

FRANCISCAN RENEWAL II

THE LIFE OF FRANCIS AND SPECIFIC SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS FROM HIS LIFE

outline

12. On the road around Assisi

- F and brothers worked around Assisi for “pay”
- brothers wondered from town to town working with their hands and serving lepers and “singing” the office in churches
 - in no way like a religious order of today—without superiors, permanent place (although they would come to Porziuncula from time to time), F merely a “presence”
- F assumed that the brothers would learn from his example: he never gave a rule at this time
- F greatest sermon was always his own life

Francisthought—

- always the Christian and therefore the Fcan should show good example

- in a sense everyone and therefore a Fcan is called to “preach”—Vatican II, Decree on the Laity:

“There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. An apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one's way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life. “For the charity of Christ impels us” (2 Cor. 5:14).

*Therefore all must preach, remembering the words widely attributed to F-- **Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.***

- invariably, people began to call him a “saint”
 - miracles were attributed to him, and he realized that he was becoming a celebrity
 - therefore F was having difficulty adapting to his new role as a leader of a religious movement and a public person
 - he began to wander away
 - F finally decided that he had to embrace his cross in a new way: he resolved to leave Assisi and travel to the Holy Land, perhaps finding martyrdom
 - his plan was thwarted however (storms in the seas) and F was back in his homeland

Francisthought—

- perhaps the Lord knew that F had to stay with his new brotherhood and “arranged” for him to remain in Italy;

For the believer, everything that happens must be looked at as **God’s plan** in some way because we have the Holy Spirit acting within us. Or another way of saying it in a personal way: **“Everything that happens to us is meant to help us in one way or another.”**

We should study the example of Joseph in the book of Genesis, chapters 37-45, and Joseph’s statement: *It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you.* The rational person would say—God did not send him there at all—it was evil that did it. But Joseph could say, and we should be able to say—in every circumstance—God sent me here with these circumstances, with what has happened in life, and it is for the good—somehow, some way.

13. The Conversion of Clare

- after coming back two lifelong friends joined him, Leo, confessor and chaplain and Rufino, first cousin of a niece in aristocracy of Assisi, Clare di Favaroni di Offrediccio (who was 11 years younger than F)
- Rufino came to F to explain that C wanted to meet him
- C was 18 in 1212 when the approach was made

Francisthought—

Following your call: Presumption is that you have followed the Holy Spirit as you have chosen your way of life.

Now, you must work with it as best you can, or ask the Holy Spirit to be part of a new decision with you.

- Palm Sunday, 1212, accompanied by her sister Pacifica, C left the family’s house through a security door
 - her family did not like it and warned off her father and uncles by showing them her shaven head, no further protest
 - she was joined by her sister Agnes
- within a couple months F settled the two women on their own at the cathedral chapter’s church of San Damiano—the first convent of the female Franciscan movement with episcopal (Bishop Guido) protection
 - at C’s request, F prepared a “form of life” sounding very much like his own instruction of 1209
 - from this point until his last illness, C completely disappears from F’s life
 - they exchanged letters, but probably no visits

Francisthought—

A Christian and therefore a Fcan will always show sacredness in close relationships with others, male to female, female to male, etc.

14. F Faces New Growth

- F received a gift from Count Orland of Chiusi (powerful aristocrat), the possession of an isolated mountain in the Tuscan Apennines, La Verna

- 1213-1216 most obscure period in F's life

- F had to deal practically with the growth of his movement and provide for a brotherhood that extended beyond Assisi

- name was given "Lesser Poor" and by 1216 Fratres Minores, Lesser Brothers

- around this time, the newly elected bishop of Acre in Syria, Jacques de Vitry arrived in Perugia, expecting to be consecrated by Innocent who had just died, eventually consecrated by Honorius III

- F struggled with his need to follow Christ's less practical directives, yet not think well of himself for doing so

Francisthought—

...How to Think of Ourselves

One of most beautiful prayers contained in Scripture is the one attributed to Mary the Mother of Jesus. Known as the Magnificat, Mary takes justifiable pride in what God has done for her, and at the same time understands what will happen to those who are "arrogant of mind and heart." Both parts of pride are important for anyone interested in living a spiritual life and therefore a Fcan life.

