

THE GOSPEL LIFE OF FRANCIS OF ASSISI



AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS WRITINGS THROUGH THE EARLIER RULE

Handbook Reflection

Dr. Luke Togni

The Gospel Life of St. Francis of Assisi Videos

Fr. Wayne Hellmann, OFM Conv. and Dr. Jay Hammond

Introduction and Afterword

Fr. David B. Couturier, OFM Cap.

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Abbreviations

<i>ER</i>	<i>Early Rule of 1221 (Regula Non Bullata)</i>
<i>LR</i>	<i>Later Rule of 1223 (Regula Bullata)</i>
<i>1C</i>	<i>The Life of St. Francis</i> by Thomas of Celano
<i>2C</i>	<i>The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul</i> by Thomas of Celano
<i>Jul</i>	<i>The Life of St. Francis</i> by Julian of Speyr
<i>Leg Maj</i>	<i>Legenda Major (The Major Legend of St. Francis)</i> by St. Bonaventure

PART 1: COURSE INTRODUCTION

SESSION 1: The Early Rule of 1221

Introduction

In a recent article, Willem Marie Speelman argues that Francis of Assisi was more a “man of gestures” than he was a developer of rules, strategies, and plans. He writes:

In an attempt to live and communicate this life, gestures were more important than words, for gestures ‘talk’ through and to the body. Thus, this humble man restored the church and the world without making use of ideals, strategies or plans. According to Giorgio Agamben the absence of an ideal or a plan was not a failure, but Francis’ very intention.¹

Thus, one of the first great paradoxes of the Franciscan way of life is that Francis writes rules not for the expressed purpose of enforcing commands, precepts, and regulations, but for the enactment of life-saving and kingdom-flourishing gestures. Francis wishes to follow in the footprints of Jesus Christ to enter into the drama of Christ’s humble coming among us in mercy and for the sake of peace. This takes obedience “to the Rule” to another level, beyond the self-satisfactions of compliance and identification. This gestural approach to rulemaking does not seek mere canonical compliance or ritual uniformity in the community. The Rule makes space for individuals to enter into the drama with the full force of their personality so that they can be accountable and agile in the performance of their *anamnesis* of the Christ in their time and place.

The Rule of 1221 is not an end product and it is not designed as a tool for solving all the problems of Franciscan life. It *is* a script that invites the friars to remember what their life is all about (living the gospel of Jesus Christ) and doing their part. It is an invitation to get on stage and enter the drama of the Christ here and now, interpreting convincingly and consistently in one’s own voice and gestures the dying and rising of the Christ among the sisters and brothers. As St. Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with **Christ**, **but I live**; yet **not** I anymore, **but Christ lives** in me.”

In this handbook, we invite Franciscans to think about and work through the way that Francis of Assisi presents the core elements of Gospel perfection. We demonstrate how solidarity with the poor is itself an intimate sharing in the work of God as God repairs the world in the Christ.

We thank Dr. Jay Hammond and Fr. Wayne Hellmann, superb experts in Franciscan theology, for sharing their knowledge and love of St. Francis of Assisi. Both of them have taught thousands of students over the years. Their videos assembled here will make their wisdom accessible across the world to new generations of students of Franciscan theology. They are dear colleagues in the Franciscan Institute.

We also thank Dr. Luke Togni, a Research Fellow of the Franciscan Institute, for developing this handbook. He has made the task both of individual and communal-based learning practical and pastoral.

¹ Willem Marie Speelman, “Pope Francis and Francis of Assisi: Men of Gesture,” *Franciscan Studies* 78 (2020): 281.

The Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University is committed to the expansion of Franciscan learning around the world. Our publications, seminars, workshops, and classes are all geared toward the widest possible dissemination of Franciscan history, theology, and spirituality. We are making these videos and handbook available free of charge so that all our sisters and brothers, especially those in struggling economies, might still benefit from the Franciscan resources available at the Franciscan Institute.

We thank our donors who have sponsored this research and this project.

For more information on the Franciscan Institute, go to: www.sbu.edu/franciscaninstitute

Fr. David B. Couturier, OFM. Cap.
Executive Director, The Franciscan Institute
Associate Professor, Theology and Franciscan Studies
St. Bonaventure University

SESSION 2: HOW TO NAVIGATE THIS COURSE

As Fr. David Couturier has explained, the Franciscan Institute has committed itself to make an education out of the riches of Franciscan tradition widely available, and to make this explanation of St. Francis of Assisi's Gospel entirely free. All of the materials for this course are available online, including the video lectures, the readings, and the handbook that has been written to guide you. Recognizing that time has its own value, and in the spirit of making this course free, we have designed it to be easily navigated and followed in simple steps easily conformed to the rhythm of your life. Furthermore, this course can be taken individually or as a community and its design makes it easy for adaptation to either approach. Read below to discover how each part of the course fits together and how to use the handbook to access and make use of the readings and the video lectures.

The overall plan of the course is very simple. You will read the whole *Early Rule* in a series of selections. Each selection from the *Early Rule* will be accompanied by a short video lecture by Dr. Jay Hammond to help you understand St. Francis' vision for living the Gospel. Additionally, most readings from the *Early Rule* will be accompanied by a video lecture from Fr. Wayne Hellmann, a Franciscan brother and priest, drawing from Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* to explain the importance of St. Francis' vision of Gospel life in the *Early Rule* and St. Francis for today. To support your engagement with the core reading and accompanying videos, we have provided a series of summaries, reflections, discussion questions, and supplementary readings. Below, we will explain how to use this material so that you may make your time spent with this course as enriching as possible.

I. Using The Handbook

Since this course is self-directed, the handbook takes the place of your instructor. It is designed to offer the structure and organization of a course, with all that you need to approach the *Early Rule* methodically. This handbook provides both an introduction to the course (Sessions 1 to 4) and a guide to your reading of the *Early Rule of 1221* with digital links to course materials and supporting summaries and questions (Session 5 to 23). It concludes with a short reflection to point you in the further direction of further studies in the Franciscan tradition (Session 24).

Sections 1 to 4 make the goal and method of this course clear. It also allows you to familiarize yourself with the *Early Rule of 1221*'s history and prepares to you to read and navigate the *Early Rule* thoughtfully.

Sections 5 to 23 are all organized as a kind of lecture without an instructor. With only a few exceptions, they are all organized in the same way. First, each section offers an **introduction** as an overview and then lists the **primary readings** and **videos**, and then **supplementary readings** with links to each in the PDF version of the handbook. This does not mean that you must read all of the material before going any further. Instead, the handbook indicates when you should read or watch the material as you proceed through each session's distinct sections. Of course, you may read or watch this material in any order you wish, but we have organized it to allow time for learning and reflection between the readings and the videos.

After the introduction, the sessions are divided into three parts. The first section is **Read the Rule**, in which you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own experiences that might be relevant to the excerpt of the *Early Rule* that you will read and learn about its historical **background**. Consider writing down your answers to the **questions to consider before reading** or even journaling with them. Once you are prepared, read the **primary reading**, which can be accessed through a link in the PDF.

The next section is **Understand the Rule**, in which you will be given material to encourage your thinking about the purpose and meaning of the *Early Rule*. First, you will be presented with **questions to help you engage with what you read**. These questions are intended to make you think over or look back on the reading and see how you understood St. Francis' teaching about Gospel life in the reading. You are also invited to read optional **supplementary readings** by St. Francis of Assisi, so that you can see links to St. Francis' understanding of Gospel life in other works and be prepared for any references to these works in Dr. Hammond's video lecture. Once you feel familiar with the reading and have begun to form your understanding of its meaning, watch Dr. Hammond's **video lecture**, in which he shares his expert knowledge of the rule's history and its spiritual vision. His lectures will let you see how carefully constructed and thoughtful the seemingly simple *Early Rule* is. Once you have watched the lecture, a **summary** is provided to review Dr. Hammond's points and even offer additional insights to the rule. In this way, both those who prefer to listen and those who prefer to read have a way to be taught about the content of *Early Rule*.

The final section is **Reflect on the Rule**, wherein you will read a **reflection** to aid you in shifting from considering the *Early Rule*'s history and original meaning to thinking about what it asks us to do in our spiritual lives. Afterwards, you will be given an optional reading selection from Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the *Joy of the Gospel*, to prepare you for Fr. Hellmann's closing reflection. In his **video reflections**, Fr. Hellmann challenges you to live St. Francis' vision of Gospel life in the present by using specific examples from Pope Francis' words addressed to the needs of the Church and world today. When you have spent time reflecting on the rule with all of these resources, you will find a final set of **questions for reflection and discussion**, open-ended questions that invite you to question and interrogate and be challenged by what you have read and heard. This can be done individually or as a group. Rather than an end, we hope these questions are a starting point for you to ponder the rule and how and if you can embrace the imitation of Jesus in the form commended by St. Francis. You, too, can and should raise and pose questions to the *Early Rule*.

Whether or not you are a Franciscan or seeking to learn from St. Francis without any official connection to a Franciscan Order, the opportunity to learn from the poor man of Assisi belongs to you. As you will learn, St. Francis took necessity as the guide in following any rule. What we have provided in this handbook is at your service. We strongly recommend following the pattern we have provided, but please use what is provided in a way that best serves your learning style. Moreover, the pace is your own. Perhaps you may take one section of a session each day or make the whole program into a week retreat. The freedom to do so is yours.

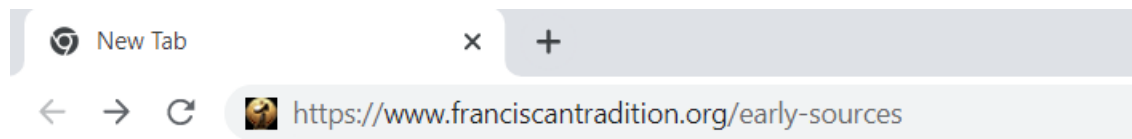
II. Accessing the materials

i. *The Early Rule and Supplementary Readings*

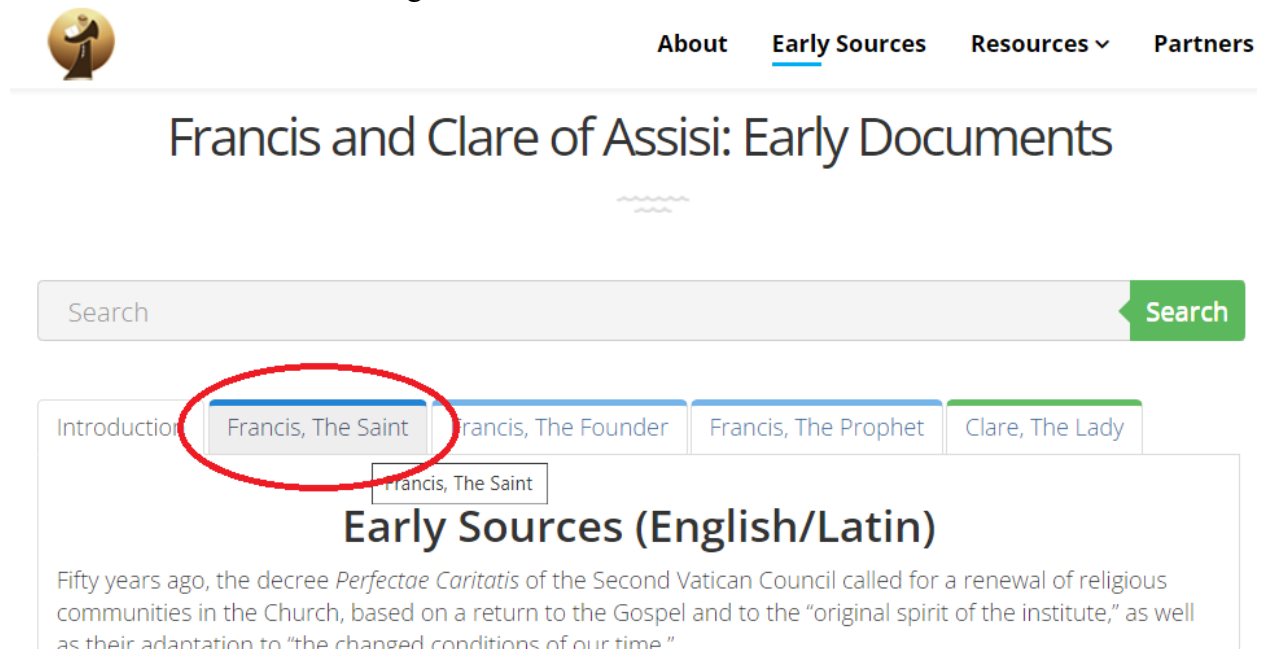
The *Early Rule of 1221* and all of the other supplementary readings can be found in the English translation of early *St. Francis of Assisi: Early Documents Volume 1: The Saint (FAED 1)*. This work is available in print and through the online database *St. Francis and Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* on the Franciscan Tradition website (<https://www.franciscantradition.org/early-sources>). This database includes all of the volumes of early Franciscan writings in English and Latin. Each document in the online database matches the pages of the print document, allowing you to use both print and online versions interchangeably. Helpfully, the online database lets you perform word searches of the documents should you want to investigate terms or ideas across the corpus of early Franciscan texts.

