozzoli's fresco. It has the temptress in the foreground and the fire separates her from St. Francis. The Sultan seems to be looking at the woman and he seems to proffer the challenge to Francis. In composition, it is very much like Giotto's except that Francis is juxtaposed against a new adversary, sexual temptation as symbolized by the woman.

Thus, the willingness of the Mamluk rulers to accommodate the desire of the Franciscans came at a period when crusading in the Holy Land had ceased to be a threat. Diplomatic and commercial relations replaced those of military hostilities, and from 1260 onward, Mamluk Sultans concluded treaties with Christian rulers and powers. In 1290, Sultan Qalawun signed a treaty with Genoa and with the kingdom of Aragon which was based on the treaty reached between the Ayyubid sultan Al-Malik al-Kamil and Fredrick II. Between 1300 and 1330, there were no less than eight embassies from Aragon to the court of al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun.[28] Trade, diplomatic exchange, and Franciscan missionary activity continued throughout the fifteenth century and later, and it is likely that Franciscans were involved in trade and diplomacy also. For example, Franciscan travelers from the seventeenth century left accounts describing their travels on both sides of the Red Sea. One went to Yemen, the primary exporter of coffee, to observe the cultivation of this plant when coffee was at the center of large fortunes in lucrative international trade.[29] The increased number of "delegates" or "companions" represented in later frescos might evoke the continuing involvement of Italian city-states with the Levant. The Crusades, despite the hostilities and violence, seem to have intensified diplomatic and commercial contacts with the Islamic world, especially around the Mediterranean. Thus, the earlier willingness on the part of the Mamluks to grant safe conduct to Franciscans, the continued presence of Franciscan missionaries in the Holy Land, and increased commercial and cultural contacts may have been conflated with the conversion of the sultan in popular legends.

Conclusion

As we have seen from the preceding analysis it becomes apparent that visual representations of *Francis before the Sultan* closely followed the contemporary literary texts and delivered a similar or parallel message. It also became apparent that the literary texts evolved overtime, reflecting different historical circumstances and the various needs of the Franciscan Order itself. Accordingly, the image of Francis before the sultan also evolved. One can detect three stages in this development. The first stage is before 1265. In this early period, written accounts were still in the process of elaboration and the composite image of Francis before the Sultan was absent or followed the earliest account of Thomas de Celano as in the Bardi dossal. The second stage is after 1265 and the publication of the *Legenda maior.* Bonaventure's inclusion of the trial by fire in his official biography became a central theme of the frescoes in the Upper Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi and of Giotto's fresco in the Bardi Chapel. Now the text and images served quite self-consciously as an affirmation of Franciscan ideals and the Christ-like nature of Francis's spirituality. The third stage in this development is the era of posthumous miracles after the middle of the fourteenth century. Although posthumous miracles were found early on in the development of the Francis legend, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, these miracles constituted the overwhelming popular perceptions of Francis. The trial by fire theme also was incorporated into the *Little Flowers* during this period and in the images produced by Gozzoli and DaMaiano. The purpose of the story of Francis meeting the Sultan, however, shifted and it became a testament to Francis's rejection of sexual temptation.

In the end, what is left is an open question of how the rapprochement between Francis and the sultan played out in subsequent history. Clearly, there was a continuing connection between the Franciscans and the Muslims. One is tantalized by the question of whether this conversation between two seeming adversaries has a lesson for us in the current era of difficult relations between Christians and Muslims.

Notes

1. For a general introduction to the incident, see Galen K. Johnson, "St. Francis and the Sultan: An Historical and Critical Assessment," *Mission Studies* 18 (2001): 146–64; for a detailed discussion of the issues raised around the episode, see J. Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997). See also F. De Beers, "Francis and Islam," *Concilium* 49 (1981): 16–27. It is generally agreed that the episode is not mentioned in Muslim sources. For a translation of a primary history of the Ayyubid period, including the events surrounding the reign of al-Malik al-Kamil, see R. J. C. Broadhurst, *A History of the Ayyubid Sultans of Egypt Translated from the Arabic of al-Maqrizi* (Boston: Twayne, 1969.) Amin Maalouf

provides translated selections from other notable historians of the period in his *The Crusades through Arab Eyes* (London: Al-Saqi Books, 1984).

2. Interest in this research developed during a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Seminar led by William R. Cook in Italy during 2003. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the American Research Center in Egypt's annual conference, Tuscon, AZ, April 2004.
3. This approach is very much in line with that taken by William R. Cook in his larger study and catalogue of the visual representations of Francis published as *Images of St Francis of Assisi: In Painting, Stone and Glass from the Earliest Images to ca. 1320 in Italy* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1999).
4. This brief summary is based on Thomas C. Van Cleef, "The Fifth Crusades," in Kenneth M. Setton, ed., *A History of the Crusades*, 6 vols. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), III, pp. 377–428.
5. Claude Cahen, "Ayyubids," in H. A. R. Gibb, J. H. Kramers, E. Lévi-Provençal, J. Schacht, S. M. Stern, and B. Lewis et al., eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 12 vols., 2nd edn. (Leiden: Brill, 1960), I, pp. 807–8; H. L. Gottschalk, "al-malik al-Kamil," in C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, assisted by C. Dumont and M. Paterson, et al., eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 12 vols., 2nd edn. (Leiden: Brill, 1978), IV, p. 520.
6. Van Cleef, "The Fifth Crusades," III, p. 140.
7. For an analysis of this document, see J. Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam*, pp. 61–134.
8. Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam*, p. 43.
9. Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*, XX, 57. This and other biographies appear in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols., *Vol. I, The Saint*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999).
10. "Introduction" in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, *Vol. 1, The Saint*, p. 365. Jacques de Vitry reports on the incident in his *Historia Occidentalis* (1221) in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, *Vol. I, The Saint*, p. 584. See Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam*, p. 99.
11. Julian of Speyer, *The Life of Saint Francis* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, *Vol. I, The Saint,* VII, 36.
12. "Introduction" in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, *Vol. I, The Saint*, p. 365.
13. Henri d'Avranches, *The Versified Life of Saint Francis* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. I, The Saint*, VIII, 135–40.
14. Cook, *Images*, pp. 165–67.
15. Cook, *Images*, pp. 173–75.
16. Cook, *Images*, p. 101.
17. A brief account could be found in P. M. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades* (New York: Longman, 1986), pp. 90–99.
18. For a brief discussion of Bonaventure's work see *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. II,* pp. 495–505. The editors do not think that Bonaventure actually ordered the destruction of other biographies of St. Francis, but that he followed the orders of the General Chapter.

19. *The Major Legend of Saint Francis* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. II, The Founder*, IX, 8.
20. Cook, Images, p. 58. For a general discussion of these frescoes, see Elvio Lunghi, *The Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. Christopher Evans (Florence: Scala, 1996). There is some controversy whether Giotto himself executed these frescoes. Bruno Dozzini, who calls this episode *Trial by Fire*, says that most of it was not painted by Giotto, see *Giotto: The Legend of St. Francis in the Assisi Basilica* (Assisi: Editrice Minerva, 1994), p. 29.
21. See Emma Gurney Slater, *Franciscan Legends in Italian Art* (London: J. M. Dent, 1905), p. 96. See also Anne Mueller von der Haegen, *Giotto* (Koln: Konemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1998), pp. 26, 122.
22. A brief biography and a discussion of his work appear in Emma Micheletti, *Dominico Ghirlandaio* (Florence: Scala, 1990). See also Andreas Quermann, *Ghirlandaio* (Köln: Konemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1998), pp. 47, 50.
23. Missions continued to be sent to the East for some time to come and Christian-Muslim relations grew. For a general discussion of these contacts, see William Bijelfeld, "European Christians and the World of the Mamluks: Some Impressions and Reactions," *The Muslim World* 73 (1983): 208–33; Norman Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (London: Longman, 1975); Donald Little "Christians in Mamluk Jerusalem," in Y. Haddad and W. Haddad, eds., *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995), pp. 210–20; Donald Little, "Jerusalem under the Ayyubids and Mamluks, 1187–1516," in K. J. Asali, ed., *Jerusalem in History* (Brooklyn, NY: Olive Branch Press, 2000), pp. 177–99; Donald Little, "Jerusalem and Egypt during the Mamluk Period," in Amnon Cohen and Gabriel Baer, eds., *Egypt and Palestine* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 74–76; Oded Peri, *Christianity under Islam in Jerusalem: The Question of the Holy Sites in Early Ottoman Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 20–22, 59–63.
24. See, e.g., Arnald of Sarrant, *The Kinship of Saint Francis*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. III, The Prophet*, pp. 678–733.
25. *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents. Vol. III, The Prophet*, XXIV.
26. *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents. Vol. III, The Prophet*, XXIV.
27. For a discussion of some of these decrees, see Noberto Risciani, *Documenti et Firmani*, (Jerusalem: Tippographia dei PP Francescani, 1936).
28. Holt, *The Age of the Crusades*, p. 165. For later commercial relations, see John Wansbrough, "A Mamluk Ambassador to Venice in 913/1507," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (*BSOAS*) 26.3 (1963): 503–30; John Wansbrough, "Venice and Florence in the Mamluk Commercial Privileges," *BSOAS* 28.3 (1965): 483–523.
29. See, e.g., Jean De Laroque, *Viaggio nell'Arabia Felice* (Venice: Coletti, 1721); Antoine Gonzales OFM, *Voyages en Egypt*, Traduit due Neerlandeais, presente et annote par Charles Libois (Cairo: Institute Francais d'Archeologie Orientale, 1977).

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CHAPTER 4

THE WOLF IN THE FOREST: ST. FRANCIS AND THE ITALIAN EREMITICAL TRADITION

Rodger M. Payne

In his introduction to the 1958 edition of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, Raphael Brown states with little fear of hyperbole that Francis of Assisi is "the most popular figure in the history of Christianity after Jesus Himself and the Blessed Virgin."[1] Indeed, given the Protestant reticence to embrace the figure of the Virgin Mary beyond her annual but indispensable appearance during Advent, Francis may well be the second most significant figure within the broader scope of Christianity. Even in the most zealously Protestant areas of the Bible Belt, concrete images of Francis grace numerous garden landscapes or stand as silent sentinels to entice shoppers at roadside stands. Within Catholicism, he has been, since 1990, the official patron of ecologists, but even outside of the Christian tradition, the saint of Assisi holds a place of prominence as the unofficial patron of nature lovers and environmentalists everywhere. Little wonder that in his foreword to a recent anthology on Francis, Joseph P. Chinnici observed that the saint has been responsible for a veritable "cottage industry" of texts and interpretations, beginning with the multitude of hagiographies and other assorted tales that appeared within the first century and half after his death in 1226. Such an extensive body of material, however, has often served to obscure rather than to clarify our knowledge of St. Francis, prompting Jacques Dalarun to comment that this most famous and celebrated of saints is, simultaneously, "certainly the most problematic of the Catholic Church's official saints."[2] As with most figures of medieval piety, "rescuing" the historical Francis from the sources about him is an ultimately fruitless task that is attempted only by the very brave or the very foolish. Thus, while the focus of this study is not upon the "historical" Francis per se, it does suggest that an important component in the cultural milieu of the Francis legend has largely been ignored

by the scholarly studies of Francis. About a century and a half before the development of the mendicant movement in which Francis was a central figure, a similar monastic "reform" swept through central and southern Italy. As with the later mendicants, these monks were concerned with living an authentic *vita apostolica* (as opposed to the less rigorous but more structured *vita monastica*); but unlike the mendicants their chosen route was through withdrawal from society, to live in extreme asceticism in the mountainous and often inhospitable terrain of the Abruzzi, Calabria, Basilicata, and Apulia. Although few of these hermit saints became well-known outside of their local regions, their revival of the eremitic tradition in the west laid an important foundation for the mendicants.

The abrupt emergence of eremiticism in Italy in the late tenth century has given rise to much speculation regarding the origin of this revival. If the Rule of Benedict, with its clear preference for cenobitism, informed all monastic practice in the west after the sixth century, then why did so many recluses, hermits, and anchorites suddenly appear in these regions? One of the possible reasons is that the Byzantine colonies of Apulia and Calabria served as refuges for iconodule monks who were fleeing the iconoclastic controversies in ninth-century Constantinople; these monks may have brought with them a Greek style of monasticism that was more amenable to eremitic practices, even within the context of some loose form of community life.[3] Although the evidence for this argument remains inconclusive, by the eleventh century new "eremitic orders" in southern Italy and elsewhere in Western Europe were developing into more formal communities that challenged Benedictine hegemony. The most important of these orders on the peninsula was that of the Camaldolese, founded by the hermit Romuald of Ravenna circa 1020 at Camaldoli near Arezzo in Tuscany, but similar practices evolved from the community in Vallombrosa founded by John Gualbert ca. 1030 near Florence. During the eleventh century in Italy, the Camaldolese hermitage at Fonte Avellana in the Marches was probably the single most significant of these institutions, especially when St. Peter Damian held the position of prior there between 1043 and 1072. Damian was St. Romuald's most fervent disciple and hagiographer as well as an eloquent apologist for the Camaldolese style of monasticism. By the next century, similar forms of practice had spread north into the continent, influencing the monastic reforms at Cîteaux in France that would—through the agency of Cistercian missionaries—return to Italy at almost the same time Francis was developing his own ideas about the *vita apostolica*.

The reappearance of eremiticism in Western Europe in the eleventh century was part of what C. H. Lawrence termed "the quest for the primitive" that fired the monastic imagination and produced a new ferment of reform. Discounting the possible influence of the Byzantine hermits, Lawrence offered three "indigenous" sources for the eremitic revival: A renewed interest in the ancient eremitic tradition of the Desert Fathers, the remnants of the anchorite tradition grudgingly accepted even by the Rule of Benedict,

and the solitaries that had been permitted by the earlier monastic reforms centered at Cluny.[4] For contemporaries, or at least for the hagiographers of the Latin hermit saints writing in the eleventh century, the revival of eremiticism was more simply explained in terms of a profound spiritual crisis within existing cenobitic forms. Disgusted with what they perceived to be a lack of discipline and strict adherence to the Rule of Benedict, these men had undertaken a solitary life as the only means of practicing the austerities demanded by the authentic *vita apostolica*. Adopting uncritically this explanation offered by the hagiographers, many modern scholars have insisted that the reemergence of eremiticism in the west was due in large part to a "crisis of cenobitism," which had led committed individuals to abandon corrupted monasteries filled with dissolute monks and live instead as solitary hermits and anchorites. Thus, writing in 1985, Jean Leclercq could argue that by "the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth century, monasticism degenerated almost everywhere into a state of institutional decadence, and in certain countries, like England, it almost disappeared altogether."[5] Leclercq depended for much of his argument on the writings of Peter Damian, who, although himself an admirer and practitioner of a strict ascetic life, was nonetheless committed to a modified form of cenobitism that allowed him to attack the extremes of either practice. For Leclercq, Damian's polemics against increasing monastic prosperity and continuing laxity in the adherence to the Rule of St. Benedict echoed the hagiographic justifications for the adoption of an eremitical life; but in the final analysis, Leclercq credited the hermits with sparking a monastic reform movement that reached its epitome with the founding of the Cistercians.[6]

More recent scholarship has challenged this crisis model, not only because it accepted as factual what may have been merely a literary convention, but because it does not go far enough in recognizing the contributions that the hermits made to the Gregorian reforms of the late eleventh century and the subsequent "reformation" of the twelfth century.[7] In 1997, Phyllis G. Jestice provided a novel perspective on the hermits in her book *Wayward Monks and the Religious Revolution of the Eleventh Century*. For Jestice, the key conflict was not between eremiticism and cenobitism per se, but rather between an older ideal of "stability" versus a rising sense of social involvement that would redefine monastic life and lead eventually to the mendicant movement. Crediting the hermits with a greater degree of social engagement appears paradoxical, but Jestice observed that in breaking the Benedictine expectation that monks be forever confined to a single monastery, the hermits and other "wayward monks" exemplified a growing sense of individualism that placed more emphasis on heroic solitary endeavors as opposed to mere success at living within a community. "Monks in the central middle ages," she argued, "...were not primarily holy men," rather "the monastery was a holy place."[8] The rejection, or rather reversal, of this understanding led to a new model of monasticism that included monks taking more active roles in preaching and ecclesiastical reform; a model that achieved its fullest expression with the

rise of the Franciscan and Dominican orders in the thirteenth century. Thus, despite the degree of novelty that both contemporaries and modern scholars have located in the figure of Francis, it seems clear that a broader understanding of Francis must include some consideration of the eremitic movement that so immediately preceded his own reforms of the religious life.

Predicating any direct associations between Francis and the Italian eremitical tradition, however, remains more speculative than definitive. Although Assisi was not very far from hermitages such as Peter Damian's Fonte Avellana or even the mother house of Romuald's Camaldolese Order, Francis made no mention of these institutions in his own writings. Likewise, his hagiographers demonstrated no knowledge of the hermit saints, even though Thomas of Celano was born in the Abruzzi region in the heart of the area that had been crisscrossed by hermits and "wayward monks" such as Dominic of Sora, whose cult remains strong in the region even today.[9] The absence of the recognition of any eremitical influence in Thomas's works, however, may be the result of his own literary campaign to present Francis as a novel model of sanctity, who, according to William Short's analysis of Thomas's work, "represented a new kind of holiness, breaking with, surpassing or transcending the tradition." Still, Short argued, Thomas borrowed sufficiently enough from the life and writings of Bernard of Clairvaux to indicate that he "had more than a passing acquaintance with Cistercian circles."[10] Jacques Dalarun pushed these connections further, suggesting that it was Thomas who actually placed the episode of Francis's receiving the stigmata at La Verna (Mount Alverna), which Dalarun described as a location that "epitomizes the highest eremitic tradition of Apennine Italy, that of Romuald, Peter Damian and Domenico Loricato." Indeed, Dalarun speculated that the incident of the stigmata itself might be related to "earlier cases of quasi-stigmatization in the Apennine eremitic tradition," citing in particular the example of Dominico Loricato, a hermit at Fonte Avellana, who was celebrated by Peter Damian for his sanguine austerities.[11]

In his study of the relationship of Francis to nature, Roger D. Sorrell also explored, to some degree, the influence of the eremitic tradition on Francis and his ideas. Like other scholars, Sorrell located the deepest roots of the Franciscan attitudes toward nature within the tradition of the Desert Fathers, but he argued further that both the Franciscans and the Cistercians arose from within the same cultural context that also produced ascetic groups such as the Cathars, all of whom held a special reverence for the natural world. Yet, despite his claim, Sorrell disassociated the Franciscans from the Cistercian model of monasticism, preferring still to connect Franciscan models of the *vita apostolica* "to earlier, simpler, eremitic life and ideals" that were "very much attached to a life of wandering and individual meditative retreat" that, he argued, reflected the tradition of the Fathers.[12] Thus, while Sorrell could affirm Omer Englebert's contention that Francis was "one of the greatest hermits in the history of the Church," he still neglected the models offered by the tenth-century hermits that were among the key foundations

for the rise of the Cistercians.[13] At the very least, however, by arguing that the Cistercians and Franciscans developed parallel if not overlapping styles of nature piety, Sorrell suggested the possibility that both shared the same source for this ideology.

In fact, the similarities between the hermit saints and the Franciscans are most pronounced in regard to their relationships with the natural world. As noted at the beginning of this essay, Francis has long enjoyed the admiration of environmentalists—even those outside the Catholic Church—because of the special reverence he held toward nature. This romanticized image of Francis, as a garden statue forever melded with concrete birds, is likely more fantasy than reality, but the image itself does suggest the way in which the Franciscan legend came to represent significant cultural changes in the high Middle Ages. According to Joyce E. Salisbury, a clear shift in the relationship of humans to the natural world occurred at this time, a shift that can be traced through the role that animals play in medieval literature. During the early Middle Ages, Salisbury notes, animals appeared in literature primarily in terms of their "functions"—as property, food, or even as sexual partners—but that "[b]y the twelfth and thirteenth centuries...different sorts of animals also appeared in the literary sources. These were animals of the imagination, fable animals, fantastic animals. The appearance of these animals marked a growing emphasis on a new relationship with animals. Animals became important as metaphors, as guides to metaphysical truths, as human exemplars."[14] Attempts by scholars such as Sorrell to locate in the stories of Francis's relationship to animals some sort of modern environmental ethic are thus imprudent at best, since these "[m]etaphoric animals live in the borders of human imagination, where any particular actual animal is almost irrelevant compared to its symbolic meaning."[15] Alison Goddard Elliott argued a similar position in her 1987 book, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints*. Although Elliott's concern was primarily with the classical foundations of early Christian hagiography, she argued that even in the passion accounts of the early martyrs, animals appeared as vehicles of larger mythic assertions. "The metaphorical language used to describe the compassionate lions and bears displays a certain sameness," she noted, "yet behind the clichés lies a consistent vision of the significance of the animals' actions. All terms of compassion, with varying degrees of explicitness, point to a reversal of codes, a change of nature."[16]

As Elliott illustrated, fables about miraculous animals or of miracles concerning animals did not originate with the Franciscan legend; they were rooted in Christianity's classical heritage and had never entirely disappeared from the Christian tradition. But Salisbury's identification of a cultural shift in the human relationship with animals indicates how and why the Franciscan attitude toward nature became such a hallmark of the saint's character. In fact, Salisbury pushes these attitudes back into the century before the life of Francis, observing that fabulous animals began to appear with greater regularity in the monastic literature of the eleventh century, and that by the

twelfth century, these tales had "emerged from behind monastery walls to amuse and influence society at large."[17] Indeed, given the significance of the natural landscape in the lives of the hermit saints—for whom the rugged and mountainous terrain of Apennine Italy represents their withdrawal from a corrupt society—we might expect to find stories similar to those in the Franciscan legend where animals function as literary devices designed to exemplify the special character of the hermit saints.

One such hermit was St. Amico, a rather obscure figure despite the fact that the *Acta Sanctorum* preserves two vitae of Amico composed within the century after his death (c. 1045). According to the vitae, he was born in Camerino, an ancient city in the Marches about seventy kilometers from Assisi. Following convention, his hagiographers report that he decided to pursue a religious life, but, disgusted with the laxity of the monasteries, he became instead a hermit in the region of the Abruzzi. His reputation for sanctity, however, soon made his mountain cave a place of pilgrimage, and he was eventually enticed to move to a monastery recently founded in San Pietro Avellana (in present day Molise). He died there, according to the tradition, in great sanctity at the age of 120, and was quickly recognized as the patron of the new village that was developing around the monastery. His tomb became a shrine and a place of pilgrimage, even attracting at one point the Bishop of Teatina.[18]

As the monastery became an important dependency of Montecassino, Amico came to be counted among the Benedictine saints of the period, although there is no evidence that he had been connected with the great Abbey there prior to his death. A separate tradition, not recorded in the vitae, placed him at the head of the Abbey of Santa Maria in Rambona, not far from his birthplace in the Marches, which, by the thirteenth century, had become an important center for the Cistercian movement in Italy. Whether the same historical figure lay behind both the saint of Molise and the abbot of Rambona is difficult to determine—while the iconography differs for each (primarily by garbing Amico either in the brown robe of the Benedictines or the white robe of the Cistercians), the legends long ago became one.

The longer vita, designated as the "First Vita" by the editors of the *Acta Sanctorum*, was probably composed at Montecassino within a generation after Amico's death, when the saint had been "adopted" by the Benedictine reform movement that occurred under the leadership of Abbot Desiderius (later Pope Victor III) in the eleventh century. This document was undoubtedly written to promote the shrine of Amico at San Pietro Avellana since the latter chapters are merely a litany of miracles that had occurred there. The "Second Vita" is probably derivative of the first, but focused entirely upon the life of Amico—his death is not discussed nor are any shrine miracles. Both vitae, however, contain various pericopes that detail Amico's special relationships with assorted animals. In one case, a hungry dog refused to eat bread that had been destined for the saint but carelessly discarded by a servant; in another, Amico's mule, having been stolen by bandits, shook off the

miscreants while crossing a stream and returned to the saint. When the bandits followed the tracks of the mule and realized that they had stolen the animal from a holy man, they confessed their sins and begged forgiveness. The "Second Vita" also recounts a story that resonates strongly with a famous tale from the life of Francis, when it reports that birds had so little fear of Amico that they ate grains from his pocket.[19] While these few narratives alone do not suggest any correlation between the legends of Francis and Amico, one story does stand out.

The story of Francis's taming of the wolf of Gubbio is one of the better known wonders from the life of the saint, despite the fact that it appears to be a relatively late addition to the Franciscan legend. The tale is not found in either of the vitae by Thomas of Celano, nor in the *Major Legend* of Bonaventure, although both mention Francis's powers over wolves and other wild beasts.[20] Rather, the first written account—at least by way of clear allusion—appears to be in the late thirteenth century additions to Henri d'Avranches *Legenda Sancti Francisci Versificata* where the anonymous redactor added these brief lines to his larger discussion of Francis's ability to tame wild creatures:

> One wolf in particular through his agency, we are told,
> Became a mild creature and with a village was reconciled.[21]

Half a century later, a chronicle of the Monastery of San Verecondo recounted that, shortly after receiving the stigmata, Francis had passed through the region on a donkey and been warned by a farmer to beware of the ravenous wolves nearby that could harm him and kill his donkey. Replying only that he had not harmed the wolves and thus had nothing to fear from them, Francis passed through the area safely. Another version, recorded by Bartholomew of Pisa at the end of the fourteenth century, contends that a woodland bandit in the area was nicknamed the "Wolf" (*Lupo*) due to his ferocious nature, but was converted by Francis and became a friar. Only with Ugolino Boniscambi's *Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions* (*Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Eius*) and its anonymous Italian counterpart *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* (*I Fioretti di San Francesco*)—both composed sometime during the early to mid-fourteenth century—does the story assume its "traditional" form.[22]

To summarize briefly this best known account: Francis, while staying in Gubbio (a small Umbrian town about fifty kilometers from Assisi), was warned by the townspeople about a wolf that lived outside the city walls, "terrifying in physical size and ferocious with rabid hunger." The animal had killed many of the citizens already, and the remainder lived in such fear that "hardly anyone dared to go outside the city gate." In an act of both compassion for the townspeople and as a sign of his own faith, Francis went out to meet the wolf, who charged at him with "jaws wide open." Francis, however, "confronted the wolf with the sign of the Cross," which "stopped it in its

tracks and closed those savage gripping jaws." He then commanded the wolf to approach him, and to the amazement of the townspeople, the wolf meekly obeyed and came to lay down "at the saint's feet." Francis then admonished the wolf, pointing out the great evil he had caused, but promised him protection in the town (and a regular diet) should the wolf be willing to renounce his predatory ways. This the wolf agreed to do, and physically sealed the pledge by nodding his assent and placing his paw in the outstretched hand of the saint. Entering the town together, the wolf repeated these actions at the command of Francis, who used the occasion to deliver a sermon on the spiritual dangers of hell as infinitely more horrendous than the physical dangers that had been presented by the wolf. "From that day," Ugolino reported, "they kept the pact arranged by Saint Francis: the people with the wolf and the wolf with the people" until the wolf died two years later.[23]

The authenticity of the story has been a subject of much debate. Despite its obviously legendary and even parabolic characteristics, even some modern scholars have supported its essential veracity. Others have followed Bartholomew of Pisa by offering the more rationalist interpretation that the story was, in reality, an allegory for other conflicts. Johannes Jörgensen, for example, read the story against the backdrop of the intermittent wars between the small Italian city-states, and suggested that the wolf might be a device used to represent covertly the depredations of local feudal lords.[24] Contemporary scholarship, however, generally rejects both the literalist and rationalist interpretations for a symbolic one. Both Edward Armstrong and David Salter argue that the narrative should be read as medieval Christians would have read it: As evidence of the power of the supernatural over the natural. As an embodiment of divine power, Francis *would have had authority* over wild beasts simply through the logic of the medieval concept of sanctity. The essential "moral" of the story, both Armstrong and Salter suggest, was not in its veracity but in its heritage and eschatology. The exercise of human dominion over the natural world both hearkened back to Eden and looked forward to the millennial age when "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid" (Isaiah 11.6a, RSV). Glimpses of the ability to reverse the effects of the Fall and, however briefly, reconcile humanity to the natural world occur repeatedly in hagiographical literature. For Salter, the archetype was the famous story of St. Jerome's taming of a lion; Armstrong likewise locates the phylogeny of the narrative within the traditions of the Desert Fathers by way of Celtic monasticism. "[T]he Wolf of Gubbio," Armstrong insists, "is descended from a long line of beasts. He emerges, not from the Apennine hills, but from his ancient lair deep within the monastic library and behaves as animal denizens of the Earthly Paradise, living reconciled with mankind, had done for many centuries."[25]

In fact, the narrative does come from the Apennine hills; or at least, a version of it appears in the legends about St. Amico. Unfortunately, the narrative of Amico's taming of the wolf is not included in either of the Latin vitae; in fact, it apparently does not appear in published form until the nineteenth

century, when Sabatino Frazzini—at that time the parish priest in San Pietro Avellana—included it in his popular vernacular version of the life of St. Amico. While this suggests that the narrative was, like the wolf of Gubbio in the Franciscan legend, also a later addition to the Amico legend, the wolf had become the most significant iconographic symbol of Amico by at least the fifteenth century, when the white-robed "Cistercian Amico" was typically presented with an axe and a wolf (often on a leash). Since the wolf seems not to have appeared in the images of the "Benedictine Amico" until the nineteenth century, this may indicate that the story originated in the area near Rambona, which was less than 100 kilometers from Gubbio. Lacking any written accounts or vitae from this region, however, we must rely on Franzini's version:

> After Amico had retired to the monastery of San Pietro Avellana—as noted previously—he desired one day, for the sake of humility, to go out with a mule into the nearby forest to gather some firewood, which he needed for the monastery. While he was chopping, a wolf of extraordinary size threw itself on the poor creature and killed it. [The wolf] was standing over [the mule] and was about to devour it, when at the sight of Amico he suddenly began to run, and [Amico] chased him as he ran through the ravines. The man of God bore all this with the greatest resignation; and, after a little while, called to the carnivorous animal and watched him come to his feet in all humility and meekness [*mansueto*]. Then Amico rebuked him for the damage he had caused, and obligated him to carry the firewood to the monastery in penance. The wolf accepted, making a clear act of reverence [*un certo atto di riverenza*]; and indeed, forgetting his ferocious nature, let himself be loaded [with firewood] and led by St. Amico to the monastery, not unlike a domestic animal. As a means of recalling these events, since ancient times Amico has been depicted in paintings with a wolf carrying firewood at his side.[26]

Obviously, there are significant differences between the story of Amico and the wolf of Gubbio, but there are also some striking similarities. Both accounts note the physical size of the wolf, who comes only when he is summoned by the saint; in both cases, the saint admonishes the wolf in regard to the damage he has done, and the wolf reacts in humility and meekness; and once the agreement is reached between the saint and the animal, the wolf makes a physical sign as a pledge. While these few correspondences are not enough to equate the two narratives, nor even to suggest that one is borrowed from the other, they do suggest a larger literary milieu in which both stories took shape.

Undoubtedly, Salter and Armstrong are correct in tracing the heritage of this story back to the eremitic tradition of the Desert Fathers. Indeed, as Elliott recounts it, versions of Jerome's taming of a lion present significant parallels to the Amico legend. After removing a thorn from the lion's paw, Jerome puts the grateful animal to work in the monastery, where one of his

tasks is to guard a donkey. When the donkey is stolen by thieves, the lion is unjustly accused of a relapse to its "natural" instincts and made to perform the labors that had once supplied by the donkey; but when the donkey reappears, and the thieves are frightened away by the lion, the saint learns the truth and reconciles the lion to his former station.[27] But the "predator turned servant" motif here may be laden with even more symbolism than a surface reading may suggest. In addition to the biblical use of the wolf as a metaphor of evil—and the resultant oppositional metaphor of godly individuals as sheep protected by a shepherd (Latin: *pastor*)—encounters with wild beasts were probably quite common in the lives of the Desert Fathers and easily became emblems of the wilderness in which they lived out their ascetic ideals.[28] In these earliest hagiographic traditions, the desert was a paradoxical symbol of both chaos and paradise. Indeed, "wilderness," whether in the desert or on a mountain, has always been an ambivalent and ambiguous symbol in Christian literature, representing simultaneously both the abode of demons and the place where direct access to the divine is most possible. To borrow the terminology of Mircea Eliade, the "wilderness" as a hagiographic landscape is an *axis mundi* where the three worlds of heaven, earth, and hell are mystically connected, making movement between them not only possible but likely.[29] A similarly complex landscape reappears in the lives of the hermit saints, although the setting has been transposed from the deserts of Egypt to the mountains of south-central Italy. Thus, the "crisis of cenobitism" that supposedly fueled the revivification of the eremitic movement in tenth century Italy may be simply a literary trope designed to connect the "Mountain Fathers" with their desert predecessors through the symbol of wilderness.

As emblems of the hagiographical landscape, wild beasts such as lions and wolves likewise depict the paradoxical relations between sacred and profane, humanity and nature, paradise and eschaton. Not only is a parabolic interpretation possible, it is demanded by the conventions of hagiography. As Salter observed, "the notion that animals were to be viewed first and foremost as signs, whose behaviour—when read symbolically—could impart to human beings important spiritual truths, was held not just by Francis's biographers, but by Francis himself." Salter suggests that both Francis and the author of the *Deeds* understood the story of the taming of the wolf of Gubbio as an object lesson in human morality and salvation, explaining further that "after Francis returned to Gubbio with the tamed wolf, he preached a sermon in which he invited the people to compare the purely physical devastation that the animal had wrought with the infinitely greater pain that they would experience if condemned to suffer the eternal torments of Hell. Therefore, like Ugolino, Francis would seem to have regarded the wolf as a symbolic object, seeing in the creature's ferocity and destructiveness a divine admonition, warning sinners of the urgent need to repent for their misdeeds."[30] No such sermon followed Amico's taming, but the iconographic portrayals of Amico with the leashed wolf certainly presented a similar lesson of the power of the sacred over chaotic evil.[31]

The symbolism of the wilderness as an eschatological paradise lends to the story other potent images as well. As noted, many scholars understand the Franciscan legend as a symbol of Francis's restoration of the prelapsarian paradise when human beings enjoyed dominion over other living things. Such a reading accords with the presentations in the vitae that present the life of Francis as coterminous with an age of peace and harmony.[32] In his twentieth-century revision of Frazzini's life of the saint, Michele Messore included a poem of Amico's taming of the wolf that reflected a similar understanding, noting that the forest in which the miracle occurred has now become "like a paradise" (*come un paradiso*) and that a place that once rang with the "howl of the wolf" (*l'ulular del lupo*) has been made into a place of "eternal poetry" (*eterna poesia*) as a result of the miracle.[33] Thus, even in a relatively modern work, there remains an implicit recognition that the significance of the narrative lay in its ability to transfigure the literary landscape into an eschatological Eden.

While these larger motifs and images certainly connect the stories of the Desert Fathers with the Franciscan tales, the shift from lion to wolf as principal antagonist illustrates the way in which these stories have reconfigured the literary landscape from Egypt to Italy. Salisbury noted some reasons why the wolf should have displaced the lion in twelfth century literature. Despite the presence of the lion in both biblical and early Christian accounts as a symbol of evil, lions were, for Christians living in medieval Europe, only imagined animals that were increasingly coming to be viewed as noble, regal, and even mystical creatures. The wolf, on the other hand, was a vicious and frightening animal that many Europeans knew well. "The fear of being eaten largely shaped people's relationship with the wolf," according to Salisbury. "Wolves were a threat to the medieval economy because of their diet of domestic animals. They were, however, a greater threat to the medieval psyche from their perceived capacity to acquire a taste for human flesh....Wolves were perceived as dangerous, threatening predators feeding on humans and feeding their fears." Further, works of both art and literature symbolically depicted the wolf "as an evil, greedy, gluttonous, murderous thief....He was dissatisfied with his lot in society and wanted more." As emblems, therefore, of such socially disruptive greed, "wolves became a metaphor for nobility gone astray."[34]

The choice of the wolf as a symbol for spiritual and social disorder allowed the hagiographers and other writers not only to lay claim to these ancient motifs but to make them their own. As a symbol of the Apennine landscape—its dark forests and dangerous mountains—the wolf of the Amico legend represented the conquest of order over chaos. But as the axe in the iconography of Amico suggests, the process is incomplete, and the hermit still lives within a dangerous landscape. With the tale of Francis's taming of the wolf of Gubbio, however, a clear transformation has taken place. Unlike Amico who lives in a monastery surrounded by forest, Francis is not an "intruder" into the abode of the wolf; rather, the wolf himself intrudes into

Gubbio. Despite the association of Francis with the natural world, the principal setting of the tale of Gubbio is actually an urban area. Amico's wolf may serve the saint, but he does so within his own habitat; the wolf of Gubbio, on the other hand, must leave his home in the wilderness and adopt a "civilized" life "going from door to door, harming no one and not being harmed by anyone."[35] As the landscape itself has been transfigured, so too has its key symbol.

Certainly, the correspondences between Amico and Francis cannot be stretched too far; the conventions of hagiography and even of oral legends about the saints make it difficult to argue conclusively the influence of one upon the other. It does seem reasonable to conclude, however, that eremitic tradition of south-central Italy expressed many of the same ideas and practices that later took shape with the rise of the Franciscans and other mendicant orders. If the tale of the taming of the wolf may be taken as a case in point, then the great accomplishment of the mendicants may have been to transfer these ideas from the Apennine wilderness to a new urban setting that better served the needs of the Italian population in the thirteenth century.

Notes

1. Raphael Brown, "Introduction" in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1958), p. 13.
2. Joseph P. Chinnici, "Foreword," in Jay M. Hammond, ed., *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography, and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), p. 9; Jacques Dalarun, *The Misadventure of Francis of Assisi: Toward a Historical Use of the Franciscan Legends* (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2002), p. 21.
3. On the Greek hermits, see André Guillou, "Grecs d'Italie du sud et de Sicile au moyen âge: les moines," in his *Studies on Byzantine Italy* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1970; orig. pub. in *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 75 [1963]: 79–110; pagination follows that of the original); Agostino Pertusi, "Aspetti organizzativi e culturali dell'ambiente monacle greco dell'Italia meridionale," in *L'eremitismo in occidente nei secoli XI e XII* (Milano: Società Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1962), pp. 382–417; Barbara M. Kreutz, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 123–27 and 163, n. 39; and Peter King, *Western Monasticism: A History of the Monastic Movement in the Latin Church* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1999), pp. 154–58.
4. C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn. (London: Longman, 1989), pp. 149–51.
5. Jean Leclercq, "Monasticism and Asceticism: Western Christianity," in Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff, ed., *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, vol. 16 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), pp. 124–25.