First, there is a justifiable pride in being accepted by someone we love. Or in carrying out something that is good for others. But, there is a pride that is harmful as well. A person who only wants applause, that is, a person who only wants praise from others can easily fall into arrogance, placing him/herself "above" others, making others feel less important in their lives, and in general, desiring only what they want as a guide to life in general.

In day-to-day living, we must be aware of both of those elements. We must have pride in ourselves, recognizing the abilities that we have, and understanding the contributions that we can make to the ones that we love. It is the foundation of being able to accomplish what we want to achieve as we grow. But we must know the sinfulness of pride as well. Too many people who are accomplished in life forget about the importance of others, what others have done for them, and often destroy any possible relationship, whether romantic or otherwise.

The virtue of pride helps us live well because we know that we can learn from others. The sin of pride makes us lose sight of others because we only see ourselves.

IV. EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION (1216-1220)

14. F and Nature

- F felt a deep union with living creatures, who like the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, lived the G precept of complete reliance on God
 - he loved living things: they moved him to prayer
- he encountered nature as a unified whole
 - eg “Canticle of Brother Sun”

Francisthought—

The Canticle should be part of every “major” Fcan event by praying it out loud, or singing it in one of the songs of the Church.

- seeming contradiction—shouldn’t he of all people forbid the eating of meat—he was the only medieval religious founder who permitted the eating of meat
 - S was more important” “eat what is set before you” (mythought: maybe F tried to compromise)

15. Integration into the Life of the Church

- although not many brothers, the movement had grown large enough that it could now fulfill Christ’s command to preach the G to all nations
 - in May 1217 Francis selected leaders to lead groups of brothers outside of central Italy
 - about 60 brothers were sent to different areas, we guess that around 300 or 400 brothers were involved
 - after F sent out his missionaries, he set out for France
 - one of the reasons may have been that France had a strong Eucharistic devotion and France had that
 - F chose Silvester, a priest to go with him so the F would never be without the Eucharist on his journey

Francisthought—

F “never wanted to be without the E”

A Fcan should try to go to Mass at least once during the week as well as on the weekend.

Take the time to realize what we believe:

- *we come into close intimate contact with a person we claim to be our God and guide*
- *and we believe that for the few minutes the bread and wine is in our bodies, we have close personal contact with our God*
 - *and too many of us let that moment pass us by without any effect at all*
 - *we truly do not recognize what we have*
 - *what can we do about it?*
 - *it is the whole thing of concentration—*

- *we do that by simply bringing our minds back once we realize that we are not concentrating*
- *perhaps we need the help of reading the words quietly*
- *or closing our eyes and getting into what is happening*
- *we are easily distracted, but we can overcome the distraction at least somewhat*

- F traveled toward France ending up in Florence where Cardinal Hugolino was

- the cardinal did not agree that F should leave the P and ordered F to return home and fulfill his major responsibility: leadership of his growing movement.

Francisthought—

*F was always “obedient” (with his own understanding of obedience) to the Church
We must listen to the significant voices concerning our choice of what to do.*

- the cardinal offered his services as an advocate at the Curia and F accepted

- this signaled a major change in the status of F, his movement and its relations to the hierarchy

16. F Dispatches Letters and Missions

- F was probably ordained a deacon at Hugolino’s assistance in 1217-18
- within a year of his return to A, F composed his first of two “Letters to the Clergy”
- what motivates him is the same passion that sent him on the road to France, his love of the E
 - comparing the E to the Incarnation
 - he knew that he could have direct contact with God during the Mass, and had very harsh words for those who ignored the E’s presence

Francisthought---

*A Fcan will always be interested in some type of Eucharistic adoration—visiting a Church, specific adoration, or the like.
During the adoration, Fcans should center themselves around Gospel thoughts.*

- in his “letter to the Clergy”, F warned of reverence for priests as well as the Blessed Sacrament

- we grasp a little of F’ developing spirituality: before he had focused on praying, repairing and cleaning churches and reverence for priests

- now his piety focused on God’s most tangible manifestation in the world: the E itself

- F also had a profound sense of God’s presence in the concrete here and now

- therefore his concern for written words which have letters that compose the glorious name of the Lord God

- F had a very difficult time refraining from judgment of others, especially when he was obliged to correct others

Francisthought---

A Christian and therefore a Fcan generally speaking will not desire to be “in charge” of anything. There are some situations which require a Christian and therefore a Fcan to be “the boss” or “where the buck stops,” but they will always consult others and try to rule with “gentle direction.”