While it is easiest to access these online texts by clicking the link in the PDF, they can also be accessed by following the steps below:

1. Enter the URL (<https://www.franciscantradition.org/early-sources>) into your web browser search bar and press the “enter” key to visit the web page.



2. At the “Introduction Page” click on the “Francis, The Saint” tab.



3. The *Early Rule*, along with all of Francis' other available writings will be found on the page accessed in step two. To read the *Early Rule*, click on its name.



[Introduction](#)

[Francis, The Saint](#)

[Francis, The Founder](#)

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[Resources](#) ▾

[Partners](#)

Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. 1, The Saint

[General Introduction](#), FA:ED, p. 11

The Writings of Francis of Assisi (1205/06-1226)

[Introduction](#), FA:ED, vol 1, p. 35

[The Prayer Before the Crucifix](#), FA:ED, vol 1, p. 40

[Admonition and Exhortation \("Letter to the Faithful"\)](#)

[Shorter Version \("Earlier Exhortation"\)](#), FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 41

[Longer Version \("Later Admonition and Exhortation"\)](#), FAED, vol. 1, p. 42

[Exhortations to the Clergy](#)

[Earlier Edition \(before 1219\)](#), FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 52

[Later Edition \(1220\)](#), FAED, vol. 1, p. 54

[Letters to the Custodians](#)

[The First Letter to the Custodians \(1220\)](#), FA:ED, Vol. 1., p. 56

[The Second Letter to the Custodians \(1220\)](#), FA:ED, Vol. 1., p. 60

[A Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples](#): FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 58

[A Rule for Hermitages \(1217-1221\)](#): FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 61

[The Earlier Rule](#): FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 63

[Fragments](#)

[The Earlier Rule](#): FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 63

[Fragments Found in a Manuscript in the worchester Cathedral](#), FA:ED, Vol 1., p. 87

[Fragments Inserted into the *Exposition of the Rule of the Friars Minor* by Hugh of Digne \(1245-1255\)](#), FA:ED,

4. Once you have accessed your chosen text, you can navigate the pages within by using the bar at the bottom of the page, or return to select another page by clicking “Contents.”

[Prologue]

¹In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

²This is the life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that Brother Francis petitioned the Lord Pope to grant and confirm for him; and he did grant and confirm it for him and his brothers present and to come.

³Brother Francis—and whoever is head of this religion—promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and his successors.

⁴Let all the brothers be bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors.

[Chapter I: The Brothers must live without anything of their own and in chastity and in obedience]

¹The rule and life of these brothers is this, namely: “to live in obedience, in chastity, and without anything of their own,” and to follow the teaching and footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ, ...

[< Previous](#)
[Next >](#)

a. David Flood’s study of this document, *Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder*, initiated a series of studies including that of Kajetan Esser which formed the basis of this translation, cf. David Flood, *Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder, Franziskanische Forschungen, Heft 19* (Weri i. W. 1967); Kajetan Esser, *Textkritische Untersuchungen zur Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder, Spicilegium Bonaventurianum 9*, (Grottaferrata: 1974).

b. *Religio* [religion] refers to any religious community yet implies less of a sense of a religious *Ordo* [Order] as that of Saint Benedict or that of the Cistercians. The reference to Pope Innocent III (+July 16, 1216) suggests that the roots of this document are the *propositum vitae*, the primitive document, which the Pope approved orally in 1209.

c. Innocent III used this formula in approving the Rule of the Trinitarians, December 17, 1198, cf. PL 214, 445; 217, 1137.

Caput I - Quod fratres debent vivere sine proprio et in castitate et obedientia

¹Regula et vita istorum fratrum haec est, scilicet vivere in obedientia, in castitate et sine proprio, et Domini nostri Jesu Christi doctrinam et vestigia sequi, ...

<	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	Contents	>
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Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol. 1, p. 63

5. You now know two ways to access the online texts of the *FCA:ED*. You may use this free resource as much as you like and return to it even after you complete this course.

ii. *Evangelii Gaudium*, “*The Joy of the Gospel*”

This apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, can be accessed for free online in many different languages on the Vatican Website at the following URL:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

If you prefer to read the exhortation in another language, you can select from a number of languages at the top of the web page. The exhortation is divided into numbered paragraphs, and all the assigned supplementary readings from *Evangelii Gaudium* follow that numbering scheme.

iii. *The Video Lectures*

All of the readings and videos for this course are available for free online. All of Dr. Hammond's and Fr. Hellmann's video lectures are hosted on YouTube and can be accessed through the Franciscan Institute website directly, or through the links in the PDF of the handbook. The first videos from Fr. Hellmann and Dr. Hammond present an overview of the course and the importance of *Evangelii Gaudium* in the context of this course.

Primary Material for Study

1. WATCH: [Session 2](#) (Dr. Hammond)
2. WATCH: [Session 2](#) (Fr. Hellman)

You now know how to navigate this course with the handbook and access all of the readings and videos. As you progress through the course, you may return at any point to revisit any sessions and its readings and videos as often as you wish.

If you are taking this course individually, please continue to Session 3 and 4. If you plan to lead a group or meet as a group without a designated facilitator, please read the note below.

III. Facilitating this course for a group

This handbook has been designed for facilitating group studies of the course as much as for individual students. However, as a facilitator, you may use the handbook differently than an individual student. If you are an experienced facilitator, you already know that being familiar with the overall material and pattern of the course will let you prepare to lead it. While you do not need to read everything in advance, the session summaries, introductions, and questions will help you prepare to lead others through the course in a manner best suited for your own community.

For a leader, the handbook is a tool and resource applicable to many different approaches. For example, your group could have everyone read the assigned session in advance of your meetings and address part of the session, or you may use the meeting to work through an entire session together. Alternatively, you may consider offering a lecture of your own based upon the written material and then watch the videos as a group. You may use the questions in the sessions, add to them, or develop your own. On the other hand, a group may take the course individually and meet only to discuss their collective responses, but even in this case, the handbook provides a shared point of reference for discussion.

However you choose to approach the course, keep in mind that the course's organization, videos, and handbook have a helpful order ready to be adapted. Their design reflects the content of the *Early Rule* and is designed to work with only a small section at a time. Even, if this is your first time working with *Early Rule*, or your first time leading discussions about it, the handbook, videos, and readings will prepare you to share it with others.

PART 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE *EARLIER RULE*

SESSION 3 & 4: BECOMING FAMILIAR WITH THE EARLY RULE OF 1221

Introduction

The *First* or *Early Rule* of St. Francis opens by presenting his most basic understanding of Gospel perfection, or, in other words, the most direct way to imitate Jesus Christ and follow in His footsteps. St. Francis also knew that not all Christians would or even should be expected to live in this manner, so this *Early Rule* also includes a simple explanation of how those who did join his community should do so, even just to test it out. In this session, Dr. Hammond presents the core elements of that vision of Gospel perfection and explains how joining St. Francis' order (or embracing its spirit) and so choosing solidarity with God and the poor is a sharing in the work of God. Fr. Hellmann's video shows how Pope Francis' encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the *Joy of the Gospel*, shows that the renunciation proposed by St. Francis to follow the Gospel is also a path to the greatest joy.

Primary Material for Study

3. WATCH: [Session 3](#) (Dr. Hammond)
4. WATCH: [Session 4](#) (Dr. Hammond)

Supplementary Readings

1. Exhortation to the Clergy, Later Edition, *FAED* 1, 54-55 (*FCA:ED*)
2. The Joy of the Gospel, nn. 25-40

I. The Historical Context of the Earlier Rule\

Questions Before Session 3 Video

1. Have you ever been tasked with developing or implementing rules to govern or guide the conduct of other people? If so, what principles guided you and how did you respond to your real-life situation?
2. What is the purpose of rules or manuals of life? Have they ever been useful for you?

Watch: Session 3 (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

The *Early Rule* composed by St. Francis of Assisi is neither the first instruction about how St. Francis and his companions (and, later, followers and imitators) should conform their lives to the Gospel, nor would it be the last. The version of the *Early Rule* that is still preserved today dates to

the year 1221, when it was approved at the “Chapter,” or gathering, of the Franciscan brotherhood together on the feast of Pentecost of that year. Lamentably, the original handwritten document is lost to us, but that only testifies to the shifting world of Franciscan legislation in those early days. Only nine years prior, St. Francis appealed to Pope Innocent III to have his fraternity of poor preachers recognized as a legitimate religious society with ecclesiastical approval. At the time, Francis presented a simple *Propositum Vitae*, a “Proposal for Living,” drawn from the Gospels directly. It was approved, however, it was soon after revised into a *Forma Vitae*, a more detailed “Form of Life,” to explain their manner of living as the fraternity became recognized as *religio*, or “religion,” that is, a religious order with its own rules and governance. This document was on its way to becoming the *Early Rule* we now possess as additional material was added to address the division of the Franciscan Order into provinces as it grew and to limit who could preach in accord with commands of the Fourth Lateran Council held in 1215. This written rule was trying to keep up with developing order and St. Francis’ own experience, and it would eventually be surpassed by the *Later Rule* in 1223, only two years after it was approved in the form we have it today as the *Early Rule*. In summary, the *Early Rule* was a practical document meant to guide living the Gospel life, and all the changes in the rule and its eventual replacement were intended to achieve that end.

St. Francis’ evolving rule stood in contrast to the other sets of rules written for monks, like the Rule of St. Benedict, and for canons (religious who lived a non-cloistered community life), like the Rule of St. Augustine. His rule would eventually become more detailed like theirs were, but Francis sought a different kind of life for his brothers, who supported themselves by working or begging in the world—hence the name of *mendicants* or “beggars” that was given to them. If those earlier Rules looked to enshrine principles for a community to seek holiness together, the development of the Franciscan rule shows an inverse approach. Francis’ earliest proposal for life enshrines the shape of holiness in imitating Christ and then grew to include the rules about how to keep this life as a community. Francis did not present himself as rival to these other forms of religious life, but it cannot be doubted that he was trying to make embracing the Gospel very straightforward and accessible to everyone in his time, although the idea of mendicant women was simply a bridge too far for his time. Nevertheless, Francis’ example led the establishment of three orders, the Friars Minor, the Poor Clares, and the lay Brothers and Sisters of Penance.