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6. Jean Leclercq, "The Monastic Crisis of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in Noreen Hunt, ed., *Cluniac Monasticism in the Central Middle Ages* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 219–29.
7. Giles Constable has explored the impact of the monastic reforms of the eleventh century—epitomized by Pope Gregory VIII, the former monk Hildebrand—on larger programs of ecclesiastical reform in *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
8. Phyllis G. Jestice, *Wayward Monks and the Religious Revolution of the Eleventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 23.
9. For Dominic of Sora and his contributions, see John Howe, *Church Reform and Social Change in Eleventh-Century Italy: Dominic of Sora and His Patrons* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).
10. William J. Short, "Francis, the 'New' Saint in the Tradition of Christian Hagiography," in Jay M. Hammond, ed., *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography, and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), pp. 153 and 158.
11. Dalarun, *The Misadventure of Francis of Assisi*, pp. 118 and 49. On Domenico Loricato, see Owen J. Blum, trans. *Peter Damian: Letters 91–120* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), pp. 211–26.
12. Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 28–38, quote from p. 37.
13. Quoted in Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 39.
14. Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 103.
15. Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, p. 103.
16. Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover, NH: Published for Brown University Press by University Press of New England, 1987), p. 149.
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19. *AASS*, §7 and 10 in the "First Vita," and §2, 6, and 9 in the "Second Vita."
20. Edward A. Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 208–9.
21. "The Versified Life of Saint Francis by Henri D'Avranches: Additions, Amplifications in Light of *The Major Legend*," in Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Volume III: The Prophet* (New York: New City Press, 2001), IX, 42.

22. Edward Armstrong suggests that the Verecondo version could be accepted as probably based upon a historical incident that was later embellished into the Gubbio narrative; see Armstrong, *Saint Francis*, pp. 206–7. Raphael Brown discusses these accounts in an appendix to his translation of *The Little Flowers*, pp. 320–21. The editor of the *Deeds* in Regis Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (*Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Volume III: The Prophet*), notes other appearances of wolves in stories about Francis; p. 482, footnote a.
23. Quotations from "The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions by Ugolino Boniscambi of Montegiorgio (1328–1337) and the Little Flowers of Saint Francis (A Translation and Re-editing of the Deeds of Saint Francis and His Companions by an Anonymous) (After 1337)," in Regis J. Armstrong , J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Volume III: The Prophet*, XXIII, 1–35.
24. Johannes Jörgensen, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1955; orig. pub. in English 1912), p. 91. Edward Armstrong offers further examples of such allegorical interpretations, but questions why such conflicts "should only have been recorded in so oblique a manner"; Armstrong, *Saint Francis*, p. 202.
25. Armstrong, *Saint Francis*, p. 210. See also David Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature* (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2001), pp. 22–32.
26. Sabatino Frazzini, *Vita di Santo Amico: Eremita e Monaco Cassinese* (Isernia, 1887), pp. 29–30; my translation from the Italian.
27. Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, p. 155. In addition to the classical tale of Androcles and the lion, Elliott finds another precedent for the story in the almost identical tale of St. Gerasimus and suggests that the story was attached to Jerome due to the similarity of their names. Cf. Salter's discussion of the iconography of Jerome and the lion, *Holy and Noble Beasts*, pp. 13–18.
28. Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts*, pp. 19–21.
29. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1987; orig. pub. 1957), pp. 32–42. A classic study of the symbol of wilderness in Christianity is George Hunston Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).
30. Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts*, p. 32.
31. Curiously, the taming of the wolf of Gubbio—despite its obvious visual appeal—has never been a popular subject for artists. Perhaps the most significant medieval work is the panel devoted to this incident by Sassetta in his altarpiece for the Church of San Francesco in San Sepulcro (in the Province of Arezzo, Tuscany; about sixty kilometers northwest of Gubbio), the panels of which depict various scenes from the life of the saint. The most famous panels of the life of Francis, however—the Giotto inspired frescoes at the Basilica in Assisi—omit the event. This could be an indication that the story had not yet entered the Franciscan tradition since the frescoes predated the *Deeds* by about thirty-five years; or it may

be simply that the painter was using as his sole source Bonaventure's *Major Legend*; cf. Dalarun, *The Misadventure of Francis of Assisi*, p. 26.

32. See, e.g., Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, pp. 176–77; Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, pp. 50–54; and Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts*, pp. 30–32.
33. Michele Messore, *Sant'Amico in S. Pietro Avellana* (Rome, 1961), p. 97. Massore, like Frazzini, was a parish priest in San Pietro Avellana; his booklet claims to "revise, amplify, and correct" Frazzini's work; cf. his prose version of the event on pp. 53–54.
34. Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, pp. 69 and 130.
35. "The Deeds of Blessed Francis," XXIII, 35.

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CHAPTER 5

WHAT HAS PARIS TO DO WITH ASSISI? THE THEOLOGICAL CREATION OF A SAINT

John V. Apczynski

Introductory Observations on the Making of a Saint

From the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, untold numbers of penitents emerged throughout Christian Europe. Enthusiastic God-seekers all, most embraced a lifestyle of evangelical poverty, imitating, in what they took to be a literal fashion, the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. The practices of these holy men and women inevitably thrust a challenge to the power, authority, and wealth of the institutional church that appeared to be compromising the purity of the gospel message by comparison. Some, such as the *Humiliati*, were able to implement their vision with the support and approval of the institutional church. Others, such as the Waldensians, began their penitential work of preaching with the approbation of the institutional church, but eventually their enthusiasm led some to espouse practices and teachings unacceptable to the institutional church. And finally others, notably those called the Cathars—Albigensians in France and Bogomils in Eastern Europe, adopted dualistic doctrines to nurture their evangelical lifestyle with the result that many were slaughtered as heretics by the church that originally inspired them.

Given the motivations behind this cultural phenomenon—particularly its penitential inspiration to embrace some version of poverty presumed to be evangelical with its concomitant self-effacement, it is not at all surprising that most of these individuals, indeed—aside from specialists in medieval history—even these movements, remain unknown or obscure. The fact that one of these penitents from a remote and insignificant region of central Italy should have emerged as a major religious icon of Western Christianity is striking, to say the least. How is it that a "poor man" from Assisi has come to occupy such a universally appealing place in the contemporary world, including the world beyond Christianity itself?

The proposal I intend to advance in this essay is that the saint known to the world as Francis of Assisi was a creation of the theological tradition he inspired, particularly of his disciple, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. This may appear to some as academically implausible or religiously disrespectful. As advanced here, though, the proposal is neither. Religiously, the proposal simply acknowledges that something must account for the cultural reception of a "saint" in addition to the (presumed) personal holiness of the individual. Keep in mind that there were literally hundreds of such men and women penitents during this era throughout Europe, many of whom were charismatic and through whose intervention followers testified to miracles. Francis's living in evangelical poverty and his sincere seeking after God were hardly unique. Perhaps his embrace of "creatures" (i.e., animals and elements of nature) and the bodily marks taken as stigmata were, but why did these not simply dissipate into maudlin sentimentality? Ecclesiastical approbation undoubtedly was a necessary condition for declarations of sanctity, but just as surely it was insufficient. Much as he abhorred it for his *Rule*, Francis's life and vision needed a "gloss" to make it intelligible and compelling for his contemporaries.[1] This hermeneutic, as we would express it today, is what his more literate followers, especially Bonaventure, provided.

The Diversion of the "Franciscan Question"

But does not such an effort to make an individual's life "meaningful" within a tradition of hagiography inevitably raise more profound questions of the historical validity of the portrait thus established? This suspicion regarding Bonaventure's "official" version of the life of Francis[2] has dominated Western scholarship ever since Paul Sabatier's *Vie de saint François d'Assise* burst on the scene at the end of the nineteenth century.[3] Basing his portrait on the rediscovery of manuscripts recounting reminiscences of Francis collected before Bonaventure's official biography was composed, Sabatier paints Francis in a thoroughly "modern" fashion. What emerges from his effort is an individual struggling to create his destiny in the face of internal anguish and of a society, while recognizing his genius, typically misunderstanding him. This depiction of Francis in Romantic hues undoubtedly opened an exciting and refreshing perspective on our appreciation of his life. In the process of portraying Francis as a champion of individual religious liberty, unfortunately, Sabatier felt constrained to castigate Bonaventure's official life as "profoundly deformed," by which he meant that it failed to capture Francis's internal struggle to discover himself and his desire to maintain the purity of his vision in the face of ecclesiastical efforts to subjugate it.[4] Since this is a Romantic conceit, Sabatier is undoubtedly correct to point out that Bonaventure would not have considered this relevant to his presentation of Francis. But to declare that as a consequence Francis is reduced to a great miracle-worker whose originality is lost by becoming a mere instrument in the hands of God hardly does justice to Bonaventure's

achievement.[5] Nevertheless, the contention that Bonaventure distorted the image of Francis by watering down its originating essential features came to predominate in twentieth-century historical scholarship. One major historian went so far as to declare that Bonaventure "never really understood the Franciscan ideal."[6]

This historical assessment is complicated by tensions arising among Francis's followers after his death. Just how was Francis's ideal to be lived once the brotherhood had grown numerically and socially beyond a small band of lay men living under the direct guidance of their founder? Francis himself was never able to resolve this issue beyond exhorting his followers to adhere simply to the rule, which he equated with the evangelical life.[7] As responsibilities for preaching—and the new pastoral expectations for preaching informed by learning—began to mount, the brothers were not able to determine how to achieve this. Just a few years after his death, Francis's brotherhood was in danger of disintegrating because of the inability to carry out his ideals under these more complex circumstances. Following the rule literally was impossible; interpreting it appeared to jeopardize his vision. What was to be done?

The leadership of the order appealed to Francis's friend and Cardinal protector, Hugolino, now Pope Gregory IX. His response, probably the most significant and fateful ecclesiastical decree for the fledgling order, determined that Francis's exhortations are to serve as ideals for the members, but not as law constricting developments or modifications to the rule.[8] Furthermore, he permitted the *use* of money held by an agent, though not by the brothers. This adaptation was a significant departure from a literal understanding of Francis's rule and lifestyle.

Ten years later the order went through a significant "reformation."[9] A variety of statutes was adopted that formalized the governance of the order and effectively restricted its leadership to clerics. Less than twenty years after the death of Francis, the originating ideal of a brotherhood guided by charismatic leadership and open to anyone desiring to conform their lives according to the gospels had been dramatically altered. Moreover, the pastoral work of preaching led to the increasing importance of academic training for the more recent members. Needless to say, not all the brothers would have been pleased with these developments, particularly some of the older "companions" who were drawn to the lifestyle by the personal inspiration of Francis himself. This was the state of the order that the young Bonaventure joined in Paris around 1243.

These tensions within the order continued to fester as the brotherhood came to be increasingly dominated by clerical, academically trained members. The problem from within the membership appeared to be principally not the direction that the order was taking, though some clearly were unhappy with this, but more the recognition that too many were joining it without the requisite spirit of conversion to an evangelical form of life. Under the energetic leadership of John of Parma (1247–1257) and Bonaventure (1257–1273),

the order continued to thrive in its new orientation while remaining faithful, at least according to the mainstream of the community, to the ideals of Francis's message adapted to these new circumstances.[10]

By the end of the thirteenth century, however, the efforts of the mediating forces within the order proved to be unsatisfactory to some of the brotherhood. Those disaffected members, known as the "Spirituals," were insistent—and they were clearly correct in this—that the raison d'être of the order consisted in a genuine conversion to the evangelical life, something that was becoming increasingly impossible to regulate in a large institution. They were convinced that this dedication to the imitation of Christ was being compromised by the huge increase in numbers of the order, its clerical domination, the substitution of learning for fervor, and, most pointedly, by the order's prestige and access to power which made a mockery of living a life of holy poverty. The Spirituals, in short, championed a return to the pristine conditions of the brotherhood, when a small band of penitents, untutored and lay, lived in accordance with evangelical poverty under the guidance of a charismatic leader.

In their critique of the accuracy of Bonaventure's life of Francis, many modern historians had assumed tacitly that the Spirituals reflected the ideals of the historical Francis while Bonaventure championed instead those of the institutional church. Today we recognize that this is seriously deficient as a historical judgment. While there were some rigid Spirituals who insisted on an unrealistic and impossible adherence to a literal implementation of the conditions of the early brotherhood, most were in fact concerned with the purity of their life which they thought was being threatened. Their reading of the life of Francis, in other words, was just as much shaped by the circumstances of their lives as was Bonaventure's. The Spirituals' depiction of Francis, accordingly, was no more "objective" or historically "accurate" than was the portrait developed in the previous generation by Bonaventure. In fact, many Spirituals appeared to have accepted Bonaventure's view.

This clearly was the case with Jacopone da Todi, whose poetic expressions calling for a life seized up in a burning love for God are often invoked as criticizing the moderating perspective of Bonaventure. Indeed, in one of his frequently invoked lines he plays on the ancient rhetoric of Tertullian to reproach arid theological speculation for its debilitating effect on the order:

> That's the way it is—not a shred left of the spirit of the Rule!
> In sorrow and grief I see Paris demolish Assisi, stone by stone.[11]

Though it came to be used as a slogan by some of the more extreme Spirituals, this is far from being a form of mindless anti-intellectualism.[12] Jacopone's target was neither theology nor creative reflection—and writing!—on the Christian or Franciscan life, but rather the way that academic self-aggrandizement was becoming a stumbling block to a self-effacing openness to divine love. In this sentiment he was, in fact, echoing the theology of

Bonaventure, who taught that the pursuit of theology must be undertaken with the humility that leads the mind toward transformation by divine love. The evidence that Jacopone read and assimilated this theological perspective appears in his digest of Bonaventure's *Tree of Life*[13] and in his use of metaphors of "sensation" for discerning God.[14] Even this startling language—

> A great wisdom it is, indeed, to go mad,
> Out of one's mind with the love of God.
> The University of Paris has yet to formulate
> A more profound philosophy[15]

—is best read as a poetic rendition of the conclusion of Bonaventure's *The Mind's Journey into God*.

These reflections should lead us, I suggest, to acknowledge that the life of Francis of Assisi manifests too great a profundity for us to capture its essence or formulate its ideals through some historical quest and that the effort to do so limits us too severely. Clearly learning with accuracy as many of the details about his life and the social forces that shaped the beginnings of his reform movement contributes significantly to our understanding of him. But as the editors of the recent collection of early Franciscan texts put it, Francis's embrace of poverty let him so to empty himself that his personal transparency to the divine compels us to adopt a variety of interpretative schemes in our attempt to come to some appreciation of him.[16] Once we are able to acknowledge that the modern desire to portray Francis "as he really was," helpful as it is for clarifying features of his movement, may also become a snare that truncates our picture of him, we may discover anew the power of the portraits that first captivated the imagination of Western culture. It is in this light that we should turn now to the way Bonaventure depicts Francis of Assisi.

Bonaventure's Theological Portrait of Francis

Despite the fact that Bonaventure crafted a sophisticated theological system informed by the scholastic methods of the day, his theology is more properly understood as a form of wisdom reflection characteristic of early Christian thinkers and of monastic contemplation. The significance of this observation is that it highlights the practical thrust of Bonaventure's theological effort, particularly its grounding in the experience of faith and its purpose in leading the theologian—and whoever should study that theology—not only toward a more profound understanding of the faith but also toward the richer experience of the "content" of that faith.[17] This accounts in no small measure for the power of Bonaventure's portrait of Francis: his aim in presenting the life of Francis was not primarily to chronicle it, but to show his readers its significance.[18] He does this because Bonaventure's understanding of the Christian faith is influenced not only by his scholastic training, but

also by his conviction that Francis of Assisi represents a privileged instance of what that faith might be. He takes it as one of the tasks of his theological efforts to express intelligibly to the wider cultural world of his day how it is that Francis's religious experience has relevance for all Christians.[19] Bonaventure's theology, in other words, is not only shaped by the intellectual traditions of the universities, but also by his conviction that Francis's religious experience is an important factor in our ability to understand what the Christian life means.

In order to grasp Bonaventure's achievement in constructing his fascinating interpretation of the universal significance of Francis's religious experience, we need to delve into his theological position. The fact that Bonaventure developed a creative personal synthesis of his received heritage of Christian (Augustinian) Neoplatonism with recently introduced features of Aristotelianism, Eastern Christian theology, and Joachite historical speculation makes this a daunting task. His conceptualization of God as the triune fecund source of all reality, his speculation on the Word of God as the center of all reality, and his inference regarding creation as the external expression of the divine activity in time are all presumed in his account of Francis. Considering these elements of his synthetic vision will provide us with a succinct, but hopefully sufficient, introduction to his theological framework.

When viewed from an eternal perspective, theology begins with the mystery of the Trinity since this is the foundation of a Christian view of reality.[20] To conceive God principally as *being*, as the Western Christian philosophical tradition does, is a helpful but incomplete approach, because it focuses—and thereby tends to limit—the mind of the inquirer toward an abstract understanding of the divine nature. A much richer approach to the divine reality is accessible by a consideration of the divine as *self-diffusive good*.[21] Here it is possible to understand the divine as perfectly self-diffusive by nature while effecting this self-donation freely through personal relationship. The highest understanding of the divine is thus not as an infinite monad, but as eternally loving relationships internal to and constituting the divine nature. The Father represents the fontal source of goodness, the Word the perfect subsistent expression of this goodness which is other than the Father, and the Spirit the perfect subsistent receptivity of goodness. The Word is thus the center of the Trinitarian relations anticipating all that is other than the Father, including the external emanation of the Father in creation.

When viewed from the perspective of the historical unfolding of human understanding of the divine, then the starting point for seeking true wisdom is the center of reality, which is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word.[22] Just as the eternal Word is the perfect expression of the Father within the Trinity, so the incarnate Word is the ground of the external expression of God. The entire cosmic order is thus a symbol of God's uttering of the divine mystery into that which is not divine. The aim of this self-donation is the complete fulfillment of the created order which is to be realized by its perfect union with the divine. The formal "hierarchical" structure of the created order

is to be completed in time primarily through its fulfillment by the human "potency" of being united with the divine. This historical telos is revealed in the story of Jesus, which contributes both to understanding nature and history. To become more like Christ is, for Bonaventure, "the most fundamental act of human existence" and the basis of "the return of creation to God."[23] According to Bonaventure, then, the incarnate Word is the key to understanding the goodness of the triune God, which overflows into the goodness of the created order and provides the possibility for its perfection in history.[24]

We may derive a preliminary appreciation of the way in which these theological presuppositions enabled Bonaventure to configure the meaning of Francis's life by considering briefly his introduction to the life of Francis.[25] Here Bonaventure situates Francis within a cosmic scheme of redemptive history: he appeared in these last days as a sign of God's superabundant mercy to those who were humble enough to discern his significance. He was a herald, a light bearing witness to the Light, a messenger calling for renewal. And like the angel of the sixth seal he announced the coming of an era of peace and salvation. Filled with divine grace, he was enflamed by a seraphic fire and became a "hierarchic man."[26] This messenger of God, "so worthy to be. . .admired by the world," exemplified in his very life what it meant to be a perfect follower of Christ. And this was all confirmed by the signs of the crucified Christ imprinted on his body.

Bonaventure's prefatory remarks provide a key to appreciate how he expects his readers to view the significance of Francis. Practically everything he includes in his life is already available in his written sources. His major contribution consists in the construction of the way in which he expected Francis to be viewed by his fellow friars, by the larger ecclesiastical community, and ultimately by Western culture itself. For our purposes we need highlight only a few pertinent examples to illustrate how Bonaventure accomplishes this.

An important motif in Bonaventure's presentation of Francis is his attempt to explore the way in which grace transformed the consciousness of Francis. Bonaventure's theological framework would hold that such a consciousness is the proper end of human awareness and, further, that it constitutes the destiny offered to the human community by the divine benevolence. But, as anyone who has attempted to study the literature of religious and, especially, mystical experience knows, this is notoriously difficult to accomplish because of the ineffability of such experiences. Yet Bonaventure has been relatively successful in depicting this Christ-filled consciousness manifested by Francis.

Consider, for example, the way in which Bonaventure presents the state of the brotherhood at Rivo Torto.[27] The initial band of brothers had just received verbal approval for their way of life from Innocent III and had returned to the region near Assisi. The brothers were spending the winter, under quite austere conditions, in a deserted hut. Francis was

torn between living a contemplative life in solitude and prayer and a life of preaching and ministry to call the Church to repentance. After prayerful consideration, since he did not trust himself to make such an important decision, Francis determined that he should "live for all men rather than for himself alone." But in the text, Bonaventure describes how the primitive brotherhood spent that winter "praying incessantly," primarily through mental prayer focusing on the image of the crucified savior, because they did not have any liturgical books to guide them. In effect Francis is groping, according to Bonaventure's presentation, toward the development of a new way of life, one which is engaged in evangelical practice and preaching but sustained by the concurrent practice of contemplative prayer.[28]

Bonaventure elaborates this motif by means of his thematic orchestration of events in accordance with a traditional pattern marking stages of spiritual development: purgation, illumination, and perfection.[29] Bonaventure's intention is to depict the way in which the external virtues, beginning with ascetical practices, lead to the kind of transformation that marks Francis as a person who is dying to his own sensibilities and is becoming conformed to the crucified Christ. The purpose of the ascetical practices was that Francis might reach "such purity that his body was in remarkable harmony with his spirit and his spirit with God."[30] Hence, it is not correct, on Bonaventure's construal, to consider the ideal of Francis's life to consist in any particular external observance, including poverty, but rather to conceive of these practices as outward reflections of the inner transformation reshaping the person into the likeness of Christ.[31]

This pattern of spiritual development, furthermore, provides Bonaventure with a basis for interpreting Francis's attitude toward nature, including "creatures." While these stories about Francis are among the most well-known and beloved, they present some initially puzzling features. Perhaps our familiarity with stories of rabbits, waterfowl, and fish cavorting with Francis or of him exhorting birds or a cricket to praise God obscures for us how odd this sort of activity is.[32] If these are manifestations of a transformed consciousness, why is it not one that is sliding into insanity? Even more, what does this have to do with conforming to Christ?

The ingenuity of Bonaventure's interpretation of Francis shines most brilliantly here. Bonaventure is arguing that, as a result of grace and his ascetical practices, these lovely stories illustrate that Francis's awareness is becoming increasingly capable of realizing its fullest potential. During his lifetime, Francis became aware of the presence of the divine in the entire created realm. His consciousness was able to expand beyond its normally restricted framework to "experience" creation as it truly is.

> Aroused by everything to divine love,
> he rejoiced in all the works of the Lord's hands
> and through their delightful display

he rose into their life-giving reason and cause.
In beautiful things he contuited Beauty itself
and through the footprints impressed in things
he followed his Beloved everywhere...
With an intensity of unheard devotion
he savored
in each and every creature
—as in so many rivulets—
that fontal Goodness,
and discerned
an almost celestial choir
in the chords of power and activity
given them by God...[33]

Bonaventure is claiming here that Francis "saw," "tasted," and "heard" the divine manifested throughout the entire created realm. Francis was able to call all creatures brother or sister, because his "piety" led him to see that they all had the same source as he did.[34] And the foundation for all this was his increasing conformity to Christ so that he was able to see in every human being, particularly the poor, the image of Christ.[35]

The strength and attractiveness of this interpretation of Francis can be appreciated by recalling the theological framework which sustains it. Since the created order is a free gift emanating from the Father, an external manifestation of the eternal Word, and a temporal outpouring of the perfectly self-diffusive Good, these characteristics ought to be constitutive of finite reality. If we consider the material world in its deepest structures, we do discover traces of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God.[36] Bonaventure's claim, in other words, is not that Francis *believed* that he discerned the divine in creatures, but that he *actually did experience* the traces of the divine power, wisdom, and goodness in nature. What makes this discernment possible on the part of Francis is that, like every human being, his mind was structured with an implicit openness to the immutable Light, the eternal Truth, and the highest Good.[37] Unfortunately the capacity for which these structures endow us is ineffectual because of our fallen condition. Our mind must be purified by conforming to Christ so that it might become hierarchic with its powers restored.[38] The life of Francis disclosed in an exemplary way what this conformation should consist in.

The culmination of this process of transformation was the ecstatic experience on Mt. Alverna after which Francis bore the image of the crucified engraved in the members of his body.[39] The way in which his consciousness was carried aloft by love into God and the resulting stigmata demonstrate for Bonaventure that Francis had been totally transformed into the likeness of Christ crucified.[40] Bonaventure follows his sources, primarily Thomas of Celano, when he interprets this overwhelming vision of God by means of the seraphic metaphor.[41] In addition to the pedagogical one of

structuring his analysis of the progression of the soul into God, interpreting Francis's culminating experience as seraphic allows Bonaventure to elaborate two significant consequences of this culmination of Francis's life for his readers.

First, the seraphic metaphor reinforces Bonaventure's provocative claim that this experience and the resulting stigmata designate Francis as an angel of the final age of history. Harkening back to his introductory sketch, Bonaventure concludes his presentation of this event with a prayerfully rhetorical address to Francis:

> Now,
> finally, near the end,
> you were shown at the same time
> the sublime similitude of the Seraph
> and the humble likeness of the Crucified,
> inwardly inflaming you and outwardly signing you
> as the other Angel ascending from the rising of the sun
> that you might have in you the sign of the living God...
> The cross of Christ,
> Both offered to and taken on by you
> at the beginning of your conversion
> and carried continuously from that moment
> throughout the course of your most proven life,
> and giving example to others,
> shows with such clarity of certitude
> that you have finally reached
> the summit of Gospel perfection....[42]

By placing Francis at the fulfillment of human history in this manner, Bonaventure offers a moderating interpretation of the Joachite controversy that was to embroil the Franciscan order well into the fourteenth century. Francis and his order were eschatological signs of the sixth, cherubic, age of the world with the aim of preaching a renewal of evangelical perfection. Francis himself, however, because of his perfect conformity to Christ, became the exemplar of the final age, which was confirmed by his seraphic vision and the stigmata.[43] His being a sign of the final, seraphic age was not a new revelation superceding the work of Christ or the Church, but its perfect embodiment.

Second, Bonaventure is able to elaborate the character of the transformed consciousness that shaped the last years of Francis's life in terms of this seraphic metaphor. In the final chapter of *The Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure proposes an exposition of the contemplative state of consciousness. Here the normal functioning of the patterns of thought in the mind of the contemplative is transcended. This is accomplished by the mind's "passing over" itself into the incomprehensible peace of

the divine presence.[44] This state of ecstatic contemplation was shown to Francis in his seraphic vision. Its significance, for Bonaventure, is that Francis unifies the way of action with the way of contemplation. Because he "passed over into God in ecstatic contemplation," Francis "became an example of perfect contemplation as he had previously been of action."[45] When understood in this capacious manner, the example of Francis's life can now serve as the means for "inviting all spiritual men to this kind of passing over."[46]

The Transformation of a Poor Man of Assisi into a Cultural Icon

Constructing a portrait of Francis that would be inspirational to his Franciscan brothers and sisters as well as to the larger university culture of his era undoubtedly was a magnificent achievement of Bonaventure's theological creativity. He accomplished this by taking the collection of anecdotes and events about the life of Francis which he had at his disposal and by orchestrating them to show his deeper significance to this medieval audience. In this process he had to address the concrete questions and issues of the social and historical conditions of his day. The challenge of remaining faithful to a charismatic reformer who practiced a particular expression of an evangelical life was urgent. Bonaventure's response was to focus on the way that Francis provided an example for conforming one's life to Christ. The key to understanding this was to be found in the profound experience on Mt. Alverna and the stigmata.[47] Reading the life of Francis in light of this destiny meant that Bonaventure did not attempt to produce a "biography" of Francis in a modern sense. The practice of "poverty" is not what made one a disciple of Francis. Rather, the practice of virtues such as poverty, humility, obedience, and charity were external signs of the imitation of Christ in his passion. The order of friars consisted of those whose lives of repentance—in whatever activity they were engaged, including the academic life—were to guide the church toward such perfect conformity to Christ. This is what Francis attained in his seraphic experience. In the last years of his life, Francis was so transformed into Christ that his consciousness was suffused with the divine presence. This is how he became a Christian saint on Bonaventure's construal. The stories about Francis's conversion to an evangelical life, his embrace of humility and poverty, his awareness of the goodness and beauty of every distinct creature were all marshaled to serve his contention that Francis had become what all humans are called to be. And Bonaventure did this with such exquisite charm that Francis has come to signify what human might be for all truly spiritual seekers. So, what did Paris have to do with Assisi? Through the creative efforts of Bonaventure, it had bequeathed to Western culture an image of a holy man whose appeal is universal and has continued to stir the imaginations of creative artists up to the present.

Notes

1. "And I strictly command all my cleric and lay brothers, through obedience, not to place any gloss upon the Rule or upon these words saying: 'They should be understood in this way.' But as the Lord has given me to speak and write the Rule and these words simply and purely, may you understand them simply and without gloss and observe them with a holy activity until the end." *Testament*, 38–39 in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols., *Vol. I, The Saint*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999).
2. This is his *Legenda maior*, which was commissioned at the general chapter of Narbonne in 1260, presented to the Franciscan leadership at the chapter of Pisa in 1263, and approved at the chapter of Paris in 1266 as the official version of Francis's life for the order. Subsequent references will be the standard chapter and paragraph numbers. A good translation, with helpful annotations to earlier documents on Francis, may be found in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, *Vol. II, The Founder,* ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), pp. 525–649. For Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* and the *Lignum vitae,* I recommend the English translation by Ewert Cousins as found in *The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).
3. Paul Sabatier, *Vie de saint François d'Assise* (Paris: Librarie Fischbacher, 1931. Édition définitive. Première édition, 1894. ET Louise Seymour Houghton [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894]).
4. Sabatier, *Vie de saint*, p. 540; ET p. 396.
5. Sabatier, *Vie de saint*, p. 541; ET p. 397.
6. John Moorman, *The Sources for the Life of St. Francis of Assisi* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1940), p. 141.
7. *Testament*, 38–39.
8. *Quo elongati* (1230) of Gregory IX in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, *Vol. I,* p. 571.
9. So called by the Franciscan chroniclers, Jordan of Giano and Thomas of Eccleston. See Dominic Monti, "Introduction," in *St. Bonaventure's Writings Concerning the Franciscan Order* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1994), pp. 17–19.
10. Monti, "Introduction," p. 19.
11. Laud 31 in Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, trans. Serge and Elizabeth Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 123. Consider also Laud 17 questioning the late Brother Rinaldo, whose doctorate from Paris is irrelevant now that he faces the real test after death. Todi, *The Lauds*, pp. 98–99.
12. For this reevaluation of the intent of Jacopone da Todi's poetry, see Serge Hughes, "Introduction: Toward a First Reading of the *Lauds*," in Todi, *The Lauds*, pp. 32–34.
13. Laud 69, Todi, *The Lauds*, pp. 209–16.

14. Laud 82, Todi, *The Lauds*, pp. 239–40. This usage adapts Bonaventure's position in the first two chapters of *The Soul's Journey into God* and in one feature of his interpretation of Francis in his *Major Life*.
15. Laud 84, Todi, *The Lauds*, p. 241.
16. "General Introduction," in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, *Vol. I,* pp. 12–13.
17. This motif of the significance of religious experience for the theology of Bonaventure is a characteristic feature in the writings of Zachary Hayes, the foremost English language interpreter of the theology of Bonaventure. See, e.g., his "Bonaventure of Bagnoregio: A Paradigm for Franciscan Theologians?" in *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2002), pp. 49, 55–56.
18. He attempts this by organizing the core of his narrative in the *Legenda maior* (Chapters V–XII) in a "thematic" pattern rather than a "chronological" order, which, he believes, will "avoid confusion" (see *Legenda maior,* Prologue, 4).
19. See Zachary Hayes, "Foreword" in *The Disciple and Master: St. Bonaventure's Sermons on St. Francis of Assisi*, ed. and trans. Eric Doyle (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), pp. x–xi.
20. *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Zachary Hayes (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute, 1979), I,2. See also Zachary Hayes, "Bonaventure and the Mystery of the Triune God," in Kenan B. Osborne, ed., *The History of Franciscan Theology* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1994), p. 49.
21. See *The Soul's Journey*, VI, 1–3.
22. *Collations on the Hexaemeron*, trans. José de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1970), I, 1, 10. See also Hayes, "Bonaventure and the Mystery of the Triune God," p. 49.
23. See Zachary Hayes, "Incarnation and Creation in the Theology of St. Bonaventure," in Romano Stephen Almagno and Conrad Harkins, eds., *Studies Honoring Ignatius Charles Brady Friar Minor* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1976), pp. 309–329, here p. 320.
24. For Bonaventure the "purpose" of the incarnation is thus not solely or exclusively the redemption of humanity through "satisfaction" or "atonement" for sin as the dominant theological tradition in the West tends to affirm. Because of the contingent reality of the fall, the incarnation is, in fact, redemptive. But the ultimately final rationale for the incarnation is simply an expression of divine love. In Hayes' terminology, the incarnation of the Word is an act of "cosmic completion" which includes a contingent need for the redemption of humanity. See Hayes, "Incarnation and Creation," pp. 325–28.
25. *Legenda maior*, Prologue, 1–2. The angelic metaphors are allusions to Apoc. 6:12 and 7:2.
26. This is a technical expression in Bonaventure's theology influenced by the medieval Latin translations of the works of the Pseudo-Dionysius. It refers to the proper alignment of human existence as both an image and a likeness of God, something that follows upon an individual's progression

in the stages of purgation, illumination, and perfection. This culminates in the transformation of the person so that the divine life flows appropriately and, as it were, palpably through the person's life. See *Breviloquium*, V, 1–253; ET: *Breviloquium*, trans. Dominic V. Monti (St. Bonaventue, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2005).

27. *Legenda maior*, IV, 2–3.
28. The significance of Bonaventure's portrayal of this period may be appreciated by contrasting it with the one provided by Sabatier. In his biography, he contrasts their physically harsh conditions with their exuberant state of joy (as this initial sharing of their evangelical lifestyle very likely promoted). Francis's dilemma is portrayed by Sabatier as a choice between a "selfish" desire for the cloister and the way of "love." This temptation arose many times for Francis, but evangelical love always won out. Francis was tempted by the contemplative state of bliss—by "peace"—but "his distinguishing peculiarity is that he never gave way to it" (Sabatier, *Vie de s. François*, p. 138; ET p. 105). Perhaps Sabatier's nineteenth century anti-mystical bias did not allow him to appreciate the more profound interpretation developed by Bonaventure.
29. See Ewert Cousins, "Introduction," in *The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis*, pp. 42–44.
30. *Legenda maior*, V, 9.
31. For this view, see E. Randolph Daniel, "St. Bonaventure: A Faithful Disciple of St. Francis? A Reexamination of the Question," in *S. Bonaventura 1274–1974. II: Studia de vita, mente, fontibus et operibus Sancti Bonaventurae* (Grottaferrata [Rome]: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1973), pp. 181–82.
32. *Legenda maior*, VIII, 8–9.
33. Legenda *maior*, IX, 1 (references to biblical allusions are omitted). The quotation is presented in accordance with the sense-lines devised by the translators to indicate the flow of the Latin.
34. *Legenda maior*, VIII, 6.
35. *Legenda maior*, VIII, 5.
36. *Soul's Journey*, I, 2, 11; II, 1, 7, 11–12.
37. *Soul's Journey*, III, 2–4.
38. *Soul's Journey*, IV, 1–4.
39. *Legenda maior*, XIII, 2–5.
40. *Legenda maior*, XIII, 3.
41. In this reading I am accepting the conclusion of J. A. Wayne Hellmann, who has argued that Thomas of Celano was the source of the use of this image for interpreting the vision of Francis on Mt. Alverna. For an example of his treatment of this thesis, see "The Seraph in Thomas of Celano's *Vita Prima*" in Michael F. Cusato, OFM and F. Edward Coughlin, OFM, eds., *That Others May Know and Love: Essays in Honor of Zachary Hayes, OFM* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1997), pp. 23–41.
42. *Legenda maior*, XIII, 10. The biblical allusion is to Apoc. 7:2.
43. This reflects the interpretation of Bonaventure's eschatology, particularly the difficult passage from *Hexaemeron* XXII, 22–23, proposed by

Eric Doyle. See "St. Bonaventure and St. Francis: The Disciple and The Master," in *The Disciple and the Master: St. Bonaventure's Sermons on St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), pp. 14–22.

44. *Soul's Journey*, VII, 1,4. In this elaboration of mystical awareness, Bonaventure is relying on the long Christian tradition of mystical teaching going back to the Pseudo-Dionysius, whose work he quotes in this chapter. Recall that this awareness is made possible for Bonaventure because of the mind's innate capacity of being already implicitly aware of the divine, which he explains in Chapter III.
45. *Soul's Journey*, VII, 3.
46. *Soul's Journey*, VII, 3.
47. See Doyle, pp. 7–21 (as in n. 43) and Daniel, "St. Bonaventure," pp. 184–86 (as in n. 31).

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PART II

FRANCIS REMEMBERED IN NEW CONTEXTS

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CHAPTER 6

FRANCISCANS IN THE NEW WORLD

Felix Heap and Jesús J. Gonzales

The Franciscan missionaries in the New World, especially those in the sixteenth century, were remarkably successful in the creation of missions, the evangelization of native peoples, and the development of "hispanized" communities. The personality of their founder, St. Francis of Assisi, as well as the Franciscan community's approach to evangelism, contributed to their success among the native peoples. The Franciscans modified their own practices and syncretized them with native cultures, making them widely accepted by the inhabitants of the New World.

When one considers the pioneers of the New World, the presence of the Franciscans is overshadowed at first by the Spanish conquistadors and explorers: Christopher Columbus's voyage to the end of the earth, Hernan Cortez's daring conquest of Tenochtitlan, Francisco Pizarro's exploits in Peru, Francisco de Coronado and Hernan de Soto's exploration of the American Southwest and Southeast in 1540. These men and others extended the frontiers and the imagination of most Western Europeans. Their determination overcame adversities even as they often brutally subjugated unwilling natives. The Franciscans (Order of Friars Minor), a community of religious founded by the charismatic Francis of Assisi, also explored and settled the land beyond the frontiers that others had extended. Two different elements of the order well attuned them to this particular mission: love of the natural world and a sense of connection to all people. The German art historian Henry Thode believed that St. Francis was the cause of the Renaissance because he loved the natural world, and he left this attitude as a legacy to his followers.[1] When the Franciscans encountered the Indians of Mexico, they created a special type of religious syncretism which included a blend of Christian belief, love for natural beauty, apocalyptic expectations, and a Franciscan nature mysticism with lyrical and aesthetic overtones. The Franciscans echoed St. Paul in celebrating Jesus Christ as the "first born of all creation": Christ appears in

visible form primarily to glorify God. Every other creature—Brother Sun, Sister Moon, the stars, and everything that is beautiful—was created to glorify the "first Born." In this respect, the Franciscans took a tack different than their contemporaries, the Dominicans, who stressed that Christ came into the world to redeem mankind.