- there were pressing matters of administration and governance to be addressed, but by talent and temperament, F found himself unsuited to the task

- the missions had a good result of making the Fcan movement known
- as missionaries returned home frustrated, F found that they did not consider passive acceptance of rejection as a virtue

Francisthought---

Passive regression is a virtue.

We do not like to be shunned, and we often want to retaliate in some way.

- some came to him to ask him to request a papal privilege
- some came to him to ask him to request a papal privilege
 - F reacted sternly for not accepting their rejection without complaint
 - prelates were to be won over by the brothers’ obedience and humility, not papal order
 - some brothers went behind F’ back and it angered F greatly
 - Hugolino procured a papal letter of recommendation certifying the brothers’ orthodoxy
 - F did not like it, of course, nevertheless, it gave F the fulfillment of a dream—to go to the Holy Land
- in June 1219, appointed vicars Gregory of Naples and Matthew of Narni
- made his departure different from the France fiasco

17. F Abroad

- recapture of Jerusalem had been a project of Innocent III and now Honorius III
- Crusader forces were in position to move against the sultan of Egypt Malik-al-Adil
 - the invasion of Egypt would become known as the Fifth Crusade
 - in the fight al-Adil died, succeeded by Malik al-Kamil, not as good as his father, but known for clemency and humanity
 - Cardinal Pelagius Galvani took leadership of Crusader forces which had become divided by rivalry and faction

Francisthought---

HOW TO LIVE IN A COUNTRY AT WAR

F went among the soldiers....

Perhaps this means that a Christian and therefore a F can should be interested in what their country (nation) is doing with regard to protecting, fighting, and killing and should volunteer in doing ways to help people rather than hate them

- contact with Crusaders profoundly disturbed F
- crusader forces suffered a major defeat
- F asked permission to cross enemy lines
 - Cardinal flatly refused, but F continued to harass the Cardinal, who finally allowed it saying in effect: if you are harmed or killed, do not expect any help from me
- F was taken to al-Kamil
 - received well, no doubt hoping that they were men who were charged with reopening negotiations
 - F got immediately to the point: he was an ambassador of Jesus and had come for the salvation of the sultan's soul
 - F never spoke ill of Muhammad just as he never spoke ill of anyone

Francisthought---

A Christian and therefore a F can will not speak ill of others, but will work to overcome their "evil" by good works and prayers.

- F received some followers including some connected to de Vitry, and this time de Vitry was very critical of F's movement
 - the horror of the sack that followed the breach of the walls probably brought back painful flashbacks
 - F heard disturbing news from home

V. F RETURNS HOME (1220-1221)

18. F and the Cardinal

- twelve months from spring 1220 to spring 1221 were F's *annus horribilis*, the most painful year of his life

Francisthought---

We are reminded of Paul's famous "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Though the exact nature of this affliction is not certain, its purpose is. Paul twice emphasizes that this "thorn" was given to him precisely to prevent his being "too elated."

The Christian and therefore a F can will recognize that there are many "thorns" in their lives that they are an indication of weakness (as it was for F). What is called for is an

acceptance of the thorns as a sign of the weaknesses of human nature, and working with them is necessary since it will make us stronger.

- F would have realized that this year would make him stronger although at the time he was too wrapped up in the problems
 - F faced the brothers who had established the new dietary rules
 - F was offended because the brothers were not willing to suffer the humiliation of the criticism of the pious people who thought they were less strict than the other Orders
 - he discovered two other problems as well
 - Brother John of Cappella had gone off on his own and formed a community to serve lepers
 - F did not want his friars to be social workers or hospital attendants
 - another brother, Br Philip Longo who was responsible for Clare and the Poor Ladies, had petitioned the Holy See to grant letters of protection for the nuns, giving him authority to excommunicate anyone who disturbed them
 - a lesser brother, following Christ's command to turn the other cheek, was not to resist evil under any circumstance or in any way

Francisthought---

A Christian and therefore a F can will "turn the other cheek" and accept any evil that is perpetrated on them.