To understand the appeal of St. Francis’ rule it is also necessary to know that it came from a medieval Italy in a time when social changes saw the rise of cities and merchant enterprises and the shift away from the feudal system, where the poorer classes relied on the patronage of nobles whose lands they worked and fiefdoms they both supported and relied upon. Simultaneously, reform movements in the Church during the later 11th, 12th, and into the 13th centuries advocated for greater integrity in religious practice by the clergy and the personal holiness of laity taking responsibility for their faith. Further, there was not only social and religious upheaval in that time. Wars, too, were fought locally (as between Assisi and Perugia), between Christian states in the wider European Christendom, and the crusades were being fought in the Middle East and North Africa. St. Francis’ guidance to a life of penance, prayer, poverty, and peace was an invitation to all who dwelt in this turbulent world to find security in relying upon God and having only what resources they would need to live and to look at every other person in the light of their creator. What the *Early Rule* preserves is not an answer to the upheaval of that age in the sense of a plan

of social or church reform in any direct way, but the invitation amid the trouble of the kingdoms of this world to choose instead the Kingdom of God, whose coming Jesus Christ preached before he established it with his cross.

II. The Text of the Earlier Rule

Questions Before Session 4 Video

1. What do you hope to find in reading the *Early Rule*? Is there a particular part of your life where you are looking for guidance?
2. If you are already familiar with St. Francis of Assisi or Franciscanism, what do you expect to find in his rule? Do you expect to be more confirmed or challenged in what you read?

Watch: [Session 4](#) (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

How can we make the most of reading the *Early Rule*? There are certainly different reasons to read it. Some read it to understand the history of the Franciscan Order, or the life of St. Francis, or even to learn about religion and society in the European Middle Ages. Others might read it as a model for their life and path to seek God in this life. This course is written for the latter, but along the way, thinking about the former way will help us see why Francis—and his companions—wrote as they did as they sought to live out the Gospel as a community in the towns and cities of their day.

This course and its handbook are designed to help you read St. Francis' *Early Rule* attentively, slowly, and accurately. As Dr. Hammond explained, it was not only the product of St. Francis' developed thinking and experience of trying to live the Gospel, but it was also composed with the help of his brothers, such as Cesar of Speyr, who added its many scriptural citations. They wrote it with a purpose. The goal of this course is to help you see that purpose in the *Early Rule* to help make it speak to you in your time. This is also the reason the meditations on Pope Francis' encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium*, "*The Joy of Gospel*," have been provided by Fr. Hellmann, so that you can connect its ancient wisdom to living the Gospel in your own context. In short, the course is designed to help you become familiar with the mind and vision of St. Francis so that we might know Christ like he did.

To help make sense of its purpose and the vision of St. Francis, this course's sessions treat the *Early Rule* in short, thematic sections. Its prologue and twenty-four chapters are divided into nine thematic sections. These themes will help to focus your reading of the chapters and consider what St. Francis and his companions thought about and did regarding the numerous issues they faced in their lives, from poverty, to work, friendship, prayer, and more. While the themes are diverse, as

Dr. Hammond explains, they reflect in the rule a single purpose: to outline a life following in Jesus' teachings in order to follow in His footsteps. How will the brothers do so? By conforming their words and actions to Jesus. Throughout this course, the dual way of following Jesus with good words and good deeds will be reiterated in Dr. Hammond's videos.

This leaves us with a question to ask the *Early Rule* in this course: "How can our words and our deeds be conformed to Jesus' footsteps?" As you find your way to an answer, you are invited to ask many smaller questions of the Rule, such as "what did Francis intend his brothers to do?", "what concrete situation was he responding to and how is mine similar or different?", or even, "how does his vision challenge me and my customary way of living?" We hope to draw you into conversation with the Poor Man of Assisi nearly eight hundred years after his death and with Pope Francis today. St. Francis' voice is a lively one that defies many romantic stereotypes and really exceeds any simplistic picture by his single-minded love of God and neighbor. The saint both challenges and consoles through his *Early Rule*. But like the Gospels themselves, no one can walk away from it with a sense of self-satisfaction. While no reader is expected to embrace the *Early Rule* as a strict rule, it offers each of us a mirror to look upon how we are striving for the Kingdom of God.

PART 3: THE *LIFE* OF THESE BROTHERS

SESSION 5: EARLY RULE PROLOGUE and 1 & 2: *The Rule and Life of these brothers...*

Introduction

The *First* or *Early Rule* of St. Francis opens by presenting his most basic understanding of Gospel perfection, or, in other words, the most direct way to imitate Jesus Christ and follow in His footsteps. St. Francis also knew that not all Christians would or even should be expected to live in this manner, so this *Early Rule* also includes a simple explanation of how those who did join his community should do so, even just to test it out. In this session, Dr. Hammond presents the core elements of that vision of Gospel perfection and explains how joining St. Francis' order (or embracing its spirit) and choosing solidarity with God and the poor is to share in the work of God. Fr. Hellmann's video shows how Pope Francis' encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the *Joy of the Gospel* shows that the renunciation proposed by St. Francis to follow the Gospel is also a path to the greatest joy.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule* Prologue – Ch. 2, *FAED* 1, 63-65
2. WATCH: [Session 5](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 5](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *Exhortation to the Clergy*, Later Edition, *FAED* 1, 54-55 (*FCA:ED*)
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 49-60

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. Do you think that the Gospel instructs us to follow a specific way of living our day-to-day lives?
2. In your reading of the Gospel, what seems to be the most important instruction for our daily living?
3. What led you to consider adopting Franciscan spirituality in your life as a lay person or as a vocation with St. Francis'?

Background

In the biographies of St. Francis of Assisi, two of the Gospel citations found in the *Early Rule* 1 (*ER*) (Matt 19:21; Matt 16:24), come from Francis' decision to confirm the desires of his earliest companion, Bernard, to leave all things behind, like Francis, and give what he received from God back to God. In Thomas of Celano's second life of St. Francis, *The Remembrance of the Desire of*

a *Soul* (1C), and in Bonaventure *Major Legend of St. Francis of Assisi* (*Leg Maj*), Francis goes to a book of the Gospels in the Church of St. Nicholas and opens it at random three times, commanding himself and Bernard to follow whatever counsels appear before their eyes.² First, they see the command, “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell all you own, and give to the poor” (Matt 19:21). Second, “Take nothing on your journey” (Luke 9:3). Third, “If anyone would follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24). This resembles an ancient Greco-Roman practice called *sortes* (“lots” or “fates”) where sacred books would be opened at random to predict the future based on the text that appeared. Christians were known to use the bible in this way, although the practice was condemned as divination, that is, trying to grasp God’s knowledge for one’s own purposes. Francis’ attitude and goal are different, since he was not trying to predict the future, but listening for the word of God and trusting that God would confirm the way to Gospel perfection. In his telling of the story, St. Bonaventure explains that the Holy Spirit moved in Francis before he went to seek the book of the Gospels. For Francis and his later followers and biographers, this episode illustrates that St. Francis’ vision for Gospel life was not his own idea, but an idea given by God.

Chapter 2 of the *ER* describes the clothing or “habit” of Francis’ followers. As Dr. Hammond mentions in the video, clothing and social class were closely connected in the European Middle Ages. Each class (peasants, the emerging middle-class in the cities, knight and nobles, and clerics) all had a distinctive way of dressing. These different forms of dress demonstrated individual status as well as social connections to families, states, and special societies. In the famous story of Francis’ stripping of his clothes before the Bishop of Assisi, his father demanded that he give all that he had back to him for his disobedience—Francis had taken his father’s money to restore little worn-down churches in the area. Francis took his clothes and entrusted himself to the bishop, but more, to his Father in heaven. By taking off his clothes, Francis renounced his connection to his family and his social class. His new habit was a simple tunic and cloak with a rope belt instead of a leather one. This was also distinguished from the dress of the religious orders of the day who wore black or white.³ His choice of dress expressed that he belonged only to God and to the poor, who wore the simplest clothes.

Read Primary Reading: ER 10-11, *FAED* 1, 71-72

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. What do the four Gospel texts and their accompanying threefold formula (obedience, poverty, and chastity) mean today?
2. The *ER* speaks against hypocrisy, i.e., those who say (words) they are following the Gospel, but their actions indicate they are not. Jesus too spoke against such hypocrisy. Where today is there such hypocrisy—not just in the “others” but in one’s own words and deeds?

² 2C 15; *Leg Maj* 3.3.

³ 1C 13; 2C 3; Jul 10; *Leg Maj* 2.4.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *Exhortation to the Clergy*, Later Edition, *FAED* 1, 54-55 (*FCA:ED*)

Watch: [Session 5](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

“To live the rule is to follow Jesus’ teachings by deeds.” This, Dr. Hammond explains, is the word-deed dialectic of the Rule. The word “dialectic” really means the kind of back-and-forth exchange that happens in conversations or in other interactions, such as games or dancing. It is a living, unfolding process. For the life of the early Franciscans and the followers of St. Francis today, the interplay between hearing Jesus’ teaching and responding to it with deeds that follow and exemplify Him is the basic law of Gospel life: “do whatever He [Jesus] tells you.” It is, therefore, a life of *obedience*.⁴

The first chapter teaches that the life of the Gospel is not simply listening to Jesus’ teaching and acting accordingly; it is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. To act in accordance with Jesus’ teaching is to become *like* Jesus; to become like the teacher. The *ER* highlights four basic ways in which this is done. First, through embracing poverty and giving all one has to the poor (this also stores up treasure in heaven). Second, by living in obedience, rather than one’s own will, which is to take up the cross by dying to yourself and your personal inclinations. Third, by living in chastity. This is done by relinquishing the flesh and blood bonds of our family, our desires for sexual intimacy, and even the children that should come from the bodily union of spouses. The follower of Francis is attached and prepared to follow Christ alone with simplicity, directness, and readiness. To those who leave behind fortune and family, the Gospel promises a great reward, a hundred-fold reward. It is a lot to ask a man or a woman in any age to give up self-interest and wealth, one’s own will, and exclusive relationships. However, it allows the person to serve anyone, wherever they may be, and to serve God at all times, for which the reward will be great: eternal life enjoying and rejoicing in God.

The second chapter explains how a newcomer to the Order should be received in straightforward steps. First, if the brother is prompted by God to join the order (and so not of his own will alone), he should present himself to the brothers. The brothers will then present him to their leader, the Minister of the brothers, who has the responsibility of explaining Franciscan life and its demands. The brothers must receive the newcomer with kindness, and because they are committed to poverty, they should not intervene in his arrangement of his worldly affairs. If he decides to join the Order for a probationary period, he must sell all he has, even though he may still be attached to his goods. These goods, or the profits from selling them, will be given to the poor. The Franciscan brothers may receive some of the new brother’s goods (as long as it’s not money) if they have a real need, because they are also poor. Once his goods are distributed, he returns to complete one year under probation and it is during this time that he receives the Franciscan habit.

⁴ In Latin, the word *ob-audire* means, from which we get *obey*, means “to listen to” or “to listen closely.”