At exactly the same time as the first Franciscan foundations were being erected in Mexico, the Franciscan Pope Julius II gave Michelangelo a Franciscan theological advisor, Marco Vigerio, to help plan the program on the Sistine Ceiling (1508–12) which reflects the same eclectic Franciscan sensibility. The ceiling includes depictions of seven Old Testament prophets whose utterances came from divine revelation. Alternating with them are five Sibyls, pagan prophetesses from the ancient classical world who derived their knowledge from reading the "Book of Nature."

Many Franciscans also inherited another aspect from the founder: love of the natural world extended also to respect for non-Christian peoples. For example, after his famous visit with Sultan Malik al-Kamil in Egypt, Francis counseled his followers to go and live among the Saracens and be subject to them.[2] They were not to seek confrontation and martyrdom, but to witness in their daily living. In later centuries the Franciscans in Mexico looked back to the Abbot Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202) who taught that victory over the "the beast" would not come as a result of military power but would be won by a faithful remnant of spiritual men.[3]

The Franciscans were the first missionaries to the New World; some had come in 1493 on Columbus's second voyage. On August 13, 1521, Hernando Cortez captured Cuahtemoc, last of the Aztec emperors, and took control of Mexico. Fray Pedro de Gante was in Mexico City by August 23, 1523; and a short while later, in 1524, the legendary *famoso doce* arrived.[4] These twelve friars were sent to begin the process of evangelization of the indigenous peoples, the *nativos*. They initiated a developmental process that culminated in the hispanization and acculturation of the natives of Mexico and of the American Southwest. The Franciscan friars were not alone in their evangelization of Native peoples. The Dominicans (Order of Preachers) arrived about 1525, the Augustinians (Order of St. Augustine) in 1533, and the Jesuits (Society of Jesus) in 1571.[5] But the Franciscans were consistently a larger presence and arguably more diligent evangelizers than the members of other religious orders.

The natives recognized the sincere good will of the first friars. They gave one of the original *famoso doce,* Toribio de Benavente, a new name in Nautl "Motolina," which means "little poor man" because he was barefoot and humble. A mere sixteen years after the *famoso doce* landed on mainland Mexico, Franciscan friars had baptized six million natives.[6] By 1559, the Franciscans numbered 300 *frailes* and had established eighty missions; those of the Sierra Gorda in Central Mexico are probably among the more famous. Later, as the Franciscan friars slipped north to *Nuevo Mexico*, in 1598 with Juan de Onate, they established about fifty missions, many of which

still function today. In Texas, by the early 1800s, forty-four missions had been established; the most famous is San Antonio de Valero—the Alamo—dedicated in 1718.[7] And in California, in a little more than sixty years, starting in 1769, twenty-one missions, with an average of two Franciscans per mission, served twenty-seven thousand Native Californians.[8]

The success of the Franciscan effort at evangelization is not only evident in their physical achievements, but also in the high regard in which the Franciscans were held by those with whom the *frailes* worked. From the very beginning in 1524, the friars were the evangelists preferred among the other religious orders by the indigenous peoples. Leon-Portilla notes that the ancient Aztec chronicle *Códice de San Juan Teotihuacan* expresses a direct preference for the Franciscans: "...the indigenous natives of this area refused to receive the Augustinian missionaries, showing themselves to be decidedly in favor of the Franciscans."[9] In 1539, Don Carlos Ometochtzan, a native from one of the noble families of Pre-Columbian Mexico, declared under oath in his defense as a good Christian:

> Behold that the friars and the clerics have their own manner of penance; behold that the friars of St. Francis have a way of teaching, and a way of life and a way of dressing and a way of praying; and the friars of St. Augustine have a different way, and the friars of St. Dominic have another way.[10]

Ometochtzan is clear in his testimony that he and the members of his Mexican nation have a clear preference for the Franciscan friars. In the work entitled *Relacion de lo que hicieron y pasaron los indios del pueblo de Cuauhtinchan, por no perder la doctrina y amparo de los frailes de San Francisco* or *An Account of what the Indians from the town of Cuauhtinchan did in order that they not lose the teaching and the assistance of the friars of St. Francis* (1569) we find more of the same: "But do you not know that once the friars of St. Dominic are installed in our town, our children will never again see the fathers who raised us, those of St. Francis."[11] These natives, as did those earlier, clearly perceived that Franciscan friars were more kindly disposed toward them than other friars.

But if in the beginning of their missionary activities, the Franciscan friars were well received by the native peoples who had been conquered by Spanish troops, how much more surprising is the assessment of the Franciscan friars toward the end of their missionizing era. The friars were in constant conflict with military powers during the evangelizing-colonization process. In the early California period of the 1770s, Junipero Serra was the most powerful Franciscan of the time. A great supporter of Serra's, the Spanish Viceroy Don Antonio Bucareli y Ursua, wrote to him:

> All this information greatly increases my pleasure and reveals very clearly the unwearying efforts with which your Reverence has undertaken to bring about the success of these Missions. God is visibly favoring you in these services...the Missions have increased as well as the number of the

converts in each, the land has produced copious harvest for their support, and these will be greater in successive years.[12]

Even Pedro Fages, the *Commandante* of Monterey and later *Gobernador de Alta California,* an acerbic critic of Serra, was nevertheless able to write in his memoirs, "...by a suavity and kindness which through love of God and desire for the welfare of these poor souls [the California Indians] is edifyingly manifested by the reverend fathers, the missionaries...[of St. Francis].[13]

Many are the documented reasons for the success of the Spanish *Conquistadores.* Their firearms were superior to bows and arrows; horses and attack dogs were frightening; pre-Columbian mythologies were seen to predict the Spanish arrival. However, the reasons for the success of the Franciscan friars have been largely unexplored. The Jesuits were suppressed in 1767, and thus ceased to exist in the New World. The Dominicans and the Augustinians turned their attention to urban affairs. But the Franciscans became the preeminent religious order on the mission trail. In *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*, Ramon Gutierrez suggests that the "model for personal transformation that the Franciscan *Rule* offered men to attain personal sanctity would explicitly double as their model of evangelism among the Indians."[14] What is so unique about this model? There is ample evidence to suggest that the Franciscans had two important strategies: they modified the practices mandated by *The Rule* when necessary and they did not fear mixing Christian belief with native culture.

Observing *The Rule*

Two central and foundational concepts of the Franciscan Order expressed in *The Rule of St. Francis* were modified to meet the missionaries' particular situation. Francis's admonitions to forsake money and power were themselves forsaken. *The Rule* was written about 1209; and in many ways, what worked with only thirty friars was too severe and unworkable when the group had grown to thousands of friars. Hence, Francis, with advice from Canon lawyer Cardinal Hugolino—later Pope Gregory IX—revised *The Rule* in 1221. Pope Honorius III approved *The Rule* in 1223. But still, some restraints of the *The Rule* proved to be untenable, if not impossible, for the friars. The Franciscan friars, still belonging to one unified religious order, the Order of Friars Minor, formed themselves into two cadres. Those friars who desired a broader, more lenient interpretation of *The Rule* were called "Conventuals," for among other deviations from *The Rule* they believed that the friars needed to own permanent domiciles, called convents, to house them. And those friars who believed in strict adherence to *The Rule* were called "Spirituals."[15] The Spirituals were eventually condemned by the Church, but they are the ideological ancestors of a reform group that came to be called the "Observants." Tension between the two groups of friars continued to exist over the next three hundred years. The Observant friars

were particularly strong in Spain. And shortly after Queen Isabella recaptured Spain from the Moors, she directed her priest—confessor, Ximenez de Cisneros, to reform the clergy of Spain. Cisneros, a Franciscan friar aligned with the Observants, had held many positions of leadership in Spain: Franciscan provincial, Archbishop of Toledo, Primate of Spain, Inquisitor-General, Regent, and founder of the University of Alcala. Among his first moves was banishing all Franciscan Conventuals from Spain in 1517.[16] In other words, only the Observant friars, with their strict obeisance to *The Rule*, were to participate in the Christianization of the New World, along, of course, with the other orders already mentioned. Ironically, this group of Observants, who had complained that other branches of the Friars Minor did not follow *The Rule*, soon found that *The Rule* complicated their missionary activities. The Franciscan Order, in Europe, had directed its efforts in service to a Catholic public. They begged for their sustenance, and they were housed in buildings owned by others, sometimes a bishop or another religious order. This conformed to *The Rule: "*I strictly command all my brothers not to receive coins or money in any form, either personally or through intermediaries" (Chapter IV*).* This is serious enough to bear repetition in the next chapter where we read "In payment for their work they may receive whatever is necessary for the bodily support of themselves and their brothers, excepting coin or money." Chapter VI makes it clear that holding property was out of the question: "Let the brothers not make anything their own, neither house, nor place, nor anything at all. . .let them go seeking alms."[17] The friars could beg for their sustenance, food and clothing, from the wealthy and powerful of Europe, and they could be lodged in the convents built and owned by others. But what could they do in Mexico? Avaricious conquerors did not share their wealth with friars who attempted to aid the conquered natives. And no buildings existed that could house the influx of friars. Juan Focher in 1517 provided an answer. Focher was an Observant Franciscan who had received his doctorate in Canon Law from the Sorbonne. He arrived in Mexico City in the early 1570s as a resource for the friars who were encountering problems in Christianizing the Indians. For example, if a native man had more than one wife, which would be his valid wife after baptism? And what would be the fate of the bastard children? Focher wrote a book to facilitate answering the concerns of Franciscan missionaries throughout the New World. The *Introduction* describes the purpose of the book as "to solve the many and intricate problems created by the birth of the new Church of the Indies."[18] In an important consideration for the Observant Franciscan friars, Focher addresses the issue of money.

> One, may, licitly and with a clear conscience, including the Franciscan friar, take money and food with him.... necessity converts this act into a licit activity, whereas it would be illicit under other circumstances. And as the conversion of the unfaithful is of great interest to the Church, the Franciscan friar is allowed to carry money when it serves the greater good.... for

> the Franciscan friar, it is a lesser good to not carry money because of his vow (*The Rule*), than to covert the unfaithful…he may legitimately avoid following the lesser good (*The Rule*) to practice the greater good.[19]

In a sense, Focher had to contradict St. Francis himself. As a young man the founder, it is said, had gone into the church of San Giorgio in Assisi with his friend Bernard of Quintavalle in order to ask God what they should do with their lives by randomly flopping open the books of the Gospels. The book opened to Matthew 19.21, "Go, sell what you posses and give to the poor," and Luke 9.3 "take nothing for your journey." Focher countered with another counsel from Jesus that trumped *The Rule* of Francis: "But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag" (Luke 22.36). Only fifty years after the reform of the Spanish clerics by Ximenez de Cisneros, after only thirty years after *los famoso doce* arrived in Mexico City, the friars retreated from their strict observance of *The Rule*. As a solution to the dichotomy between the two apparently contradictory commands they created the post of *nuncio*, a non-clerical person, who would accept money on behalf of the friars and spend it as the friars needed. Friars, employees of the King of Spain, each received 200 pesos a year in support of evangelization activities; this was increased to 400 pesos by the time of the California missions. Access to money gave the friars freedom to develop their missions. The mud used in the building of adobe structures was free, but paint and other decorations needed to be purchased. Seed and animals for starting crops and herds had to be purchased. The *nuncio* dispensed "seed-money" at the behest of the friars. Simply put, the Observant friars realized that they had to reinterpret *The Rule* so that they could follow the counsels of the gospel. This reinterpretation enabled the Franciscan friars to develop, as earlier noted, forty-four missions in Texas, fifty missions in New Mexico, and twenty-one missions in California.

Another command from *The Rule* of St. Francis would face a revision. We commonly call the friars, or *frailes*, Franciscans. But they actually belong to a religious order whose actual full name is, Order of Friars Minor—*Orden de Frailes Minores*. And *The Rule* begins: "The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers." This brief prepositional phrase was well understood by all of the brothers. The very name of their religious order affirmed that they were to be the most humble of men, even more humble than the poorest of the poor. In a letter that Francis sent to all friars in 1220, he reiterated what all knew: "let the one…who is considered the greater be the lesser and the servant of others….We must never desire to be above others, but, instead, we must be servants and subject to every human creature for God's sake."[20] In a European society, within a stratum that was rich and powerful, the friars had little difficulty being "Lesser Brothers." Similarly, the *frailes* had little difficulty being humble with the poor and infirm of Europe whom they served. But, the friars in Mexico, who had had little experience in directing the efforts of others, found themselves in charge of people, directing coordinated

efforts, for a greater common good. This conundrum was quickly addressed, even before Focher's book. Phelan writes that Geronimo de Mendieta, OFM, a *fraile* and historian in Mexico during the mid–1500s "wished to substitute in the Indian commonwealth paternal and pedagogical discipline."[21] This would be a marked departure for the subservient friars. But Mendieta saw a natural simplicity within the Indians which made them natural followers: "Los indios eran ninos de cera blanda.... Necesitaban de padres y maestros que los criaran y los guiaran...en la forma y manera y licencia que los padres y maestros tienen derecho divino y humano, para criar, ensenar, y corregir a sus hijos y discipulos" [The Indians are like soft wax....They need parents and teachers who will rear and guide them...in the form and manner and permission of parents and teachers who have a divine and human right to raise, to teach, to guide their children and followers].[22]

Very quickly the Franciscan *frailes* realized what the churches needed for the practice of liturgical services, for the food needed for the community of Christian believers, and for the social and religious ministrations for the welfare of the Indians would not happen unless the Franciscan friars assumed positions of leadership among the Indian masses. "This meant that instead of living side by side with the Indians as humble washers of feet, as envisioned by St. Francis, the friars assumed the role of fathers instructing ignorant and immature children."[23] One of the structural reasons for the success of the *frailes* was that they quickly distanced themselves from some facets of *The Rule* of St. Francis. This must have been a difficult position to take for the Observant friars, so recently involved with the reformation of the Franciscans in Spain conducted by Cisneros.

Respectful Syncretism

In addition to modifying *The Rule* to enable them to function within the colonial society, Franciscan pastors also modified their practices to absorb native belief systems. This syncretism strove to honor local culture and the grand tradition of Christianity. The Franciscans, especially the "Spirituals" and in turn the "Observants," were strongly influenced by Joachim di Fiore. Joachim was an Abbot from Calabria, Sicily, who had left the Cistercians to found a more rigorous monastic order and died in 1202, just four years before Francis started the Order of Friars Minor.[24] Joachim's influence extended to his use of symbols as a manifestation of theological mysteries too difficult to verbalize.[25] His unique contribution in this area was that he syncretized Christian beliefs with expressions from other cultures. From the Jewish Kabbalah, Joachim took geometrical patterns to portray the Trinity and other aspects of the divine nature. From the Old Testament, he used musical instruments such as harps and trumpets to depict the harmonious union of human beings and God through prayer. From the Hindu tradition, Joachim took symbols of growth such as trees and flowers to express Christianity's organic development. Using the Roman/Babylonian traditions, Joachim

depicted the conflict between good and evil with symbolic animals such as dragons, eagles, tigers, etc.[26] Joachim knew that many different forms of expression, beyond simply preaching or writing, could be used to express the truths of Catholicism. The Franciscan friars of the New World adopted this Joachite strategy. When the friars faced the immense task of evangelization, of explaining the mysteries of Jesus as the Son of God, Mary's Virgin birth, and the Trinitarian combination of three persons in one, they fell back upon the tradition of syncretism they had learned in their study and emulation of Joachim di Fiore. The Franciscans encouraged the production of syncretic religious art, especially in the decoration of churches and monasteries, in new liturgical celebrations to reflect a broader audience, and in new religious personas that represented an indigenous people.

Soon after the conquest of Mexico, with the arrival of the *famoso doce,* the Franciscans, indigenous arts begin to be incorporated into Catholic motifs. Leon-Portilla writes that the ancient manuscripts of the colonization of Mexico, *Anales Mexicanos,* "describe the adaptation that the Franciscans have made, or acceptance, of certain indigenous symbols.[27] And in this production, they were encouraged to replicate their own religious images as Christian icons. Hugo Nutini asserts "...the friars strove to understand the religious outlook of the Indians and seldom forced orthodox Catholicism on them..."[28] When the friars employed native artisans to decorate Christian churches the result was a style called *tequiqui*: native style and Christian subject matter. As an example of the diffusion of syncretic manifestations in construction, at the early mission outpost at Calpan, Puebla, native artists carved the Last Judgment on the stone facade of a *capilla posa*—a small, outdoor chapel within the courtyard of a larger church. The face of Christ is depicted in a flat style, with nature decorations, as is evident in ancient Codices on bark. Christ's traditional halo resembles a ruff of feathers similar to an icon at *Teotihuacan*, which represents *Quetzalcoatl*, the Feathered Serpent (figure 6.1). In this case, Jesus Christ, the preeminent figure in Catholicism is blended into the preeminent figure from Aztec theology, *Quetzalcoatl.*

The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Franciscans intended to make Mexico a new Utopia to counterbalance the decaying world of Europe. They believed this new Utopia could be possible only in an urban society. The friars tried to gather the natives into communities: villages were formed, churches and homes were constructed, religious instruction was propagated, agricultural, industrial, and aesthetic arts were taught and practiced. In the construction of new living and working environments, the *frailes* instructed native workmen to produce beautiful church carvings and decorations from indigenous elements. In the late 1590s, as Spanish colonization spread north to New Mexico, Franciscan syncretism continued evolving. The friars built their churches, *capilla postas*, and cloisters, with Pueblo *Kivas* within their walls. *Kivas* are round, underground structures, used for social-religious-political purposes. James Ivey, a historian for the National Park Service in New Mexico, believes "that the Franciscans did countenance the *kivas* in

their *conventos*, and indeed, encouraged them."[29] The juxtaposition of two sacred places aggrandized each to a higher status. In his examination of several of the twin sites, Ivey concludes "that they were part of a century-old New World Franciscan effort to use innovative and architectural combinations for the religious and cultural education of their neophytes."[30] Simply put, a century after iconic syncretization started in Mexico, it continued in New Mexico. Professor Ruben Mendoza has demonstrated that many, if not all, of the California missions were constructed upon a solstice axis. In the early morning of the winter solstice, December 21, 2000, he filmed the progression of a stream of light that penetrated the upper, center sanctuary window and crawled down the *retablo* until the light rested upon the tabernacle. And on the summer solstice, June 22, 2003, Mendoza again repeated the photographic record at San Carlos Borromeo del Rio Carmelo, commonly called Mission Carmel. He argues that the Franciscans, because of their extensive travel from mission to mission, were adept at astronomical calculations. At the same time, the indigenous people of California were also proficient in that same science. He concludes that this convergence of scientific knowledge enabled the friars to imbue the Indian builders with a degree of authority and integrity in the evolution of cosmic harmony. The Indians took their knowledge of the heavens, used previously to serve their own cultural beliefs, to serve the glory of the Christian god.

The new buildings of the Franciscans, and the art which decorated them, set the stage for syncretism in an even deeper sense within the beliefs and practices of the church. This still lingers in the celebration of All Souls Day in November in the Roman Catholic Church, the liturgical celebration which coincides with a Pre-Columbian autumnal feast honoring dead ancestors, *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead). And to this day, each of the two events is celebrated simultaneously in Mexico and throughout Latin America, on November 2. In some ways the syncretism was greatly aided by the similarity that the Franciscans found between the manifestations of Catholicism and those of Pre-Columbian theology.[31] Catholics had a bloodless sacrifice that ended with the eating of Christ's body; the indigenous had a bloody sacrifice that ended with the eating of the victim's heart. Both theologies espoused baptism, confession, the cross as symbol, the virgin birth (Christ for Catholics and *Quetzalcoatl* for Aztecs), penitential fasting, elaborate liturgical costumes and celebrations, incense, and so forth.

The naturalization of the white-skinned Blessed Virgin Mary of Spain into the dark-skinned, olive-eyed Virgin of Guadalupe with indigenous features in Mexico City is another result of the syncretization of beliefs. The Virgin of Guadalupe dates back to the early 700s to the province of Extremedura in Spain; since the early 1300s, she has been under the care of the Franciscan friars. Thus it comes as no surprise that an Indian-looking Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to an Indian, Juan Diego in December of 1531. She appeared to him on the *Cerro de Tepeyac*, the site of a Pre-Columbian shrine to *Tonantzin*, an earth/fertility goddess to the Aztecs.[32] Soon, the

Franciscan bishop, Juan de Zumarraga, accepted the miraculous appearance, not as a continuation of the Spanish Virgin but as the emergence of an Indian Virgin. And not long after this occurrence in Mexico City, in 1542, a corncob figure of a woman was found in a field not far from the modern city of Guadalajara, a place known as *Tzapopan*. This figure was believed to possess miraculous powers and was soon venerated as the Virgin of Zapopan. She was paraded throughout the countryside to share her miraculous power with all who need it. These two Virgins are but a few of many syncretized renditions of religious personalities that breached the chasm of the Old World and the New World.

Sometimes the merging of religious cultures took a surprising twist in recorded versions of miracles. The Jumanos, a tribe of Indians from Texas, traveled almost 500 miles to near modern-day Albuquerque, in 1629, to a Franciscan *convento*. The Indians, surprisingly knowledgeable of Catholicism, had come seeking a friar. They had had an apparition by "a lady dressed in blue" who had instructed them in the basics of Catholicism.[33] They now sought a Franciscan to evangelize them in Texas. In effect, the Indians of Texas had been predisposed to accept the new belief. And three states over, in California, over a century later in 1771, a similar event occurred. Two Franciscans, Fray Pedro Cambon and Angel Fernandez Somera, encountered hostile Indians near present-day Mission San Gabriel. In defense of themselves, the *frailes* unfurled a banner of the Virgin, Our Lady of Sorrows. The Indians dropped their weapons and fell upon their knees before her. In the painted banner, they had recognized her as a physical representation of a mental image that they had imagined from their religious tradition. In this case, art imitated life, their religious life.[34] Franciscan friars were predisposed to accept the integrity and authenticity of the indigenous experience, and then build a creative Catholicism upon it.

Syncretism in art, architecture, and belief all come together in examples we have of actual religious practice. Leon-Portilla concludes, after translating a series of discussions that the same *frailes* had with the indigenous leaders, "the Franciscans proposed these other forms of effecting a closeness, with performances and festivities, in which oftentimes, elements of the ancient culture survived."[35] On another occasion, he reports "the feasts, the performances, the songs, the kinds of teaching and symbols, all introduced by the Franciscans, accepting in part, elements of the ancient culture."[36] So successful was the syncretization, that icons of Western Catholicism were indigenized. In September of 1567, in celebration of St. Francis, within the city of Tlateloco, St. Francis was honored in a manner reminiscent of Pre-Columbian nobility.

> And when the feast of St. Francis arrived, on a Saturday, the song was sung very well. Those who directed the dance, people from the church, received the emblems of authority: a helmet, a shield, a headdress of heron plumage, all that belonged to *Aztahuacan,* "the place of the herons."[37]

The work of the Conquistadores at some point ended. But the work of the Franciscan friars continued for over three hundred years. They readily understood that *The Rule* that had guided their efforts in Europe was not amenable to the context of their tasks in the Americas. So they changed *The Rule* for the sake of the Gospel. They believed that they, like Francis, could dialogue with non-Christians and so they used syncretism to preach to the Indians within their culture. Their guide was the Gospel. Their task of evangelization, hispanization, and colonization was a grand design executed through the simple religious lens their love of nature and all peoples before God.

Notes

1. Henry Thode, *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien* (Wien: Phaidon-Verlag, 1934).
2. J. Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997), p. 28.
3. Hoeberichts, *Francis and Islam*, p. 23.
4. Miguel Leon-Portilla, *Los Franciscanos: Vistos por el Hombre Nahuatl* (Mexico: Centro de Estudios Bernadino, 1985), p. 23.
5. Dale Hoyte Palfrey, "Mexico's Colonial Era, Part II: Region and Society in New Spain," Mexico Connect, www.mexconnect.com/mex.
6. John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), p. 45.
7. G. E. Brown, "The Catholic Mission in Texas," Online, Franciscan Mission in Texas, sancta.sacrificial@netzero.net.
8. Fr. Zaphyr Englehardt, OFM, *The Missions and Missionaries of California*, Vol. VII (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1930), p. 570.
9. "los indigenas de ese lugar se rehusaron a recibir misioneros agustinos, mostrandose decididos partidos de los franciscanos." Leon-Portilla, *Los Franciscanos,* p. 8. All translations are by the authors.
10. Leon-Portilla, *Los Franciscanos,* p. 11.
11. "? No sabes que, si una vez quedan de asiento en nuestro pueblo los frailes de Santo Domingo, nunca mas veran nuestros hijos a nuestros padres que nos criaron, de San Francisco." Leon-Portilla, *Los Franciscanos,* p. 42.
12. Francisco Palou, *Life and Apostolic Labors of the Venerable Father Junipero Serra: Founder of the Franciscan Missions of California*, trans. C. Scott Williams (Pasadena, CA: George Wharton James Press, 1913), p. 169.
13. Palou, *Life and Apostolic Labors*, p. 44.
14. Ramon Gurierrez, *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991) p. 66.
15. William Cork, "The Evangelization of the Americas: St. Francis as Conquistador. The Implication of 1492," Central Vermont Ecumenical Forum, October 13, 1991, http://www.wquercus.com/faith/conquis.htm.
16. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom*, p. 43.

17. *The Later Rule, IV, 1; V, 3; VI, 1–2* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols., *Vol. I, The Saint,* ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999).
18. Juan Focher, *Itinerario de Misionero en America* (Madrid: Libreria General Victoriano Suarez, 1966), p. vii.
19. "Puede, pues, entonces licitamente y con conciencia tranquila, incluso el Fraile Menor, llevar consigo dinero o comida...lo convierte en licito la necesidad...lo que la necesidad hace licito, siendo illicito en otras circunstancias...Y como la conversion de los infieles es un interes de la Iglesia permitido al Fraile Menor llevar dinero cuando atiende al bien comun...para el Fraile Menor es un bien inferior el no llevar dinero por razon de su voto, que la conversion de los infieles...legitimamente omite el bien menor para practicar el mayor." Focher, *Itinerario de Misionero en America*, pp. 34–36.
20. *Later Admonition and Exhortation*, 42, 47.
21. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom,* p. 59.
22. Leon-Portilla, *Los Franciscanos,* p. 4.
23. Cork, "The Evangelization of the Americas."
24. Bernard McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot Jaochim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), p. 3.
25. McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot*, p. 102.
26. McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot,* pp. 108–11.
27. Leon-Portilla, *Los Franciscanos,* p. 14.
28. Hugh Nutini, *Todos Santos in Rural Oxcala* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 90.
29. James Ivey, "Convenio Kivas in the Missions of New Mexico," *New Mexico Historical Review* (1998): 46 and 127 [21–151].
30. Ivey, "Convenio Kivas," p. 145.
31. B. C. Hedrick, "Religious Syncretism in Spanish America" (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Museum, n.d.), p. 3.
32. Palfrey, "Mexico's Colonial Era."
33. Brown, "The Catholic Mission in Texas." See n. 7.
34. James Sandos, "Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Mission, 1769–1836," *The Journal of the California Missions Studies Association* (2003): 8–9 [5–10].
35. "los franciscanos propiciaban estas otras formas de acercamiento, con representaciones y fiestas en las que no pocas veces perduraban elementos de la antigua cultura." Leon-Portilla, *Los Franciscanos,* p. 37.
36. "las fiestas, representaciones, cantos, formas de enseanza y simbolos introducidos por los franciscanos, aceptando en parte elementos de la antigua cultura." Leon-Portilla, *Los Franciscanos,* p. 44.
37. "Auh in ihcuac ilhuitzin quiz Sant Francisco Sabalotica huel ihcuac in meuh. In teyhtotiqueh teopantlacah....auh in quimahmaqueh tlahuiztli, casco, chimalli, aztatzontli, Aztahuacan tlatquitl...Y cuando llego la fiesta de San Francisco, en un Sabado, entonces se entono bien el canto. Los que dirigian la danza, gente del templo....recibieron las insignias, un casco, un escudo, un tocado de plumas de garza, todo pertenecia de Aztahuacan, "el lugar de las garzas." Leon-Portilla, *Los Franciscanos,* pp. 58–59.

CHAPTER 7

THE VISUAL PIETY OF THE SACRO MONTE DI ORTA

Cynthia Ho

The lakeside towns ringing northern Italy's Lake Maggiore all bear the imprint of the noble Borromeo family: land, water, islands, gardens, architecture, castles, churches, even grand hotels. At the southern end of the lake in the port of Arona stands the thirty-five-meter (115 feet) tall copper statue of the family's most famous member, Cardinal and Saint Carlo Borromeo. Erected in 1624, this huge hollow statue has interior stairs which lead the visitor to the very top. From there, one can look out through the saint's eyes at a panorama of the countryside. This literal imposition of Borromeo's gaze upon his domain reifies the power of his reforming vision which transformed the religious life of northern Italy following the Council of Trent.

One important example of Borromeo's campaign to create a pious landscape is the Sacro Monte of Orta. This Sacred Mountain represents a particular moment of the intersection of high and popular religion in which the church made use of images in its efforts to shape lay piety. Orta depicts the life of Saint Francis as it has been constructed, deconstructed and restructured since first presented in Thomas of Celano's *The Life of Saint Francis* in 1228. While various genres of literature such as hagiography, lyric, and homily have been used to present Francis to differing audiences for nearly eight hundred years, the memory of Francis has been profoundly dependent on images as well.

Sacri Monti

Sacri Monti are Northern Italian mountaintop worship sites built in the late fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Each includes a series of chapels devoted to a particular narrative theme such as the life of Christ, the life of

St. Francis, or the Stations of the Cross. The chapels, most of which are free-standing structures recalling early-sixteenth-century Lombard centralized churches, house groups of life-sized polychromed wood or terracotta figures. Each tableau within its chapel represents an episode from the guiding narrative. In addition, the interior back and side walls are painted in illusionistic frescoes that further reinforce the impression of historical events being acted out. Like waxworks or the dioramas of a natural history museum, the life-size statues are set as if on a stage.

The project of the Piedmontese Sacri Monti began in the fifteenth century when the Franciscan friar Bernardino Caimi returned from the Holy Land with the desire to create a site for a new kind of pilgrimage destination in the Italian Alps. In 1486 Caimi received papal permission to make the first Sacro Monte, the "New Jerusalem" at Varallo. Because he knew well the landscape of the Holy Land, the chapels were initially "luoghi sancti," sacred sites simulating in detail the topography of the sites of Jesus's life. Even the distances between the chapels were reproduced proportionally to the original space between sites. Thus, the visitor, aided by Caimi's guidebook, followed in the footsteps of Christ. In 1513, Gaudenzio Ferrari (1475–1546) was commissioned to fill the empty chapels with frescoes and statues. The earliest chapels were simple, open, box-like rooms, in which the visitor could walk among the figures; later ones were larger and more complex, with more figures populating them. Now, the visitor is kept at a distance, behind a screen pierced with peepholes placed at the ideal viewing points. The various details of each scene complete the reality effect and facilitate the spectator's willing suspension of disbelief. There are now nine Sacri Monti sites in the Lombardy/Piedmont region of Italy, and all with the same conceptual framework.[1] The Franciscans effectively converted the mountains into ideological texts with the mission of indoctrinating pilgrims to the Catholic interpretation of the world.

Despite a sustained appetite for Sacri Monti (nine sites built over more than two centuries), appreciation for them has languished in "art's outskirts."[2] Two interrelated artistic objections to the sites are responsible for this disregard: a general disdain for their blunt didacticism and their use of heterogeneous materials. Today, didacticism has a strong negative connotation because it designates works that are too close to propaganda to be artistically valid. Alain Robbe-Grillet has referred to this genre as one "despised above all others."[3] Modern readers, attuned to irony and ambiguity, are trained to assume that an artful story cannot be unambiguous. Since it is true that the agenda of these tableaux is to allow viewers to experience the truth concretely, it is necessary for us to examine our prejudices about the place of didacticism in fictional representations in order to understand and appreciate the art of the Sacri Monti. In addition, the distinctive heterogeneous aspects of the art of the Sacri Monti which fascinated early visitors have attracted later disdain. The inclusion of real hair, glass eyes, and "ready-mades" such as clothing, toys, kitchen implements and furniture were added to intensify

the verisimilitude and to turn, in Nevet Dolev's words, "a second-hand reality into a second reality."[4] However, situations in which "real" objects (re)presented themselves also have been condemned as a breach of artistic faith, overly dramatic, even garish.[5] These works, which some say overstep boundaries by being exaggeratedly realistic, are a decidedly different kind of art than the classical works which populated private collections of Milan and Florence.

A third complaint about the Sacred Mountains is that they were created for a purely popular and unsophisticated audience. However, this misreads the history of the sites. The art of the Sacri Monti was not exclusively popular nor aimed solely at one particular group. The social background of visitors has in fact always been very mixed. While there is no doubt that most pilgrims belonged to the lower strata, the early audience also included members of aristocratic and humanistic circles. Alessandro Nova has demonstrated the especially close rapport between the Milanese aristocracy and the Franciscan Observants who oversaw the sites. At its height of popularity, the site at Varallo had up to ten thousand pilgrims daily.[6] Even today in the summer, there are enough pilgrims to Orta that a tourist tram stays busy ferrying visitors up and down the mountain. It seems, then, that the sites were able to speak simultaneously to audiences of differing analytic abilities and backgrounds and had the capacity to address the well-educated few without ignoring the needs and experiences of both literate and illiterate lay viewers.

Trent and the Two Borromeos

The climate which sustained the production of the Sacri Monti of Northern Italy began with the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and subsequent efforts to enforce its proclamations. The Council, which met with the aim of purifying the Catholic faith, considered the correct use of religious art an important tool of internal revitalization. Catholic ritual and piety have used the imagination and senses as an opening to the mystery beyond them. The question of icons and figures has been a contentious one in Christianity, and for the West, the Second Council of Nicea (787 CE) took the official position that images of "the figure of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, of our spotless Lady, the Mother of God, of the Honorable Angels, of all the saints and of all pious people" are essential to Christian worship.[7] Nevertheless, quarrels over the use of religious imagery continued to surface, culminating in intense attacks by radical iconoclastic Protestant reformers in the sixteenth century. In Italy's Piedmont, efforts to thwart the Protestants were especially vigorous. In 1532 the Waldensians voted to unite with the Calvinists in Geneva, and political chaos ruled as Catholics and Protestants killed each other across the Alpine borders.[8] Later in response, a Vatican decree ruled that architecture and art were to be used "to draw the line against Protestantism."[9]

As a result of the Council of Trent, the desire to revitalize sacred space and its decorations for devotional practice created a flowering of visual piety. In 1563, the Twenty-fifth Session of the Council of Trent issued a statement "On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images." Within this proclamation, the council began by reiterating the earlier stance of Nicaea II. Specifics on the production and use of the art were laid out, insisting that all religious art programs should stay focused on the official Truth. The bishop had the role of approving sacred works of art and making sure that the art left no room for accidentally errant readings and potential heresy.[10]

Cardinal and Archbishop of Milan (1564–1584), Carlo Borromeo was the most influential reformer in the Counter-Reformation drive to implement the Tridentine reforms. In 1565, soon after the close of the Council of Trent and upon the death of his maternal uncle, Pope Pius IV, twenty-seven-year-old Carlo returned from Rome to Milan prepared to give full attention to his ecclesiastical responsibilities.[11] Before returning to the north of Italy, Borromeo had worked on various architectural projects including explorations of the newly discovered Christian catacombs, which helped to develop his sense of a prototype for sacred architecture.[12] Wietse de Boer calls his intention to overhaul completely the teaching and practice around the area of Milan, an "extraordinary social experiment" that sought "to transform the social order by reaching into the consciences of its subjects" through "a system of discipline that was comprehensive, consistent, and unswerving."[13] Reformation of the arts became one of his special concerns. His series of written pronouncements demonstrate that the central reality for the Borromean reform is a consistency between the word preached, the art viewed, and the pastoral ministries of Eucharist, confession, and baptism.[14]

In 1573 and again in 1576 Borromeo warned that those who did not conform to his reform measures regarding painting and sculpture would be heavily fined, clergy as well as artists. He ordered that, "in order that bishops might more easily execute these and other prescriptions of the Council of Trent, let them call together the painters and sculptors of their diocese and inform all equally about things to be observed in produced sacred images."[15] Soon after, in 1577, he published the first full treatise regarding sacred art and architecture including a summary of Catholic traditions regarding church design in *Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae*. This became the central document that applied the decrees of the Council of Trent to the design and furnishing of Catholic churches.[16] Two chapters and portions of others identify directives regarding the use of decoration, religious images, relics, and graphic inscriptions. Part 17 bearing the lengthy name, "Sacred images and pictures/what is to be avoided and observed in sacred images/ the dignity of sacred images/the symbols of the saints/places unsuitable for sacred pictures/the ceremony of blessing images/occasional inscription of saints' names/accessories and additions for ornamentation/votive tables," has been called "a veritable manifesto against artistic license."[17] Borromeo

prescribed the content––historical truth or valid theological teachings—and the viewer response—evocation of piety—for sacred works. In this way, the Cardinal was a decidedly hands-on micromanager, a surprise to his diocese after decades, even centuries in some cases, of absentee benefice holders.[18] Acting as apostolic visitor, appointed by the Pope, he imposed his vision on multiple churches and institutions which had previously been left alone to follow their own desires.[19]

Carlo Borromeo died in 1584, and in 1589 he was succeeded in Milan by his nephew Federico Borromeo. The lengthy program of renovating and constructing churches begun in Carlo's period necessarily continued into subsequent periods. Coming a generation later, Federico nuanced, but did not change, his sainted uncle's didactic program. What has been called his "Christian Optimism" was the second wave of Counter-Reformation thought and appealed to a sensory appreciation of nature in order to attract contemplative minds to Catholic truth.[20] With this vision, Federico founded what would eventually become the famous Biblioteca Ambrosiana of Milan. In the academy's rules of 1620 he explained that he founded what would become the gallery and library in order to teach aspiring artists how to reform sacred art in accordance with the decrees of the Council of Trent. Federico's conception of sacred art's efficacy demanded that it be "natural" in order to reflect Christian truth while appealing to the senses.[21]

It is in this time of the Borromeos that Sacri Monti inaugurated by Carlo and continued by Federico flourished in the region. Carlo's principle project was Sacro Monte de Varollo, which represents the life of Christ. Frederico was especially interested in two other Sacri Monti, one at Arona devoted to the life of San Carlo and the other, based on the Mysteries of the Rosary, at Varese.[22] While the idea of the Sacri Monti began pre-Tridentine, the imagery and didactic effect that they project was in fact perfectly matched with the programmatic intentions developing from Tridentine ideals. The Borromean uncle and nephew demonstrated interest in the Sacri Monti both for their theological implications and in their real presence as pilgrimage venues. Carlo had a passion for making pilgrimages to Italy's sacred shrines: one of his biographers has written that "he considered pilgrimage a valuable element in that grand design of counter-reform which was the real program of all his pastoral activity."[23] Carlo wrote, "even though in our unhappy times, when the religious exercise of making pilgrimages has diminished to so great an extent, you must not become tepid, my dearest brethren, but you must become more enkindled because this is precisely the time when real Catholics and obedient sons of the church show the zeal of their faith and piety"[24] For the pilgrim, the experience of the Sacri Monti evokes the multivalent aspects of pilgrimage. As Dee Dyas has noted, from the fourth century, the term "pilgrimage" has come to refer to a journey with a particular religious goal; the pilgrim is someone who is taking either a literal, physical trip to a place which grants special access to God, a "vortex" of power, or is having a lifelong spiritual experience.[25] The tensions between the two kinds

of pilgrimage are here mediated in one space. Here, the pilgrim takes a symbolic journey and worships at a symbolic relic, but he or she can nevertheless replicate the benefits of the real concrete experience. All Sacri Monti are a facsimile of something else which provides the opportunity for an interior journey, undertaken in common with others.