- this caused dissension which divided the brotherhood
 - F had a famous dream: small black hen and under him so many chicks were hatching that he could no longer keep them under his wings
 - obvious conclusion: for F, he had failed
 - F went directly to the Pope Honorius III
 - asked for someone with whom he could discuss affairs
 - gave him "The Lord of Ostia," Cardinal Hugolino who had already been advising F
 - F got Hugolino, who was acting as "pope" in F's eyes to revoke the letters of Philip Longo and reject John of Cappella's project
 - De Vitry in his history said that he had never encountered a group whose identity was so tied up with the personality of its founder, a founder who was himself uncomfortable with his position of leadership

Francisthought---

Probably the biographer who most captures F' personality is G.K. Chesterton in his book "Saint Francis of Assisi."

What Chesterton does (with uncanny but, for him, typical brilliance) is draw the reader into the mind-boggling simplicity and singleness of vision that characterized Francis' view of life after breaking with his old way of life as the son of Pietro di

Bernardone. Chesterton treats Francis sympathetically, describing him as a man who, quite literally, started over. When Francis gave himself to God, embracing the principles of poverty, chastity, and obedience, he did so with a startling purity and, some might say, naiveté. Chesterton is at his best when defending this naiveté. He recognizes the danger of trying to institutionalize or force these virtues on all of Christendom in the way that Francis embraced them personally, arguing that it was more necessary for Francis to be absorbed into Christendom than for Christendom to be absorbed into Francis, but he sees Francis nonetheless as a necessary and crucial reminder and challenge to the church and the world.

Mythought:

[F's personality can speak to the Catholic people in the midst of the current moral crisis among the Catholic hierarchy including Pope, Cardinals and Bishops.

Quote from Michael Gerson, Washington Post: (non-Catholic author)
"When religious institutions are corrupt, there are at least two paths of reform. The first is the way of St. F of A. He reacted to the ecclesiastical and social corruption of his time by renouncing his father's wealth, stripping off his clothes and living a life of poverty and service. He touched lepers, cared for animals, tried to mediate a crusade and introduced gentleness and love into the harsh 13th century. At one personal turning point, he heard God saying, 'F, seest thou not that my house is in ruins? Go and restore it for me.' And he did, by returning to the example of Christianity's founder, but staying within the established church."]

-----Note; the other path of reform he cites Martin Luther, who left the Church. He closes his article with: *"F or Luther? In either case, Christian reformers start with an advantage. The founder of their faith was also a radical religious reformer—an opponent of complacent religious leaders, a tough critic of hypocrisy and a defender of children. And he calls his followers to restore a house in ruins."*

- F and Hugolino chose Peter of Cataneo, Cesarius of Speyer and Elias of Assisi to be his advisors
- F called for a chapter at the P (with H's help)
- Honorius III released encyclicals on behalf of F's movement, calling them for the first time an Order
 - establishing rules for those entering the Order, the novitiate, etc.
 - H decided that the best way to introduce F to the Curia was to have him preach before a papal consistory

- he did and the pope and cardinals were edified as he preached from the heart and not from a prepared text as H wanted

- F no doubt consulted with experts together with Peter and Caesarius about the “form of life” that he now undertook to write

- F and Angelo Tancredi stayed at Rome in a Cardinal’s (Brancaleone, friend of H) residence

- F became very sick, probably the malaria that he contracted in Egypt which F interpreted as the demons attacking him

- F looked at it as the “sin” of abandoning his flock, and returned to the brothers where he wanted to work on the Rule

Francisthought---

The “mental pain” of F:

One of the most important “virtues” that a Christian and therefore a F can should learn is the ability to work with mental pain.

- Talk to someone you trust.

- Get moving: exercise, etc.

- Learn how to relax.

- Be aware of your emotional triggers.