When that year is completed, the initiate may choose to stay or go, and if he stays, he undertakes obedience to the Order and cannot join another Order afterwards. He will live his life according to the Rule as well as the rites and laws of the Church. He will live *poorly* and wear poor clothes. In choosing solidarity with the poor, refraining from the bonds of family and society, and renouncing one's own will, he will listen to and follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

In the video, Dr. Hammond discusses how the entry of a new brother (and in our context today, of a new sister, too) entails a relationship between God, the self, and the neighbor. As the scriptural quotations *ER 1* say so clearly, in Gospel perfection, there is an unbreakable link between choosing God and choosing the poor. In St. Francis' vision of Gospel life and perfection, when God raises in us the invitation to follow him, our answer is not isolated from our neighbor, especially the poor neighbor. Our embrace of the neighbor is the place where the initiate says "yes" to God by saying "no" to his or herself, when she or he makes the double renunciation by choosing another on this Earth to obey and to place all goods in the hands of the needy. The *ER* is very clear; this action should be irrevocable. The will and goods once given away should not be sought again because now the man or woman has the freedom to follow Christ and to store up treasure in heaven. This treasure, however, is not clawing back what was given up on Earth. No, like the one behind the ploughshare, the Franciscan looks forward, so that the work of following Christ on Earth will reap fruit in accordance with it. Trust in God and solidarity with the poor on Earth will become bonds of fulfillment and mutual joy in heaven.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 49-60.

Watch: [Session 5](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

"Rejoice!" the angel announced to Mary when she was about to conceive the Son of God. Fr. Hellmann teaches that the coming of Jesus into our lives should always be marked with joy. He notes that Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, explains that if we follow the commands and wisdom of Jesus truly, whatever we do will be accompanied by joy. Otherwise, our acts will not be of the Gospel, no matter how it might seem so to us.

How can this be? Our lives, when striving to live according to Jesus' life and teachings, to embody the "word-deed dialectic," while marked with wonder, happiness, consolation, excitement, and hope are met with our experience of sorrow, repentance, disappointment, anger, loneliness, and other painful feelings. Living the Gospel does not banish being human and wash away the

difficulties inside and outside of ourselves. If so, how can a life of following the Gospel always be marked by Joy? Fr. Hellmann points out a powerful statement from Pope Francis in chapter 10 of *Joy of the Gospel* that explains the nature of this Gospel joy, which he abbreviates and paraphrases as: “Life is obtained in the manner it is given up in order to give life to others. Therein, we will find joy.”

That statement is a sort of rephrasing of the Gospel citations of the *Early Rule* 1: “If you wish to follow me [...] take up your cross and follow me [...]” and “[...] you will find treasure in heaven.” God’s love for us is what St. Francis saw in Christ’s cross, the cross that was imprinted on his body, and what Pope Francis sees in Christian joy. Furthermore, to take *up* the cross is not to punish ourselves, even if it involves penance and mortification by dying to our self-will. To take up the cross is to love others *with God’s love*, the love of charity that gives life to another and makes us most fully alive.

To have this charity, God’s own love for Himself and for us, is the highest good a human can have. It makes us the most human we can be, whatever our circumstances may be. As Pope Francis says in *Joy of the Gospel* 8, “we become most human when we become more than human.” Here, we will find friendship with God, which is eternal life and a prize one-hundred times greater than anything we have given up or will give up. Such friendship is a joy, the fullest joy, and because it is *the greatest good*, it is the most shareable gift of all. When that friendship, filled with grace, moves our actions towards others, it will shine through us with all of our real experiences (both happy and sad), and communicate the joy of the Gospel to them, too.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. The counsels of Gospel perfection are demanding. If God has made so many good things on this Earth, why should even these good things be renounced?
2. Can you see your pursuit of a Franciscan spirituality in the instructions for a postulant, even 800 years later? How so or how not?
3. Can those who are not professed Franciscans still live the Gospel life that St. Francis proposes? Should they? Or is there a more appropriate option?

SESSION 6: EARLY RULE 3: Prayer and Fasting

Introduction

Early Rule 3 concerns the directions for the brothers on fasting and prayer, particularly, liturgical prayer (the public prayer of the Church) and the placement of fasting in the liturgical seasons. Dr. Hammond explains that *ER 6* is divided into three parts: first, quotations from the Gospels present Jesus' teachings on prayer and fasting; second, it explains how the brothers, both clerical and lay, are to pray the divine office throughout the day or to pray a suitable replacement; third, it delineates the fasting seasons. *ER 6* seems very straightforward in its basic commands to the brothers, but Dr. Hammond shows us how to read between the lines and to perceive its spiritual insight.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule 3, FAED 1, 65-66*
2. WATCH: [Session 6](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 6](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *The First Letter to the Custodians, FAED 1, 56-57 (FCA:ED)*
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 61-72

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. Where have you found experiences of communal prayer or fasting?
2. What have you discovered by praying your way through the psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours, or in another way?
3. As you have come to know St. Francis as a model for spirituality, what contributions has he made to the way you pray?

Background

The divine office, now often called the “liturgy of the hours,” is, alongside the mass, the central public prayer of the Church. It is prayed throughout the day at different time or “hours” (*hora*, “hour,” can simply mean “time” in Latin). Perhaps you are familiar with these prayers or even pray them yourself, nevertheless, it is helpful to review their structure, history, and place in the life of the Church during the time of St. Francis.

The divine office consists of the recitation of the psalms throughout the day coupled with other readings, hymns, antiphons, and responsories in chanted form. It is envisioned as a communal

prayer. In the west, this practice gave rise to much of what would become Gregorian Chant. Singing the psalms through the day was an ancient practice with its roots in Judaism. St. Benedict of Nursia developed a pattern of praying all 150 psalms each week, eight times a day: Vespers (evening), Compline (after sunset), Matins or Vigils (through the night), Lauds (at dawn), Prime (around 6am), Terce (around 9am), and None (around 3pm). His monks spread this practice and it was also adopted for clerics in the western church. For monasteries, or at least the monks who could read (usually clerics), this became the central action of their lives, along with mass, which was said after Terce.

In St. Francis' day in medieval western Europe, the office would have been prayed in Latin using prayer books, or *breviaries*. The printing press had not yet been developed and paper was not in circulation, so books were made from sheepskin, or *vellum*. Producing a book was a costly endeavor – it required the life of an animal or sometimes even a whole flock. Because of this, owning a book was not unlike like owning a sophisticated, expensive computer. While St. Francis was very careful to guard against the use of things that would detract from their vowed poverty, he allowed the clerics to have all the books necessary to sing the offices and even allowed brothers who could read to keep a psalter. While the exact prayer prayed by literate lay brothers is not made completely clear, it is reasonable to think that they joined in singing the psalms with the clerical friars but did only listened to the other portions of the hours.⁵ For the illiterate brothers, they replaced the psalms with the repetition of the Creed, the Our Father, and the Glory Be.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule 3, FAED 1, 65-66*

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. How do you understand the ER's association of prayer with exorcism?
2. What is the value of ritualizing prayer and fasting?
3. Why would Francis allow a psalter to be kept by a literate brother, given its costliness?

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The First Letter to the Custodians, FAED 1, 56-57 (FCA:ED)*

Watch: [Session 6](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

⁵ Edward Foley, "Franciscan Liturgical Prayer," in *Franciscans at Prayer*, ed. Timothy Johnson (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 403-404.

Summary

The Gospel citations at the beginning of *ER 3* frame the spiritual vision of its directions to the brothers by addressing exorcism and hypocrisy. While the link with fasting may be more obvious, what does exorcism have to do with saying the daily offices of Church? Dr. Hammond explains this through the citation from Mark 9:28. Although commissioned to perform exorcisms and drive out demons from the possessed, the apostles could not drive this spirit out from a boy possessed by a deaf and mute spirit; only Jesus could. He taught that “this kind of spirit can only come out with prayer and fasting.” Prayer and fasting have a power to enact a conversion from the oppression of evil, represented by the demon, to the life of the Gospel. Dr. Hammond explains, furthermore, that as the boy was made able to hear, perhaps Francis thought that through prayer, the brothers would be allowed to listen and speak; to hear the voice of God, but also to hear each other’s voices in their community along with the voice of their leader, the minister, who is tasked with teaching and admonishing the brothers (as described in *ER 2*, 4, and 5). Interpreted this way, prayer and fasting establish the brothers in their conversion to God and to each other, and lay the foundation for their way of living as a community. In other words, to be established in God drives out the spirits of division and enables communication among the brothers.

ER 3’s directions are simple but have a lot to say when we understand how they establish the brothers in the spirit of listening to God and each other. The clerical brothers are instructed to pray the divine office, including saying the Eucharist as other clerics do, supposing nothing special about themselves, but continuity with the wider Church. Thus, they follow their state in life and use the necessary books. As noted above, the lay brothers who could read would have prayed the psalms from a psalter while illiterate brothers would pray the Creed, Our Father, and Glory Be a set number of times for each hour of the divine office. In addition to these prayers, the clerics are instructed to pray two particular psalms each day: Psalm 51 *Have Mercy on Me*, to ask for forgiveness for the sins of the brothers, and Psalm 130, *Out of the depth*, to pray for the dead. While all the brothers pray to be centered to God through the day, these last two Psalms show the focus on penance, confession of fault, and imploring God’s mercy in the lives of the Franciscan brothers.

ER 3 also places self-denial as the partner to prayer in the Franciscan life. Fasting and self-denial should not make the brothers gloomy or proud hypocrites, but it should put them in a spirit of joy. The clerical brothers can use the books they need, and the literate lay brothers can use a psalter, but those who cannot use these books cannot have them in their possession. These things are only to be used to foster prayer, not as things to be collected or coveted. Similarly, fasting from the Feast of All Saints (November 1st) until Christmas, and from Epiphany until Easter, devotes more than a third of their year to a very restricted intake of food, one meal a day. This kind of fasting was also commanded for every Friday of the year. Strict rules about what kind of food, however, were not imposed. Rather, the Franciscan could eat anything offered to them. By surrendering their will in self-denial, they opened themselves to what God would give through their Gospel life and the generosity of others.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

In communal prayer and fasting, the brothers sought what they prayed for every day in Psalm 51: “A clean heart create in me, O God; and renew within me a steadfast spirit.” Through prayer, they raised their minds and voices to God. And by fasting, they raised their bodies, setting them apart to serve God above all, and in God, all others. Today, Franciscan life and spirituality is not often presented with a focus on the recitation on the office. Embracing poverty, care for the poor, preaching or mission work, and concern for creation are more easily associated with St. Francis. But how can we “take up the cross and follow” Christ, as *ER* 1 proposes, and undertake the form of life, either as Franciscans or those embracing that spirituality, if we do not attend to God with our minds, our voices, and our bodies? We may run the risk of being both deaf and dumb, and hypocrites, or worse, turning spirituality into a kind of possession for ourselves; an achievement fulfilled by our own power. As Dr. Hammond made clear in the video, this form of prayer and fasting outlined by *ER* 3 carefully avoids any contamination with wealth, so that poverty and prayer would be found together at the very core of Gospel life.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 61-72

Watch: [Session 6](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

To pray the psalms is to pray the prayers that Jesus prayed; to pray the Our Father is to pray the prayer that Jesus gave us. Fr. Hellmann teaches this when he explains the centrality of prayer in the life of the brothers described in *ER* 3. These prayers bring us into Jesus’ own prayer, who though being God, prayed like we do and left us the pattern of prayer. Above, we noted how Dr. Hammond explained that communal prayer allowed the brothers to hear God, their local leader (the minister), and each other. Fr. Hellmann explains how Pope Francis has also looked to the divine office and the praying as a Church as both an encounter with Jesus and as a bond between Christians.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis says that the liturgy of the Church, its public and communal prayer, evangelizes the world and the Church. The Church evangelizes, that is, shares the Gospel of Jesus saving life, death, and resurrection, through the beauty of the liturgy. In the daily offices and the Eucharist, the faith of the Church and God’s goodness are displayed in our worship expressed through the actions, deeds, and symbols of the rites. The Church is also evangelized because it hears the Gospel proclaimed, to which the Church must respond. Moreover, it is proclaimed to us not as individuals but as a community. In the liturgy, Fr. Hellmann stresses that

Pope Francis sees a guardian against privileging our private personal devotions and views of God. While individual devotions are good, the Church is one in Christ, and prays together in the prayers Christ prayed. Without this shared experience of prayer, Pope Francis writes, “We become nomads, without roots”—a danger faced by the brothers, too, adds Fr. Hellmann. Those in the Church, just as in the brotherhood of the early Franciscans, are members of each other. Our sisters and brothers in the world, especially in the Church, are part of our life of faith by the duties of justice and charity we owe them.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. The Our Father is frequently repeated in the cycle of daily prayers, especially by the lay brothers. What makes it an ideal prayer for a friar? What makes it an ideal prayer for us today?
2. If prayed aloud and communally, the divine office, or liturgy of the hours, is a very involved undertaking. Do you think it is worth pursuing or preserving in your local church or faith community?