Franciscan Sensibilities

Post-Tridentine desire to revitalize the didactic arts had strong affinity with longstanding Franciscan practice. Simulacra are objects or sites that depend for their effect on the viewer's controlled access to a highly illusionistic, even literalistic, representation of a sacred story for devotional purposes. These were already well established in the thirteenth century because of the characteristic Franciscan interest in visual details. This established devotional practice of course drew on the precedents of Francis's own didactic methodology. The most typical of Francis's devices was the teaching tableau; Francis mindfully created scenes calculated to teach by their stunning visual impact. He made himself a concretely accessible example to others, who were then expected to interact with him in a great variety of ways. Stephen Jaeger argues that the twelfth century was an age whose mentality derived its values from the charismatic presence. Francis is clearly such a person: "The living presence of the teacher is the curriculum. The personal aura is the locus of pedagogy, and the language of the body is its medium. The charismatic teacher ushers the student into the charged field of his personality and transforms him, demiurge-like, into a little copy of himself."[26] This exemplarism which Francis promoted was, and is, uniquely active—for to be exemplary is to be exemplary to others; it is to perform for an audience expected to interact with the example presented.[27]

Three texts, written at almost hundred year intervals, show the continuity found in Franciscan exemplary devotion. *Meditatione Vitae Christi* by the Italian Franciscan, John of Caulibus, appeared sometime between 1346 and 1364 and became immediately influential. The overall structure of the text divides the meditation on the life of Christ over the seven days of the week, apportioned at canonical hours of the day. *Nicholas Love's Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* is the 1410 translation into Middle English. On a meditation for Friday, for example, the text urges readers to imagine that they are comforting the Virgin and apostles, urging them to eat and sleep after the burial of Christ.[28] A second text, *Zardino de Oratione* appeared in Venice at the end of the fifteenth century and encourages its readers to project biblical persona, places, and events on real people. The author urges his readers "to move slowly from episode to episode, meditating on each one, dwelling on each single stage and step of the story" by choosing someone well known to them to represent people involved in the passion.[29] Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, 1548, is the most outstanding example of what came to be called *devotio moderna*. While it was different from some older forms of

mystical contemplation, it clearly had roots in traditional Franciscan practice. Loyola encourages the creation of vivid and concrete imagery; he constantly stressed the importance of "seeing the place"—and this seeing amounted to a sort of mental exercise that enabled the imagination to clothe an idea with visible form. The success of the meditation depended upon the penitent's ability to produce a clear and distinct image of the subject so that the image could be studied, retained, and used in the future as a guide to conduct. Every "composition" had two parts: the image and its place. If the subject was to be the crucifixion of Christ, then the image would be the suffering body on the cross and the place would be the hill outside Jerusalem.[30] The Sacri Monti as Tridentine artwork function as manifestations of all these devotional practices, and especially the *Spiritual Exercises*. As pilgrims come before each chapel, they focus meditation on the scene inside the chapel, and thus it assumes a reality. Through Borromeo's initiative, each chapel of the Sacro Monte has become one of Loyola's "compositions of place," activated when a visitor looks through the grilles.

Sacro Monte di Orta

The Sacro Monte of Orta is the most explicitly Franciscan of the Sacri Monti, for it portrays the life of Francis himself. Recently named a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is now the focus of intense restoration. The decision to build a shrine on the picturesque shore of Lake Orta was made by the City of Orta in 1583, but the central figure in the actual creation of the Sacro Monte was Abbot Amico Canobio from Novara, who built the first chapel as a prototype with his own seed money. Friar Cleto da Castelletto Ticino was the designer of the route, the surrounding landscape, and the chapels.[31] Perhaps because it was close to the end of his life, Carlo Borromeo safeguarded his vision by giving Carlo Bascape, Bishop of Novara (1593–1615), supreme authority over the construction at Orta. Bascape was well attuned to the desires of his hero Carlo Borromeo (whose biography he wrote), and the archives of his numerous letters demonstrate that he organized, promoted, encouraged, ordered, checked, and controlled the works at Orta. He was the one who chose the *fabbricieri,* today's general contractor, as well as the treasurer. He officially visited the site in 1594 when only Chapel XV (The Stigmata) was complete and again in 1604 when more chapels were in progress. Bascape kept a close watch and insisted that all artistic programs be approved by him to insure *verosimiglianza:* conformance of the décor, narrative, and details to the sacred history.

Francis Yates sets out the rules for making mental images that lodge in the memory, all of which are highly operative in Orta. To become an unforgettable place, the picture should form in a place deserted and solitary—Orta, with its densely wooded promontories, hides what few inhabitants it does have. Next, sites should be individual, distinct, neither too bright nor too dark, placed apart from one another with moderate intervals between

them.[32] All of the chapels at Orta make a sophisticated play of light and dark, open and secluded. The Chapel of the Stigmata (XV), for example, appears across from an exhilarating view of the entire region. The chapel of the birth of Francis, stands, as it should, at the top of the initial walk up the mountain. Immediately, the chapel establishes a relationship with the visitor, and it announces the intention of being read a certain way: this is the beginning of the path to an *imitatio Francesci.*

Narrative Sources

The exact textual sources used for planning the didactic program of Orta are difficult to identify. Abbot Amico Canobio asks in a letter dated 1589 for a text he calls *Croniche di San Francesco.* This might be *Delle croniche de gli Ordini instituiti dal P. S. Francesco*, written originally in Portuguese by Mark of Lisbon, translated into Castilian by Diego Navarro, and finally edited and printed in Italian in 1582 and 1604. A copy now resides in the library of the local convent at Monte Mesma. According to Gabriele Trivellin, Mark's text was based on the classic sources of the Franciscans: Celano, Bonaventure, *Fioretti*, and so on.[33] In addition, the most important conceptual source for the life of Francis as depicted at Orta was *De Conformitate Vitae Beati Francisci ad Vitam Domini Iesu*, composed between 1385 and 1390 by the Franciscan Bartolomeo of Rinonico (sometimes called Bartolomeo of Pisa, causing confusion with another Bartolomeo of Pisa).[34] This work had an astounding success in the Order during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, not in the least because it contained many materials from important sources of Franciscan hagiography, history, and spirituality, including full blown catalogues of Franciscan saints, masters of theology and minister generals.[35] In addition to its archival function, this lengthy text also proposes ideological correlations which exalt Francis, through biographical comparisons with Jesus, to a level of supra-human similarity to him. *De conformitate* is the fullest expression of the long Franciscan tradition that Francis was in all respects conformable to Christ.

Of course, Thomas of Celano, in *The Life of Saint Francis,* says that at the death of the saint, he was "Conformed to the death of Christ Jesus by sharing in His sufferings."[36] While every believer could attempt *imitatio Christi* (the endeavor on the part of man to follow Christ), Francis had actually achieved *conformitas Christi* (a gift conferred by God of the likeness to Christ). For the Friars Minor, Francis was not just another saint, but an exceptional being to whom God had granted the stigmata at La Verna, which made him a new Christ: *alter Christus.* Bonaventure, in the *Legenda maior,* developed for the first time in unequivocal fashion the theme of the similarity of Francis to Christ which gave his sainthood a special significance. Later texts in the Franciscan hagiographical tradition emphasized even more strongly the fact that the life of Francis was indeed a copy of that of the Savior and that in the words of the author of the *Miracula sancti Francisci*

composed in the second half of the fourteenth century, "God renewed his Passion in the person of St. Francis."[37] But Bartolomeo goes further with his systematic defense that Francis "conformed" himself to Jesus in every aspect of his life. Every feature of the life and passion of Christ, he says, was duplicated in Francis. Like his master, Francis was subject to sale, betrayal, the agony in the garden, the binding, mockery, scourging, crowning with thorns, stripping of raiment, crucifixion, piercing with a lance and the offer of vinegar.[38] Authorial choices are made to increase the piety of the reader rather than to remain faithful to the biographical narrative, and important events in the lives of both Jesus and Francis are omitted when a correlation cannot be found or contrived.[39] Thus the apparent reliance on Bartolomeo's agenda seems to have dictated specific scene selections from the many available episodes of Francis's life.

The original design of the abbot was for thirty-six chapels, as shown in the painting of Lorenzo of Pavia (1628). Today there are twenty complete and one incomplete chapels. The choice of scenes to be represented and the general artistic plan seems to have been done by the painter Guglielmo Caccia, known as "Moncalvo," a mannerist painter who lived in Asti.[40] The placement of the chapels in Orta along mountainside paths, with occasional signs directing the pilgrim's steps, provides a strict biographical reading of the site. In some of the chapels, the visitor enters from one side and exits by the other. Now, all of the tableaux are viewed through screens although this was originally not the case. The first chapels were executed with small, intimate groups of terracotta figures but towards the middle of the seventeenth century a colorful and dramatic Baroque style was introduced. The Lombard painter Stefano Maria Legnani introduced early examples of the Rococo style, which typified the additions of the eighteenth century. Thus it happens that any one chapel, because of centuries of ongoing renovation, can display numerous styles.

The Birth of Francis

A close study of the first chapel, "The Birth of Francis" allows us to see the Borromean epistemological agenda in action: carefully controlled art which facilitates the pilgrim's encounter with Christ through Francis. The chapel was begun in 1592 on the initiative of the town of Orta tinsmiths and the terracotta sculptors of France and Spain. There seem to have been some financial problems in the beginning, but it was essentially finished after 1615. The chapel was restored in 1801.[41] None of the early biographies of Francis provides details of his birth, beyond noting that his father was away on a business trip, and that the baby originally had two names, first John and then Francis. The tradition is now amplified with stories surrounding his birth, all products of the late fourteenth century when the fashion aggressively began to portray Francis as a saint who lived in perfect conformity with Christ in all the moments of his life. Typically, these later versions of Francis's birth

have three narrative parts. First, a wide variety of people foretell the importance of Francis and his birth; second, Francis's mother, because of problems with her labor, gives birth in the stable; and third, a pilgrim comes to the house. With a bizarre aggressiveness, the beggar/pilgrim demands to see the newborn baby. When Lady Pica (the nickname for Francis's mother, because she was from Picardy) allows this, he proclaims Francis's greatness in contrast to another Assisi-born boy (never named) who won't turn out so well.

Arnald of Sarrant's *The Kinship of Saint Francis* (written in 1365) is probably the source for the first motif, prophecy. Arnald's entire work illustrates that Francis's life is in direct conformity in nine points of the life of Jesus. While Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* articulated the nine primary virtues of Francis's life, Arnald nuances this idea further and shows that Christ's life became a form to which Francis was called to conform. In his story of the birth, he includes predictions by Abbot Joachim, an unnamed abbot in "regions over the seas," Saint Dominic, Innocent III, Brother Elias, Brother Pacifico, and an unnamed devout man of Assisi. Even Francis's mother, Lady Pica, "foretold the wonderful renovation of his life." The seventh chapter, *De Liberalitate*, which Arnald says will amplify this particular story, is unfortunately missing.[42] Bartolomeo of Rinonico takes Arnald's nine autobiographical parallels and spins them into eighty: forty events from Jesus and forty from Francis. Carolly Erickson particularly notes the awkward, even ludicrous, lengths Bartolomeo goes to in the nativity of Francis. The painful Joachimite prophecies, she says, are really "too much."[43]

The second event, the birth of Francis in a stable, is one of the latest medieval Franciscan legends, and it does not occur in any of the early Franciscan sources.[44] The first surviving evidence for this story is an inscription on the archway above the entrance to the oratory San Francesco Piccolino which reads "*Hoc oratorium fuit bovis: et asini stabulum in quo natus est sanctus Franciscus mundi speculum*" (This oratory was the stable of the ox and ass in which was born Saint Francis, the mirror of the world). According to the Franciscan scholar Giuseppe Abate, this inscription dates from between 1316 and 1354.[45] In contrast, noted Assisi historian Arnaldo Fortini believes the earliest possible origin for this legend is the end of the fourteenth century, although he has not been able to identify an original source. There has, in fact, been more scholarly discussion about where the stable might have been than where the story of the stable might have originated. Because the three narrative elements of this story (prophecy-stable-pilgrim) are usually conflated, the source of the stable story itself has not yet been sufficiently identified. Critics have variously attributed it to *The Legend of the Three Companions, The Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi,* Bartolomeo's *De confomritate,* or even, strangely, the Irishman Luke Wadding.[46] But in fact it is not in any of these works. The source, then, is still a mystery to be solved. It seems, however, that the story must have circulated after Bartolomeo because it fits so perfectly with his scheme that surely he would have used it if he had had it at hand. The story was,

however, well enough established to be part of Benozzo Gozzoli's painting "Scenes from the Life of Saint Francis" in Montefalco (1452). Above a fresco, which cleverly shows the three narrative units in one artistic frame, appears the following description: *Qualiter b. F. Fuit denu(n)tiatus a xro i(n) forma peregrini quod debebat nasci sicut ips(e) in stab(u)lo qualit(er) quida(m) fatuu(s) p(ro)ste(r)nebat b. F. Vestime(n)tu(m) in via* (How St. Francis was announced by Christ in the form of a pilgrim, and that he, like Christ himself, had to be born in a stable. And how a certain simple man spread his clothes out where St. Francis was walking.)

The third event, a prophet-pilgrim who appears after the birth of Francis, seems to appear first in *A Book of Exemplary Stories* (1280–1310). Brother Nicholas of Assisi, whose family home was next door to the Bernardones, remembered the story of the pilgrim who appeared at the door of Francis's family.[47] Arnald, in *Kinship*, explains the typological meaning: "As we read that Christ was carried by Simeon in his arms and that he also prophesied many things about Christ, thus, on the same day Francis was born, a pilgrim made his way to the door of his family's house."[48] Bartolmeo amplifies the story by having the pilgrim disappear and thus reveal that he was Christ in disguise. *De conformitate* also describes angels joyfully announcing the happy event, as the angels did in Bethlehem.

Arnaldo Fortini, in his *Nova Vita di San Francesco*, quotes a Franciscan sixteenth-century chronicler, Mariano of Firenze, who also presents the story of the pilgrim who comes to see the boy Francis on the day of his birth. Mariano notes that the other boy to whom the mysterious pilgrim refers was called Azolino de Navata, although he gives no further information about him. He states that he took this piece of information from the writings of Francesco di Bartolo, a Franciscan friar, author of the *Tractatus de Indulgentiae Portiunculae*, written some time before 1334.[49]

Chapel One

Originally, the exterior of Chapel One was painted with portraits of Francis and Giulio, the patron saints of the lake, as well as a landscape representing the "principle places of the shore with Lake, Mountains and Land" by the Lombard painter Stefano Maria Legnani.[50] Only traces of the paintings are left, but there are still landscapes on the inner walls of the chapel surrounding the doorway. These landscapes create the "image and place" required by Loyola, while also reflecting Federico's desire to glorify nature. The square chapel has only one entrance, which leads into an interior space equally divided into two parts: a vestibule with frescoed walls and the nativity scene behind a wooden screen. In the tableau area, the ceiling painting imitates wood, the walls simulate stone, and a hay loft hangs on the back wall. While there is no hay there now, it seems probable that there once was. The initial impression of exterior combined with interior is that this place is Orta, it is Assisi, it is Bethlehem, it is everywhere.

There are seven human and three animal statuary figures in the scene of this early, fairly simple chapel. In a group of three on the left, the immediately post-partum mother of Francis, dressed in a simple rose dress and navy blue cloak, reclines against the older and seemingly wise midwife (figure 7.1). Another female helper reaches out to her, as do the painted female attendants who appear on the left wall. Pica gazes heavenward with a supernatural calmness that expresses her foreknowledge of the meaning of the event. Francis's mother clearly imitates Mary in both her serene gaze and symbolic clothing. The medieval Virgin Mary often wears a dark blue mantle, which was originally a Byzantine status marker. Beginning in the tenth century Mary also wears red, symbolic of nobility, suffering and passion. From these two evolved the classic representation of the Blessed Virgin Mary with a red robe and a blue mantle. The simplicity of Lady Pica's clothing and hair is particularly noteworthy when compared to the strikingly elaborate costumes and coiffures of most of the other women.

In the group in the middle, a kneeling woman holds the baby Francis. The baby gazes directly at the viewer. Naked, except for swaddling across the genitals, Francis holds his hands in a benediction: left hand across the heart, and right hand raised in a babyish blessing. This evocative hand gesture, called a *moti* in Gian Paolo Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'arte* (1584), indicates Francis's saintly character and creates the central gesture of the group.[51] To the right, one elaborately dressed woman moves toward the baby, folding down her bodice to expose her breast in a cupped breast gesture. Her hair is in an elaborate coiffure intertwined with ribbons and a medallion. Her costume, which includes a broad red girdle and an intricate apron of seemingly expensive material over a full dark skirt is clearly a fine garment. The careful detail with which it is painted certainly suggests that a popular style is being referenced: it resembles those in near-contemporary bourgeois portraits recorded by Racinet as well as surviving local antique costumes of the Ossolano valley.[52] As such, these material objects bring home the meaning to the female viewer—that she, too, can affectively imagine motherly attentions to the baby. Here, the explicit admonishment to venerate Francis, and through him Jesus, is made in the relationship among the particulars of the story, the general truth it illustrates, and the devotional response of the audience. This chapel makes the birth real in an almost photographic evocation of the past reality.[53]

At the right, a servant woman simply holds a bowl of water. Next to her, another woman gazes at the scene and thus directs the viewer's sight. She holds linens and is not really a necessary member of the ensemble except that she provides meta-narrative guidance. Her glance confirms the didactic stability of Truth of the historical event and its artistic representation. Acting as an embedded interpreter, she reads on behalf of the viewers, who are also engaged in the effort to understand the correlations of the tableau.

Three animals make important appearances as well. Directly behind Francis is an ass with a rope tied around his neck. He seems hidden, until the

viewer looks through one of the ovals in the screen, and then the ass gazes directly at the viewer with what must have been intended to be a look of compassion. Francis's frequent reference to the body as "Brother Ass" makes this an obvious iconic connection, and the rope foretells Chapel XIII when Francis is lead through the streets with a noose around his own "Brother Ass." Tucked in next to the ass is a horned ram, also gazing at the viewer and also iconographically linked with the saint. Francis especially loved sheep throughout his life for the simplicity of their way of life. By grazing and eating from the hands of their owners, the sheep reflect the Franciscans' alms-based economy. And of course Christ is the Lamb of God, and in loving sheep Francis expresses his love of Him. In a circle of reciprocal references, Christ is like a lamb, the lamb is like Francis, and thus Francis is like Christ.[54] Looking over the servant's shoulder is a large horse. He, too, gazes at the baby Francis with an anthropomorphic grin and adoring eye. In the traditions (but not biblical texts) of Christ's nativity, the ass, ox, and the sheep keep watch.[55] Rather than an ox, here the more courtly horse is present, and the reason for the change is not clear. Perhaps a horse is more likely in the urban stable, especially at the birth of the man who will become Christ's knight.

Through the use of servants, elaborate clothing, and animals, the improbable figure of a wealthy woman giving birth in a stable becomes naturalized, as this somehow foreign idea is translated into a believable, identifiable sign. We do not know who the original artist was, but in 1604 Bishop Bascape pointed out certain inaccuracies in the illustration of the episodes in the story of the Saint and ruled that the artist was not sufficiently skilled. It is tantalizing to speculate what the problems were. All we know is that the bishop felt they did not accurately reflect the truth of the scene. Bascape himself showed workers drawings of the scenes he wanted to represent correctly the "canonical" reading of the Franciscan texts. At this point a team under the direction of the Lombard sculptor Cristoforo Prestinari took the project and consequently had it in place by 1617. Prestinari's "serene narrative style perfectly met Bascape's requirements regarding religious illustration."[56] This episode demonstrates the careful choice of all the details of the chapel.

The chapel has a few descriptive labels or the traditional *tituli* (inscriptions), which often work together with sites in explanatory symbiosis, but they are sporadically applied. The portraits of Francis and Dominic, for example, have short descriptions. Perhaps there are few inscriptions because of presumed collective memory. Certainly, the creators seemed to have assumed a guide, a guidebook, or inherent knowledge of the scenes to guide the pilgrims. The audience's view of the internal scene of Chapel One is controlled by a seven-foot carved wooden screen with four oval openings. The addition of grilles was a profound physical alteration in the fabric of the Sacro Monte and represents a significant change in both its intended purpose and its function. The original chapels incorporated the viewer as participant, creating an enhanced liminality, but the Tridentine focus on didacticism and authority necessitated a change in the way the sites operated. The grilles

supported the authority of the church by delimiting the place of the pilgrim, dissolving any potential ambiguity.[57] That being said, the actual experience of peering through the portholes is not very limiting. While the straightforward view from the holes focuses on the figural groups described above, the whole interior is easily viewed without much obstruction.

In the vestibule area of the chapel, where the viewer stands, the walls are decorated with frescoes outside the invented space of the faux-crèche. On the viewer's right the housemaid gives bread to the visiting pilgrim (identified by his staff and pilgrim badges), while the pregnant Lady Pica is carried into the stable by two servants. The implication here is that the angel/pilgrim is the one who tells Francis's mother to forsake her wealthy bedchamber and deliver her baby in the stable. On the left the pilgrim, now with the wings of an angel, holds the naked baby Francis. At one time an oil painting of the "Birth of Christ" executed by Camillo Procaccini in 1618 hung overhead; it is now in the church, on the right side of the presbytery. Procanccini is famous for his adoration of the shepherds' motif, which he employs here as well. This early master of the Baroque evokes a reality of the experience in a way expressly encouraged by Federico Borromeo.[58]

Viewers knowledgeable in the life of Francis might be surprised that there is no chapel at Orta dedicated to one of the most memorable events in Francis's life, his creation of the Christmas nativity scene at Greccio. Both Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure relate that Francis created a living nativity scene in the round to celebrate Christmas Eve in 1223. In the woods of Greccio he arranged hay, an ox, an ass, a manger, and a baby (perhaps a doll, perhaps a real sleeping child). Francis's "tableau vivant" re-created the real atmosphere of the stable in Bethlehem and movingly touched the emotions of the audience.[59] Thomas of Celano, in one of his interesting tense shifts, exclaims: "out of this is made a new Bethlehem."[60] Celano probably means that Francis popularized the celebration which is reenacted each year; he certainly also means that Francis has created a scene to demonstrate a new distinctly "Franciscan," affective viewing practice. But, Chapel One at Orta *is* the Greccio scene, as the baby Francis in a stable again recreates the birth of Christ and remakes Assisi a new Bethlehem as well. In another loop of self referentiality, Francis's own birth recalls the nativity scene at Greccio, the nativity scene remembers the first Christmas, and Christ's nativity provides the foundation for Francis's *imitatio Christi*.

Here in Chapel One, Carlo and Federico Borromeo's notion of art's documentary efficacy is in full display as each element supports the reading of all other elements in a remarkable conformity between stated agenda and execution. It is natural, as a modern reader, to look to these sites for signs of disjuncture and contradiction: how do the ideals of didactic containment fail? However, David Morgan argues that "while avant-garde images tend to foment the rupture" of didactic sites, popular images "often serve to mend them or conceal them."[61] This is true here at the sacred mountain dedicated to Francis, which offers a cultural product which imaginatively connects patron,

artist, and pilgrim in a unified community of piety. As the essays in this volume argue, the art and literature of different historical periods have interpreted and appropriated Saint Francis for the specific needs of their audiences. The Sacro Monte di Orta offers an edifying version of Francis's life which demonstrates an unbroken tradition of Catholic interpretation from medieval devotional vernacular practices to the Post-Tridentine agenda. In these chapels believers are invited to experience how Francis conformed himself to Christ and then offered Francis as a devotional image to help others do likewise.

Notes

1. The nine Sacri Monti and the year each was begun are Sacro Monte di Varallo (1486), Sacro Monte di Crea (1589), Sacro Monte di Orta (1590), Sacro Monte di Varese (1604), Sacro Monte di Oropa (1617), Sacro Monte di Ossuccio (1635), Sacro Monte di Ghiffa (1591), Sacro Monte Calvario di Domodossola (1657), and Sacro Monte di Belmonte (1712). For background on Orta, see Elena De Filippis and Fiorella Mattioli Carcano, *Guide to the Sacro Monte of Orta* (Novara: Riserva Naturale Speciale Sacor Monte di Orta, 1991).
2. Dolev Nevet, "The Observant Believer as Participant Observer: 'Ready–Mades' avant la lettre at the Sacro Monte, Varallo, Sesia," *Assaph, Studies in Art History* 2 (1996): 189 [175–93].
3. Robbe–Grillet is quoted in Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 3.
4. Nevet, "The Observant Believer as Participant Observer," p. 178.
5. S. J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy, 1500–1600* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 393.
6. Alessandro Nova, "'Popular' Art in Renaissance Italy: Early Response to the Holy Mountain at Varallo," in *Reframing the Renaissance,* ed. Claire Farago (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 113–26, esp. p. 123.
7. Matthew Gallegos, "Carlo Borromeo and Catholic Tradition Regarding the Design of Catholic Churches," *The Institute for Sacred Literature* 9 (2004). http://www.sacredarchitecture.org/pubs/saj/articles/borromeo.php.
8. E.g., in July 1618 the Protestant party in the Valtellina murdered their Catholic opponents and cut the strategic communications between Milan and the Tyrol, but in another coup engineered by the Spanish governor in Milan, the Catholic Party there, in turn, rose and massacred Protestants in the so-called Sacro Macello. See Peter Cannon-Brookes, *Lombard Paintings c1595–c1630: The Age of Federico Borromeo*, (Birmingham, AL: City Museums and Art Gallery, 1974), p. 12.
9. Michael P. Carroll, *Veiled Threats. The Logic of Popular Catholicism in Italy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 186; see also Roger Aubert, *The Church in the Industrial Age* (London: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 288–306; and Sean O'Reilly, "Roman versus Romantic: Classical Roots in the Origins of a Roman Catholic Ecclesiology," *Architectural History* 40 (1997): 223 [222–240].

10. Benjamin Westervelt, "The Prodigal Son at Santa Justina: The Homily in the Borromean Reform of Pastoral Preaching," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 32 (2001): 109–26.
11. William French Keogh, "Charles Borromeo, *Catholic Encyclopedia,* http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/index.html.
12. Gilda Balass, "Taddeo Zuccaro's Fresco," *Assaph* 4 (2004): 107 [105–25].
13. Wietse de Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul: Confession, Discipline, and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) p. ix.
14. Westervelt, "The Prodigal Son," p. 126.
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Figure 1.1 *Interior View of Upper Church*, San Francesco, Assisi
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

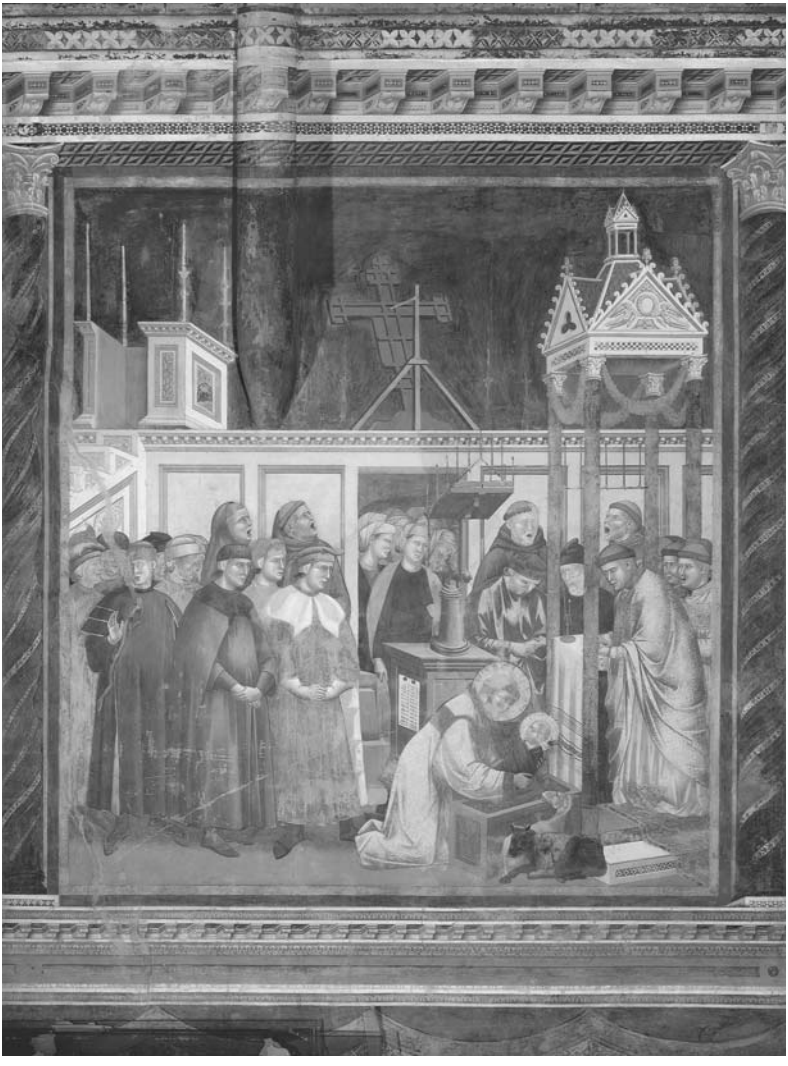

Figure 1.2 *Institution of the Crib at Greccio*, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

Figure 1.3 *Verification of the Stigmata*, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

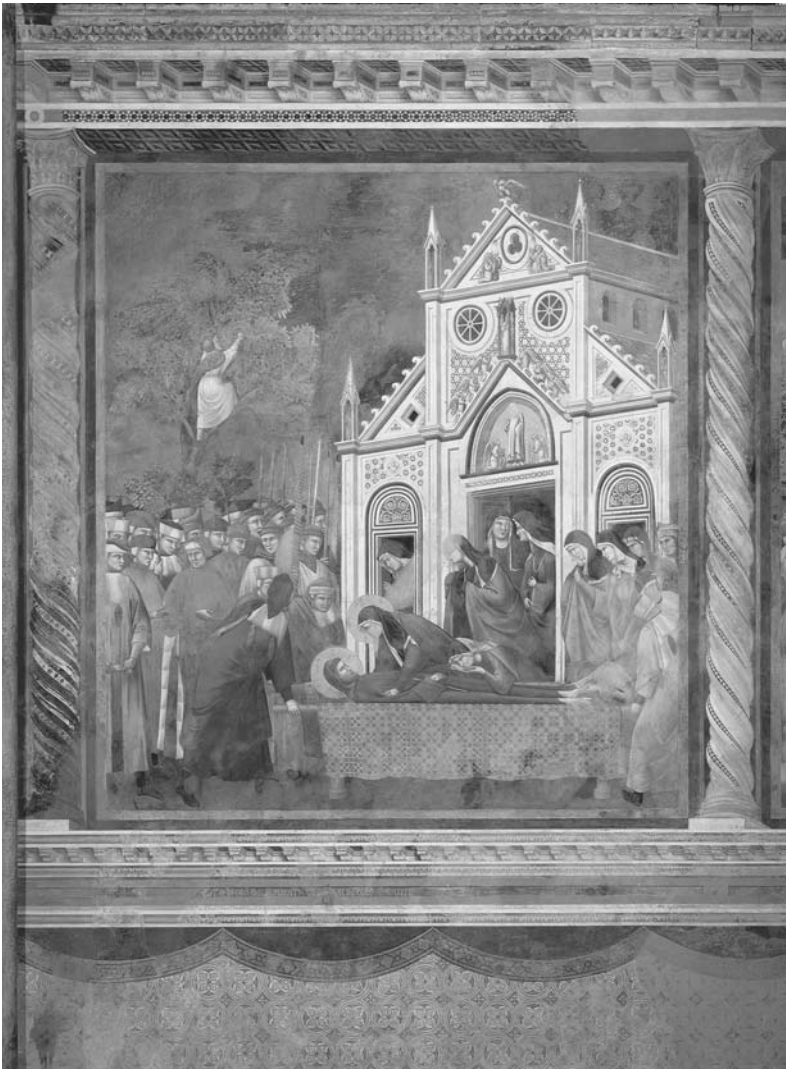

Figure 1.4 *Mourning of the Clares*, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

Figure 2.1 *The Ecstasy of Saint Francis*, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

Figure 2.2 *The Vision of Francis in the Fiery Chariot*, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

Figure 2.3 *The Chapterhouse at Arles*, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

Figure 2.4 *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

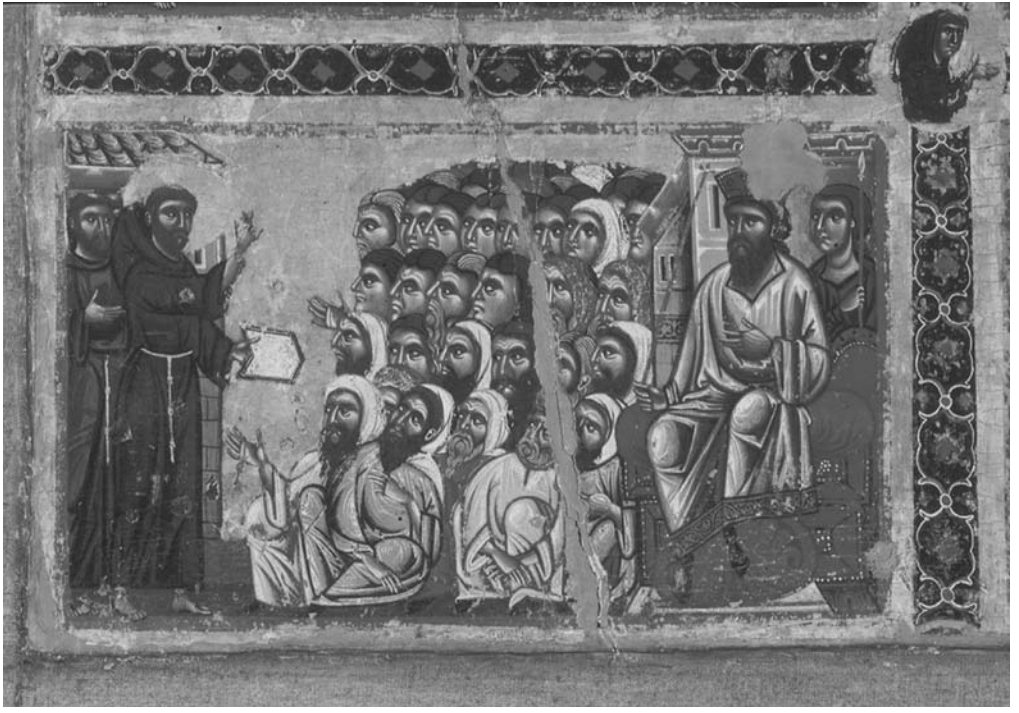

Figure 3.1 Bonaventura Berlinghieri, *Francis before the Sultan*, Bardi Dossal, Sta. Croce, Florence
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

Figure 3.2 *Francis before the Sultan*, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

Figure 3.3 Giotto, *Francis before the Sultan*, Bardi Chapel, Sta. Croce, Florence
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

Figure 3.4 Benozzo Gozzoli, *Francis before the Sultan*, San Francesco, Montefalco
Photo Credit: Stefan Diller/www.assisi.de 1985–2007

Figure 6.1 *Last Judgment*, detail from St. Andres Mission, Calpan, Mexico
Photo Credit: Felix Heap

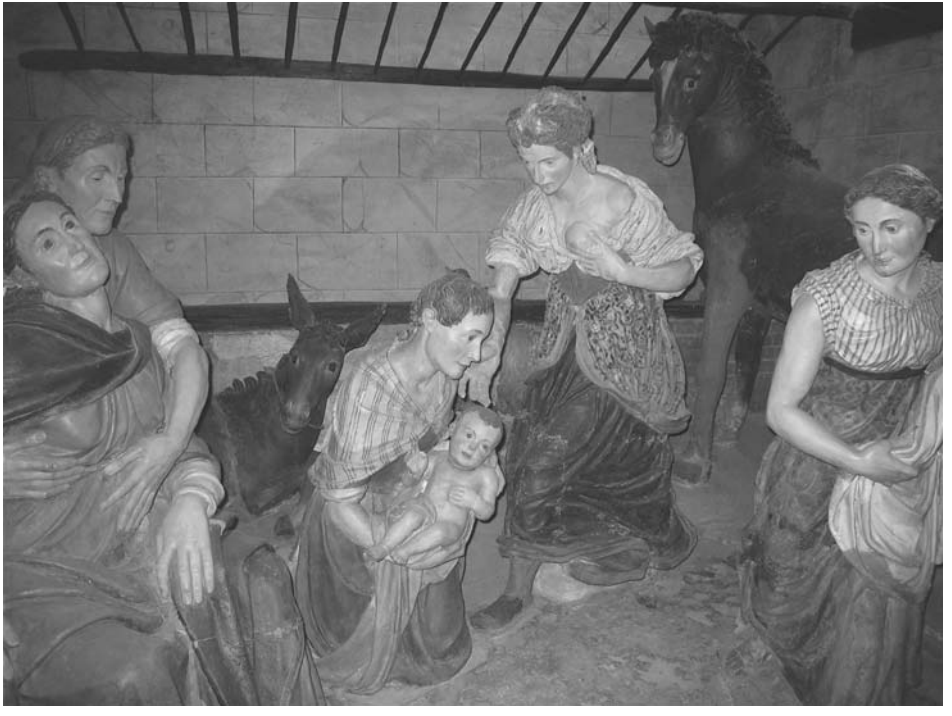

Figure 7.1 Chapel One, Sacro Monte di Orta
Photo Credit: Cynthia Ho

CHAPTER 8

A CHRISTIAN MODERNIST AND THE AWE OF NATURE AS PRESENTED IN OLIVIER MESSIAEN'S OPERA, *SAINT FRANÇOIS D'ASSISE*

John McClain

> *While they were hastening to the summit at a very easy pace, Lady Poverty, standing at the top of the mountain, looked down its slopes. She was greatly astonished at seeing these men climbing so ably, almost flying. "Who are these men," she asked, "who fly like clouds and like doves to their windows?"*
>
> *The Sacred Exchange between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty*

Saint Francis's role as a model of conscientious stewardship of the environment is now firmly set for the modern audience, alongside his equally famous ministry of voluntary poverty. In the over 700 years of lived Christian Orthodoxy in the footsteps of Francis, shifts have occurred in the connotations of both "Nature" and "Poverty." In the modern world, for example, poverty has come to be seen as a problem to be solved, a perspective far removed from Saint Francis's chivalric accepting and addressing of poverty as his "Lady." Nature has become the more fully realized environment. These twin themes of Francis—Poverty and Nature—might seem to run a parallel course, but are in fact tightly entwined in the fulfillment of Francis's teaching. This connection is most effectively communicated today in the ultra-modernist opera *Saint François d'Assise* by Olivier Messiaen. Not *despite* being in some ways the grandest opera of the second half of the twentieth century, but *because* of its grandeur *Saint François d'Assise* shares with modern audiences the values of a supremely ascetic saint from the Middle Ages.