- Avoid self-medication.

- Focus on the positive.

19. F Resigns

- after six months or so of work on his Rule, F announced his intention to relinquish leadership of Order and appoint Peter of Cataneo as his replacement

- no one was deceived: F remained the de factor leader

- Peter was not strong willed, and truly struggled with what to do with F

- F looked at himself as the “example” for the brothers, and he struggled with that role as exceptions were made to him because of his illness (malaria, probably)

- F suffered greatly from bouts of temptation and spiritual suffering

Francisthought---

F had the feeling that God had given him an impossible task.

We have spiritual suffering as well.

The solution is to talk to someone.

But we must guard against scrupulosity--a modern-day psychological problem that echoes a traditional use of the term scruples in a religious context to mean obsessive concern with one's own sins and compulsive performance of religious devotion.

- F looked at them as diabolical attacks

- only in solitude and prayer did he find any relief, a refuge that, by isolating him from the brothers and depriving them of his example, probably further fed his doubts and temptations

- God had given him a burden and he could find no escape from it even in retirement

20. More Letters and a Spiritual Testament

Francisthought---

Every Fcan should be reading something "Fcan" at least once a year, and part of the reading ought to include F's own writings.

- one way that F addressed the confusion of the brothers was to write letters to groups for which he had a special concern

- those letters that F wrote on his return to Italy give us an idea of his spiritual state of mind

- they were actually some of his thoughts before he left for the Holy Land, and we can see his development as a spiritual writer and mentor

- he wrote in Latin, the style of the Latin psalter which F sang or recited every day for several hours

Francisthought---

A Fcan should pray at least a Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer from the Divine Office (including modern adaptations when they feel better about the translations).

- F wrote to priests, Fcan ministers, and the podestas of Italian cities, all during 1220 probably

- one of F's letters spoke of honor to the Blessed Sacrament

- with similar ideas but calling for a bow to the Blessed Sacrament (the clerical gesture) rather than a genuflection (lay style preferred by F) at the elevation

- begged recipients to pick up and keep in reverence any piece of parchment on which was written one of the holy names of God

- that he wrote twice on this topic of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament is a window into F's mind

- another letter was to rulers stressing that death will come and will take away all of what they have, and he warned them of hell

Francisthought---

F was very concerned about people's souls. He wanted all people to go to heaven and it bothered him immensely that there were some people who might not. He was governed by a set of laws that spoke of sin and especially mortal sin. He was concerned especially about his friars, but he could see what was happening in the world.

A Christian and therefore a Fcan should be very concerned about what is happening in the world, praying that everyone use the grace that God gives them (without judgment of the person).

- but his specific thinking was a writing known as “Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers of Penance”
 - reworks what he wrote to the Sisters and shows some development of spiritual thought
 - two parts, the first to Christians practicing the virtues and the sacramental life, the second to those who neglect them
 - first part opens with a long section on the Incarnation and its links to the E
 - how the Lord chose poverty—exalted above all creation, he humbled himself to take flesh from the Virgin
 - interesting that this is the only mention of poverty in F’s letters of 1220-1221
 - does not dwell on poverty in itself, but on what J did
 - highlights a theme consistent with F’s post-conversion: the imitation of Christ’s act of self-offering is which is seen in the E
 - horrified F that some were indifferent or even hostile toward the E and preferred other shadows more than the Light
 - second major revision of the Earlier Exhortation
 - he links “penance” (within sacramental confession) directly to reception of communion
 - three specific acts of penance:
 - those of have power and can exercise it are to show mercy rather than judgment
 - those who have possessions are to give them up by giving them away
 - all believers can abstain from their “vices and sins” practicing prayer and fasting
 - also part of this Later Exhortation is a lengthy section devoted to love of neighbor, indeed love of enemies
 - subordination of “will” – obedience
 - only after this does F bring about physical mortification

Francisthought---

What about obedience for the secular Fcan?

Obedience to God, obviously—a Fcan has made a promise to God over and above obedience to rules of a Church;

Obedience to Others—husband, wife, parents, children, grandchildren, etc.;

Obedience to Self—health, exercise, etc.