**PART 4: BROTHERS AND MINISTERS
IN RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER**

SESSION 7: *EARLY RULE 4 & 6: Minister and Servant*

Introduction

Sessions 7 and 8 look at a series of three chapters in the *Early Rule* (*ER* 4, 5, and 6), that deal with relationships between the leaders (the ministers) and the brothers in the early Franciscan communities. Session 7 will examine how these leaders must act towards the other brothers in *ER* 4 and 6, and Session 8 will examine how the brothers should respond according to *ER* 5. Through these chapters, it will become clear that while the brothers obey their superior in their shared way of life, that obedience is grounded on Gospel humility and mutual recognition, in which, as the Lord commands, we do unto others as we would have done to ourselves.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule* 4 and 6, *FAED* 1, 66-68
2. WATCH: [Session 7](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 7](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *The Second Letter to the Custodians*, *FAED* 1, 60 (*FCA:ED*)
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 73-84

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. Have you ever held authority over other people? If so, what challenges have you faced?
2. Have you, in your adult life, been under the authority of another? How have you experienced good and bad leadership?
3. Have you ever served someone closely to attend to their health or day-to-day living?

Background

The *minister* is the name of the leader among the Franciscan brothers, both in their smaller local communities and for entire provinces of the order. The leader of the whole Franciscan family is the Minister General, the position that would follow in the place of St. Francis of Assisi. Today, if we hear the term *minister* and envision a church leader or a government officer, it hides, by the prominence of these positions, the humble origin of the name. This Latin word, *minister*, means servant, and *ministerium*, that is “ministry,” means service. More precisely, it names someone who helps another person directly, like a waiter or personal assistant, rather than the physical toil of other forms of servitude.

In the Middle Ages, the titles for leaders of monastic communities, and even of other mendicant orders who begged like the Franciscans, often suggested primacy of some sort. An *abbot* is a father, and an *abbess* a “fatheress.” A *prior* is “first above the others,” a *provost* or *dean* (*praepositinus*) is “placed ahead,” and the *master general*, as among the Dominicans, is the “teacher of all.” The

term *minister general*, chosen by St. Francis, comes from the saint's desire that the only leaders in his fraternity are would-be servants. St. Francis, however, did not scoff at the other leaders in the Church as if he were superior because of his perceived humility. On the contrary, just as he had great reverence for priests but did not encourage them to join the order, he wished to be genuinely humble by taking a lowly station. Nonetheless, he was charged with leading the order, and framed this leadership as a *ministry* to his companions and the wider Franciscan family that formed around him.

The service he envisioned was not, of course, the service of a waiter or a personal secretary to the brothers. The service undertaken by Franciscan leaders was a service to their souls, through teaching and correction. In practical terms, being named a *minister* rather than a *superior* or *prior* did not change the duties of religious leadership, but it did frame the nature of that leadership. The goal could never be to direct the brothers to accomplish the private intentions or aspirations of the minister, rather, the minister's duty was to ensure that the brothers were led in the way of salvation. He exists for *their sake*, and not the other way around.

Later in his life, in 1221, St. Francis himself demonstrated the *priority* of humility in leadership when he resigned from his practical duties as general of the order and promised obedience to his vicar.⁶ However, he retained a spiritual leadership and meant to hand⁷ on an imitation of Christ to be followed, exercised not through sacramental, legal, or intellectual power, but through humility in embracing his littleness before God.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule* 4 and 6, *FAED* 1, 66-68

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. Does the title “lesser brother” imply that the brothers are the “little brothers” of Jesus? If so, how does Jesus' example inform and transform the relationships within the community?
2. While the brothers are called to treat each other as they wish to be treated, what sort of difficulties do you suppose the ministers must have faced in the community?

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Second Letter to the Custodians*, *FAED* 1, 60 (*FCA:ED*)

Watch: [Session 7](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

⁶ Augustine Thompson, OP, *St. Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 2012), 80.

⁷ Thompson, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 80-81.

It has become clear by this point in the *Early Rule* that Francis sought to place the words of Jesus, the Lord, and a new Moses, in a place of priority at the beginning of the chapter. In that way, the *Early Rule*'s discussions of Franciscan life act as an explanation of Gospel life. This chapter begins with an invocation: "In the Name of the Lord!" Dr. Hammond explains that this phrase was often found at the beginning of legal documents in the Middle Ages. It may be an addition to the *Early Rule* or the early *Forma Vita* (Francis' first, but lost, explanation of the way of life) added when the Rule became a kind of legal document for the friars as they were organized into Provinces. Nonetheless, this invocation tells us that we should listen carefully to Christ, the giver of the New Law, who speaks in the words of the Gospel as they are lived in the lives of the brothers.

What does this New Law, the Gospel, say to the brothers? In *ER 4*, we find two sets of Gospel passages, one directed towards the ministers and one directed towards the other brothers. For the brothers in general, *ER 4* quotes Matthew 7:12: "Do to others what you would have them do to you," and also the Rule of St. Benedict's rephrasing: "Do not do to another what you would not have done to you,"⁸ a simple rule governing their conduct. For the ministers, Christ's bold statement in Matthew 20:28 that he, the Lord, has come to "serve, not to be served," governs the conduct of the ministers. Dr. Hammond explains how the four direct commands in the rule of *ER 4* give practical directions to follow these divine commands in the daily life of the order.

Dr. Hammond identifies four exhortations, or statements beginning with "let." Two statements are directed to the ministers and two to the rest of the brothers. Together, these four statements lay out the mutual responsibility of each group, but focus, in *ER 4* and 6, on the ministers' particular role.

The first of these statements exhorts the brothers, the "ministers and servants" of the other brothers (and we must not forget that they are all brothers, first of all) in all the provinces to call the brothers together so that they might do three things: visit them to get to know them, admonish and warn them about their faults, and encourage them. In this way, Dr. Hammond explains, the ministers will be able to care for the brothers who have been entrusted to them. If they do not, and they lead the brothers astray in the way to salvation, they will have to give an account of themselves before the Lord on judgment day. In other words, the ministers must care for the brothers as if they were their own immortal soul. It is in this manner that they will serve rather than be served, fulfilling the fourth exhortation.

The second exhortation, *ER 4* tells the brother they must obey the ministers in those matters that pertain to Franciscan life and the good of their souls, although the text implies they do not need to follow a command that would go against any of these. The third exhortation, requires the brothers to treat all, including the ministers, the way they would prefer to be treated. Surely this means to demonstrate respect and swift obedience to the ministers, as well as kindness and helpfulness to all those that belong to their shared love. They should all be brothers to each other.

ER 6, a very short chapter, rounds off the relationship between the minister and the brothers. The minister of a province comes to the many brothers to guide them, but the many brothers may also approach him when they are faced with difficulties. This is especially true when one brother has trouble living out a Franciscan form of life. He should seek out the minister, who is instructed to

⁸ *Rule of St. Benedict*, LXI.14.

care for the brother as he would wish to be cared for, that is, with real concern, kindness, and determination to find a real solution to the problem.

Thus, *ER 6* encapsulates the relationship between the ministers and the other brothers. The minister is not a tyrant who puts himself above the brothers, he is one of them. And as Dr. Hammond says, they are all of equal importance, thus, no brother should be called prior, as discussed above. Rather, together, they are all *lesser* brothers, as the name *friars minor* attests. Yes, the minister can approach the brothers to direct them, but they too can call upon his help with trust. He is, after all, their servant, just as Christ washed the apostles' feet, but those brothers must also let their feet be washed, and in a kind reversal, submit to the servant.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

When the Lord says, "I came to serve, not be served," we are confronted with a claim that seems to turn the world on its head. These are the words of the God we worship in prayer and sacrifice, with fasting and devotion. And rightly so. In John's Gospel, Jesus prays for worship: "Father, Glorify your Son so that your Son may Glorify you." In what is God glorified? In Jesus, God did not seek earthly power, riches, or other human honors—these were Satan's temptations. The Creator does not need or want them for Himself. God shows what is better and higher than acquisition: service.

It is a great truth of the Christian religion that God did not make us like the gods of myth, so that we could feed or appease one of God's needs. If God could be said, by way of a metaphor, to have a need, it is this alone: to share God's own goodness; to give what God has to another. God showed His will to give us His life in a way that seems strange: in littleness and service. God has used all sorts of images and visions to communicate with us. However, through His fullest revelation in Jesus, God shows us something far more intimate. We see the fullness of His divinity through a workman in Palestine 2000 years ago, who wandered, healed, preached, and ended his earthly life to serve and save us from sin and death.

We are not God. We cannot confusedly think that we can save ourselves or make our way through life alone. We must accept that we must be served, by God and our fellow human beings. We can share in the life of God, in part, by embracing the life of service to others and even receiving service from others in humble gratitude. Like the brothers in the *ER*, we must have the humility to serve and be served. To accept littleness is no shame. God became little to show us His way of life.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 73-84

Watch: [Session 7](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis cries out for the deep need to support the building of genuine relationships between people in all situations. What is it to be genuine? To relate to people as if they were your very own self, treated as a real person, created in the image and likeness of God. Through this, we might truly know, love, serve, and seek the good for each other. Fr. Hellmann explains that to treat each other in this manner is at the heart of the Gospel.

How can this be the heart of the Gospel? What about the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection? What about repentance, conversion, and prayer to God? Quite simply, all these are implied in what the Pope has said and what Fr. Hellmann has pointed out. As God has become human, even taking our death upon Himself, he has taken on the smell of the sheep under the weight of sin and death. The Son of God has won for us the power to remit and free ourselves from sin; to overthrow death and instead establish our share in the eternal life of God. That renewed life is the Gospel life, and it has the form of God's life. In it, we share in the restoration of the world, especially our broken human relationships. Just as God has come to us in the flesh through love, we must come to each other in the same way, by grace, even when it is difficult. This reflects the words of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you." If we do not follow this divine command, how can we say that we share in eternal life?

Fr. Hellmann shows us that the Franciscan pursuit of the Gospel life models the healing of these relationships in a practical way. In the face of exclusivity, wielding power and position, the Franciscan brothers listen to each other *as brothers before all else*. Yes, they pray daily, they live in obedience, and they live a life of renunciation and taking up the cross. The fruit of all these facets of their life, is their brotherhood and their mutual love in God. If only, as Pope Francis laments, the decisions of the Church and the spiritual correction could be animated by this brotherhood and sisterhood! Fr. Hellmann invites us to imagine how different our whole world would be if such genuine relationships were the norm.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. Where might the sort of mutual responsibility between the brothers and between the minister be adopted in the world?
2. Correction can often be painful. What role does fraternal correction play in our communal Christian life? Does the role of Franciscan Minister challenge our contemporary forms of leadership?
3. Is the Golden Rule, "Do to others what you would have them do to you," an effective means to building community?