What are Saint Francis's values? Specifically, how does he evaluate and accommodate nature in his faith in God and practice of poverty? He refers to nature frequently and affirmatively. Both in his own writings and in accounts

of his life he experiences all of nature, creatures and natural forces, as one family with God as their Father. For example from his famous *Canticle of the Creatures* from 1225: "Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, Who is the day and through whom You give us light…Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,…through Sister Water…through Brother Fire…through our Sister Mother Earth…."[1] And from his equally familiar preaching to birds: "'My brother birds, you should greatly praise your Creator, and love Him always. He gave you feathers to wear, wings to fly, and whatever you need.'"[2] Indeed it was this incident that provoked in Francis a reverence for Creation as a whole: "all animals, all reptiles, and also insensible creatures, to praise and love the Creator…."[3] Thomas of Celano's *Life* recounts other incidents from Francis's travels, for example the rowdy swallows at the village of Alviano who quiet themselves following Francis's request that he be allowed to preach, as well as his saving, then freeing, Brother rabbit and the fish from the Lake of Rieti both of whom, after their release, want to stay with him but whom he advises to return to their natural states.[4]

As these incidents and others portray him, Saint Francis reveres nature and her creatures, but because this reverence concerns ultimately their source, God, God the Father and God the Son. As he states from his *Later Admonition and Exhortation*, "Let *every creature in heaven, on earth, in the sea* and in the depths, give praise, *glory, honor and blessing* to Him Who suffered so much,…Who *alone is good*…."[5] Francis values creatures if they praise (thank) God for his gifts to them, including his Son. Again: Francis emphasizes that it is *through* the sun, *through* water, *through* fire that God gives. "Creation" is gift-giving and should be reciprocal. God does not need such praise, but should receive it from His creatures because it demonstrates their acknowledgement of Him. In their praise they are beautiful and only then are they truly and most beautifully natural. Francis's own veneration of nature is itself practically a form of beautiful worship of Him.

Saint Francis himself cannot see this, "know" this, or do this until after his conversion. Faith in God informs nature as His beautiful creation. As Thomas of Celano's *Life of Saint Francis* describes it: while recovering from the illnesses that shook his confidence as an upper middle-class reveler, roustabout, and soldier, Francis "went outside one day and began to gaze upon the surrounding countryside with greater interest. But the beauty of the fields, the delight of the vineyards, and whatever else was beautiful to see could offer him no delight at all."[6] Nature was barren of beauty for Francis until informed fully by his faith in it as the creation of God, and thus by his absolute faith in Him.

For Saint Francis poverty is another part of the practice of this faith. As one of God's creatures himself, how can Francis, too, praise God? He can do so when he does not pretend to possess parts of what are, after all, His creation. For Saint Francis possessions separate one from the rest of creation and thus from God, too. As Julian of Speyer's *Life* explains, "Since he traced all things back to their one first beginning, he called every creature 'brother,'

and, in his own praises, continuously invited all creatures to praise their one common Creator."[7] One does not own one's family; one is of that family. How can Francis *be* of this creation? As Lady Poverty asked and observed: "'Who are these men,' she asked, 'who fly like clouds and like doves to their windows?'"[8] Francis's life answers: look at what God's creatures possess. Clouds and doves are "poor" and thus free to ascend through the sky toward heaven. The eyes of Francis follow them. To be like them, Francis likewise chose poverty and thus *freed* his faith from physical constraints and temptations. The practice of poverty is a practice of spiritual peace. But it is *expensive* in a way, too, regarding the material self. As Henri d'Avranches presents Francis's last moments, "For I am called from pain to pleasure, a prisoner in a mundane Cell to liberty celestial."[9]

For Olivier Messiaen music is part of the practice of faith that celebrates not through owning but through receiving. His opera *Saint François d'Assise* debuted in Paris in 1983. Messiaen's portrait of Saint Francis presents to a contemporary audience these beliefs and the spiritual life of this medieval saint, but with an extreme modernist musical vocabulary. Specifically, Messiaen's incorporation of bird song, its "re-creation" or, better put, adaptation for contemporary instruments, performs what is, for Messiaen, God's art, showing how modernist music, with up-to-date electronic instrumentation, is a viable tool for communicating spirituality: nature as a harmonious model of God's gift of grace in human experience, in this case as exemplified in the life of Saint Francis.

Olivier Eugène Prosper Charles Messiaen was born in Avignon in 1908. His father, Pierre, was a scholar of English literature; his mother, Cécile Sauvage, a poet. He went to the Paris Conservatoire at age eleven, having already taught himself to play the piano and compose, and left the Conservatoire in 1930. He became a teacher himself and continued to teach throughout his life, eventually at the Conservatoire. In World War II he was a hospital orderly in the French Army; captured by the Germans, he spent two years as a prisoner of war at Gorlitz, in Silesia. While there he composed and debuted what is considered his first masterpiece, *Quartet for the End of Time*. He played piano; three other inmates located a violin, a cello, and a clarinet. He was repatriated in 1942. His works between then and 1983's *Saint François d'Assise* include much explicitly religious music, for piano, organ, and chorus, as well as the *Turangalîla-Symphonie*, perhaps his most important orchestral work, commissioned by the Boston Symphony and premiered in Symphony Hall, Boston, in 1949. He became the organist at Sante-Trinité in Paris in 1931, a position he retained, with occasional interruptions, for over fifty years. He married twice. He and his first wife, Claire Delbos, who died in 1959, had a son, Pascal. Messiaen's second marriage was to the concert pianist Yvonne Loriod, who survives him; he died in 1992.[10]

Messiaen was a true modernist; in his music one hears early on, for example, echoes especially of Claude Debussy, whom he always acknowledged as the pivotal musical antecedent for him. He said, "For me, Debussy's lesson

is irreplaceable."[11] Modernists like Debussy were interested in adding different tonal colors, wider scales, literally more notes, expanding the then (to them) conventional musical vocabulary. Messiaen continued the modernist experiment with tonality, atonality, and dissonance. As George Benjamin, a former student of his, commented, "what Messiaen has done, he's added even further harmonics from high up to give his sound a stained glass quality, a brilliance, a luminosity."[12] Messiaen did not want to be another Debussy, musically. Rather, Debussy's "impressionism," his attainment of musical color, was Messiaen's love and goal, but via an extended and different musical language. Part of Messiaen's "modernism" was his unclassifiability, all the while remaining engaged in the modernist pursuit of musical color. As one critic commented, "If Debussy may be said to have given tone colour a hitherto unsuspected independence, it was left to Messiaen to take this process of emancipation to its ultimate conclusion."[13]

Messiaen was perhaps a "modernist-plus;" one might dare to call him a postmodernist (though he never did himself). If "postmodernism" is not pastiche or pop but true aesthetic integration of cross-cultural and historical referencing (as for example in some of Philip Johnson's architecture), this is certainly true also of Messiaen's oeuvre. At times his music used Gregorian chant, Greek meters and Hindu rhythms, Indonesian and Balinese sound effects, gongs whose purpose was to achieve "extended resonance."[14] His incorporation of Hindu rhythms was crucial for the attainment of color, for they allowed him an emphasis with irregularity of rhythm, not steady beats but variation and unevenness. Messaien sought not to write musical narratives, but rather to create a certain mood, a frame of mind, a color that becomes varied and more intense. The intensity increases by silences, stops that the music must "leap over" in order to continue. In sum, Messiaen sought to further the now somewhat "conventional," or at least familiar, modernist vocabulary, with even wider scales, higher notes, and cultural rhythmic reference, all in pursuit of musical color. As he emphasizes, "There is only music that is colored and music that isn't."[15]

Messiaen's updating of modernist music also depended upon his incorporation of bird song. He was an ornithologist. He noted, transcribed, and recorded bird song from all over the world, throughout Europe but also from as far away as Utah and New Caledonia. He stated, "It's probable that in the artistic hierarchy, birds are the greatest musicians on our planet."[16] How did he incorporate this "natural music" into modernism? He explained, "A bird…sings in extremely swift tempos, absolutely impossible for our instruments. I'm therefore obliged to transcribe the song into a slower tempo."[17] Their high register is another problem, "so I write one, two, or three octaves lower."[18] Leading up to *Saint François d'Assise,* and crucial for understanding the bird song therein, were the opera's antecedents, *Le Reveil des oiseaux* (1953), *Oiseaux exotiques* (1955), *Chronochromie* (1960), and *Des canyons aux etoiles* (1971–1974), which was inspired by his trip to Utah and visits to Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks.

He was a "modernist-plus" also in that his instrumentation was often contemporary, electronic; he was an advocate especially of the *ondes Martenot*, an electronic keyboard instrument. Going for both "natural" resonance and dissonance, often via electronic instruments with the use of very high bird-like notes, gave his music at times an icy and eerie quality that for him conveyed the spiritual and even the mystical that was his faith. Electricity is a natural phenomenon; "nature" performed in part by electronic instruments is a musical match regarding both form (style) and content.

Messiaen was a deeply spiritual and devout Roman Catholic which gave his music meaning. This can be seen in his initial statement of musical explication, *The Technique of My Musical Language* (1944). While he does address and explain there the specific subject at hand, the details of his understandings of rhythm, harmony and melody, he is also candid in his articulation of belief and his agenda. He writes, "At the same time, this music should be able to express some noble sentiments (and especially the most noble of all, the religious sentiments exalted by the theology and the truths of our Catholic faith)."[19] Christianity's universal character, the Roman Catholic Church's global presence, and Messiaen's complete devotion to both, all coincide with his musical technique: modernism blended with multicultural musical borrowings and bird song (the voices of species the world-over), a universal belief system and a "universal" musical language. He states, "Spoken languages are obviously not universal, whereas music, which reaches a dreamlike, subconscious domain, might seem to be universal to a greater extent."[20]

Given his Roman Catholicism, his fascination with bird song and its musical potential, and his love of nature generally, an opera with Saint Francis as its subject would appear to be the almost too conspicuous choice for him. Everything said previously about his beliefs and music comes together in the opera. Messiaen states, "I chose him because, of all the saints, he is the one most like Christ, morally through his poverty, chastity and humility, and physically through the stigmata that he received in his feet, hands and side."[21] *Saint François* was commissioned by the Paris Opera in 1975; it took Messiaen eight years to complete it. He composed it, orchestrated it, and wrote the libretto. For the libretto he used *The Canticle of the Sun*, the scriptures, *Considerations on the Stigmata,* and the *Fioretti*.[22]

Messiaen uses these texts to construct *Saint François* as an opera in three acts with eight scenes. It exploits one hundred nineteen musicians (including three *ondes Martenot* soloists), a 150-person chorus, and seven vocal soloists.[23] Despite this length and grandeur it does not attempt to exhaust the life of Saint Francis; *Saint François* is not opera-as-biography. Rather, it uses those incidents from his life that Messiaen believed were most crucial for understanding his reception of grace. Much is left out: Francis's relationships with his father, with the Roman Catholic Church, with Saint Clare, and also famous incidents like his taming of the wolf. What Messiaen insures with these omissions is, ultimately, that nothing will detract the audience from Francis himself. He guarantees this intent by using everywhere Francis's own

writings. Many lines come from *The Canticle of the Sun*: in Act One, "brother Wind," "sister Water," "brother Fire," and "sister mother Earth" are invoked, as are "diverse fruits and coloured flowers and herbs!"[24] In Act Two, he references "brother Sun" and "sister Moon;"[25] in Act Three Messiaen elaborates the spirit of the Canticle's celebration of nature as a rejoicing in God's power and creativity with a catalogue of nature's aspects.[26] These references are interspersed in the scenes that Messiaen has chosen for the opera, among them the kissing of the leper, the angel musician, the sermon to the birds, and the stigmata.

The musical climax of the opera is Francis's sermon to the birds. It is the longest scene (forty-five minutes) and, Messiaen said, "in my own view, the best."[27] The bird songs he seeks to evoke are at first European species: turtle doves, wrens, robins, blackcaps; then those from Morocco, Japan, and Australia. There are skylarks, golden orioles, garden warblers, blackbirds, song thrushes, Australian lyre birds. "Each character is represented by a particular theme as well as by a bird call."[28] For example, the Angel's is a "gerygone, a New Caledonian species of warbler found only on the Isle of Pines."[29] For Francis himself the bird is the capinera, "the famous blackcap from Assisi."[30]

This incorporation of bird song is not primarily decorative. In this bird chorus Messiaen uses the superimposition of bird songs to convey a key theological point: how God exists outside of both time and nature. What for us is successive in sound, or chaotic in sound, is simultaneous and clear for God. This idea has been both deliberately and accidentally contrived in his music, as he attempts to explain in the same interview: "From my earliest works, I've tried to express a sense of immutability by means of very very slow movements and a highly colourful musical language."[31] And yet, "...it may well be that I unconsciously projected this idea on my work—in spite of myself, as it were."[32] Birds don't necessarily wait their turn to sing, even when in the same backyard. What does God hear when what the birds are singing, in Chicago or Siberia, is happening at the same time? Perhaps something like what one hears in scene six of the opera. First one hears Saint Francis singing (sermonizing), then birds responding, more sermonizing, more bird response; the birds become more and more excited and eventually create two concerts, the first about a minute in length, then the second and last, a full two and a half minutes of overlapping bird song. In these concerts what at first sounds like dissonance eventually disappears; but it takes patience and thus time to comprehend this music, just as one must take care when reading and rereading complex modernist poetry or prose. For there are, the more one listens, constructed silences. Silence is part of nature and bird song, too. The interaction of quiet and bird song becomes a blend; the bird songs achieve harmony. This is a spiritual intercourse between man and nature. For Messiaen's Francis, the birds' responding to his sermon is in fact their singing to and praising God in thanks for His gifts to them, the gift of flight and, of course, the gift of song. Thus they themselves demonstrate the

principle of faith in the importance of music, sung by the Angel-Musician to Francis earlier in the opera (and before playing a viol to him in Act Two). The Angel sings, "Thou speakest to God in music: He is going to answer thee in music. / Know the joy of the Blessed by gentleness of colour and melody."[33] At the end of their second concert the birds form four groups and Francis exclaims, "East, West, South, and North, the four directions of the Cross!"[34]

The joy Messiaen found in bird song was crucial for his intent. He was not a "doom and gloom" Christian: "But I myself feel sin isn't interesting…I left out sin."[35] The energy of birds and, to Messiaen, their optimism and joyfulness, evoke his own joy at the certainty of God, the certainty of the resurrection of Christ, and nature as a harmonious model for human religious experience. He stated, "I'm not a theorist—only a believer, a believer dazzled by the infinity of God!"[36] Francis's requested suffering and his reward, the stigmata, was to Messiaen God's grace allowing Francis to anticipate his "fusion" with God's immutability and infinity, another similarity he has to Christ and his literal Christ-likeness. Messiaen states, "Unlike some people, I don't see the Resurrection as an effort made by Christ: it's something He underwent, like an atom bomb exploding."[37] Ecstatic pain and perfect redemption go side by side. As he is dying, Francis sings: "Farewell, creature of Time! / Farewell, creature of Space! / Farewell, Mount Verna, / farewell, forest, / farewell, rock that received me in thy bosom! / Farewell, my dear birds! / Farewell…."[38] However the opera ends not with Francis's death, but with the choir anticipating resurrection. The choir closes, "From sorrow, from weakness, and from shame:/ He resuscitates Power, Glory and Joy!!!"[39]

The title of this chapter is: "A Christian Modernist and the Awe of Nature as Presented in Olivier Messiaen's Opera, *Saint François d'Assise*." It is "and" not "in" awe of nature, for Messiaen did not want to be understood as doing a subjective interpretation but rather conveying what to him was objective, God, and His creation, nature. Saint Francis, the saint to Messiaen most similar to the son of God, was the perfect model of a fully human everyman. His literal practice of the life of Jesus exemplified that finest aspect of human nature, faith. Messiaen admitted that *his* creation, or perhaps better put, his *discovery,* this gargantuan opera, was criticized as "much too rich to describe a saint who was poor and didn't want to own anything."[40] But Saint Francis lived on this earth in the "age of faith," from 1182 to 1226, years in which colossal Gothic churches at Chartres, Paris, Amiens, and elsewhere were built. They offered then and offer today stained glass performances of light that entertain and educate the faithful. Soon after his death, the huge basilica in Assisi dedicated to him was begun, "an extraordinary feat of engineering and a masterpiece of Gothic architecture…the richest and most evocative church in Italy."[41] Perhaps this is ironic. But Messian's huge modernist opera is not; it is "traditional" in this sense, a "church" that he has composed, an architecture constructed of music. It performs musical "stained glass." His opera is modernist "gothic."

Saint Francis believed that viewing, listening to, and appreciating nature were appropriate ways to "naturally" practice faith in God. This appreciation of nature in turn brought forth the pleasure of a poverty which does not own, but instead receives from God. Messiaen believed that his modernist music, with its technical abilities, universal access and accessibility, and "leaps" of experimentation was perhaps among the finest music so far in communicating this faith, the leap of faith. For Messiaen, Francis was in fact not a medieval man, not an out-of-place symbol of faith from another age, quite inappropriate for the modern world. No, Francis *is* a saint. Francis hears the sounds of our "today" as part of eternity, an eternity the understanding of which people can approach both in the experience of nature and when celebrating nature as God's creation, as in the music of Olivier Messiaen.

Notes

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3. Celano, *Life*, 58.
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21. Marti, "*It's a Secret*," p. 25.

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25. Aprahamian, *Saint François*, p. 127.
26. Aprahamian, *Saint François*, p. 153.
27. Marti, *"It's a Secret,"* p. 28.
28. Marti, *"It's a Secret,"* p. 27.
29. Marti, "*It's a Secret,"* p. 27.
30. Marti, "*It's a Secret,"* p. 27.
31. Marti, *"It's a Secret,"* p. 20.
32. Marti, *"It's a Secret,"* p. 20.
33. Aprahamian, *Saint François*, p. 131.
34. Aprahamian, *Saint François*, p. 143.
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36. Messiaen, *Music and Color*, p. 28.
37. Marti, *"It's a Secret,"* p. 21.
38. Aprahamian, *Saint François*, p. 153.
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CHAPTER 9

CONSTRUCTING SAINT FRANCIS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Janet McCann

It is ironic that someone who was known for his fierce purity of vision and for his refusal to temper the absolutes by which he lived should have been adopted and adapted by so many individuals and institutions. Here is a Catholic saint who has been borrowed by Protestants, Buddhists, vegetarians, antiwar activists, producers of pet food, and a vast and various group of individuals with personalized needs for him. And all have found him, although the versions followed are as different as the seekers.

When I went to Assisi, like anyone else, I was looking for St. Francis and St. Clare. The city is a medieval hill town, with its hundreds of stone steps and the wheat-colored buildings with the faded orange tile roofs. Seemingly hundreds of stores all sold the same thing—Tau necklaces, rosaries, statues of St. Francis with doves and wolves, reproductions of the San Damiano cross. The crosses are piled in bushel baskets by the door; you can pick up a half dozen to take home to your nieces and nephews for under $10. And yet, underneath the hype the place has a holy feel to it still, with the many nuns and priests and brothers in the streets, the permeating sense of history, the startling beauty of the cathedrals and churches and the sudden glimpses down into the surrounding countryside. You want to go into the churches and visit with St. Francis and St. Clare, who are buried in their churches but who are also present in the streets, in the air, in the familiar way the local residents greet each other, as though they had lived there for centuries.

Assisi is all images, few words. It is very hard to find any books in Assisi, even in Italian, except for books written about the saints and tourist guides; there is also one religious bookstore intended to serve the Franciscan community. In one little tourist bookstore I counted thirty-four different books about St. Francis, thirty of them in Italian, from the very first one written

right after his death by Thomas of Celano to a 2001 hagiography complete with Imprimatur. Missing, of course, were the controversial newer biographies which question the miracles and the stigmata, or find parallels between Francis and other non-Christian thinkers, or stress his personal idiosyncrasies, or attack his first biographers or the church for misrepresenting him. I could not help but wonder what part of Assisi's Francis is exportable, beyond the icons and images picked up in the stores. There is no conflict, no controversy about him there.

Yet throughout the world hundreds of books have been written about St. Francis, and thousands of paintings of him exist from the first ones made right after his death to present representations. Both paintings and books can be analyzed to show how Francis has been made to answer the needs of a time and place, and it is intriguing to examine which Francis is being constructed by biographers in particular to answer the needs of the twenty-first century. Clearly we still have a stake in St. Francis. For many readers the man they need is the one suggested by the first writers—someone who gave up all for Christ, who lived slightly above starvation level in order to please Him, who practiced a kind of tough love on his fellow human beings that inspired others to follow him as closely as they could, who was beyond any other human being an imitation of Christ. This was the Francis known for preaching to birds, civilizing vicious wolves, performing miracles of healing both before and after his death, and receiving the stigmata—that divine stamp which showed God's approval of his life and marked his life as a parallel to Christ's. Any confusions or inconsistencies in his life are read over or discarded by this primary group of Francis followers. It does not matter if each new biography of the saint is just like the last; it is a good story, a truth always worth hearing again.

But even the biographers right after Francis's death had what we could think of as an agenda: they wanted to reinforce the Franciscan order as he had set it up, and they wanted their brothers to go back to Franciscan principles as he had established them. It was felt necessary to underscore the parallels between Francis's life and Christ's by selecting (or editing) those features which most graphically demonstrated this parallel. Since Francis was the greatest authority on his order, it is certain that the early writers from that order quoted selectively and misremembered or even invented facts and events. Later biographers had the task of sorting him out—trying to figure out, for instance, which miracles had been ascribed to Francis simply because Francis's authority was needed to support someone else's program: for example, the desire to reinforce his primary commitment to poverty, chastity, and obedience among his later followers or to suggest that his life indeed was a perfect imitation of Christ's.

And now eight centuries later, other Francis seekers are still involved in the effort to redefine him, and he still answers spiritual needs in the twenty-first century. At least twenty new biographies have been written in English or translated into English in the years between 1993 and 2003. A few more

have followed, and of course there is a constant flow of Francises in poetry and fiction, but the turn of the twentieth century writers seemed especially involved in the project of appropriating Francis for today's world. These new biographers created a Francis for the reader who is critical, cynical, blasé, a little tired, yet still hungry for faith. So they emphasized different areas, tried to find what is acceptable to the reader of *Time* and the *New York Times,* described a charismatic holiness that does not violate the willing suspension of disbelief that now constitutes not only poetic faith, but faith itself. Their Francis—whether found or created—is very unlike the Francis of the first biographers. Of five biographies written around the turn of this century, one presents the saint as a guru, one a kind of road show, one a visionary ascetic, one a man who spent his whole life dying, and one a very simple Christ follower. I would like to take a brief look at the different Francises created by contemporary biographers, and to comment on the needs and desires addressed by each portrait.

I am not looking at the new books that accept the traditional image of the saint—and there are many; these are devotional biographies that preach to the choir. Some of them are well written and lively; some of them are not. Their limitation is that they are still retelling the same tale. They are written for Catholic schools, home schools, members of the Third Order of St. Francis, the Franciscans themselves. The best of these may be Michael Robson's *Francis of Assisi: The Legend and the Life* (2000), which blurs the distinction between the two parts of its title but remains clear, vivid and moving; its reviewers include numerous members of the Third Order of St. Francis, who indicate that the book reinforced their determination to live the Franciscan life. Descriptions of the book often quote several members of the Third Order of St. Francis, although the precisely written and meticulously researched book is satisfying to casual Catholics as well. But I am looking particularly at the men represented in books intended for a general audience: "for readers of any faith or none," as the review of one of the books promises.

At one point, of course, the standard biography was expected to be a hagiography, whether it was of a minister, saint, or political leader. We think of the "warts and all" biography as having been initiated by Lytton Strachey with his very unflattering portrayals of Florence Nightingale, Queen Victoria, and others; these bios are perceived as "objective." This appearance of objectivity seemed to make the goal truth rather than reverence, but of course hatchet-job biographies are not necessarily any more accurate than hagiographies. Critical theory emphasizing the relativity and unreliability of reports has undermined the notion that any biographies are true, and the breaking of genre boundaries has opened the possibility of the deliberate mingling of what is believed to be true and what is clearly fictional. Current styles include the quest biography, popular in the sixties and after, which tells about the writer's search for his subject, and the fictionalized biography, which includes acknowledged or unacknowledged fiction, such as the

Reagan biography *Dutch*, by Edmund Morris, which places the biographer in the life of his subject as a character of Reagan's age although he was in fact much younger. Now the truth/fiction boundary descriptions are complicated by charges of falsification (e.g., *A Million Little Pieces*) and issues of plagiarism. Semibiographical movies appear, claiming to be "based on actual events," but mingling fictional and real people. Objective fact retreats farther and farther into the mist.

John N. Hall, in his seminars on biographical method, notes that biographies can be sorted on the basis of fictionalization, authorial presence, and speculation.[1] The first issue involves the extent to which the biography clearly fictionalizes, creating conversations, events, and situations that could not possibly be documented. Biography for children fictionalizes heavily in order to maintain interest and communicate a sense of the presence of the past; this is a part of the genre and is expected. Fictionalization becomes more controversial in a case such as Morris's when the intended adult audience learns that a main character in the biography is more or less invented, and they wonder on what sort of truth the biography rests. The biographical novel is a case by itself; the writer takes whatever license she or he wishes, and may or may not provide an epilogue giving some information on what is reliable. The reader presumably is satisfied with a vivid impression of a time and a person, and is willing to sacrifice accuracy for a vivid reading experience.

The second issue concerns to what extent a biographer can be a character in his own work, using first person to describe researches, false trails, encounters. The extreme of this kind of biography is the quest biography, in which the emphasis is so clearly on the seeker that sometimes the experience of looking is much more important that what is found. This kind of biography may blur with memoir, as the biographer is often given a part in directing decisions and influencing events—thus in Norman Sherry's three-volume biography of Graham Greene, for instance, we often picture the biographer at Greene's elbow providing advice.

The third consideration is to what extent does the biographer speculate leadingly, identifying flights of fancy as such but inviting the reader to follow them: "What could Francis have thought after he left the leper's side? Did he recognize his worst fear, and the need to confront it once and for all?" Speculation is often strongest where there are few facts, such as in *The Invisible Woman*, the biography of Charles Dickens's mistress by Claire Tomalin. The lack of solid material launches whole pages into the subjunctive.

Clearly there are overlaps among these areas, as speculation, fictionalization, and the very real presence of the author as a character tend to go together. The styles range from the third-person, apparently objective presentation of facts, to the account of the frantic following of clues to, occasionally, no real closure. The five Francises that emerge in five of the recent biographies not intended for specifically Catholic audiences represent the range of biographical styles and produce very different individuals.

James Cowan's *Francis: A Saint's Way* is an appealing approach that blends a kind of leftist Catholicism with mystical leanings.[2] Cowan is a poet and novelist as well, and his nonfiction works often are a mixture of biography and autobiography. This work is a quest biography: Cowan travels to Francis's haunts and looks for his traces and his spirit. The "I" is very much present; Cowan's reasoning and intuitions are described in detail. "Why did I come here? I asked myself. To gaze upon that crucifix? Or simply to recall those days when Francis broke stones and mortared walls? I can see him now, his hair filled with stone dust...."[3] This quest form gives the biographer a lot of freedom, and indeed Cowan presents few facts. The Francis he looks for and finds is a man in search of existential freedom: freedom from the commands of his time, from his body's needs and desires, even in a sense from God. He empties himself in the way suggested by mystic Meister Eckhart, trying to become nothing but a vessel through whom God can operate. Heidegger and Husserl turn up too as parallels, as do a variety of Eastern mystics; indeed this biographer finds that Francis's trip to the East and his interchange with the Sultan of Egypt made him a meeting point of Eastern and Western thought. Afterward Francis is different, having completed his own understanding in that interchange with the sultan; he is the meeting of East and West.

As is the case generally in quest biographies, Cowan claims discovery, finding a complex Francis who is a mix of the *via positiva* and the *via negativa*, Christianity and Eastern religion, denial and delight:

> It seemed to me as I stood in the lamplit crypt of the lower church of the Basilica of St. Francis and gazed up at his rough stone sarcophagus secured by an iron grille, that I was looking at a different man than I had earlier imagined. He had become more human. His spirituality was more accessible. Something about his absence penetrated me deeply. I think he renewed my faith in the idea that the human adventure was an act of spiritual recovery, not some voyage after ephemera.[4]

Cowan describes the Assisi of today, then asks, "what more could I ask of him now than that he remain the Bodhisattva of my dreams....I could ask him to remain the living icon of an intense humanness that we all aspire to make our own."[5] Cowan does credit famous Francis miracles, but oddly: some people, he explains, are so in tune with nature that they can do that sort of thing. He provides Francis with a lot of self-doubt, of an existential angst sort, claiming that Francis's belief vacillated between believing in the God reflected in Christ and holding an image such as Meister Eckhart's mystical understanding of God as a supreme and unknowable Nothingness. Cowan's Francis is the modern ascetic and god-seeker, and he is an attractive figure although he is clearly the creation of his seeker—but are they not all? Perhaps it is only an appearance that the quest-biographer more than other kinds of biographer finds in his reconstructed subject his idealized self.

Donald Spoto's *The Reluctant Saint* (2000) follows a very different track: it is a report biography with the "I" not present, though it does do a lot of editorializing and preaching from either the third person or a "we" point of view.[6] His emphasis is on the personal sanctity of Francis; Francis as exemplar for faith. He wants to normalize Francis, and so expends much space showing how many characteristics and activities of Francis which contemporary readers might find extreme are explained by his time and place. Indeed, he wants to explain away the supernatural and to present the essential Francis as example for "some preliminary and tentative ideas toward a fresh understanding of conversion and the nature of authentic holiness."[7] His analysis of Francis is full of physical diagnoses—the saint had leprosy, he had malaria, he had trachoma; we are asked to look at a saint without any of the trappings of sainthood, but with all the human afflictions to which a human being of his time period was prone. Spoto treats with special disdain the notion of the stigmata, which he diagnoses as leprosy. Spoto's book is hated by the Francis websites, as he more or less accuses the Franciscans of lying about Francis and exploiting him.

> It is not difficult, then, to understand how devout people, amazed by the enormity of Francis suffering, were inclined to turn his pains into a reminder of Christ's; thus the stigmata were soon taken as externally imposed insignia rather than for what they really were—signs of...disease resulting from a lifetime of dedication to others. It took only one century for the Franciscans...to spread the practice of the Stations of the Cross—a series of pious pictorial tableaux that concludes with the burial of the dead Jesus....With that sort of iconography, the Resurrection, which is at the heart of Christian faith, was effectively ignored.[8]

Effectively, he accuses the Franciscans of replacing Christ with Francis in their religious practice.

Spoto provides an argument with support from others that insists that Francis's stigmata were really the sores of leprosy. He focuses on the wounded body of Francis as a sign of his humanity and service. Spoto's Francis is the holy man alone remembered for his intensity, which is what proves to be the basis of his saintliness. "Popular piety often finds no room for this sense of mystery, this incessant hunger for the Infinite that was at the root of his character and his charm."[9] He presents Francis in the light of his—and presumably his audience's—need for a concept of goodness or sainthood that is founded in intensity and desire, and is all the more poignant for its loneliness since God does not point to it through miracles and visible seals of divine approval.

Further still from the hagiographic image of Francis is Valerie Martin's enigmatic *Salvation: Scenes from the Life of St. Francis*, which is well written but heavily fictionalized.[10] She bases much of her tale of Francis, not on chronological narrative, but on the paintings. She begins with his death, a

graphically described and very human death, and traces events in his life back to his young manhood, presenting him through the eyes of those who knew him. Since she is using paintings as sources and freely fictionalizing, reporting conversations and events that did not take place, she is free to create her own Francis: he turns out to be a romantic idealist desirous of martyrdom. Not a Catholic, she is not interested in sanctification so much as characterization. The best known paintings take life in these segments of a biography; Martin is free not to answer the questions she poses about what was central to Francis because his most fervent followers did not know, and she is looking at him through them.

Her scenes are themselves paintings, and the point of his life that she leaves us with is what she sees as his conversion—his embrace of the leper—which comes at the end of a wordless interchange that draws Francis into the powerful grip of compassion. "Tenderly he takes the leper's hand, tenderly he brings it to his lips. At once his mouth is flooded with an unearthly sweetness...." The narrator is in Francis's mind and in the painting at the same time.

> His ears are filled with the sound of wind...a cold, harsh wind blowing toward him from the future, blowing away everything that has come before this moment, which he has longed for and dreaded....He reaches up, clinging to the leper's tunic, for the wind is so strong, so cold, he fears he cannot stand against it....He is there in the road, rising to his feet, and the leper assists him, holding him by the shoulders. Then the two men clutch each other, their faces pressed close together, their arms entwined. The sun beats down, the air is hot and still, yet they appear to be caught in a whirlwind. Their clothes whip about; their hair stands on end; they hold on to each other for dear life.[11]

This highly visual, highly fictionalized account is persuasive in the same way the paintings are.

Chiara Frugoni's small biography, *Francis of Assisi, a Life,* is translated from the Italian.[12] She has written a long work on the invention of the stigmata, and her short biography of St. Francis is somewhat irritating and confusing. She too wishes to explain away the stigmata, and uses some of the same evidence as Spoto; she too diagnoses his illness as leprosy, with virtually no evidence. Both wish to make the wounds symbolic rather than real, but her purpose is less clear than Spoto's—it is not to represent what she considers a purer kind of holiness, but seems to be more on the order of "debunking." The little book is inconsistent in style, beginning like a book for young people, with clear, simple phrasing and a great deal of speculation along the lines of, "The young Francis must have felt...," but the book suddenly gets complicated when she starts discussing the stigmata. It appears to be an attempt to popularize material from her more in-depth analysis of the stigmata material, but she has not worked to make the two styles consistent. The book has no

notes whatever, and she occasionally quotes with no attribution, frequently failing to indicate from where she has taken a controversial assertion.

In the first, simpler part of the book, she tries to recreate a youthful Francis whose ideals are based on French romances she thinks he probably read. Indeed, she attributes specific actions and behaviors to specific romances, assuming that they were as "in the air" then as Harry Potter is today. The material in the second part is much more specific, though not always more factual. In the attempt to explain away the stigmata, she gives a variety of reasons why those who affirmed the stigmata might have invented or exaggerated what they saw. In this part her style is heavily speculative; the other part is filled with dates and quotes, but the less credible sources are given more weight than those accepted as more reliable. This is the least rewarding of the new Francis books to someone interested in biography rather than impressions, as its patchwork nature is apparent. Francis appears as a romantic soldier of Christ in the first part, and disappears into speculation on the stigmata in the second. The stigmata, she says, were described in many conflicting ways, and were accepted into the official story because St. Bonaventure's biographical account prevailed. But he had an agenda: "Bonaventure wanted to impose a physical identification of Francis with the crucified Christ and to evoke Calvary, not the Mount of Olives...."[13]

Adrian House in *Francis of Assisi: A Revolutionary Life* is more open to the miraculous, but he too does some diminishing.[14] House wants to report the miracles, yet he does not want to seem naive. Thus the miracles are partly explained away and then reaffirmed. On the subject of the stigmata he tries to be judicious, pointing out a variety of explanations including the miraculous but committing to no explanation. House's biography is easily the most readable, cozily including the reader in second-person description of Franciscan places: "As the branches close over your head the air grows chilly; in the dim light a blue and white haze of anemones spreads over the forest floor...."[15] Like Spoto, House wants to normalize Francis, and therefore gives casual topical information which helps to make some of the saint's actions seem less extreme, more logical. But he does not want a saint completely stripped of the supernatural, and certainly does not want to blame the Franciscans for honoring the legends as well as the man. Sometimes he carefully attributes a miracle to a particular narrator, other times he does not, but generally he uses the sources as authoritative. His comments on the Wolf story: "Francis...agreed to tackle the wolf outside Gubbio, perhaps taking with him a tempting cut of meat. He turned out to be an elderly animal, perhaps reduced to taking any feeble livestock it found and occasionally scavenging limbs from corpses." The story recounts how Francis, addressing him as Friar Wolf, rebuked him for his reign of terror, but acknowledged that this was due to hunger. He therefore proposed a pact between the wolf and the people by which they kept him fed, while he promised to stop his attacks on them....When Francis held out his hand to the wolf to seal the contract, the narrator endows it with the manner of a dog. He says it "stretched out its paw

in return expressing its assent with movements of its body, tail and eyes. Two years later it died. In 1872 the skeleton of a wolf was dug up in Gubbio, under the chapel of San Francesco della Pace."[16] The source cited for this, *Fioretti*, doesn't have anything like the specifics of this account, and simply recounts the miracle of the vicious wolf who was tamed by Francis and agreed to a legal contract with the people of the city not to eat them in return for being fed.[17] What is intriguing is the attempt to believe in and discount the miraculous at the same time—to reduce the miracle to something small enough to be acceptable to the contemporary reader.