SESSION 8: EARLY RULE 5: Obedience and Correction

Introduction

ER 5 describes how the friars should correct each other. It includes both correction among the brothers and the brothers' correction of the ministers. Dr. Hammond and Fr. Hellmann make this comparatively long chapter of the *ER* an opportunity to examine the fraternal spirituality of Franciscan life and how mutual love is absolutely essential to St. Francis' vision of Gospel life. In that vision of life, obedience to Christ is more than obedience to a religious superior, it requires every brother to be obedient, a *listener*, to every other brother and a participant in the mutual spiritual care. Whatever our state in life, we, too, are invited to take up that Christian responsibility.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule 5, FAED 1, 67-68*
2. WATCH: [Session 8](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 8](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *A Rule For Hermitages, FAED 1, 61-62 (FCA:ED)*
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 85-96

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. Have you ever had an experience where you regret offering correction or an experience where you regret not correcting some one?
2. How do you respond when you receive correction or criticism? Does it differ depending upon who is correcting you?

Background

ER 5 speaks about the Chapter at Pentecost without any further description. What was this event? A Chapter or *capitulum* is a word with many meanings. Of course, we know the division of a book into chapters, or "little headings," but it also describes the gathering of a religious community to read a chapter of their rule (for example, the Rule of St. Benedict), and it has also come to refer to both a gathering of religious to discuss the life of the order and those representing an order at such a meeting.⁹ At St. Francis' bidding, the entire family of Franciscans were to meet at the Church of St. Mary of the Angels, the *Portiuncula*, on the feast of Pentecost, to hold a chapter and take up the issues of the order. If the Minister General had died or needed to be succeeded, this was

⁹ "Chapter," in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (1958), 264.

typically the occasion to elect a new Minister General.¹⁰ This Pentecost Chapter initially gathered all the brothers together, until 1221 when the last gathering of the whole order occurred, it numbered in over five thousand.¹¹ This meeting came to be held every three years, but sometimes at a shorter interval at the discretion of the Minister General, and it was held at other locations besides the Portiuncula.¹²

Francis' initial intention to gather all the brothers together represented a hope to recognize all the brothers as brothers together. There were also provincial chapters, which Francis could not attend, but these indicated the emergences of the organized development of Franciscans in the form of other religious orders, with different levels of leadership according for the smaller divisions of territory. These chapters, as discussed in Dr. Hammond's video, gave an opportunity to take up problems in living the Gospel life of the communities, including problems with the brothers and with the leaders. This allowed for accountability, but also involved politics. As the history of the order shows, Brother Elias, the second minister general, and Brother John of Parma, the sixth, would be dismissed by the general chapter, one for corruption, the other for the suspicion of heresy. The general chapter would not only become the place to hold leaders accountable, but it also became the legislative body in which the *Later Rule* that replaced the *Early Rule* would be interpreted and legislation would be promulgated to support living according to the *Rule* long after St. Francis had died.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule 5, FAED 1, 67-68*

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. Why do you think St. Francis, in following Jesus, instructed the brothers to try three times before alerting the minister about a matter needing correction?
2. What does "living according to the flesh and not the Spirit" mean to you?

Optional Supplementary Reading: *A Rule For Hermitages, FAED 1, 61-62 (FCA:ED)*

Watch: [Session 8](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

¹⁰ *Later Rule 8, FAED 2, 104.*

¹¹ *Anonymous of Perugia 8, FAED 2, 37; ER, "Introduction," FAED 1, 63.*

¹² *Later Rule 8, FAED 2, 104.*

Summary

You may have noticed that *ER 5* is longer than several of the others, and it is for a good reason. In an order dedicated to humility and being *minor* (lesser) brothers, the topic of correction is not an easy one to treat without a great deal of warning, since correction is speaking with some kind of authority over another. It is true that we have seen that St. Francis established ministers to serve the brothers, but even they can be corrected. As Dr. Hammond explains, correction comes with the risk of pride, seeking power, anger, and many other sins. Nevertheless, we know how easy it is to stray from doing what is right and in accord with Christ in daily life. How much easier must it be to stray from the more rigorous life of poverty and penance that renounces even ordinary goods! Therefore, St. Francis carefully outlines the way the brothers should correct each other in both practice and spirit. The scriptural citations for this chapter are all warnings, both for those straying and those correcting. As the first scriptural citation sums up: “it is a fearful thing fall into the hands of the Living God” (Heb. 10:31).

How are the brothers to keep a watch over their own souls and the souls of their brothers? Dr. Hammond notes that the very beginning of the chapter seems to be aimed at the minister: live in the holy way and do not command another to sin out of obedience. No one is bound to follow a sinful command, nor should they invite sin invited by a bad example, suggests Dr. Hammond. Obedience must be a tool on the way of life, not death. Nevertheless, it is possible that a minister might sin and offer a bad example, or worse, command evil according to the life of the *flesh* rather than the *spirit*. If the brothers observe this in the ministers, some standards should be observed: admonishing the minister patiently from love (up to three times), preferring the local community and only going above to bring up the matter to the general chapter if necessary, and pursuing the matter for the good of the minister’s soul even, Dr. Hammond says, if it incurs scandal. A similar process unfolds for when the brothers correct a brother of the same status, admonishing three times as a community before bringing the matter to their local minister. In this way, the brothers will follow Jesus’ teaching on correction in Matthew 18:15-17.

This procedure calls for care and discernment, therefore, *ER 5* guides all the brothers, minister or not, to refrain from sin in this correction. Dr. Hammond identifies four situations that receive this guidance, with a positive and negative exhortation. First, *ER 5* warns the brothers against becoming disturbed or angry by the sin of another. This can lead to sin, or in the case of anger, be outrightly sinful, and the devil wants sin to beget further sin and to tear down the community of brothers. What is the answer? Simply to desire and work to *help* the brother as one who is ill and in need of a physician. Dr. Hammond observes that in this way, many brothers help *one* brother who is living by the flesh to live, instead, by the spirit. In this case, the good of the many *is* to seek the good of even just one. It is not the practice of the community to cut its losses, but like a body, the healthy parts serve the healing of the sick part. Notice, it is also the work of healing that help keeps the sickness of sin at bay in the wider community.

Where the first warnings concern anger at sin and the way to guard against it, the second warnings concern resisting the temptation to power. Using the words of Matthew 20:25-27, the *ER* forbids the seeking and display of power over one another. Instead, any admonition must be strictly an act

of service and of being *less* than another. This is true of both the official ministers and all the other brothers.

Third, while obedience has extolled as a key virtue of Franciscan life from the beginning of the *ER*, obedience facilitates openness to correction, since all the brothers are called upon to obey *each other* voluntarily, as a response to any evil. This obedience relies on the *charity* of the Holy Spirit and is, in fact, the obedience of Jesus Christ, who in taking the form of a servant, was obedient to all—even to death. This complete openness to everything except sin is the pearl of Franciscan life. To desire to listen to each other (and to God) and put one another *first* – Dr. Hammond says this is being a *lesser* brother.

A final warning is offered at the end: “as often as they have turned away from the commands of the Lord (Ps 119:21) and ‘wandered outside obedience’ (Ps. 119:2) let all the brothers know, as the Prophet says, they are cursed outside obedience as long as they knowingly remain in such a sin.” Even if one can hide such disobedience from their brothers and from rebuke, they do not live in obedience. As Dr. Hammond explains, they know that they are not following Jesus’ teaching nor are they living as they promised. This is not the path of salvation; it is the path of peril until it is repented.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God. In a spiritual vision that looks to the joy of the Gospel life, such a stark warning may seem shocking. St. John writes that the “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). So, what does fear have to do with a life that seeks to follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Certainly, we do not yet have perfect love. Our frequent need for correction, confession, repentance, and penance attests to this. St. Francis urged his brothers to keep a guard not only over the souls of each other, but over their own souls as well, especially when engaged in correction. To rephrase St. Francis’ concern, we must look to see where the love of God and neighbor is not active in our lives, and to temper our self-righteousness by asking when our love of God and neighbor is self-love in disguise. To one motivated by self-love at the expense of others and (supposedly) free from God’s laws, the love Jesus offers us to make our own may be feared as a loss or, instead, as the source of inevitable punishment when one is finally caught. Of course, Francis has the rightful fear of hell in mind. If at the end of our lives we should look into the mirror of the Living God and see our own death by the rejection of grace, surrender, and true love of another in God, what we would see is the prison we have created by being turned in on ourselves, terribly alone and isolated by selfishness. Mutual correction and mutual love are not simply convenient, it is to turn outside of ourselves and rise above on the path of the living God. For St. Francis, to be our truest self we must be free of our false selves (to borrow the words of Thomas Merton). We cannot find that freedom alone or by being set above others. We must, instead, embrace being *lesser*, as servants to our sisters and brothers and served by the God who loves us.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 85-96

Watch: [Session 8](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

Fr. Hellmann invites us to see in mutual correction much more than a practical need of a community to avoid the horrors of sin. In particular, he sees that mutuality in general, even beyond correction, belongs to the soul of Gospel life. Ministers must watch over the souls of the brothers, and the brothers must also watch over the minister's souls, treating each other as they would want to be treated and refraining from wielding power (by the ministers) and acting unreasonably (the brothers). When this mutual care and desire for the good of another is kept from anger and disturbance when faced with the need for correction, Fr. Hellmann says it is the love of Lord. Why? Because the brothers love with the patient love that Jesus exercises, which does not take offense but instead endures until the brother is made well. It is unconditional because it is not caused by anything except by God's own goodness. It does not mean one becomes a doormat or an object of abuse, but it does mean to refuse to return harm upon the one who has done wrong.

Fr. Hellmann points us to Pope Francis' writing on the effect of anger in our conflicts to help us see the need for mutual spiritual care more clearly. The Pope decries anger that arises in conflicts and that which often traps us in those very same conflicts. He recognizes that anger can lead to some kind of solution, usually "negotiated settlements" in which each party in a conflict, whether personal or on a larger scale, gets something they want. These settlements attempt to exercise control and guard some kind of good for each party. Pope Francis sees that the long-term consequences are not really considered when anger governs settling a conflict, and, worse, there are usually no attempts at a genuine reconciliation – a true dialogue as brothers and sisters – thus, none of the mutual care that the Gospel vision of St. Francis places at the center of the fraternity's life. This is why, even when motivated by real issues of justice, we must not be controlled by the anger that is eager to control others. And we must not be disturbed by the passions that keep us from being moved by the words, or even complaints, of our brothers and sisters.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. Many people do not want to be corrected. Why does Francis connect correction with treating others the way we want to be treated?
2. What actions do you think are entailed in helping someone spiritually? Can fear and love motivate correction at the same time?
3. Which of the aspects of mutual correction do you find most challenging? Why?

PART 5: DAILY LIFE OF THE BROTHERS

SESSION 9: *EARLY RULE 7: Serving and Working*

Introduction

ER 7 explains how the Franciscan brothers could and should perform work in the world. The previous chapters have explained the life within the community. This chapter looks outside of the community and shows how several aspects of Franciscan life, including poverty, humility, obedience, and love operate in the broader context of the wider world. It also demonstrates the value of honest work in St. Francis' vision of Gospel life, a vision that Pope Francis takes up in his further meditation on the connection between work and human solidarity.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule 7 FAED* 1, 68-69
2. WATCH: [Session 9](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 9](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *A Letter to a Minister, FAED* 1, 97-98 (*FCA:ED*)
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 97-108

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. What is your work? What do you do for a living? Is it a job, a role in a group, or something else?
2. Do you find more happiness or frustration in your work?
3. Do you perceive your day-to-day tasks as an act of religion?

Background

Work in medieval Italy, especially in Assisi where the Franciscans arose, shows us the story of a world in transition. There, the well-known image of medieval serfs (the peasants who worked on the land of their Lord), was giving way to urbanization and new social structures that allowed for greater personal independence.¹³ Assisi was developing as a place where the rule of the *maiores*, the nobles, over servants in relationships of dependence was giving way in the early 13th century to communal organization by the townspeople, or *minores*.¹⁴ This word is familiar to us from the name of the Franciscans as the *Ordo Fratrum Minorum*, the Order of Friars Minor. As a man of

¹³ David Flood, "Franciscans at Work," *Franciscan Studies* 59 (2001): 21–62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41975283>, 21-22.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 28

Assisi in this time period, Francis saw the *minores* draw up a new charter for the city in 1210 that eliminated the practice of *hominium*, the service of somebody else's person, that is, a bonded servant.¹⁵ When *ER 7* warns against taking up an *officium*, or duty, we may be inclined to think that Francis had in mind the avoidance of an office with prestige or power. While that may be true given the rest of the text, David Flood has argued that Francis was warning against becoming a servant to the nobles in the city, or even to the monasteries outside the city, and that bonded servitude would be scandalous to the solidarity with the townspeople (another kind of *minores*) and a detriment to serving no earthly Lord but Jesus Christ.¹⁶ Franciscans looking for work to sustain their lives ran the risk of signing on for terms that made them legal servants of the *maiores*, which would impede their own free fraternity. Instead, St. Francis' brothers in the Gospel life were in solidarity with these other *minores*; a mutual support that defended this new kind of society while also preserving the freedom of the brothers to be *free* servants.

Looking into the past helps us to see more clearly how Francis was not simply seeking a Gospel life apart from society. On the contrary, the Early rule shows that the brothers were mixed into the social upheaval of the later Middle Ages, including on the important matter of how work defined human relationships.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule 7 FAED 1, 68-69*

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. How do you compare the call of a “lesser one” with the actions of the “hypocrites”?
2. Why should the brothers receive anyone, even thieves, with kindness? Is this a practical way to live, or does it have anything to offer to those who do not live as professed religious?

Optional Supplementary Reading: *A Letter to a Minister, FAED 1, 97-98 (FCA:ED)*

Watch: [Session 9](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

ER 7 presents the rules for the brothers when they are working in the world. The Order of Friars Minor was established as a *mendicant*, or a begging order. Unlike many other religious orders, the early Franciscans received their food and other provisions by asking or begging for them. The brothers also worked jobs to provide for the community as laborers. This is a facet of Franciscan

¹⁵ Ibid, 27-28.

¹⁶ Ibid, 26-28.

life that would largely disappear as the order would become increasingly clericalized, but as can be seen from *ER 7*, it was a matter that warranted close attention in the order's early days.

Dr. Hammond examines the numerous points of this chapter that treat how the brothers were supposed to go about in the world. Unlike monks, who were cloistered, these mendicant friars were meant to be seen and serve in a direct way and to be an example of Gospel life in their words and, especially, deeds. Accordingly, the manner of carrying on in their day-to-day lives was of the utmost importance to the mission of the order. Dr. Hammond breaks *ER 7* down into three sections: first, the work that brothers cannot perform; second, that which they can perform; and third, their conduct when meeting people, including other brothers in the world.

As in the other parts of the *ER*, New Testament citations form the basis of St. Francis' directions. This case is no different because St. Paul's injunction that one who does not work will not eat (2 Thes. 3:10), required the able-bodied Franciscan brothers to not presume that God will provide in some extraordinary way when God has given them the ordinary means to do so: labor, as implicated in the Fall from Paradise. Dr. Hammond observes that the brothers are permitted not only to work the trade they learned before entering the world, but to also have the appropriate tools (much like the clerical brothers, who keep liturgical books to fulfill their duties). Thus, they provide for their needs, and, if they cannot do so, the brothers may beg instead.

Dr. Hammond explains that there is another reason for this work: to avoid any idleness that the devil might exploit to turn the brother to sin. Work and prayer keep temptations afar. If work serves such purpose, it is not surprising that Francis teaches that some work cannot be done. Any work that raises the brothers into *priority*, or into possession of money, or that might cause scandal for a professed poor man must be avoided. Work must serve the life promised by the brothers as *lesser brothers*. Whether the houses in which Franciscans' work refer to the houses of the wealthy or the workspaces of their employers, any brother who chooses to work in one must be a servant—but not a bonded slave, as discussed in the historical background above.

Service alone is not the mark of a brother. *ER 7* describes the bearing of a brother in the world: joyful and welcoming. Continuing the concern for the brother to be *lesser* in the house where they might work, the rule also teaches that brothers must not be jealous for those places where they dwell, in hermitages or other places, but receive anyone who comes to it. "Friend or foe, robber or thief," whoever should come is not even a guest because the brothers cannot lay a claim to that place. And so, they are ready to share or even cede it with kindness. Indeed, the brothers are the guests, even in spaces that seem to be their own. In that way, whoever is received with kindness would be received, it might be said, into the heart of the brothers too. Therefore, if whenever the brothers meet each other in mutual kindness, they share a joyful fraternity that should be free of complaints and the other gloomy attitudes that often beset a family. Instead, they must give each other real attention and respect in accordance with their spiritual life and professed poverty. If they let go of all possessions but hold on to personal grievances, the brothers would be hypocrites.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

ER 7 proposes a question to us: what do we seek through our work? Or put another way, what do we recognize in our work? Many need to earn money in a way that the early Franciscans did not, but that should not dissuade us from taking those friars as a way to think about work. They too sought to support themselves. However, not all who work are paid for it. All those who care for children, the elderly, and the infirm in their families as well as those who dedicate their efforts to the care of their community work. Common to all kinds of work, as Francis implored his brothers, is the opportunity to do *good works*, to *avoid idleness*, and to subject to others by serving them. We should ask whether we are doing good or making something good through the time we spend working. We may also ask, in the process of working, whether we are putting our bodies and souls in a situation that keeps guard over what we do. Finally, we might ask whom we are serving through this work, or whether we simply make others serve us. If we ask these questions, we may see that in fact many of the forms of work, although not exclusively, that care for the lives of others are very close to the spirit of Franciscan work. This is because it is work that sustains life, keeps one thoroughly occupied, and serves another. We might, therefore, not only look to the Franciscan themselves, but also to often overlooked caregivers as a model for our work, whatever it may be.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 97-108

Watch: [Session 9](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

Fr. Hellman situates *ER 7*'s discussion of work against the spiritual background of Franciscan life: the divine inspiration has called the brothers into taking up this form of life, as *ER 2* explained, and that the Spirit of the Lord sustains the mutual love of that life. Indeed, the *Later Rule* states clearly that this life is a pursuit of the Spirit of the Lord. It is the Holy Spirit that enables the brothers to live with the mutual respect, spiritual care, and obedience that dignify and raise human relationships to a site of holiness.

What happens when docility to the Holy Spirit is pursued in the day-to-day life of the world, where human labor sustains and furthers lives and societies? Fr. Hellmann tells us that then work also becomes a Gospel deed and a way of serving the transformation and elevation of human relationships. Pope Francis explains that when our work does not serve our own private goals and aspirations and when it serves another person or many people and their genuine good, it “manifests the integrity of the complete self-giving of Jesus’ whole life.”¹⁷ The Pope highlights, in particular,

¹⁷ This is a paraphrase of *Evangelii Gaudium*, 265.

how working for the poor and those on the edge of society helps us to escape the traps of recognition while seeking the good of another.

As Jesus is the one through whom all things were made (John 1:3) and who makes all things new (Rev: 21:5), sharing in work is an opportunity to cooperate with the creator and re-creator in all our good works. As Pope Francis teaches us, in cooperating with the creator of all, we are freed from isolation and can find solidarity if we do not disdain any good creature that the Lord has made.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. How do you think receiving only the necessities of life rather than money affected the way the Franciscans did their work? How would it affect your work if you were compensated in this way?
2. How is the “dignity of work” and expression of the “dignity of the human person?”

SESSION 10: *EARLY RULE 8 and 9: Money and Alms*

Introduction

In *ER 8 and 9*, we return directly to the implications of the brothers' vowed poverty: the refusal of money as well as the manner and spirit of begging alms. These two chapters raise a great warning about the dangers of money and the spiritual necessity of being close to the poor. And, in the case of Franciscans, to become like the poor, although there are clear differences between the voluntary and involuntary poverty. St. Francis' rejection of money stands out in our age as a point for consideration when almost all economies operate through money and we, too, use money to exist in these economies. It challenges us in whatever state of life we find ourselves and it convicts us to examine the way we look upon and use wealth.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule FAED 1*, 68-69
2. WATCH: [Session 10](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 10](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *A Letter to a Minister, FAED 1*, 97-98 (*FCA:ED*)
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 97-108

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. Where have you begged in your life before? Have you ever had to beg for money? What feelings or emotions did it bring up?
2. What did you learn about money growing up in your family of origin? How does it effect how you handle money today?
3. Francis' attitude toward money is really about what should be valued. In everyday life, what ways does the value of money overshadow the value of people?

Background

To understand the novelty of the kind of life that St. Francis is exhorting for the brothers, it is useful to outline the ways in which it is not new. The impact of the scriptures, church practice, and the writings of the Church Fathers on almsgiving as the expression of charity was very great in the Middle Ages. For example, monasteries washed the feet of the poor elaborately on Maundy

Thursday, but also carried out this practice in their daily life.¹⁸ Funerals were accompanied by alms to the poor, and nobles celebrated feast days, and other celebrations, by extending their aid to the poor.¹⁹ The commands of the Gospel stood behind these acts, especially the connection of conversion or penance with almsgiving. The writings of the Church Fathers emphasized that giving alms, while not earning the forgiveness of sins, acted both as the worship of God and as a restitution for sin, a kind of restorative justice to God lavished on His poor. Christian teachings of the time stressed the connection for one's salvation to the charitable treatment of the poor.²⁰ In turn, the expectations of this form of almsgiving resulted in social structures by which the poor could expect the help owed to them with some regularity, and the wealthy found a way to part with the goods of this world.

But who were the poor? Or rather, who were deemed the deserving poor. A common thread among medieval attitudes to almsgiving was that those who were able to work but preferred not to were unvirtuous and not truly deserving of charity, or worse, robbing from those who truly needed it.²¹ Who, and in what conditions exactly, fell into the category of deserving alms shifted across the Middle Ages. In fact, the rise of the mendicant, or “begging,” orders like the Franciscans and Dominicans stoked debate about what acceptable begging should be when able-bodied men embraced it as a religious act.²² It is not surprising that the mendicants were met with sharp criticism in a society that already valued almsgiving, since their way of life turned the expectation of receiving upside down in voluntary begging. It is also not surprising that mendicant orders had internal debates about how they should sustain themselves and developed arguments to say why they should not be treated as robbers or hypocrites.

The strangeness of St. Francis' choice to embrace poverty was not merely one of ordinary humility. In its historical context, Francis chose what seemed to be a shameful life in order to preach repentance, conversion, and the need for charity.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule FAED* 1, 68-69

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. Why does the *ER* focus on the necessities? What do the necessities of life have to do with the higher things St. Francis preached about, especially, repentance, prayer, and salvation?
2. What is Francis' “insight” regarding the relationship between money and anxiety?