What is the common denominator of all these different portrayals? A need for the sense of holiness, the belief in saints, however they might be defined. Desire for miracles and a fear of them; a desire to believe in the possibility of the supernatural without wanting to commit oneself to a particular manifestation of it. The desire for absolutes, even if they are absolute faith in someone else's faith. The longing to touch extraordinary humanness, so extraordinary that personhood is transcended. And the need to provide a believable spokesperson in the form of an authorial presence who cannot be accused of naiveté. It is interesting that while earlier generations helped themselves liberally and sometimes indiscriminately to all the available early accounts, the new ones tend to favor the first biography over the rest, because the others are more filled with miracles and have more visible agendas.

Thomas of Celano's first biography seems to be an attempt to preserve what was known of the life of the saint, to honor him of course, but not to put words into his mouth for the purpose of building or changing institutions. And yet this biography has a firstness, a freshness, that many will find more compelling than any later narrative:

> How great do you think was the delight the beauty of flowers brought to his soul whenever he saw their lovely form and noticed their sweet fragrance?. . .Whenever he found an abundance of flowers, he used to preach to them and invite them to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason. Fields and vineyards, rocks and woods, and all the beauties of the field, flowing springs and blooming gardens, earth and fire, air and wind: all these he urged to love of God and to willing service. Finally, he used to call all creatures by the name "brother" and "sister" and in a wonderful way, unknown to others, he could discern the secrets of the heart of creatures like someone who has already passed into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.[18]

Yet the new Francis portraits have their appeal also. I would speculate that few who have no interest at all in spiritual inquiry are interested in reading books about St. Francis. These writers are addressing those who want to be shocked with the spiritual, knocked over the head and dragged off by it, and yet who don't want anyone to be able to judge them as naive. The contemporary reader of popular books about St. Francis's life wants the persuasiveness

of the transcendent to be in the narrative as well as the facts; they want originality of approach; they want revision as vision. What is left of the original Francis is the mystery of the man; the essence of charismatic faith that all these biographers sift through the dust to find.

Notes

1. John N. Hall, "Seminar in Literary Biography," City University of New York, Summer 1977.
2. James Cowan, *Francis: A Saint's Way* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2001).
3. Cowan, *A Saint's Way,* p. 59.
4. Cowan, *A Saint's Way,* p. 177.
5. Cowan, *A Saint's Way,* p. 178.
6. Donald Spoto, *The Reluctant Saint* (New York: Viking, 2000).
7. Spoto, *Reluctant,* p. xvii.
8. Spoto, *Reluctant,* p. 196.
9. Spoto, *Reluctant*, p. 197.
10. Valerie Martin, *Salvation: Scenes from the Life of St. Francis* (New York: Vintage Press, 2002).
11. Martin, *Salvation,* p. 241.
12. Chiara Frugoni, *Francis of Assisi, a Life* (New York: Continuum, 1998).
13. Frugoni, *Francis,* p. 135.
14. Adrian House, *Francis of Assisi: A Revolutionary Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring Press, 2001).
15. House, *A Revolutionary Life,* p. 121.
16. House, *A Revolutionary Life*, pp. 180–81.
17. *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* in *Francis of Assisi* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols., *Vol. III*, *The Prophet,* ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, (New York: New City Press, 2001), XXI.
18. Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis* in *Francis of Assis*, 81.

CHAPTER 10

CAPTURING THE GRAVITY AND GRACE OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI ON STAGE: A MEDITATION ON WORD AND IMAGE

John Bowers

For twenty-five years I have been surrounded by images of St. Francis. His portrait hangs over the altar at the University of St. Francis chapel here in Joliet. Tapestries of him and Clare drape the walls of our campus. Nearly everyday, I have passed a statue of Francis as I cross our quad on the way to teach my classes on Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature. Francis stands in his brown robe, looking down, belt rope hanging from his waist, left hand, clutching a cross, held slightly in front of him. He studies the cross as his right hand points to his chest. Until recently, I had never really given these images much thought. But in the past year and a half, they have begun to take on more meaning for me. I have begun to pay attention to them and the particular scenes of Francis they depict, and I find myself contemplating the messages they try to convey about our patron saint.

My interest in these symbols has been inspired, in part, by a climate of spiritual and intellectual renewal on our campus engendered by a new administration. Excited by this climate, I volunteered to write a play about St. Francis for our undergraduate students. I began to read every modern biography I could get my hands on to gain a deeper understanding of the dramatic nature of St. Francis. The more I read, the more I suddenly found Francis entering my life in new and dramatic ways. As I walked to campus, for example, I would find myself mentally addressing "brother tree" and "sister bird" and appreciating the spiritual nature of the natural world in a way that was uniquely connected to my readings of Francis. I found myself thinking about God and about poverty and humility as I crossed a street. I thought about Francis and the suffering he went through to be closer to God, a suffering he embraced with joy,

and I found, much to my surprise, that the story of Francis was renewing my own spirituality.

In my readings, I was struck by the way Francis's life reflected what Simone Weil has described as a spiritual reciprocity that exists between God and humankind.[1] It is a reciprocity based on becoming spiritually authentic through suffering. Meditating on the significance of Catholic communion, Weil writes that "God did not only make himself flesh for us once, every day he makes himself matter in order to give himself to man and to be consumed by him. Reciprocally, by fatigue, affliction and death, man is made matter and is consumed by God. How could we refuse this reciprocity?"[2] Francis did not refuse. I wanted to write a play for our students that would capture this sense of Francis being consumed, through his suffering and devotion, by God and with God. I wanted them to experience in the theater the excitement of the life of Francis and to feel the intimacy with him that I felt when I read the biographies. I wanted our students to feel in their lives the change I felt when I walked along city streets with his story in my head.

Scene: Italy

When I learned that the National Endowment for the Humanities was offering a seminar on St. Francis in Italy, I applied and was accepted. I traveled to Italy with my wife, Linda, and our son, Nick. I spent the summer of 2003 there studying the life of the man who inspired these images on our campus, walking the fields that he walked, visiting the places where he preached, and staying in the places where he stayed and where he prayed. I came home with a new appreciation, not only for the images that adorn our campus but also for the power of one individual, through simple, yet profound, acts of love and generosity, to change the world around him. For me, this seminar helped put flesh on the bones of St. Francis.

The seminar was directed by William R. Cook, a medieval historian who spent twenty years of his life traveling through Italy photographing and describing the artwork done on Francis in the thirteenth century. In the introduction to his book, *Images of St. Francis,* Cook noted that he came to a new understanding of Francis by studying the art in the thirteenth century focused on the saint's life.[3] Cook tells his readers that when he first read Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* in graduate school, he told his colleagues "Francis must have been the craziest person who ever lived." It was only later, when Cook visited Assisi and spent some time there that his appreciation for Francis began to deepen. "One summer in Assisi," he wrote, "over a period of several days, I reread the *Legenda maior.* In those same days, I strolled the streets of Assisi and I spent a lot of time looking at the frescoes in the Upper Church that were based on the *Legenda maior.* Francis began to make sense, and the art that presented his life to me was at least as responsible for my new understanding as Bonaventure's text. . . .It is clear to me that

even today," Cook added, "more people know about Francis through visual images of him than from anything they have read."[4]

In our seminar, Cook insisted that we, too, engage the life of this saint in both word and image. For weeks we pored over the early documents by Francis and about him. We read the biographies by Celano, *The Legend of the Three Companions*, *The Assisi Compilation*, and Bonaventure's *Legenda maior.* We also traveled to sites in Rome, Pistoia, Pescia, Pisa, Montefalco, Florence, Siena, and Assisi to view the early frescoes and dossals of Francis. Cook taught us how to read these art works as literary texts to be interpreted and compared to each other and to the biographies of the period. Through Cook's instruction, we learned to appreciate the nuances between the written word and the painted images. Cook showed us how the Franciscan story was taught to an illiterate populace through the medieval paintings and dossals, and how that story was enhanced by the combination of the image and word throughout the churches of Italy.

As I worked on my project for the seminar, the play, I was especially interested in the way medieval artists used the painted image to universalize religious themes for their audiences. In Siena, for example, the Madonna and Child were painted with the architecture and landscape of Siena in the background to remind the viewer that the image was universal and local at the same time. This same technique was used by the Florentine and Umbrian artists to localize the early saints by putting them in a familiar setting that the audience could recognize. As James Cowan in *St. Francis: A Saint's Way*, notes "[Italy] is a land of sweet melancholy. You only have to peer into the paintings of the Umbrian artists. . .to see how deeply attached people were in those days to tree-clad hills, contorted vaults of stone, and garden seats overgrown with vine." He adds: "It's no accident that Umbrian artists liked to paint their Madonna and Infant portraits in the countryside, rather than the enclosed architectural background so favored by Florentine artists. I think they believed that the Virgin would feel more at ease seated among rocks, trees, and flower-decked gardens than in some regal boudoir in town. . . .Hers was the landscape of nature."[5] I learned that the Umbrian artists, like other artists throughout Italy, chose the local setting to personalize the Madonna and Child and to make them more relevant among an Umbrian audience than they would have been if they were painted in a Palestinian setting. Absolute accuracy was less important than relevance. The audience of the time felt a kinship with the Madonna and Child in a setting recognized as their own.

We spent our last week of the seminar in Assisi studying Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* and examining the frescoes that line the walls of the Upper Basilica of San Francesco. The humility of Bonaventure, who tells us that he feels "unworthy and unequal to the task of writing the life of a man so venerable and worthy of imitation" is perfectly balanced by the boldness of the images of Francis on the basilica walls with a dramatic force that brings the words of Bonaventure to life.[6] The combination of word and image in both

the text and the frescoes captures the spirit of Francis. The frescoes convey an image of Francis that is both personal and worldly in a way that words alone cannot fully convey. The painter captures the rigorous and knowledgeable inwardness of his subject in dramatic detail. As Cowan points out:

> What he painted in all the various tableaux on the walls of the basilica of San Francesco is a man whose grace was tempered by a rigorous and not unworldly inwardness. In Giotto's hands, Francis became the first man to stand apart in Western painting. In that sense Giotto celebrated the individual for the first time. The psychology of Francis interested him more than the ritual gestures that until then made up the subject and themes of medieval art.[7]

Studying the celebration of the individualized Francis in the Upper Basilica's frescoes and comparing them to Bonaventure's stories of the saint, I came to a greater appreciation of Cook's point that the life of Francis is best rendered in both image and word. These paintings reinforce and deepen the stories in Bonaventure by inviting the viewer to contemplate the images in their imaginative detail.

Francis as Image-Maker and Dramatist

The power of the image was not lost on Francis. He was a master image-maker, crafting scenes to be interpreted by those around him. He did not tell people how to find God. He taught them, by example, how to see God in their lives and in the world around them. He gave them images, dramatic acts that they could imaginatively contemplate, acts captured by painters and the early biographers. Like the medieval painters who placed the Madonna and Child in local settings to personalize the event, Francis created images that could be personally interpreted by those who viewed them. Cook's emphasis on approaching Francis through both images and words created a new appreciation in me for the visual possibilities offered by a dramatic production. I began to think about how I could use setting and image in the play to make Francis personal to our students.

But, to my surprise when I returned home, putting flesh on the bones of St. Francis did not help me write the play. In fact, my experiences in this seminar, as wonderful as they were both visually and intellectually, only made the prospect of writing a play about Francis more difficult. The more I began to see the stories of Francis depicted in the frescoes of Italy, the more I began to read from the early biographies of Francis, the more I began to see how complex and complicated this man was. Certainly, he had a flair for the dramatic act. Most modern biographers who write about Francis note this aspect of his nature. Donald Spoto, for example, notes that "Francis always preferred action to analysis" and Adrian House points out that "As an actor Francis understood the uses of gesture and mime; he was said 'to make

a tongue of his body'."[8] G. K. Chesterton says that it is "truly said Francis of Assisi was one of the founders of the medieval drama, and therefore of the modern drama...for...he was pre-eminently a dramatic person."[9] In the same way, John V. Fleming observes that "There are repeated indications that Francis's 'fervor' took corporal expression, that his preaching was characterized by a good deal of kinetic energy, rhythmic movement, emphatic gesticulation."[10] Whenever possible, Francis would always reach for the dramatic act over the carefully articulated phrase.

To dramatize his renunciation of wealth and privilege, for example, he stripped himself naked in front of his father and the Bishop of Assisi. "When he was in front of the bishop," Celano tells us, "[Francis] neither delayed nor hesitated, but immediately took off and threw down all his clothes and returned them to his father. He did not even keep his trousers on, and he was completely stripped naked before everyone." We are then told that "The bishop, observing his frame of mind and admiring his fervor and determination, got up and, gathering him in his own arms, covered him with the mantle he was wearing. He clearly understood that this was prompted by God and he knew that the action of the man of God, which he had personally witnessed, contained a mystery."[11]

This is a critical moment for Francis, conveyed in a significant image whose mystery is left open for interpretation by the bishop and those who witness it. The image speaks louder than any words could have done in this case. It is bold and dramatic. It contains a mystery that draws the audience in and asks for interpretation. It is a scene that has been written about and painted many times because it appeals to our imagination. Commenting on this scene, for example, Cowan notes that it is an essential act in the life of Francis. Once he strips himself naked in front of his father, his friends, and his neighbors, there is no going back to an ordinary life; to go naked into the world is to renounce all its pretensions, all its fabrications, all its concealments and hypocrisies that clothing symbolizes. As Cowan notes, "A man who goes literally and figuratively naked takes upon himself a unique responsibility, for he is placing himself between man as a figure of concealment, of selfhood, and the mysterious perturbations of the Invisible."[12] Naked, Francis places himself in a condition of complete acceptance. His destiny is now in the hands of God. Francis relies on the moment, and the image of his nakedness, to convey the "mysterious perturbations of the Invisible" behind his act.

Again, when asked to preach a sermon to Clare and the women at San Damiano, he uses the dramatic act without words to convey his message. Celano relates the story this way:

> The Ladies gathered as usual to hear the word of God, but no less to see their father, and he raised his eyes to heaven, where he always had his heart, and began to pray to Christ. Then he had ashes brought and made a circle with them round himself on the floor, and then put the rest on his head. As they waited, the blessed father remained in silence within

> the circle of ashes, and real amazement grew in their hearts. Suddenly, he got up, and to their great surprise, recited the 'Have mercy on me, God,' instead of a sermon. As he finished it, he left quickly. The handmaids of God were so filled with contrition by the power of this mime that they were flowing with tears, and could hardly restrain their hands from punishing themselves. By his action he taught them to consider themselves ashes, and that nothing else was close to his heart except what was in keeping with that view.[13]

Here Francis preaches a sermon without words. Again, he uses an image to engage the imagination of his audience. The audience must interpret the significance of the action for themselves. The image itself remains powerful and mysterious, larger than any single interpretation offered in the more limited medium of words.

For Francis, the image triumphed over the word. On one occasion to emphasize the evils of money to a fellow friar, he had the man take the forbidden money in his mouth and place it in horse dung outside the church at Portiuncula.[14] Francis sought to teach through the dramatic act or image rather than the carefully formulated sermon. As William Fry has observed:

> If the Communion of Saints should ever decide to put on a play or a film...surely St. Francis of Assisi would be their natural choice for the star. He combines all the qualities needed for instant appeal to the public: a beautiful singer, a personality to draw an audience at any street corner, and also something of a clown; cheeky, ebullient, yet desperately vulnerable; brave but gentle, an obedient scamp, workman and poet, a sanctified tramp, scared of women yet drawn into a lifelong partnership with a beautiful girl.[15]

"Christ Plays in...Eyes Not His"

Francis and the early Franciscans embraced the idea of using drama and figurative images as teaching devices, much in the way the early medieval painters employed paintings to teach Gospel stories to the illiterate and unlettered members of their society. According to David L. Jeffrey, "The Franciscans carried with them a passionate determination to harness popular culture as a medium, and to elevate it as a value." They sought to reach popular audiences by dramaturgy. They inserted dramatic vernacular images in their sermons and were interested in the dramatic as a way of presenting the Christian story. The legacy of St. Francis to medieval theater is above all one of style and dedication—extravagant style and dedication to a popular audience. It was not unusual for Francis or his followers to break into song during a sermon or to dance around as they spoke. They sought to teach and delight as they preached the Gospel message. Theatricality was an important medium

for their teaching. Their theatricality was viewed as a risky way to teach the Gospel by the clergy of their day, but, as Jeffrey notes, "it was entirely consistent with the other risks they were willing to take with the frailties and foibles of ordinary human nature."[16] But Jeffrey also points out that:

> we should not lightly equate this risk-taking with naiveté. Rather, we should see that it proceeds from a tremendous confidence in the sovereignty of God and in the power of grace released in the Incarnation—grace sufficient to redeem our most ridiculous ineptitude. . .through the features of men's faces—. . .: for the Franciscans the "good game"—the "godly game"—was *imitatio Christi* after all, and they believed that one played it best who saw that in all this playing of mankind it is Christ who may be discovered, the Player indistinguishable from the game, redeeming our world by taking on its humblest parts.[17]

This penchant for the "godly game" of *imitatio Christi*, of discovering Christ through this playing of humankind, of redeeming our world by taking on its humblest parts, lies at the center of Francis's dramatic nature. Seamus Mulholland argues that St. Francis is both a dramatic character and a poet who is capable of using language and action in a dramatic manner to convey his personal vision of Christ and the Gospel message to others. Mulholland writes:

> As a poet, I am keenly interested in the way in which St. Francis perceived the world, how he expressed in word and deed his experience of that world, and how, with his poetical mind, he translated inter-active experience into the concrete and the visual. This has led me increasingly to look at St. Francis as a 'dramatist,' one who takes that abstract or conceptual and crafts from it a visible experience and expression in word and deed so that the abstract becomes enfleshed in the drama and the drama itself becomes that experience.[18]

This ability to teach through both word and image, to take the abstract or conceptual and craft from it a visible experience so that the abstract becomes enfleshed in the drama, is an important aspect of St. Francis. Any attempt to present him on stage must take into account this aspect of his nature. In an important sense, St. Francis is a poet and dramatist who "'acted' out the experience of his world, time and culture and the problems within it, with truthfulness and integrity." But, as Mulholland also notes:

> This does not mean that Francis was insincere—of course he was not—but he did have a powerful sense of imagination, or rather his intuitive imaginative response to thought, feeling and experience provided him with a "poietas," a method of crafting, of making visible in concrete actions what was originally unformulated abstractions. It is this true imagination which in a sense sets his dramatic expression of these experiences

> free from the confines of pure thought, or better still, which does not limit the experiences to speculative metaphysical reflections. In the case of Francis, Marx's dictum 'Do not contemplate the world; change it!' is most obviously true; for Francis not only changes his own world, the world of his imagination, action, reflections, and inner space but through his own changing, changes the world around him.[19]

This power of drama, the embracing of popular culture in a dramatic way, is what makes Francis appealing to those who encounter his story. By embracing popular culture and by changing himself and indirectly changing the popular culture, Francis is able to move those who encounter him to a higher conception of God and the way the divine informs everyday life.

This dramatic play allows Francis to project to others his sense of God in the world around him. Thus, he "preaches" to the birds, or he exchanges clothing with the beggar in Rome. His dramatic actions objectify his inner subjective sense of the divine, and others watching his performance are edified by his actions. In Celano's second biography of Francis, this sense of providing action by example is directly addressed. A Doctor of Theology, Celano tells us, visits Francis and asks Francis how he would respond to these words of Ezekiel: If you do not warn the wicked man about his wickedness, I will hold you responsible for his soul. The theologian asks Francis what he would do if he saw someone doing something immoral. If he did not correct the individual and chastise him, the theologian says, would Francis not be responsible for the person's soul? "If that passage is supposed to be understood in a universal sense," Francis replies, "then I understand it to mean that a servant of God should be burning with the life and holiness so brightly, that by the light of example and the tongue of his conduct, he will rebuke all the wicked. I say, the brightness of his life and the fragrance of his reputation will proclaim their wickedness to all of them."[20] In other words, Francis would show through his own conduct, his own imaging, what it means to be the servant of God and the person would be edified by that example.

For Francis, the "godly game" was *imitatio Christi*. He sought to play this game so well that Christ might be discovered in the playing, the Player indistinguishable from the game for those who viewed the action. But Francis's actions are not separate from him, Mulholland points out, "they are not what he *does* but rather they are what he *is*. In the imagination that brings a picture of him to our minds as we read his writing, poetry or stories concerning him, he is the sum total of his actions and words—the fiction becomes the fact and thus the imagination becomes the reality."[21]

Any dramatic production of the story of Francis must take into account his *imitatio Christi* through symbolic action, his belief that God can be made visible by the "actor" whose actions function as a channel through which God may appear. Francis was the master of the one-act play. Just as the actor on the stage must efface his self-identity to assume that of another, Francis constantly effaces his sense of self so that God may be made visible through

his action. He understands that the actor gives form and shape to an abstract idea through a concrete image turned into action so that the image makes the subjective experience an objective experience to an audience who then subjectively takes it in again. The abstract idea that Francis is concerned with is how do we live with God in our lives. How do we make manifest the sense of the divine in our daily life? What concrete image can we use to convey this abstract idea of God's grace and to remind us daily of God's presence in our lives? For Francis, we can only make way for God's presence and grace if we deny our sense of self and constantly turn our thoughts to God.

Exit Francis, Stage Left

Francis lets the symbolic act speak for itself. That is why, even though he was called a saint in his own day, he resisted the term because it focused attention on the human and not on God whom the human images. There is a famous passage in *The Assisi Compilation,* for example, where someone says of Francis: "This man is a saint." Francis replies, rather cryptically, "I am not sure that I won't have sons and daughters," and then goes on to say:

> As in a painting of the Lord and the Blessed Virgin on wood, it is God and the Blessed Virgin who are honored, and God and the Blessed Virgin are held in memory. The wood and the paint attribute nothing themselves because they are merely wood and paint. In the same way, a servant of God is a painting, that is, a creature of God, in whom God is honored because of His goodness. Like wood or paint, he must not attribute anything to himself, but give all honor and glory to God.[22]

Francis took literally the idea that we are made in the image of God. He tried to make himself transparent so God's gift of grace could be viewed through his actions. Francis attributed nothing to himself except shame and struggle. He was a conduit for God's grace, and his actions reflected honor and glory back to God, the source of goodness in the world. He understood that our sense of self, our center of pride and arrogance, must be emptied so God can enter us.

Gravity and Grace

For Francis, this ability to listen, to hear, God's message involves the necessity of silencing the noise of the self so that we can hear God speaking to us. Simone Weil accurately describes this tension between the flesh and the spirit that Francis enacts in his daily life in her book of meditations titled *Gravity and Grace*. She argues that there are two forces at work in the world: gravity and grace. "All the *natural* movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity." She writes. "Grace is the only exception." Gravity is what pulls the soul down and holds it to the earth. "Everything we

call base is a phenomenon due to gravity." Weil says. "Moreover the word baseness is an indication of this fact."[23] Gravity reflects what is base and low within us. Our souls are subject to this same gravitational pull. Only God's grace can create a sense of the transcendent in us. As Weil notes, "We possess nothing in the world—a mere chance can strip us of everything—except the power to say 'I.' That is what we have to give to God—in other words, to destroy. There is absolutely no other free act which it is given us to accomplish—only the destruction of the 'I.' "[24]

According to Weil, the destruction of the "I" and our power to say "I" can come about by two causes. First, some outside force, some catastrophe or an overwhelming set of depravations, can destroy our sense of self and rob us of our power to say "I." Weil writes:

> Nothing in the world can rob us of the power to say "I." Nothing except extreme affliction. Nothing is worse than extreme affliction which destroys the "I" from outside, because after that we can no longer destroy it ourselves. What happens to those whose "I" has been destroyed from the outside by affliction? It is not possible to imagine anything for them but annihilation according to the atheistic or materialistic conception.[25]

People who suffer the loss of self from the outside do not experience a lessening of ego. Their egoism is increased. As Weil notes, "Though they have lost their 'I,' it does not mean that they have no more egoism. Quite the reverse. To be sure, this may occasionally happen when a dog-like devotion is brought about, but at other times the being is reduced to naked, vegetative egoism. An egoism without an 'I.' "

But the "I" can also be destroyed from the inside by turning toward God. This destruction of the "I" from the inside creates a void through which God's grace can enter. Through God's grace the individual can experience divine love. There is a divine reciprocity at work in the destruction of the "I" from within. God withdraws in order that we might come into being, and we withdraw by destroying the "I" to make way for him. This "double operation," made possible only by God's grace, leads to humility on the part of the individual, not egoism.

St. Joan

This destruction of the "I" from within allows the individual to silence the noise of the self so that he can hear God speaking. In George Bernard Shaw's play *St. Joan*, for instance, we see an example of this kind of silencing. When the authorities of the Inquisition are interrogating Joan, she is asked about the divine voices she hears. The Inquisitors ask her why God speaks to her through these voices but does not speak to them. She replies that God speaks to all of us; she simply listens. Her destruction of the self and its noise allows her to hear what the rest of us miss.[26]

Two hundred years before the body of St. Joan was turned to ashes in the fires of the Inquisition, St. Francis of Assisi had also learned to silence the self by destroying it from within. He too had learned to listen to God's voice when that voice was silent to those around him by withdrawing himself so that God could be present in him, just as Simone Weil says God withdraws so that we can come into being. Dramatist and poet, Francis intuitively understood the nature of this divine reciprocity. He understood that the abstract concept of God's grace could be made visible in the dramatic act and in the tangible image. Life, for St. Francis, was a drama involving God and mankind, a play in which God, in the abstract and the conceptual, is made tangible, crafted and shaped from a visible experience and expressed in a word or deed so that "the abstract becomes enfleshed in the drama and the drama itself becomes the experience."[27]

When I attended the NEH seminar in the summer of 2003, I had no idea that it would have such a profound impact on my understanding of St. Francis. I came away from that seminar with a complex vision of St. Francis that I am now crafting and shaping into a play that can be subjectively experienced by our students. Following the lead of the medieval artists who painted saints in the local settings of Italian cities or the Italian countryside, I have decided to present the story of Francis in a modern setting because our world is no less complicated than the world Francis knew. I want our students to feel the presence of Francis in their world today because his story is timeless. The gap between the rich and the poor is as great as it ever was. The lepers still walk among us, although they are given different labels today. The voice of God still speaks to human hearts; through the example of Francis, we know we only have to observe and listen. The images that Francis used to teach us to observe and listen are as powerful today as they were in his own time. In fact, in our age of global warming, nuclear proliferation, religious hostility, and national arrogance, the message that Francis sought to convey through the image and the word has never been more urgently needed. As G. K. Chesterton has written:

> [Man] knows that there are in the soul tints more bewildering, more numberless, and more nameless than the colours of an autumn forest. . . .Yet he seriously believes that these things can every one of them, in all their tones and semitones, in all their blends and unions, be accurately represented by an arbitrary system of grunts and groans. He believes that an ordinary civilized stockbroker can really produce out of his own inside noises which denote all the mysteries of memory and all the agonies of desire.[28]

In many ways, St. Francis was an ordinary man, but the grunts and groans of his soul were not arbitrary. They arose out of his deep longing to experience transcendence in his daily life and to spread that experience to others. They denoted all the mysteries of memory and all the agonies of desire, but these memories and desire were, for Francis, radically focused on his dedication

to God and obedience to the will of God. This poor, relatively unlettered, little man from Assisi spoke his love for God and sought to dramatize that love for all mankind, common or uncommon, so that all could experience it. I am trying to capture in concrete modern images his acceptance of the divine reciprocity that animated his life and changed the world around him. That is the debt we owe to this master of the one-act play who lived his life completely and dramatically devoted to his God.

The Process of Writing: Imagining Francis

During the NEH seminar, we spent three weeks in Siena at the church of San Francesco, the site where Francis stayed when he came to the city. In the piazza, there was a statue of Savina Petrilli, the founder of the Sisters of the Poor. It depicted her holding a child in her arms, and under the image were the words "*Tutto per Amore*," "everything for love." I would sit in the piazza and contemplate this statue every day. It dawned on me that this was a perfect title for a play on Francis. I came home with a title but little real direction on how I would tell the story of Francis for our students.

As I began to work on the play, it quickly became apparent that I could not do justice to the richness of this saint's life unless I focused on some specific moment that resonated with the audience and was central to the spirituality of Francis. I chose to focus on the early life of St. Francis, specifically the renunciation scene with his father. My play begins with this scene and will end with it because this moment is pivotal in the life of the young Francis. It is the demarcation point that marks the final movement from the young playboy of Assisi to the servant of God. The audience is confronted with this renunciation out of context in the beginning of the play and then sees it in a context at the play's end. This approach gives me an opportunity to examine the relationship between Francis, his family and his friends. It also allows me to concentrate on Francis's emptying of himself so that God can enter and nurture his growing generosity and his love of all of God's creation. I believe this scene will resonate with students because they, too, are in the process of breaking away from family, whether slightly or dramatically, and choosing their own path in life.

I also wanted to emulate the medieval painters who tried to make the lives of saints relevant to audiences by putting them in contemporary settings. To do this, I created two characters of Francis in the play. One is a young Francis living in the modern world. He encounters the problems that a young person today would face. The problems are not that different from the medieval times. A young person wishing to live a life based on God's love today must still negotiate a world based on materialism, greed, and harsh judgments against those who are "different." Students may not identify with Francis kissing a leper and the treatment of lepers in the Middle Ages, but they can identify with an AIDS victim and the treatment of gays in the modern world. I want to highlight through the character of my modern Francis that, though

the situations change, the way one engages the world through love and compassion remains as problematical as it was in medieval times. To emphasize this connection between the past and the present, I also have a character representing St. Francis from the thirteenth century. He is dressed in the traditional robes of the saint, has the marks of Christ on his hands and feet, and offers commentary regarding the events occurring to the modern day Francis, connecting them to the historical Francis. Thus, there is a constant interplay, a dialogue, between the medieval world of the thirteenth century and our modern world in the play. The audience is reminded that, though technologies change, the issues regarding God's love and compassion, and how we manifest that love and compassion in our own lives, never change.

My play is not finished. I am more than half way in my journey, and I find myself constantly thinking about Francis and his wonderful generosity and humility. It is to keep him in my mind. I love living with the play because it forces me to think about Francis and about how he lived with God in his life. How do I make manifest the sense of the divine that animated Francis and gave meaning to his life? For Francis, we can only make way for God's presence and grace if we deny our sense of self and constantly turn our thoughts to God. That presence is manifested in the images of the world we encounter every day. We only have to be open to it. That is why I am writing this play. I want the audience to carry the images of Francis with them when they leave the theater so they can be contemplative players in the divine drama of their own lives.

Notes

1. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (New York: ARK Paperbacks, 1987).
2. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, p. 30.
3. William R. Cook, *Images of St Francis of Assisi in Painting, Stone and Glass from the Earliest Images to ca. 1320: A Catalogue,* Italian Medieval and Renaissance Studies 7, (Florence: Olschki, 1999).
4. Cook, *Images*, p. 20.
5. James Cowan, *St. Francis: A Saint's Way* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), pp. 48–49.
6. *The Major Legend of Saint Francis* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, *Vol. II, The Founder,* ed. Regis Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), Prologue, 3.
7. Cowan, *A Saint's Way*, pp. 42–43. Cowan refers to Giotto as the author of the Upper Basilica frescoes. That once common attribution to Giotto is now largely discarded by many scholars, particularly those outside of Italy.
8. Donald Spoto, *Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis of Assisi* (New York: Viking Compass, 2002), p. 120; Adrian House, *Francis of Assisi: A Revolutionary Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring, 2000), p. 111.
9. G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (New York: Doubleday, 1924) p. 86.

10. John V. Fleming, *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), p. 119.
11. Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis* in *Francis of Assisi,* 15.
12. Cowan, *A Saint's Way*, p. 42.
13. Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul,* 207.
14. Celano, *Remembrance*, 65.
15. William Fry, "Brother Francis: the Story of a Theatrical Production," *The Franciscan* 24 (1982): 78 [78–83].
16. David Jeffrey, "St. Francis and the Medieval Theatre." *Franciscan Studies* 43 (1983): 345 [321–46].
17. Jeffrey, "St. Francis and the Medieval Theatre," pp. 345–46.
18. Seamus Mulholland, "St. Francis as Dramatist and Poet" *The Cord* 38 (1988): 339 [339–43].
19. Mulholland, "Dramatist and Poet," p. 340.
20. Celano*, Remembrance*, 103.
21. Mulholland, "Dramatist and Poet," p. 342.
22. *The Assisi Compilation*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. II*, X.
23. Weil, *Gravity and Grace,* p. 1.
24. Weil, *Gravity and Grace,* p. 24.
25. Weil, *Gravity and Grace,* p. 23.
26. Weil, *Gravity and Grace,* p. 11.
27. Mulholland, "Dramatist and Poet," p. 339.
28. Chesterton, *St. Francis*, p. 21.

CHAPTER 11

ST. FRANCIS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

John Hart

Francis of Assisi is appreciated universally for his experiences in and engagement with pristine nature. Representations of St. Francis in art have been varied and abundant through the centuries. Paintings, sculptures, drawings, and even backyard bird fountains commemorate his life. Francis's celebration of creation and creatures is elaborated and extolled in books, essays, and film. His poem *Canticle of All Creatures* (*Canticle of Brother Sun*),[1] which he sang to a borrowed melody, is one of the earliest expressions of Italian literature. His love for nature is manifest in his interactions with birds in the air, worms on the earth, and fish in the water.[2]

It is important to remember that Francis's consciousness and life were not just about his exuberance in forest and field, mountain and meadow. His relationship with nature and human communities—including his compassion and care for the outcasts and the poor—was far more complex, and intertwined with his specifically Christian spirituality and perception that creation is revelatory of God. He believed that simplicity of life, compassion, and respect for God's creation are fundamental aspects of the Christian message. He contemplated creation, cared for creation, and communed with the Creator through creation. Although he came from an historical era and area substantially distinct from any twenty-first century social setting, Francis's insights are useful for promoting care for pristine nature and for all creatures, social compassion and commitment, consciousness that people are interrelated to and interdependent with other members of the biotic community (the community of all life), and a sense of divine immanence in, and yet transcendence from, creation.

The life and ideas of St. Francis have the potential to have a significant impact on the well-being of Earth and on living communities inhabiting Earth in the twenty-first century and beyond.[3] His sense of kinship with all creatures, simplicity of life, and solicitude for and solidarity with the poor

and other outcasts provide a model for regarding all humans as neighbors, and co-inhabitants of a shared Earth home that deserves care and conservation. Francis offers people today ideas and a vision complementary to and at times congruent with their own. His interaction with Earth's creatures within a common cosmic context is remarkably attuned to the best contemporary humanist environmental consciousness, and the best religious teaching on caring for creation. Secular and sacred viewpoints find common ground when they share a common respect for creatures and a profound sense of a powerful presence permeating nature—whether or not that presence is acknowledged to be divine.

Francis of Assisi was neither the first nor the last religious visionary to engage the sacred dimensions of reality in nature. Stories passed through the ages orally and in texts describe diverse people who experienced the Spirit and encountered the sacred in outdoor places. Some prophets received their call in a temple, but most extraordinary religious experiences occurred outside of buildings dedicated as sacred space. Moses converses with God by a burning bush (Exodus 3); Elijah speaks with God outside a cave on Mount Sinai (1 Kings 19); Ezekiel has visions by the River Chebar in Babylon (Ezekiel 1); Jesus encounters demonic spirits and angelic spirits when confronting and overcoming temptations in the wilderness (Matt. 4); Jesus is transfigured on an unnamed mountain (Mark 9); and Paul is converted from persecutor to promoter of Christianity after his experience of the divine on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Buddha receives enlightenment beneath a tree and Muhammad is instructed in a cave. In indigenous people's stories, traditions, and practices, just as in the narratives of the religions cited, the Spirit is encountered in pristine places through visions and voices. Spiritual consciousness emerges from and is enhanced by an unexpected awareness of and engagement with divine presence in pristine nature.

Il Poverello

During the lifetime of St. Francis, the pope was a powerful political leader with his own army; the Catholic Church owned, in one form or another, half of Europe; the payment of money was replacing a barter system as the primary form of exchange for goods and services; and, in part because of the latter, a middle class of merchants and artisans was emerging, and becoming financially independent of the landed aristocracy.

Francis was born in Assisi in 1182 to Pica and Pietro di Bernadone. Pietro, a cloth merchant, was one of the wealthiest men in Assisi. Pica was a loving mother who sometimes shielded her son from his father's wrath; little else is known about her. Since Pietro loved to travel to France to acquire bolts of the finest woven cloth, he insisted that his son be called "Francesco." Francis later accompanied his father on his commercial travels and sold cloth in his father's store. As he grew to adulthood, Francis had minimal formal education, probably less of one than his contemporaries in his social class because of

his youthful loose living and his brief foray into the life of a soldier. Although he was very popular among his peers as a fun-loving troubadour, he rejected the customary social manners of his friends, and renounced familial and financial security. He became known as *Il Poverello*, the "Little Poor Man" who lived a simple, celibate life. His mendicant lifestyle contrasted with the affluent lifestyle of his family and friends, and of the Catholic Church hierarchy of his era and continent. He taught that he and his followers should live simply and own no property, neither personal (not even religious books) nor communal (no land, not even for farming; no buildings, not even for housing). They were to be dependent on God and neighbor even for subsistence needs. Through manual labor and begging for alms they provided for their sustenance. The brothers were not allowed to accept money, but only to receive food and other essentials as compensation for their labor or as alms provided as a direct charitable contribution. They were to have a minimal impact on the physical world but a maximum impact on the material world and on cultural consciousness. They were to promote spiritual well-being and social compassion. Francis and his friars sought, by their teaching and way of life, to guide people to live simply (the poor already did this, involuntarily living at subsistence level or below), to reject acquisitiveness, and to have a sense of community.

Through his gentleness, humility, sincerity and persuasive words, Francis was able to convince church and secular leaders, and princes and peasants, to support his ideas and accept the commitments of his congregation of friars. His dedication to Christianity (and his willingness and, according to St. Bonaventure in *The Life of St. Francis*, his aspiration to be a Christian martyr), prompted him to journey through the desert at great risk, after the destruction of the fortress of Damietta in Egypt in 1219 during the Fifth Crusade, to try to convince the Muslim sultan Malik al-Kamil to become a Christian. He did not suffer martyrdom, and he was unable to convert the sultan. However, the latter honored him as a special guest for two months, and, probably as a result of their conversations during that time, proposed reasonable peace terms to the invading Christian crusaders (who rejected the sultan's overtures, and subsequently were repulsed militarily in their effort to wrest biblical lands from Muslim control).

Francis suffered from ill health and physical deprivation, and endured hostility from his opponents. Through all of this, he lived simply and continued to love all peoples, wild creatures, and pristine places, and had a special compassion for the downtrodden—the poor and the lepers who were a special focus of his ministry. By the time that he died in poverty on October 3, 1226, he had become respected as a great spiritual leader.

In the World and Of, Not of, the World

Francis sought in his life and teachings to replicate the life of Jesus, even while living in a time and place markedly distinct from the historical setting

of early Christianity in Roman Palestine in the first century. Jesus was born in an occupied land among an oppressed people in a remote part of the extensive Roman Empire. He was in the world as an ethnic and religious Jew at a particularly trying period in Jewish history. He did not, however, share the world view prevailing among his contemporaries, and in that sense was not "of the world" whose ideology he rejected. Jesus taught that his reign (or "kingdom") was "not of this world," that is, it did not conform to his culture's way of thinking, or to the social, political, and economic consciousness and structures that flowed from it.

While the Gospel of John records Jesus declaring that his reign is not a worldly one, in the Gospel of Luke Jesus states that his reign is "among" his followers. The juxtaposition of these and other biblical texts has led some Christian writers through the centuries to declare that the followers of Jesus must be "in the world but not of the world." Biblically, "world" can mean a place or a perception, a context or a consciousness. Thus, in the first gospel text mentioned, Jesus rejected the ideologies of his time—the ways of thinking contradictory to his message of compassion and love and justice—and rejected being limited to a particular place, as was advocated by those who thought his role was to fulfill the prevailing Jewish messianic political thought. The latter expressed a hope that a warrior king, in the spirit of David, would expel the occupying Romans and reestablish the kingdom of Israel as a nation in this world. Jesus, therefore, while living "in" the physical world, was not "of" the "world" that is a political ideology or a political entity.

Francis lived in the world. In his adult years, he was a child of the thirteenth century, with its historical people, events, and consciousness. He accepted and adapted to the perceived role—political and temporal, as well as spiritual—of the Catholic Church of the time. Francis was of the world: he shared the perspective of his time and place that the church and its leaders were to be served as religious guides and as God's representatives no matter what their personal shortcomings might be; and that the human was called to discipline strictly and even disparage the physical body and its present, corporeal, earthly setting, and develop a spiritual life that would enable the soul to enjoy future life in heaven.

Francis was not "of" the world, in the sense of "world" as ideology. In that regard, he rejected what Jesus rejected. Francis did not accept his era's money-oriented mentality, social stratification (including in the church), and struggles by individuals and social groups for political and religious dominance over one another (including instances of popes with armies defending or extending their sovereign territory). He was, however, "of" the world in his immersion in church religious teachings and practices.

People are all, to some extent, limited by, but not restricted to, the ideas and ideologies dominant or prevalent in their time and place. Francis was no exception. He was very obedient to church authorities, but convinced them to permit the founding of his "lesser brothers," the "Friars Minor," at a time when popes and other ecclesial or political leaders were suspicious of emerging

religious orders. He believed that only the priest brought God among humans, during the Mass, but yet saw signs of God in creation: he did not reconcile his fidelity to Catholic sacramental doctrine with his experience that creation was revelatory of the divine without priestly rituals. He sought to restore the church to God's ways, but believed that priests should be revered, because of their role at Mass, even when their personal conduct was reprehensible.

Francis lived in two cultural worlds: a tradition-breaking medieval social world in a state of political and economic upheaval; and a tradition-bound church spiritual world that simultaneously sought, with mixed results, to assert some authority over secular rulers and civil affairs. Like Jesus, Francis transcended his social world, not allowing himself to be bound by its ideological, political, or economic limitations. Jesus had conflicts with the pharisees and priests of his time, and even confronted directly the power of religious leaders in the Temple in Jerusalem in his conflict with the moneychangers and animal merchants. Francis, by contrast, to a great extent let himself be defined and confined, doctrinally and behaviorally, by Catholic religious leaders.

Francis, then, loved nature and the natural world, and loved creatures who lived according to their nature and who were integrated with nature. But he did not accept humans' place in nature as corporeal beings who are part of the natural world. Humans were to strive to subdue their bodies, as if people were called to be angels rather than created to be humans. Ironically, Francis thereby negated creation to some extent. His focus on the next life blinded him, preventing him from regarding humans as creatures who are inextricably integrated and interdependent with the rest of creation. Francis did not relate to humans as corporeal beings immersed in historical contexts, humans who had been called "very good" along with all other creatures in the first biblical creation story, humans who naturally live, reproduce, and provide for their subsistence through their work. He did affirm people's rights to sustenance in, and to charity from, civic communities. Francis related to people essentially as embodied spirits who were called to a heavenly afterlife, who on Earth as descendants of Adam and Eve were fallen beings who should reject the physical part of their humanness. Like his contemporaries in the church, Francis regarded life as a time of trial, testing, and sanctification, where the physical was subjected to what was understood to be a "higher" spiritual reality. There was no complementary affirmation of living a fully human life (physical as well as spiritual and social), no comparable teaching that sanctification might be given to people who live in a holistic way, including by engendering and lovingly raising children, and working responsibly to the best of their ability in their labors to earn their livelihood to support their family.

Francis, unlike Jesus, sought to suffer. He wanted to discipline his body's physical needs and wants. Like Jesus, Francis accepted unexpected pain or discomfort as an inevitable consequence of being human or of fulfilling what he understood to be his mission. Jesus spoke of voluntarily taking up one's cross, choosing to bear hardship or even death for the reign of God. One should not

seek deliberately to become ill, or to be executed as a martyr. Francis departed from Jesus's teaching when he sought martyrdom (if Bonaventure's assertion is accurate), when he sought to be humiliated, and when he whipped himself, or put on chains and a hair shirt. It should be remembered that when Francis did these things he was doing what people of his time thought were ascetic, self-disciplinary acts; he is, then, "of the world" in that regard, fulfilling the requirements or expectations of the limited and limiting church understandings of his time. This was an era when the story of Adam and Eve with their "fall" in a historical Garden of Eden was understood literally. Christians were to recognize this "original sin" and their own sins, all of which flowed from their corporeal humanity, and seek salvation from "this world" preoccupations. St. Francis, then, lived heroically—as few others did—the ideals of Christianity as he understood them in his time and place.

Community of Creatures in Creation

Francis of Assisi developed his spirituality in creation. Beyond church walls, he encountered the Creator in ways distinct from his experiences in formalized worship in constructed sacred space. The story of Francis's misinterpretation of the command he heard in an aural mystical experience is instructive here. As he knelt and prayed before an iconic crucifix in the ruins of the church in San Damiano, near Assisi, Francis heard a voice emanating from the crucifix. The voice instructed him, "Francis, rebuild my house." He understood that he was to repair the church building, and set about to reconstruct the ruined edifice within which he had been praying. Over time, he and others realized that his call was not to be a mason rebuilding structural venues, but a mystic who taught and lived spiritual values that could transform the Catholic Church. The biblical connotation of "church" is "community of believers"; the word does not describe a building or a structured institution. Francis and his followers realized that bricks and mortar are less important than a spiritual consciousness of creation and community that catalyze compassion for, and commitment to, the "least important": the peasant, the poor, and other subordinated biota, all of whom are "brother" or "sister." Francis came to realize that while some space might be set aside as sacred and exclude uses other than religious rituals, ultimately all space is sacred space because of the permeating presence of the Creator in creation. He taught his followers similarly to place community needs over concerns about property and buildings.

Stories of Francis's friendly engagements with living creation abound. Among them are narratives describing how Francis preached a "Sermon to the Birds" near Bevagna in 1213; converted the wolf of Gubbio from his predation; held comfortingly in his hands and then released a waterfowl and a fish while on the Lake of Rieti (or Piediluco) in separate incidents; and became friends with a falcon on Mt. LaVerna in 1224.[4] Crickets and crows, lambs, nightingales and turtle doves are among others of his creature friends. In 1225, he composed his *Canticle of All Creatures*, which celebrated abiotic

creation in words, and biotic creation in music. At the time of his death, it is said, a flock of skylarks, in fond farewell, soared above, sang near, and settled on the roof of the house where he died.

In the *Canticle of All Creatures* Francis expresses most beautifully his relationship with creation and with the Spirit encountered in and through creation. He developed these relationships continually in his daily life. They were reaffirmed through his encounters and associations with a variety of species and individuals in the biotic community, and his mystical appreciation of abiotic creation.

Canticle of All Creatures

Most High, all-powerful, and all-good Lord,
Praise, glory, honor,
and all blessing
are yours.
To you alone, Most High, they belong,
although no one is worthy
to say your name.
Praised be my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially my lord Brother Sun,
through whom you give us day and light.
Beautifully he shines with great splendor:
Most High, he bears your likeness.
Praised be my Lord, by Sister Moon and Stars:
in the heavens you made them bright
and precious and beautiful.
Praised be my Lord, by Brother Wind,
and air and cloud
and calm and all weather
through which you sustain
your creatures.
Praised be my Lord, by Sister Water,
who is so helpful and humble
and precious and pure.
Praised be my Lord, by Brother Fire,
through whom you brighten the night:
who is beautiful and playful
and sinuous and strong.
Praised be my Lord, by our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us and guides us,
and provides varied fruits
with colorful flowers and herbs.
Praised and blessed be you, my Lord,
and gratitude and service be given to you
with great humility.[5]

The *Canticle* expresses the hope and expectation that God will be praised "by," or "through," or "for" all creatures. The original *per* in the song can mean any or all of these. The present translation opts for "by" as the translation of *per*: God is praised *by* God's creatures. The choice of this key, meaning-laden word with potentially profound implications will be explained and elaborated below.

In the beginning of his *Canticle*, Francis declares that God, the "Lord," deserves worship from all creation, although no person is worthy even to say God's name. Then he asks that the Lord be praised with all creatures: respect is due to them, as they are in community with God. In the next several verses Francis alternates male and female, brother and sister, in his references to inanimate aspects of the created world, beginning with heavenly bodies and then going through the traditional four basic elements—air, water, fire, and earth. Brother Sun is praised with God, while the other creatures praise God: Sun is "lord" as well as brother, in the likeness of God (probably because of the solar titles given to God and to Jesus in earlier Christian centuries). Then Sister Moon and the stars praise God, as Francis proceeds from the brightest light to the more diminutive lights, which are bright and beautiful in the night sky. Elemental creatures then bridge the heavens and the earth. Brother Wind, the air that is his body, and the clouds and other weather creatures praise God. The mention of clouds and weather leads to Sister Water: she is the liquid form of the clouds, holds a humble position on Earth relative to the clouds above, and is useful, precious and pure. Brother Fire, the third basic element, is the last of the creatures bridging the heavens and the Earth, a light below to complement the heavenly lights above. He leads to Sister and Mother Earth, who complements Brother and Lord Sun. Earth is sister and mother: a fellow creature in the family of creation, on a horizontal plane; but a sovereign, parallel to the lordly sun, who governs her children and nurtures them as a loving mother on a vertical plane. The words of the *Canticle* declare, then, that from the mightiest creature above to the mightiest below, inanimate but familial creatures praise God and provide for humankind.

Francis's appreciation for inanimate or abiotic creation is not apparent in most of the biographies written about him, which focus on his appreciation for the biotic community, living creation. Ordinarily, he is on familiar and familial terms with living creatures, but not with their Earth habitat or the universe beyond. He preached a sermon to the skylarks, not to the sky or stones. People familiar with stories about his life and teachings might wonder why he does not mention birds, animals, and flowers in his *Canticle*.

People of Francis's own time would not have noted an absence of living creatures. They were familiar with the melody of his song. As folk singers before and since have done, Francis took a popular song and substituted his words for those of the original songwriter while retaining the existing melody. He sang his poem to the melody of a song that praised the beauty of fields and flowers and other living creatures. He added words about inanimate creation to the melody to make the song complete. The *Canticle*'s

words and melody interacted in a harmony that expressed consciousness of the interrelationship of all of nature, and the realization that all of nature praised God. Francis, then, did include both nonliving and living creatures. The *Canticle* powerfully evoked a spirituality of creation, an integrated, harmonious relationship of creatures and Creator.

The *Canticle* reflects two poems in the Hebrew Scriptures with which Francis would have been very familiar: Psalm 148 and Daniel 3.59–82. In Psalm 148, all of creation is called to bless the Lord who brought it into being. In addition to angels and people, a succession of creatures that represent the totality of creation (and recall the six creation days of Genesis 1) is summoned to worship: sun, moon and stars; waters above and below; lightning, hail, snow, clouds, and storm winds; mountains and hills; fruit trees and cedars; wild and tame animals, sea monsters, creatures that fly or crawl. In Francis's breviary, Psalm 148 was part of Lauds, prayed each day at dawn, so its sentiments would have been well ingrained in him as part of his life of prayer.[6] The psalm is unusual for its lack of a distinction between the capability of animate or inanimate, rational or non-rational creatures to praise the Lord.

Similarly, the song of the three young men in the fiery furnace, as described in Daniel 3.59–82, calls all of creation to praise God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego call upon all of the Lord's works to bless, praise and exalt the Lord. They cite individual parts of creation, adding, to rational angels and people, non-rational and inanimate beings: the heavens, including the sun, moon and stars; waters above and below, including showers and dew, rain, ice, snow, clouds, springs, seas and rivers; lightning; nights and days, light and darkness; earth; mountains and hills; dolphins and all water creatures; all birds of the air; and all wild and tame animals. The young men's song expressed in the verses in Daniel was also very familiar to Francis: on Sundays and holydays it was added to Psalm 148 at Lauds.[7]

When the *Canticle of All Creatures* is compared to the verses in Psalm 148 and Daniel, it is evident that Francis drew upon these earlier sources. They linked his nature mysticism to his Christian biblical tradition, and he expressed in song in his own language his appreciation for the wonders of the Spirit in creation. In Psalm 148, all creatures are exhorted to praise God. In the canticle, Francis sings that all creatures do praise God. The psalmist's exhortation is complemented by the song's affirmation. The creatures might be seen, when both works are linked, to be responding to the exhortation, or, that they have already been praising God, so that no exhortation is necessary. While the psalmist exhorts or commands, Francis with his mystical sight perceives that the command is actually unnecessary; God is being praised by all creatures, each in their own way.

In Daniel and Psalm 148, there seems to be an underlying assumption that all creatures might render praise to their Creator, although theologically they are regarded as lacking in intelligence and awareness of God. Ordinarily Francis was, theologically and ecclesially, very much in accord

with the doctrines and hierarchical structures of his time and place. In this creative, mystical moment, however, he seems to be moved less by his intellect and his filial deference to Church authority, and more by his spirit, by the creating Spirit whose solicitous presence he encountered in creation, and by his dialogical experiences with creatures, both animate and inanimate.

The *Canticle*, then, reveals how Francis had come to appreciate more and more the wonders of creation, and experienced in a profound way the presence of the Creator-Spirit in the works of creation. His *Canticle* is his most beautiful expression of that experience. It would not have been composed, however, had the biblical poetry of Francis's prayers not been complemented by his extraordinary experiences in nature.

God Is Praised by (*per*) Creatures

All three poems—the biblical two and the *Canticle*—imply that all of creation is able, in some way, to praise God. Some might question, Can that be true? Is not the human being the only rational part of the cosmos, and therefore the only creature capable of praising God? At issue here is whether or not *per* in the *Canticle* might be translated "by," given ordinary Christian theological sensibilities and sensitivity, and, moreover, whether or not when God is praised *by* creatures the creatures do so consciously or unconsciously, as volitional beings or solely as impassive objects whose diversity, complexity, and integrality reveal the wondrous imagination and creativity of divine Being.[8]

Several scholars, represented by Roger Sorrell, believe that "for" is the most accurate translation, with "humanity" being the unspoken subject of the action of praise. That is, people praise God in thanksgiving for all of the wonders of God's creation. In offering this praise they might become more respectful of the work of God and grateful for God's gifts to them: "For it is not primarily creation that would be exhorted to praise God, but people, because of their offensive ingratitude to God. Thus the '*per*' would be interpreted as 'Be praised, my Lord, (by humankind) for (because of) Sister Moon and the stars.' "[9]

Sorrell believes that this interpretation would stimulate respect for creation—certainly an objective of Francis—more than would a poem by Francis merely paralleling the biblical passages. This is not necessarily the case, for if people are led to see that creatures other than humans are capable of rendering praise to God, their respect for those creatures should be enhanced; if Francis meant "by" he would reinforce, in the emerging Italian language of his time, a biblical theme.

The *per* as "by" translation and interpretation of Francis, as used above, responds to Sorrell's concerns about the poem both promoting respect for all creatures and acknowledging their usefulness to people. These inanimate creatures first praise God, and then their utility is noted. Since these creatures praise God, they are worthy of respect; and since they are described as useful to humanity, then their utility is indicated very directly.

Alessandro Vettori has weighed in on the discussion. In *Poets of Divine Love*,[10] he observes that the Canticle "does not pantheistically deify nature"[11] (see below for a distinction between "pantheism"and "pan*en*theism"). While Vettori does not agree that *per* means "by," he does acknowledge, in his historical-literary analysis:

> Since 'per' follows a passive diathesis, in Francis's archaic usage it may correspond to the modern Italian "da," "by," thereby making the creatures evolved into the bearers of God's praise, as in "May the Lord be praised by.…"[12]

Vettori observes, too, that Luigi Foscolo Benedetto in *Il Cantico di frate sole* "maintains that the preposition means 'by.'"[13]

Others would translate *per* as "through": God is praised through gratitude given to God because of God's creation, or God is praised through God's creatures. Arnaldo Fortini states that Francis came to an appreciation of the praise offered to God by other creatures: "It is not only the human being alone who sings praises to God, he had come to realize. His is but one song in a chorus of all creatures. God is best praised when all the songs are joined and all creation sings in brotherhood."[14] Fortini adds later in a footnote that "Thomas of Celano, in his references to the *Canticle*, seems to use the interpretation 'by,' with his comparisons of the canticle sung by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3.52–90)."[15] Since Celano was a Franciscan who had met Francis and wrote *Vita Prima*, the first biography of Francis, at the request of Pope Gregory IX just two years after Francis died, his interpretation of Francis's intention might be viewed as having substantial credibility.

It might be asked here what understanding of the rationality and intentionality of creatures Francis might have meant to convey. He wrote from within his thirteenth-century social and ecclesial historical setting with its prevailing consciousness, but had culture-countering mystical experiences of the Spirit in creation, and also developed a sense of kinship with all creatures. *Per* as "by," as an expression of the relationship of creatures to Creator, would be incompatible, in its literal rendering, with traditional Christian theology. *Per* as "for" apparently would be reading too much into the text, by projecting into it humankind, not directly mentioned by Francis, as the subject doing the praising; this would seem to negate Francis's familial terms for the elements of creation. Consequently, *per* as "through" would be the most appropriate translation for some scholars. But further reflection might stimulate questions about why Francis would establish in the verses a family of creatures on the one hand, and then reject that family affirmation in favor of a human-headed hierarchy on the other. It would contradict, as well, the understandings expressed by the biblical poems upon which the *Canticle's* written expression was based.

God might be praised by creation in different ways. One is in a very literal sense: creatures consciously praise their Creator. Or, God might be praised by creatures when they live according to the form of existence that God has devised for them—skylarks as skylarks, skunks as skunks, salmon as salmon—all fulfilling their natural function in the cosmos, according to the roles God had assigned to them, and according to the natural laws of God's creation expressed through them. Or, "by" means God receives from creatures a reflected praise: God's wondrous works unconsciously praise the glory of God. In all of this one might wonder how Francis perceived creatures, other than humans, to be in relation to their Creator. Is the family of creation one in which all God's children (all creatures) consciously relate to the Spirit who brought them into being, a relationship in a different reality or different dimensions of reality than the one in which they relate to each other? This would affirm that in the family of creation humans are not the only creatures capable of consciously being in relationship with the Spirit. Francis, who preached to birds and called inanimate parts of creation "brother" and "sister," might not only have experienced familial kinship, but also sensed a spirit or the Spirit in those creatures.

For Francis of Assisi, then, God's presence permeates creation and can be encountered in unique ways in creation; people should respect all creatures, which have an inherent dignity before the Creator; people should live in harmony with creation; people should respect Mother Earth, who provides for human needs; and people should justly distribute Earth's natural goods, in order to meet the needs of all.

Francis as a Traditional Thirteenth-Century Catholic

Although Francis was innovative in his historical place and moment with respect to his consciousness of kinship in creation, he was a product of his time and culture in other ways. He prayed to God, and to Jesus, Mary, and Christian saints, and believed that only Christians would enter heaven. He believed that the supernatural life took precedence over natural life, and urged people to be mindful of life after death. He saw a hierarchy in nature and shared in the anthropocentric tendency common in Christianity (which expresses the belief that creation is ordered to the service of humankind), although he required respect for all creation. He did not teach people to have regard for creation because of their self-interest, because they needed Earth and Earth's goods and creatures to provide for human needs. Rather, he taught that while creation and creatures were intended to assist humans, they were to be viewed as worthy of familial affection in their own right. Francis expressed his spirituality in unique terms for his era and area, but in his Catholic religion he was still conditioned by his culture.

Francis acknowledged the goodness and value of all creatures. He transcended the anthropocentrism of his time when he called animate and inanimate beings "brother" and "sister": there is no rivalry among these siblings,

but interdependence, and a familial relationship. It might be said that creatures are not to be regarded solely as having *instrumental* value, i.e., having worth solely on a *spiritual* level as the bearers and revealers of divine Being, or on a *material* level as the providers of some benefit for humankind; rather, for Francis creatures have *intrinsic* value, an inherent worth based on their status as God's creations, a value and a status which they share with humankind, their relatives.

After dedicating himself to God, Francis began to see the "footprints" of the Spirit in creation. His understanding about the presence of the Creator in creation would be viewed today as pan*en*theistic. This is not to be confused with "pantheistic." While pantheism sees a unity of Earth and God (God is in and part of Earth as its spiritual essence—however understood—or guiding power), panentheism understands Earth to be permeated by the immanent presence of a transcendent God, who is distinct from creation (Earth is in and reveals the transcendent-immanent God). A panentheistic perspective provokes inquiry into, and provides insights about, the Creator's loving engagement with creatures.

Compassion for the Poor

Poverty might be voluntary (chosen by the poor person) or involuntary (imposed on the poor person through social, political, and economic structures, and maintained through unjust laws regarding wages, benefits, etc.). Francis lived in *voluntary* poverty inspired by his religious understandings, and he identified with and had compassion for those who lived in involuntary poverty imposed by their social standing and the prevailing political and economic consciousness and social conditions that were its foundation. Thomas of Celano writes in his *Vita Prima* of St. Francis: "While staying in the world and following its ways, he was also a helper of the poor. He extended a hand of mercy to those who had nothing and he poured out compassion for the afflicted."[16] Among other actions, Francis shared his meager supply of food with people poorer than he was. He overcame his fear that leprosy would kill or disfigure him, and embraced and ministered to lepers who were commonly separated from their families and from all human companionship other than their own afflicted fellow sufferers.

Leonardo Boff writes that Francis "was especially gentle with the poor and the poorest of the poor, the lepers. The biographers are unanimous in stating that Francis's first conversion was toward the poor and crucified, and from them toward the poor and crucified Christ."[17] Boff notes further that while people are well aware of the mystical nature of Francis, they often overlook his concrete compassion for the poor. Therefore, Boff reminds Francis's admirers that Francis lived an integrated spiritual life. He sought not only transcendence, a striving beyond the material world toward divine being, but also trans*des*cendence, an experience of suffering with the downtrodden

in this world. Boff asserts that those who want to live in the spirit of Francis should seek both:

> Through transdescendence, the individual is open to what is below, thrust toward the shadow of the stigmatized poverty of the bodies of the exploited and leprous. Accepting them with gentleness and tenderness, they are integrated through human sharing, especially by the most intimate sharing, which is the compassionate heart. . . .Whoever makes her own the totality of this experience of transcendence and transdescendence, like Francis, will be able, from the depths of her heart, to sing the hymn to all creatures.[18]

Francis called the religious order he established the Friars Minor or Lesser Brothers. In an era when the merchant and skilled labor classes were rising in power, and the nobility was trying to retain its power over them, Francis rejected the competition of egos and for wealth by affirming those who had neither, and establishing his order among them. They were to be a contrast to the social currents of the time: they could not own property (personally, or even in land or buildings as a religious community); they must dress in the clothes of the poor; they could accept no money for their work, and must beg for their food when necessary; and they should aid the leper outcasts of their region. They were to be among the "least brethren" described by Jesus in the Last Judgment story in Matthew's gospel.

St. Francis wanted the Lesser Brothers to be models of community living: as brothers concerned about each other, and as men who shared human common goods from the Earth commons while living a simple, subsistence-level life. They lived on God's power, not their own power. Their lives stood in stark contrast to the acquisitive efforts of the rising merchant and artisan classes and the (hoarding) practices of the existing noble class. Their lives demonstrated that the needs of all might be met if the wants of some were constrained. At times, the begging brothers were in competition with other poor people or social outcasts. Some of the latter were disabled and made their living by begging; others feigned disability to acquire alms. It became evident, through the friars' example, that if the nobility and the merchant class would even minimally share their goods, and pay just wages to those they employed (even while not being obliged to "sell all they had to give to the poor," as per the invitation Jesus extended to the rich young man in gospel narratives), then poverty-driven begging and poverty-afflicted disabilities would be diminished or eliminated.

Spirituality and Solidarity in the Twenty-first Century

Although most people who admire Francis of Assisi today have in mind a friar friend of feathered creatures who loved all nature, this spiritual and social troubadour was a much more complex person. It is true that those

within the Christian tradition have much to learn from him about relationships with nonhuman creation. But those same Christians should also be at least intrigued by his ideas on living simply and compassionately, and consider how they, too, might seek to integrate his perspective in their own lives. In past and present eras, Christians have debated the meaning of *imitatio Christi* ("imitation of Christ"): how literal should this be? To what extent should Christians "imitate" Christ in their lives, perhaps particularly if they are members of the laity who have to worry about supporting a family, providing food for the table, paying the rent, and so forth? In the current historical era, when care for creation and compassion for downtrodden members of human communities are increasingly needed, a literal *imitatio Francisci* should not be a goal for Christians and other admirers of Francis. *Il Poverello* was in many ways a product of the theological, spiritual, and ecclesial consciousness and practices of his time. But just as Francis sought to be the best he could be insofar as he understood what that was, his twenty-first century admirers might explore his life and teachings to see how they might be faithful to who they are and to what they are called to do in their own historical moment. They would be concerned then about both care for creation—their home, habitat, and environment—and compassion for their poor and outcast sisters and brothers.

Significant themes in the life and teachings of Francis include *spirituality* (an appreciation for and engagement with the sacral dimension of reality); *simplicity* (a focus on distributing Earth's goods equitably, to meet individual, communal, and ecological needs, rather than continually enabling acquisition and consumption of goods to satisfy excessive wants); and *sociality* (a sense of human community, biotic community, and cosmic community; compassion for all peoples, but especially expressed as solidarity with the poor and other social outcasts; and familial regard for non-human creatures, who are relatives because of their common origins in cosmic stardust, and their commonly shared DNA).

The extremes of Francis's lifestyle need not—should not—be replicated today. But their revision and adaptation to twenty-first century cultural contexts would counteract consumerism, classism, ethnocentrism, racism, and nationalism, none of which should limit or define humanity. In an age of overconsumption of scarce Earth resources, of forced extinction of species of wildlife, of disparagement of the poor, of dominance of humans over other members of the biotic community, and of pollution of Earth's air, land and water, Francis of Assisi models alternative modes of consciousness and conduct. Leonardo Boff declared that "[Francis] is the purest figure. . .of Western history, of the dreams, the utopias, and of the way of relating panfraternally that we are all searching for today. He speaks to the most archaic depths of the modern soul, because there is a Francis of Assisi hidden within each one of us, struggling to emerge. . . ."[19]

People in the twenty-first century could put into practice the care for creation, the compassion toward the "least of the brethren," and the community

consciousness that mark the path of Francis in several ways. They would enable the Francis within them to emerge, and to prompt them to act, if they were to consider

- With Francis who embraced and cleansed the wounds of lepers: Why, in the richest nation on Earth, is there not universal health care, so that the wounds of the poor might be cleansed, and the health needs of people of all colors and of every economic status might be met?
- With Francis who preached to the birds: Why are eagles, bears, and salmon endangered with extinction, whose likelihood increases when habitats in trees and streams are destroyed as forests are clear-cut and disappear?
- With Francis who celebrated Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and Sister Mother Earth as family members in creation: Why are the skies filled with smokestack emissions that hide sunsets and starlight, and return to harm Earth as acid rain? Why are rivers polluted with drainpipe effluents that poison once-living water? Why is the soil contaminated with chemicals that harm food for humans and all life?
- With Francis who fed the hungry: Why is anyone hungry or starving when Earth has sufficient food to provide for all? Why do obesity and malnutrition jointly afflict populations within the same geographic area? Why are food supplies contaminated? Why have organic foods not been grown and distributed in greater quantity to safeguard human health?
- With Francis who lived simply: Why are renewable and nonrenewable Earth goods (grown in Earth's soil, or mined or pumped from beneath Earth's surface) and manufactured goods (which are produced from human-altered Earth goods), not being used more responsibly and equitably, so that all people might meet the needs of themselves and their families?
- With Francis the peacemaker who tried to mediate between Christian factions in Siena, and between Christian leaders of the Fifth Crusade and the Muslim Sultan Malik al-Kamil: Why do wars still shatter people's lives and dreams? For whose benefit are they waged? Who profits from them, and who most feels their pain? Why do citizens allow torture by their nation's military? Why do people call civilians of foreign nations "collateral damage" when they are killed?

When they try to live in the spirit of St. Francis, contemporary people seek ways to live more in harmony with each other, with all life, and with Earth, and to share the common goods of Earth. They strive to transform their political, economic, and religious structures and institutions to provide for the needs of the "least brethren" in human communities. They are mindful of their intergenerational responsibility to ensure that the water, soil, energy sources, and minerals that their offspring will need in the

future will be available. They replicate in their individual and community lives, as well as in their relationships with other creatures, the harmony between living creatures and the Earth commons that Francis celebrated in his *Canticle*.

To live in the spirit of St. Francis in the twenty-first century is to remember that the present is the mother of the future, and that the future is the mother of the present. What people do today will give birth to the future in which their descendants will live. What people envision for their descendants will give birth to their actions today. As people transcend their social setting, reflect on it, and become immersed in it again, aided by global communications networks, data bases, and international news programs, all of which were unavailable to Francis in his time and place, they will be enabled to embody and to enhance the spirit and core values of St. Francis. They will be able to envision a more just world while they acknowledge and seek to satisfy their complementary corporeal and spiritual needs. They would not have an unreflective cultural consciousness, which would be "of the world." Rather, they would envision, and act to realize, new economic, political, and religious structures and institutions that would recognize and respect all peoples and all creation as an integral being comprised of members of an integrated, interrelated, and interdependent cosmic community. Then will the spirit of St. Francis be embodied in the twenty-first century. . .and beyond.

Notes

1. The title *Canticle of All Creatures* is distinct from other titles used for Francis's song because the canticle is about more than *Brother Sun*; because *Canticle of* the *Creatures* might be interpreted as referring only to the inanimate/abiotic creatures mentioned in Francis's words for the song; and because, in a representative way, as will be indicated later, all creatures are present when one considers the biota that were mentioned in the original song whose melody Francis adopted.
2. This chapter is adapted, in part, from John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*, with a Foreword by Leonardo Boff, and an Afterword by Thomas Berry (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 5–6, 23–40. Earlier forms were presented at "Spirituality and Sustainability," Assisi, Italy (respondent: Thomas Berry), 1996; and at "St. Francis and the Traditions of Spirituality: Multidisciplinary Approaches," University of North Carolina, Asheville, 2005.
3. Earth the planet is capitalized to distinguish it from earth as soil, and to promote respect for the common home of the biotic community.
4. See the discussion of Rieti in Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 95; and Piediluco in Arnaldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, trans. Helen Moak (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 534.

5. Translated by this writer, from the Italian text of Ms. 338 in the Assisi library, as cited in Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, pp. 566–67. The present translation has taken into consideration the analyses of Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, pp. 567–68; Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature,* p. 101; Eloi Leclerc, O.F.M., *The Canticle of Creatures—Symbols of Union: An Analysis of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), p. xvii; and Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., and Ignatius C. Brady, O.F.M., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), pp. 38–39. The Italian *per* is translated "by." See later discussion regarding *per.*
6. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature,* p. 99.
7. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature,* p. 99.
8. Fortini and Leclerc use "through," from Fahy's English translation (*Omnibus*, pp. 130–31); Armstrong and Brady use "through"; and Sorrell, "for." Fortini, however, acknowledges in a footnote that Francis's first biographer, Thomas of Celano, understood Francis to mean "by" (568). Each of us tries to be faithful to Francis as we see him in his context and view him from our own.
9. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, p. 121. Sorrell goes on to state that Francis's indication of the utility of sun, water and earth to humanity justifies the worth and value of creation, in opposition to people who do not appreciate that creation is a blessing from God.
10. Alessandro Vettori, *Poets of Divine Love: Franciscan Mystical Poetry of the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).
11. Vettori, *Poets of Divine* Love, p. 91. Vettori goes on to note that "nature is the means through which divinity manifests itself," and nature is also the "instrument" used by God to make God's presence "felt and known." He states further that Francis strives "to see the invisible God behind the visible signs of the natural world." Along these lines, "Francis's achieved purity allows him to go a step further and elevate nature to the status of divine sacrament" (p. 92). I would add that Francis can both regard creatures as natural sacraments, and see them as having intrinsic worth in their own right. . .and even, in some way, being able to praise God. Vettori adds later that "Nature as the mediating structure between human beings and God acquires the privileged status of sacrament, being the tangible sign of divine presence in the cosmos" (p. 101). For a deeper analysis of concepts of "sacramental universe" and "sacramental commons," see my *Sacramental Commons*, especially chapters 1 and 4.
12. Vettori, *Poets of Divine Love*, p. 101.
13. Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, *Il Cantico dif rate sole* (Florence: Sansoni, 1941), p. 35; cited in Vettori, *Poets of Divine Love*, p. 109, n. 48. Vettori reaffirms Benedetto's analysis (p. 111, n. 49), but then claims that Benedetto later "*seems* to recant his initial opinion" (emphasis added). Vettori's reluctance reveals his more traditional interpretation of Catholic theology.
14. Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, p. 566.
15. Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, p. 568.

16. Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents,* 3 vols.*, Vol. I: The Saint*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), 17.
17. Leonardo Boff, *Saint Francis: A Model for Human Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 23.
18. Boff, *Saint Francis*, pp. 24–25.
19. Boff, *Saint Francis*, p. 18.

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CHAPTER 12

CANTICLE OF MEMORY: POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND FRANCIS OF ASSISI

John K. Downey

There is a story about Francis and a theologian. One day a very learned Dominican theologian was visiting, and he asked Francis to explicate a troubling passage in Ezekiel: If you do not warn the wicked man about his wickedness, I will hold you responsible for his soul" (Eze. 3.18–20). The theologian is worried that since he doesn't always scold the wicked, he may be responsible for their souls. Francis advises that the "brightness" of our own lives "will proclaim their wickedness to all of them." His interpretation prompts the visiting scholar to say: "My brothers, the theology of this man, held aloft by purity and contemplation, is a soaring eagle, while our learning crawls on its belly on the ground."[1] But Francis was no theologian: he does not respond with theological discourse but exhorts his hearers to live a certain way, to transform their lives. The Dominican's praise affirms that the practice of Christian spirituality trumps scholastic achievement. In the light of this story, it may seem rather risky for me to offer a theological remembrance of Brother Francis.

While the exact role of the intellectual life isn't completely clear in the earliest Franciscan texts, it can be said that Francis asserts in various ways that his little band is not about books and learning. The oldest texts are in Celano's *Second Life of Francis* (1247) where we learn he was not educated in scholarly disciplines, and he "considered a true philosopher the person who never set anything ahead of the desire for eternal life." Celano even has Francis worried that books will be the ruin of his Little Brothers.[2] On the other hand, Francis honors theologians in his *Testament* and earlier allowed Brother Anthony of Padua to continue his theological career as long as he put the "Spirit of prayer and devotion" first.[3] In his *Legenda maior* (1266), Bonaventure, himself a powerful theologian and mystic, slightly rewrites

Celano to contextualize this worry as a reminder that prayer and religious wisdom should direct all human enterprises.[4]

Some worry over a tension between religious experience and academic method, between a spirituality that orients a life and its appropriation in an intellectual pattern of experience. Francis had a right to be worried that the possession of books and knowledge could confuse the compass of his friars. But Christian tradition has consistently maintained the complementarity of these two strands. For example, the zealous monk, reformer, and preacher Bernard of Clairvaux lost in his attempt to quash the rise of dialectic in medieval theology. A prayerful wisdom was joined with intellectual questioning in schoolmen such as Aquinas and Bonaventure. It is possible to argue that an academic theology that does not imply concrete Christian discipleship is invalid, and a spirituality which does not imply a good theology is empty.[5]

Though the world of theology was not the path of Francis, a theology may converse with Francis. That discipline seeks to think about religious experience and place it in a wider intellectual dialogue. The contemporary theological enterprise is a critical intellectual correlation of religious traditions, images, concepts and common human experience. It turns on a moral commitment both to the community of academic inquirers and the community of believers.[6] It engages threads of culture and tradition at the academic rather than the pastoral level, and it is a risky business. The critical theologian must wonder whether a contemporary intellectual grid would be so universal and rationalist that it drops out the practical spirituality of Francis of Assisi. Intellectual schemata bring their own biases, so care must be taken in choosing a dialogue partner. A contemporary theological articulation of Francis's spiritual impulse would be another way we can imagine Francis today.

Mystical and Political

I want to suggest that the new political theology of Johann Baptist Metz provides an intellectual idiom friendly to Francis.[7] Political theology rethinks theological method in a way that does not violate the spiritual sense of Francis. It is a commitment to a new pattern for relating society and religion, one sharpened by seeing the suffering of others. Francis would approve of this commitment as just the sort of public mysticism he championed. Political theology arises from a dialogue with contemporary philosophy and culture and so can't really claim to be derived from Francis of Assisi. Later on I will take up some profound differences in their agendas. But at several points the projects of Francis and Metz work together, throwing light on each other from their own perspectives. In the end they each want Christians to reorient their lives, and they find a common cause in attention to the suffering of others. I want to organize some of their common challenges around the notion of an imperative to remember who we are. But before moving to these specifics, however, I'd like to note the common concern with conversion their approaches share. Both Metz and Francis want to engage

social and cultural amnesia: they find society is disoriented when it does not remember the humanity of others. They call on Christians—and indirectly all human beings—to redirect their lives. They both anchor this call for conversion in the experience of human poverty and in a universal responsibility before God. Both want a conversion that is social and practical. Neither is comforting.

Francis isn't just a garden gnome for the pious. He's disturbing: he challenges the way things are as disoriented and lives his life differently. He doesn't accept the status society gives him but begs, wears rags, and hugs lepers. He does not participate in the culture of money and forbids the brothers from even touching it; he doesn't want a house but would rather be a pilgrim. He's not satisfied with what's normal. For Francis, centering on God and the Gospel generates resistance to the mainstream, a resistance without scolding. For example, in his exegesis of the passage from Ezekiel already mentioned, Francis calls for people to live a better life themselves rather than point a finger at others. The call to do penance is the heart of Francis's mission. In the very first line of his *Testament* he says "The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way." But penance means conversion, "a wholly new way of seeing reality—a new way of seeing himself, others, the world, and God himself" that had entailed new values and behaviors.[8] This sentence from the Testament goes on to spell out the connection between penance and the suffering of others in a concrete action: "For when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers.. . .And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned to sweetness of soul and body." Doing penance has a practical intent; conversion means doing something, changing the way one lives one's life because that life is reordered.[9]

For Francis, Christians are called to live against the grain of society: they should live lives of dependence, not stability, lives of response, not control. In the contemporary context Metz puts it this way: the shortest definition of religion is interruption.[10] Christian faith calls for disruption of controlled middle-class futures. This *metanoia*, this conversion, this change of heart opens a new future. The Christians' word for this is discipleship. Like Francis, Metz wants to tell Christians that they are not living their conversion, that the change of heart is not taking place, but rather is being covered over by mere belief in a change of heart:

> Are we disciples or do we just believe in discipleship, and under the cloak of belief in discipleship, continue in our old ways, the same old ways? Do we love or do we believe in love, and under the cloak of belief in love, remain the same egoists and conformists? Do we share in the suffering of others, or do we just believe in sharing them and remain, under the cloak of a belief in sympathy, as apathetic as ever?[11]

A change of heart entails a new way of acting and that new way will rebuild Francis's crumbling church.

Religious conversion and penance are antidotes to cultural amnesia. For Metz, they call for a life centered on the value human beings and the future of justice, peace, and reconciliation to which they are called by God's promises. Christianity must not become an endorsement for the future which believers themselves control and make for themselves; Christians must not forget the future to which they are called by God's promises. The messianic future of the Christian faith, the future of human solidarity, connection, justice, and compassion, disrupts and transforms that future. That promised future will be one, as Jesus says, where the first shall be last and the last shall be first, where those who possess their lives will lose them, and those who despise them will win them. A political theology wants to remind society "about the responsibility of one for the other prior to any relationship of exchange or competition. . . .And it does this not for the sake of theology, but for the sake of humanity itself."[12] To remember who one is in this web of relations, hopes, and responsibilities is to be called to a life and to a theology that is mystical and political.

For Metz, Christian theology must be anchored in religious experience and lived out in concrete social structures. Using the word *God*, one must remember the future and the suffering of others, which compel a different vision of the world. And this memory provides part of the intellectual, the reasonable, grounds for theology. It is not enough for reason to focus on data, logic, or analysis: reason must also be normed by attention to the human good, to the value of others. Academic theology, not just its ethical-pastoral application, demands an anamnestic reason that draws human beings into compassion.[13] The spirituality of Francis is likewise grounded in a call to concrete action and relationship. His poverty brings the suffering of really poor into view and sparks compassion. It preaches that God is a god who calls humankind to respond to his love by responding to others. Francis offers a God-consciousness that calls people to act because they are valued and because they are connected to the rest of the universe. Such memories can be dangerous because they may impel believers toward conversion and resistance, to penance. "There are dangerous memories, memories that make demands on us. There are memories in which earlier experiences break through to the center point of our lives and reveal new and dangerous insights for the present. They are memories we have to take into account; memories, as it were, with future content."[14] Both Francis of Assisi and Johann Baptist Metz want human beings to remember who they are in the cosmos and to act accordingly. Their projects are, to use the jargon of Metz, mystical and political. They both, *mutatis mutandis*, interlock and champion the experience of God and a responsibility to the concrete social setting. While one is a medieval saint and the other a contemporary theologian, there is a fundamental harmony in their two voices. For them, remembering God and remembering humanity are intertwined. We might, then, imagine their challenge to us as a canticle of memory.

A Canticle of Memory

Remember Our Poverty

Rejecting domination and control as the source of human dignity amounts to an anthropological revolution. For Metz this foundational revolution is "our attempt to achieve a new relationship to ourselves, to our natural and social environment, which is not one of domination and exploitation."[15] It is in living a life of genuine vulnerability, nakedness, dependence––in the decentering of our ego, in accepting a certain lack of control—that Christians discover the God of Jesus. "In the midst of our existence there unfolds the bond (*re-ligio*) that ties us to the infinitely transcendent mystery of God, the insatiable interest in the Absolute that captivates us and underlines our poverty.[16] Metz argues that this sort of humility, this poverty of spirit, brings human limits into view and affirms human transcendence in the relationship to God and humankind. A political theology is rooted in a faithfulness to being human. "To become human means to become 'poor,' to have nothing that one might brag about before God."[17] "We are all beggars. We are all members of a species that is not sufficient unto itself. We are all creatures plagued by unending doubts and restless, unsatisfied hearts."[18] The transcendent captivates and interrupts.

Put another way, Metz's point is simply to say that a life of domination and exploitation, though a common answer to our quest for survival, is actually unrealistic. He argues that control and subjugation are not what make one human. Metz cautions against living off a "bread of domination" that disconnects people: subjugation does not give lives their value. "An identity thus formed through the principles of domination and subjugation makes the individual profoundly disconnected and, in the strict sense of the term, egoistic."[19] To be human is to realize connectedness, responsibility and vulnerability; moreover, this false anthropology of domination leads to the attempt to dominate even death. But the real threat to humanity is not death but the denial of death. As Metz puts it: "It is, in fact, not death itself which alienates us from ourselves and snatches life from us: it is, instead, the suppression of death, the flight from death. This suppression of death has made us into those dominating beings bent on subjugation who today are everywhere encountering the limits of their survival."[20] Francis of Assisi reflects a similar anthropology. Francis is not alienated from death. In his *Canticle of the Sun* he gives praise and thanks for all of nature—including "sister death."

Through his actions Francis reminds believers constantly of who they are—and are not. They are heralds of a great king, but not the king. They are creatures who, like all creatures, praise God by being what they are meant to be. They are connected to others.[21] To Francis, relationships matter. The brothers don't just imagine they are vulnerable, they affirm this by giving away their human security. They don't just imagine they rely on others but must beg to eat. People may pretend to control their lives and

limit their sufferings but they can't. The human person emerges in vulnerability and humility which call for dependence on God and dependence on others.

In Christian anthropology centering on one's own power is the human default and root of distraction. Pride is the first of the seven deadly sins. For this reason Francis's *Earlier Rule* forbids brothers from holding offices, he's nervous about the dangers of being learned, and he opposes property. Spiritually he is naked so that he can remember God. Francis tells a story warning about power over others. Coming at night in the rain to a Franciscan house, he and his companion are turned away. They are muddy and wet, but the brother who answers the door tells them to go away and calls him stupid. Accepting this would be "true joy."[22] It would mean that one was not covertly acting for his or her own power, for his or her own glory but within the matrix of God and the community. Francis ends a similar story in Celano's *Second Life* by saying "unless I hear these words with the same expression on my face, with the same joy in my heart, and with the same resolution for holiness, then I am in no sense a Lesser Brother."[23] This humility trusts in the human condition before God.

Nakedness surrounds the life of Francis.[24] At the beginning of his new life Francis strips off all his clothes and declares loyalty only to his father in heaven. His life ends with his request to be placed naked on the ground when he dies. To be vulnerable is to have no defense and to trust others; it is to be naked. It is this sort of human poverty which provides Francis with a window to God. This profound poverty, this anthropological revolution, this turning away from defining the self through control motivates the various concrete ascetical tactics of humility practiced by Francis.

Fasting, begging, living poorly, obedience that puts others first, the discipline of the ego and the body encourage right relations with the self, God, and others. Francis and the brothers are unique in their call to extreme social and physical measures of the practice of poverty, but all Christians are called to live the God-centered life of dependence and relationship.

Nothing is more striking to Francis than the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. He can not get over the image of God becoming a human being. This act is the model and inspiration for human humility. At Greccio one Christmas, he brings in a manager and real animals. "For I wish to enact the memory of that babe who was born in Bethlehem: to see as much as possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, and how with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay." Book I of Celano's *Life of Francis* ends with and is summed up by the Christmas scene, the incarnation of God in the birth of Jesus Christ as a naked baby. "There simplicity is given a place of honor, poverty is exalted, humility is commended, and out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem."[25] In this memory the life and humble birth of Jesus reminds Christians that to be disciples is to be poor.

Remember Our Solidarity

This poverty which attacks egocentrism also demands that human beings turn outward: solidarity and poverty entail one another. For Francis, God's creatures are rather literally brothers and sisters and, as always, this fact compels a response: gratitude and brotherhood. The turn to God that is penance brings a realization that humans are creatures who should give thanks just as it calls believers to humble themselves even as God's son did.[26] And this imitation of Christ also calls Christians to his solidarity.

Francis's hugging the leper triggers a conversion, a turning-point: he realizes the leper he has hugged is a fellow creature of God, a brother. Those who constitute the least in Assisi, the invisible ones, are the litmus test of human dignity and worth. "No, he or she was the privileged and sacred place where the human reality created by God was to be encountered first and foremost—because always dismissed and therefore missed."[27] This realization changes everything: it demands a distance from the exploitation of others inherent in the emerging monetary system, from the warfare that kills others, and from the private property that tells them they are not as worthy.[28] What needs to be fixed is the person's relationship to fellow creatures; what needs to stop is the fracturing and dividing of the human community. Perhaps this is why Francis is "in sin" before that transformative encounter with a leper: "The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers."[29]

Consider the harmony called for in what is, after all, called the *Canticle of the Creatures* and which also includes praise for pardoning others. The admittedly suspiciously late story of the wolf of Gubbio implies a similar point about our natural solidarity. In that story Francis reconciles the town with the attacking wolf in the name of God.[30] Remembering relationship creates solidarity.

Metz cautions against living off a "bread of domination" that disconnects people. Political theology offers the antidote of hearing the voices of the marginal, of those who have disappeared. It suggests that people find themselves in being liberated from a drive to dominate.[31] "To speak of this God means to speak of the suffering of the stranger and to lament responsibility neglected and solidarity denied."[32] As Augustine puts it, sin is turning of the heart inward. As we have seen, in political theology Christianity becomes a challenge to live a new anthropology: to realize connectedness and responsibility as well as vulnerability. Christian discipleship as seen by Metz offers as its hope human solidarity rather than domination. It is founded on a hope that the human heart will turn outward. Metz sees Christianity as a "community of memory and narrative in imitation of Jesus, a community of those who looked first to the suffering of others."[33] He opposes any privatized or individualized notion of Christian life. Conversion and mysticism are public and community affairs. For him the Christian life is a life together, not a personal salvation. "Only when our hope is inseparable from hope for others,

in other words, only when it automatically assumes the form and motion of love and communion, does it cease to be petty and fearful, a hopeless reflection of our egotism."[34] The biblical account of the Good Samaritan is a story about the least likely person helping his least favorite person. Christians don't get to decide who is the neighbor about whom they should care or from whom they might receive care: our neighbor is whoever is there. The biblical tradition preaches a type of universal responsibility. For Metz as for Francis, Christianity is a community that remembers others—even aliens and enemies.[35]

Remember Praxis

Using the word "praxis" is simply a way to turn attention to transformative action as the ground for being human and the norm for theory. It makes responsibility important. As I argued above in the section on penance, this is the sense in which "praxis" brings together the practice of spirituality and the practice of theological thinking: both focus on living and doing, on the transformation of a life and not just on believing. The turn to praxis in theology is a significant intellectual move which gives a certain "pastoral" ring to political theology. Praxis includes but goes beyond historical and interpretive work.[36] Francis agrees that being Christian must be life-changing, a weave of relationships and a pattern of doing. Actions establish a world.

Christian memory must have a practical intent; it must be not just a doing, but a praxis, a value-laden acting that reflects humane values of God-consciousness. So talk of praxis is not code for social work or political leadership; that would make it less profound. It is a claim that Christians should operate from a horizon of compassion for treating all people and situations. Francis's *Earlier Rule*, for example, insists throughout that the brothers live poorly and honor others—even lepers and enemies. But praxis is a double imperative: it calls for the living out of conversion, for penance, but it also calls to others by proclaiming in action the reality of God. Francis is something like a performance artist: his actions are the point; they do not call forth an explanation or a theory but preach by experience.

Most of what we know about Francis comes from stories remembered. Those who retell them do so in order to edify and inspire. Most of these stories are about actions, pulling the audience into another world, a different frame of reference. He preaches to birds, he picks up worms from the road. When he wants to reinforce his stricture against money, he orders a brother who has touched a donation of coins to put that bag in a pile of cow dung with his teeth. When he wants to stress his trust in God, he takes off his clothes; he does not write an essay. The testimony of Francis is praxis. When Francis interprets the aforementioned passage in Ezekiel 5.18, his solution is matter of public conversion and action: "by the light of example the tongue of his conduct, he will rebuke all the wicked."[37] When Fr. Sylvester decides to join the brothers, he has a dream of Christ showing him how much the deeds of

Francis were worth.[38] Francis says that we give birth to Christ "through holy activity."[39] Celano sums up Francis well: "He filled the whole world with the gospel of Christ. . .proclaiming to every one the good news of the kingdom of God, edifying his listeners by his example as much as by his words, as he made of his whole body a tongue."[40]

For Metz too human connectedness makes ethical claims and Christians are called to show their connection in their actions: to be mature and responsible, to be doers, actors, agents, and not mere passive objects bobbing atop the waters of history. Christianity is not foremost a doctrine but a praxis to be lived radically. This praxis is not a later application but an expression of this faith. "Ultimately, it is of the very essence of the Christian faith to be believed in such a way that it is never just believed, but rather—in the messianic praxis of discipleship—enacted."[41] A messianic discipleship is a life lived in expectation of God's future now.

Too often an elegant theory or routine can hide human destructiveness or become a tool of oppression. When Christians do not practice compassion but only believe in compassion, they foster apathy and lack of responsibility for others. It is this merely-believed-in compassion and discipleship "which allowed us Christians to continue our untroubled believing and praying with our backs to Auschwitz—allowed us, in a phrase from Bonhoeffer, to go on singing Gregorian chant during the persecution of the Jews without at the same time feeling the need to cry out in their behalf."[42] For Metz the important criterion for theology is whether it respects or denies human solidarity, whether it respects or denies the reality of human suffering. Praxis serves as a corrective to the theoretical abstraction so typical of theological systems.[43]

Both Francis and Metz call for a practical public testimony, for praxis, for being a tongue with one's life: a doing that transforms and grounds both the intellectual life of theology and of the Christian's daily life. The suffering of others lies at the core of this foundational transformation. Celano's *First Life* declares: "He found it easier to do what is perfect than to talk about it; so he was constantly active in showing his zeal and dedication in deeds, not in words, because words do not do what is good, they only point to it."[44] In the very next paragraph we hear of the appearance of the seraph and then of the stigmata.

Remember Suffering

Attention to the suffering of others is the way to spark memory. When the suffering of others strikes home, poverty, solidarity, and praxis come forth. Both Francis and Metz draw attention to that suffering because it interrupts the routine, pushes people to question their lives, and elicits reorientation.

A political theology looks to the deeper social, cultural, and economic values at work in any human enterprise. It maintains its relationship to God and to its humanity by remembering suffering—not one's self-referential suffering but others' suffering.[45] This memory of concrete historical cases of

suffering is not part of a pastoral application of a previously worked out theoretical theology, but a structural part of the process of theological reason. This anamnestic reason, this reason that remembers human beings, injects a *memoria passionis* into intellectual calculations. "This *a priori* of suffering is what orients theology's claim to truth when, as a political theology, it incorporates the historical, social, and cultural situation in its talk about God."[46] The cry of the victims, the cry of the poor, the voice of the other, must be heard in the logos of theology.[47] This is what it means to say that the Christian life and Christian theology are mystical and political. Here lie both foundations for theology and for penance and conversion. The memory of God does not lead to ecstatic removal from a tainted world, but to kissing lepers.

Jesus followed his Jewish tradition by joining love of God and love of neighbor. Luke's story of the Good Samaritan, of the man who helped the stranger who had been robbed and thrown into a ditch, argues that one may not delimit who counts as a neighbor. The obligation is universal. It is not just remembering one's own suffering that matters but, as Metz points out, remembering the suffering of others, even the suffering of one's enemies. Jesus focuses not on the sin of others but on the suffering of others. And all of this means that human beings are not the autonomous controlling center of their lives; rather, they are in relation. "People who use 'God' the way Jesus does accept the violation of their own personal preconceived certainties by the misfortune of others."[48] Remembering one's humanity means remembering our human responsibility. More specifically, Metz calls for a *memoria passionis*, constructing an intellectual theological enterprise that turns on the authority of others' suffering. This memory, this compassionate connection makes one human and makes a believer's talk about God Christian.[49]

The memory of others' suffering reminds people of their common ground and calls for them to act on the fact that all are beggars and creatures before God. Many stories of Francis's life indicate his compassion.[50] His tenderness toward animals goes beyond the usual hagiographic trope of restoring Edenic order.[51] He continues to insist that the brothers work with lepers and considers returning to that work himself in his last years. Francis consistently gives to those in need: his house at Rivo Torto, his clothes, the community Bible.[52] "The father of the poor, the poor Francis, conforming himself to the poor in all things, was distressed to see anyone poorer than himself, not out of any desire for empty glory, but from a feeling of simple compassion. Though he was content with a ragged and rough tunic, he often wished to divide it with some poor person."[53] He warns the brothers they will be thieves if they don't give away their alms to those in greater need.[54] And when some brothers refuse money from a man named Guido, Brother Bernard explains: "While it is true we are poor, our poverty is not as burdensome for us as it is for the other poor, for we have become poor by the grace of God and in fulfillment of His counsel"[55] Also telling are the story of the hungry friar and the note to Leo. One night a friar who was fasting had become painfully hungry, and Francis rescued him by giving him permission

to eat and, in fact, eating with him so he wouldn't be embarrassed. We also have among the few pieces by Francis himself, a note he seems to have written to calm a worried Brother Leo.[56] But the most fabulous sign of the depths of his *memoria passionis* is his experience of the stigmata.

Book II of Celano's *Life of Francis* centers on the stigmata and draws one into the dynamic of compassion, for the stigmata of Francis is not only about his compassion for the suffering Jesus: in Christian thought the passion of Jesus is a response of his compassion for the suffering of humankind.

> As such, the vision of the seraphic Christ lifted up on the cross for the healing of the world indelibly confirmed for Francis and in Francis what had been revealed to him during his encounter with lepers: that all members of the human fraternity were sacred creatures of God and that every attitude and action that does violence to this sacred community must be repented of.[57]

The point of the suffering of the innocent Jesus is not the suffering of Jesus but how it compels people to engage the suffering of the innocent in the world. For example, the bible story of Jesus' apparent abandonment by God on the cross (Mark 15.33) brings home the responsibility for taking the crucified off the cross. Just as Francis, the paradigmatic disciple, is identified with Jesus in his birth—"out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem"—so too does he come to the compassion of—and not just for—Jesus. Book I of Celano's *First Life* ends with Greccio and turns immediately in Book II to La Verna. Any focus on the suffering of Jesus that does not also attend to others is misguided.[58]

In the telling of the life of Francis, conversion to embracing lepers is followed closely by the experience of the stigmata. The experience on Mt. La Verna, whatever it was, is a reflection of and an invitation to his compassion for Jesus and for others. It is not just a new miracle endorsing a new saint nor is it only an act of pity for a new suffering Christ: rather, it teaches Francis is as a person who, like Jesus, wanted to alleviate the suffering of others.[59] In theological jargon, it teaches our universal responsibility for others. It calls for an active compassion for others, not a dreamy romanticism.

Public solidarity with the poor and suffering functions as a pedagogy, then and now: it challenges society to Christian discipleship. It keeps the poor "on our eyeball," as a significant obligation of identity. In the time of Francis the market economy created more desperate poor and located them in the cities without food and necessities. But, as historian Lester K. Little points out, the friars did not change social structures to stop poverty. They inspired laity to give alms in order to take the edge off poverty and maybe to join a confraternity dedicated to helping poor directly.[60] "The friars were not really the poor, but rich people dressed up as the poor." They helped keep the down and out before the eyes of the rich and inspired lay confraternities that performed works of mercy. In short, the friars interrupted the

status quo, providing a dangerous and disruptive reminder in society that the poor are there and that the gospel demands that believers reach out to them. "The son of a wealthy cloth merchant, [Francis] embraced the dregs of society. He never became completely poor, however. He remained always a rich man, disguised as a pauper. He was, and is, the intermediary between rich and poor."[61] Francis brings the poor into view and provokes a response. One might become accustomed to those in involuntary poverty: they could become invisible. But it was much more difficult to dismiss one's social peers witnessing to the reality of poverty, holding up a mirror to human misery and to human dignity. As Metz might put it, the religion of Francis is essentially a resistance to cultural amnesia.

Remembering others' suffering infuses and supports the canticle of Johann Baptist Metz and Francis of Assisi. It reminds people of their solidarity and poverty, galvanizing them towards the praxis of a new way of living. The call to an anamnestic reason and *memoria passionis* in Metz functions in a manner not unlike the pedagogy of poverty in Francis. These two Christians go public with a God-consciousness that disrupts alienation, conflict, and domination with social responsibility and communion. The authority of suffering provides a tonic for anything that says lepers, the poor, or those of lower status are not our brothers and sisters. It skewers apathy. It sums up the call to Christians to be disciples, to do penance, to be both mystical and political.

Coda

The verses in this canticle are not distinct compartments: they overlap and crisscross; one implies the others. They review the challenge of Francis of Assisi and highlight the agenda of contemporary political theology. Each may be a resource for the other in striving to remember suffering, solidarity, poverty, and praxis. Of course theology is not religion nor is religion theology. Though their language-games differ, they are less alien than complementary. The discourse and jargon of a twenty-first century theologian will not be those of a thirteenth-century saint; nevertheless, they both seek a humane and divine future in a reorienting, interruptive, transformative, God-consciousness. They call humankind to an anthropological revolution. "Christianity lives, when it lives, in its communities of memory. It is committed to the one undivided discipleship of Jesus which does not permit a dualism between mysticism and politics, between spirituality and responsibility for the world."[62] Metz cannot substitute for Francis, Paris cannot replace Assisi. But letting them interpret one another can strengthen the voices of both. The intellectual Johann Baptist Metz and *Il Poverello* harmonize in a call for Christians to act out their hope in God. It is a call to penance.

The spirituality of Francis and the theology of Metz are not congruent. Most obviously, Metz's theology is rooted in and implies a spirituality, but it is about questions asked by intellectuals; it is about the intellectual correlation of religion and culture in a compassionate praxis. And while

Francis's spirituality and religious experience certainly imply a theological structure, his personal mediation of religious experience is pastoral rather than intellectual.

Two places of significant difference are attention to nature and attention to changing social structures. Francis includes nature and all creatures as part of his imperative to connection and compassion. Metz hardly mentions ecological concerns. Perhaps this is understandable since he sets out to develop a fundamental theology of the *subject*. But this is something he can learn from his conversation with Francis. His analysis and his anthropology would be helpful to ecological theologians.[63]

Francis, on the other hand, is unaware of the plasticity of social structures and the responsibility of human beings for constructing and deconstructing them. This is no surprise in a medieval person. As was evident in the story of the theologian and the passage from Ezekiel, Francis never wants to scold others but simply to live his life correctly.[64] Not only does Metz want to criticize social structures as part of theological praxis, but he also says Christianity "leads us into a responsibility, not only for what we do or fail to do but also for what we allow to happen to others in our presence, before our eyes."[65] For Metz Christian love must take sides, but it remains Christian because of how it takes sides, viz., "without hate for personal hostility—even to the folly of the cross."[66]

The friars identified with the poor and the suffering but were not about changing economic and political structures to stop poverty. This may have been one reason they could be so attractive to and effective with the rich.[67] Metz goes beyond Francis when he wants us to imagine new economic and political structures: in our contemporary postmodern, post-Marxist horizon, it is possible to reconstruct the world as we know it. We have to change the world and not just act with personal integrity in it. Both Metz and Francis seek an impact on society, but with a difference.

This mystical and political canticle brings Francis into another venue. As Metz would say, it interrupts our culture's comfortable amnesia, a forgetfulness that lets human beings go on much as they have—with their backs to the poor, the suffering, the non-person. Francis might see this too as a small part of preaching, as getting the attention of some new birds. If one's theology would be the same with or without awareness of human poverty, with or without the imperatives of solidarity and praxis, before and after a *memoria passionis*, beware. Francis sets out to enact solidarity and dignity before God, to recenter personal identities by looking to the least powerful parts of society, by dressing in rags, by begging. Living poverty reminds people that they are not defined by money, social position, clothes or power. Cultural amnesia requires an antidote: solidarity, which resists a life of apathy disconnected from others.[68] Both Francis and Metz risk antagonizing the Establishment by pointing out those whom it harms. Both resist forgetting we are all creatures, brothers and sisters. Both serve as an intermediary for the suffering and the poor, bringing them into view and insisting on some response.

Metz provides the very useful category of memory to join these enterprises. They both want people to remember the reality of God and suffering. This memory, spelled out in a canticle, invites others to a grateful resistance and a full life. As Celano says of Francis, "his teaching showed clearly that all the wisdom of the world was foolish, and quickly, he turned all toward the true wisdom of God through the foolishness of his preaching."[69] This memory is dangerous because it challenges people to live an anthropological revolution, a consciousness of poverty and dependence, a binding solidarity, and an active compassion: such people can only look foolish according to the usual standards. Jesus' vision of reality was so odd that he could be mistaken for a fool or a rebel. Anyone who follows Jesus might fall victim to the same confusion. Francis could agree with Johann Baptist Metz that "Our present misery is not that we are considered fools and rebels too often, but rather, practically never."[70]

Notes

1. Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols., *Vol. II, The Founder*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), 103. The texts from which scholars draw their picture of Francis are famously problematic. What we have are largely hagiographical writings rooted in story and memory. For advice on reading the genre see William J. Short, "Hagiographical Method in Reading Franciscan Sources: Stories of Francis and Creatures in Thomas Celano's *First Life* (58–61)," *Greyfriars Review* 4 (1990): 63–89. Also of interest is Cynthia Hahn, "Picturing Text: Narrative in the *Life* of the Saints," *Art History* 13 (1990): 1–33. For a careful treatment of the sources and their relationship see, Jacques Dalarun, *The Misadventures of Francis of Assisi: Toward a Historical Use of the Franciscan Legends,* trans. Edward Hagman (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2002).
2. Celano, *Remembrance*, 102, 164, and 195. For comparisons see William R. Cook, "Fraternal and Lay Images of St. Francis," in James Ross Sweeney and Stanly Chadrow, eds., *Popes, Teachers, and Canon Law in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 269–89; esp. 268–70.
3. *Testament*, 13; *Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua,* 2.
4. Bonaventure, *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, XI, 1.
5. For a discussion of the historical relationship of Christian theology and spirituality see Keith J. Egan, "The Divorce of Spirituality from Theology," in Patrick W. Carey and Earl C Muller, eds., *Theological Education in the Catholic Tradition: Contemporary Challenges* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), pp. 296–307. See also in the same volume Matthew L. Lamb, "Challenges for Catholic Graduate Theological Education," pp. 108–30. The mystical-experiential element withers into a private devotion and personal preference without its connection to broader intellectual traditions.

See Robert Ellwood, *The History and Future of Faith: Religion Past, Present, and to Come* (New York: Crossroad, 1998). For a theological take on this relationship today, see J. Matthew Ashley, "The Turn to Spirituality? The Relationship between Theology and Spirituality," in Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows, eds., *The Study of Christian Spirituality* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 159–70.

6. For a sense of the theologian's terrain see David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), esp. pp. 3–21. Also clear on the structure of theological method is his *Pluralism and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). See also Schubert M. Ogden, *Doing Theology Today* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996). As philosopher Bernard Lonergan puts it in *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. xi: "A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix."
7. Johann Baptist Metz (b. 1928) is a Roman Catholic diocesan priest from Bavaria. He holds degrees in both theology and philosophy and is Ordinary Professor of Fundamental Theology, Emeritus, at Westphalian Wilhelms University in Münster. He has also been Visiting Lecturer in Politics and Religion at the Institute for Philosophy at the University of Vienna. Metz has consistently sought to view theological and philosophical problems through the lens of human suffering. His political theology should not be confused with that of Nazi legal theorist Carl Schmitt who sought to justify the political as polemical.
8. Michael F. Cusato, "To Do Penance/Facere poenitentiam," *The Cord* 57 (February/March 2007): 9 [3–24].
9. See Raffaele Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), esp. pp. 120–37.
10. Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), p. 171.
11. "Messianic or 'Bourgeois' Religion?" in Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future: Essay on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), pp. 18–19.
12. Johann Baptist Metz, in John K. Downey, ed., *Love's Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), p. 175.
13. "This anamnestic reason we are seeking here wins its enlightened character and its legitimate universality when it knows itself to be guided by a specific memory, precisely by the memory of suffering: that is to say, not the form of a self-referential memory of suffering (the root of all conflicts!), but in the form of a memory of others' suffering, in the form of a remembrance of the stranger's suffering." Johann Baptist Metz, "God: Against the Myth of the Eternity of Time," in Tiemo Rainer Peters and Claus Urban, eds., *The End of Time? The Provocation of Talking about God,* trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), p. 42. For a discussion of this notion of anamnestic reason, reason that does not

forget the human face, see also his "Anamnestic Reason: A Theologian's Remarks on the Crisis in the *Geisteswissenschaften*, in Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer, eds., *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 189–196.

14. "The Future in Memory of Suffering," in Metz and Moltmann, *Faith and the Future*, p. 8.
15. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 60.
16. Johann Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), p. 26.
17. Metz, *Poverty*, p. 10.
18. Metz, *Poverty*, p. 25.
19. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 54.
20. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 56
21. See, e.g., Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis,* 16 and the *Canticle of the Creatures*. People as different from Francis as a leper or a Sultan remain sisters and brothers. For a well-drawn discussion of this connectedness that also looks at role of conversion, see Cusato, "To Do Penance," esp. pp. 11–24.
22. *True and Perfect Joy,* in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. I.*
23. Celano, *Remembrance*, 145.
24. Stories of Francis's nudity are a good example of his "performance theology." See Lawrence Cunningham, "Francis Naked and Clothed: A Theological Meditation," in Jay M. Hammond, ed., *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography, and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents* (New York: New City Press, 2004), 165–78.
25. Celano, *Life of Francis of Assisi*, 84–85.
26. For a critical treatment of this solidarity theme in Francis's *Canticle,* see Roger D. Sorrell, St. *Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. pp. 125–37. Although both Francis and Metz are sure that our human solidarity exerts a claim on us, Metz does not talk about nature as part of this solidarity. Here he needs to learn from Francis. For a recent attempt to draw the implications of Metz's political theology for ecological issues see J. Matthew Ashley, "Environmental Concern and the 'New Political Theology,'" in John K. Downey, Jürgen Manemann, and Steven T. Ostovich, eds., *Missing God? Cultural Amnesia and Political Theology* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), pp. 139–58.
27. Cusato, "To Do Penance," p. 11.
28. For a development of this notion that Francis holds a universal fraternity of all creatures, see Michael F. Cusato, "Hermitage or Marketplace: The Search for an Authentic Franciscan Locus in the World," in *True Followers of Justice: Identity, Insertion and Itinerancy among the Early Franciscans*, Spirit and Life 10 (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2000), pp. 1–30.
29. *Testament*, 1–3. Remember that "the sight of lepers was so bitter to him that…even two miles away he would cover his nose with his hands (*I Celano,* 17). Celano continues on: "When he started thinking of holy

and useful matters with the grace and strength of the Most High, while in the clothes of the world, he met a leper one day. Made stronger than himself, he came up and kissed him. He then began to consider himself less and less."

30. *The Canticle of the Creatures*; *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, XXI.
31. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, pp. 53–60.
32. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 170. "Every authentic religious act is directed toward the concreteness of God in our human neighbors and their world. There it finds its living fulfillment and its transcendent point of contact. Could humanity be taken any more seriously than that? Is anything more radically anthropocentric than God's creative love?" (Metz, *Poverty*, pp. 32–33).
33. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 169.
34. Metz, Love's *Strategy*, p. 138.
35. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 170.
36. Political theology differs, as does Liberation Theology, from other theological methods in giving transformative praxis primacy as a criterion for truth. For a general introduction to this type of fundamental theology, see Dermot A. Lane, "The Move to Praxis in Theology," in his *Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process, and Salvation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), pp. 6–31. See also Matthew L. Lamb, "The Theory—Praxis Relationship in Contemporary Christian Theologies," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 31 (June 1976): 149–78.
37. Celano, *Remembrance*, 103. The biblical passage is given as: "If you do not warn the wicked man about his wickedness, I will hold you responsible for his soul."
38. Celano, *Remembrance*, 109.
39. *Later Admonition and Exhortation*, 51–53. *The Anonymous of Perugia*, 37, reports: "Saint Francis used to give the brothers admonitions, corrections, and precepts, as it seemed best to him, after consulting the Lord. Everything, however, that he said in word, he would first, with eagerness and affection, show them in deed."
40. Celano, *Life*, 97.
41. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 47. One sees this commitment as well in his notion of narrative. See his "A Short Apology for Narrative," in Johann Baptist Metz and Jean-Pierre Jossua, eds., *The Crisis of Religious Language*, Concilium 85 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), pp. 86–87 where Metz repeats with approval this story from Martin Buber: "My grandfather was paralyzed. Once he was asked to tell a story about his teacher and told them how the holy Baal Shem Tov used to jump and dance when he was praying. My grandfather stood up while telling the story and the story carried him away so much that he had to jump and dance to show how the master had done it. From that moment, he was healed. This is how stories ought to be told."
42. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 48.
43. Metz does go further than Francis in his picture of praxis by insisting on a critique and even a revolution of social structures. He defines Christian

love "as the unconditional commitment to justice, freedom, and peace for others." Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 34. For him this means a political revolution, a change not just in our own behavior but social structures themselves.

44. Celano, *Life*, 93.
45. See, e.g., Metz, "Communicating a Dangerous Memory," in *Love's Strategy*, pp. 135–49.
46. Metz, "God: Against the Myth of the Eternity of Time," p. 42.
47. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, pp. 70–71.
48. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 170.
49. For a brief history of this fundamental category of Metz's theology, see his recent book *Memoria Passionis: Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2006), pp. 252–57.
50. Celano, *Life*, 17 is a typical report: "While staying in the world and following its ways, he was also a helper of the poor. He extended a hand of mercy to those who had nothing and he poured out compassion for the afflicted." Still, it has been argued recently that Francis was basically concerned with his own spiritual growth and identification with Christ rather than with truly helping the poor. See, e.g., Kenneth Baxter Wolfe, *The Poverty of Riches: St. Francis of Assisi Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). I think such a critique misses the close identification of love of God and *genuine* love of others in Christian thought. It likewise ignores the serious and self-conscious social critique of power and property shot through Francis's countercultural life and evident in myriad texts. Finally, it seems to confuse Francis with a modern social activist. The poverty of Francis was concrete, catalytic, and Christian.
51. See, for example, Celano, *Life*, 58–61 and the discussion in Short, "Hagiographic Method," esp. pp. 75–89.
52. Celano, *Life*, 44; *Assisi Compilation*, 31 and Celano, *Remembrance,* 53–57, 91.
53. Celano, *Life*, 76.
54. Celano, *Remembrance*, 87.
55. *Anonymous*, 21.
56. *The Assisi Compilation*, 50; Celano, *Remembrance*, 22; *Letter to Brother Leo.*
57. Michael F. Cusato, "The Mystical Experience Behind the Stigmatization Narrative," in *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi: New Studies, New Perspectives* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2006), pp. 29–74; 73.
58. For contemporary theological examples, see liberation theologian Jon Sobrino's *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), esp. pp. 1–14; and political theologian Jürgen Manemann's "Abandoned by God? Reflections on the Margins of Theology," in John K. Downey, Jürgen Manemann, and Steven T. Ostovich, eds., *Missing God? Cultural Amnesia and Political Theology*, pp. 19–33.
59. For a discussion of the stigmata as neither unheard of nor simply about a miracle, see Richard C. Trexler, "The Stigmatized Body of Francis of

Assisi: Conceived, Processes, Disappeared," in *Frommigkeit im Mittelalter: politisch-soziale Kontexte, visuelle Praxis, korperliche Ausdrucksformen* (Munich: Fink, 2002), pp. 463–97.

60. E.g., the *Misericordia* confraternity, not friars went throughout the city assuaging need. The appealing notion of the friars focusing their lives on ministering directly to the poor has not been confirmed by contemporary scholars. See Lester K. Little, "Religion, Economy, and Saint Francis," in Emily Albu Hanawalt and Carter Lindberg, eds., *Through the Eye of the Needle: Judeo-Christian Roots of Social Welfare* (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1994), pp. 147–63.
61. Little, "Religion," in pp. 162–63.
62. Johann Baptist Metz, "The 'One World': A Challenge to Western Christianity." *Hunthausen Lecture*. Saint Martin's College, Lacey, Washington, October 9, 1989 (unpublished typescript), pp. 10–11.
63. "Indeed, to put my theses as provocatively as possible, it is not in spite of but because Metz articulates his theology from the vantage point of the challenge of becoming and continuing to be a subject in solidarity with others, in God's presence, that his theology offers crucial resources to a contemporary environmental theology." Ashley, "Environmental Concern," p. 140.
64. *Anonymous*, 38: "He also admonished them not to judge or look down upon anyone, not even those who drink and eat and dress extravagantly, as stated in the *Rule*, 'Their Lord is also our Lord. He who called us can call them, and He who willed to justify us can also justify them.' "
65. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 47.
66. Johann Baptist Metz, "Messianic or 'Bourgeois' Religion?" in Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, eds., *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 20.
67. Little, "Religion," p. 162.
68. "Clearly, something more is required here, a radical process of repentance, a new relationship to social identity, property, and affluence in general, which will be very hard to establish." Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 26. For a discussion of the poverty of Francis and Clare as a both mystical and political in this sense see Paul Lachance, "Mysticism and Social Transformation According to the Franciscan Way, in Janet K. Ruffing, ed., *Mysticism and Social Transformation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), pp. 55–75.
69. Celano, *Life*, 89.
70. Metz, *Love's Strategy*, p. 142.

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