Optional Supplementary Reading:

¹⁸ Elaine Clark, “Institutional and Legal Responses to Begging in Medieval England,” *Social Science History* 26, no. 3 (2002): 447–73, 452.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 452-455.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 450.

²¹ *Ibid*, 456.

²² *Ibid*, 457.

Watch: [Session 10](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

In Dr. Hammond's video, he draws attention to a noteworthy detail about *ER* 8 and 9: as a pair, they begin and end with warnings from Luke 21:34 to "guard yourselves against the anxieties of this world and the cares of this life." What does the rule identify at the heart of these anxieties? Quite simply, it declares that money is at the root of and represents the wider anxieties that trouble us in our day-to-day existence. Since we live in a world where money offers security and choices, and more money offers even more choices, to present the rejection of money as the path to liberty could hardly sound stranger. Dr. Hammond explains that St. Francis was not advocating for alternative economics or suggesting another means of transaction (even if he may have approved of those ideas) but teaching the brothers to reject money in the midst of a world centered around it.

ER 8 expands upon the discussion of work in *ER* 7, especially, as Dr. Hammond explains, its statement that the brothers could not receive money for their work by stating that the brothers should not even touch coins. *ER* 8 does not see money's first problem as the possibility of luxury that would break the brother's vow of poverty. Rather, it sees money as a source of anxiety that connects to greed and even malice. As *ER* 7 commands the brothers not to own their dwellings, which could mean defending their private ownership, *ER* 8 treats money in a similar way. If you have it, you may hurt others to keep it, and if you do not have it, your jealousy may impel you to take it from them in some way. All sorts of temptations, and worse, sins against God and neighbor, lurk in lustrous coins. For this reason, unlike the real goods that money can buy, money itself is as valuable as dust. Thus, just as the brothers cannot work for money, they also cannot beg for money. The exception to this rule, however, is instructive: the brothers can receive money if it is going to be used for the care of sick brothers, perhaps to pay for a physician or medicine. If money is filthy, why make such an exception? As Dr. Hammond explains, the genuine care of people is the end of all these laws, and not the other way around. Furthermore, it appears that money could be begged for on behalf of the good of the lepers, for the same reason. Nevertheless, even this work is risky, and *ER* 8 warns that a brother who does hoard money is a thief and even like Judas—who held the money bag for Jesus.

After warning the brothers not to live for "filthy gain," *ER* 8 gives way to *ER* 9's instructions on begging, which is the imitation of the "humility and poverty of Jesus." Dr. Hammond perceives the central idea behind *ER* 8 and 9 as: necessity and excess are opposites. Money allows excess and the hoarding of the necessities that belong to all. Begging, on the other hand, is an association with those in need and has the goal of fulfilling necessities such as food and clothing. Moreover, to beg with the involuntary poor is to know their needs and to beg with them and for them to fulfill their necessities, too. Money can be hoarded, but among the poor, clothes will simply go unworn or food will rot, and it is better shared among those who do not have the means to store it indefinitely. As he puts it: "people trump things instead of wants trumping needs."

To join the beggars in seeking the necessities of life rather than amassing excess in opposition to others has other rewards, too. As noted above, the poor who beg are associated with Jesus. Indeed, *ER 9* says that “[a]lms are a legacy and a justice due to the poor that our Lord Jesus Christ acquired for us” (*ER 9*). In other words, Jesus stood as first among the poor and won the justice that the poor are owed in his incarnation, when the God who is owed worship became a poor man. Furthermore, Jesus joined in receiving the rebukes and revilement the beggars received. Dr. Hammond notes the legal imagery *ER 9* uses to turn such rebukes on their head: the rebuked beggar will be rewarded before the “tribunal” of Jesus Christ, and the rebuker will be found guilty *because* of the right that Jesus won for the poor.

There is also further benefit for those who care for the poor – they will be rewarded for the charity, which is by extension charity of Jesus in the poor. By begging, the brothers open such a path for those who have excess income to transform it into a spiritual good that will not perish as things of this world will. Dr. Hammond connects this to the exhortation that the brothers should care for each other like mother and child, which the grace of God inspires. For if the brothers make their needs known to each other, they can minister to one another by supplying their bodily needs while also sharing in the spiritual benefit of *giving* alms. Such care exists in the freedom of eating whatever necessity demands, as the Apostles harvested wheat on the Sabbath and David ate the loaves of offering.

Finally, as warned at the beginning of *ER 8*, *ER 9* reminds the brother they should not be anxious for the goods and security sought in life; seeking only what is necessary grants freedom beyond many laws because it follows the life of the Gospel, a gift that cannot be lost.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

In *ER 9*, St. Francis refers to Jesus’ defense of the liberty of his Apostles to eat according to their necessity: “Whenever a need arises, all the brothers, wherever they may be, are permitted to consume whatever food people can eat, as the Lord says of David who *ate the loaves of offering that only the priests could lawfully eat* (Matthew 12:4).” On the one hand, Jesus’ reminder takes precedence as an exception of the ritual law to uphold the fulfilment of a true human need. Just as the Sabbath, that is, the ritual law, was made for humanity’s good, and not the other way around. There is another level that can also be drawn from the text, namely, that the care for human necessity, which is evident among the poor is not separate from but an integral part of the worship of God. It is, perhaps, natural to see the consumption of the bread in the Jerusalem temple by the hungry as a change of the bread’s purpose, from a sacrificial offering to worship God to a meal fit to fill David’s hunger. However, rather than a change of purpose, we can see it, instead, as a change of the manner of the offering. While the bread is typically offered ritually in the temple, for David, it was offered to God through fulfilling a human need. St. James teaches us that *pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world* (James 1:27). Many of the Church Fathers taught that our care of the poor is an act of offering a life-giving sacrifice. As a well-known example, St. John

Chrysostom taught that the poor are kind of an altar consecrated to be the place of holy offering. And St. Francis knew this too.²³ As Christ is in the altar as the one who makes true worship possible, so too is Christ in the poor by solidarity and makes them, with Him, a place where the glory of God is manifested through acts of love. These acts, when they are in Christ through the Charity of Holy Spirit, are indeed the worship of God.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 97-108

Watch: [Session 10](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

St. Francis of Assisi warned his brothers of the danger and even uselessness of money in the *ER*. Pope Francis, as Fr. Hellmann explains, expands this line of thinking further in *Evangelii Gaudium* by warning that money must not become an idol, like the Golden Calf,²⁴ in whose name people were and are oppressed and even killed. For this reason, Pope Francis insists that we discern whether our use of money and our earning it is in accordance with the kingdom of God or run against the Gospel imperatives. As St. Francis of Assisi saw necessity as the core use of goods, Pope Francis decries structures that exist to put wealth in the hands of the few and deprive many of their necessities or the security of their necessities. This monstrousness is captured in an image: “The powerful, with money making more money, actually feed on the powerless, leaving even governments even impotent to serve the common good of all.”²⁵ Our economic system hoards money so that it might grow through interest, and invests in stocks and in building machinery and companies to increase income no matter the cost. Money is the end goal, the “new idolatry,” where money rules everything else.

Fr. Hellmann insists that the right use of money must be properly discerned, that is, thought about carefully and reasonably through our Christian principles. When it is not, the poor, the marginalized, those who are treated as “throwaways” suffer terribly. In his pleas, Pope Francis is doing what St. Francis exhorted his brothers to do: to beg for the poor. Whatever our status in the world, even if we are poor too, we must, like the lesser brothers, beg for the poor and minister to them from what we have.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. Does the medieval axiom “necessity has no law” have any applicability today?
2. How does voluntary poverty differ from involuntary poverty? How do you think we should treat people in either situation?

²³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Second Corinthians* 20.

²⁴ *Evangelium Gaudium*, 55.

²⁵ This is a paraphrase of *Evangelium Gaudium*, 53.

3. If we cannot avoid money in our daily lives, how might the *ER* offer guidance in how to deal with money?

**PART 6: BROTHERS' ASSOCIATIONS
WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH WOMEN**

SESSION 11: *EARLY RULE 10 & 11: Physical and Spiritual Care*

Introduction

Sickness stops our lives in its tracks, and it was no different for the early Franciscans. As *ER* 7, 8, and 9 show, responding to a sickness of such great importance can suspend the very strict prohibition against receiving money. However, the importance for caring for the body provided an opportunity to illustrate and recall the even greater importance of caring for the soul. *ER* 10 and 11 explain this priority while presenting practical rules governing the conduct around the sick. In this way, the brothers might be able to not only endure sickness, but even profit by the bodily infirmity that would inflict their communities.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule* 10-11, *FAED* 1, 71-72
2. WATCH: [Session 11](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 11](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *The Praises of God and the Blessing*, *FAED* 1, 108-109 (*FCA:ED*)
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 121-132

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. How do you relate to people when you are sick? How do you relate to God?
2. Have you ever been so sick that you could not look after yourself?
3. How does a healthy community talk about each other? How does an unhealthy community talk?

Background

The *Rule of St. Benedict*, which shaped so much of the Western Church's monastic and religious life, also set a great importance upon the care of the sick. It says: "Before others and above all, special care must be taken of the ill so they may be looked after, as Christ said, 'I was sick and you visited me'; and 'What you did for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did for me' (Matthew 25:36, 40) (*Rule of St. Benedict*, c. 36). Like the *ER*, the *Rule of St. Benedict* offers guidance on the treatment of the brothers that reflects the mutuality of which Fr. Hellmann and Dr. Hammond have detailed in the *ER*. St. Benedict taught that the sick brothers should not forget that "they are being taken care of for the honor of God" and so should not place "unreasonable demands on the brothers." On the other hand, demands that might be distressing should be "born patiently" because a "greater reward is obtained from them." Further, the sick should not be

neglected, and the abbot must ensure that the brothers look after the sick. The sick can eat whatever they need and may bathe according to necessity, a relaxation of the rules placed upon the healthy brothers. Finally, the sick are appointed their own cells, whereas typically the brothers are to share a room (*Rule of St. Benedict*, c. 22).

Clearly, the care of sick brothers in religious communities was normal when St. Francis wrote of *ER*. Many of the same elements can be seen in mutuality, the warning against disturbing or being disturbed, the presence of brothers to minister to the sick, and the acquiescence to necessity. However, differences can be seen between the two rules, not the least of which is the use of a private cell by the Benedictines, which the Franciscan *ER* rule does not mention. As discussed in earlier chapters, the Franciscans did not initially have the stability of a monastery and were even admonished not to call a place their own. If the lesser brothers did use a separate room for the sick, it was not mentioned. The *ER* instead emphasizes fraternity and renunciation of excessive hopes for bodily cures. For the Benedictine rule, sickness is an opportunity for humility and meriting treasure in heaven through patience. The Franciscan rule lays its emphasis on sickness itself as an opportunity for spiritual recollection and reflection upon our sins, our smallness, and our reorientation towards the eternal good.

Finally, by contrast, the early Franciscans did not have the stability of a monastic foundation in which to take care of their sick, neither through the large community nor the resources. Poverty among the Benedictines was a rejection of private ownership, and all goods were received through the abbot according to need, and begging had no place (*Rule of St. Benedict*, c. 33, 34). The voluntary precarity of the early Franciscans becomes clearer by contrast. They must rely directly upon labor or begged alms to care for a sick brother. They chose to be placed in a vulnerable position in order to imitate Jesus Christ.

Read Primary Reading: ER 10-11, *FAED* 1, 71-72

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. Why would the *ER* use so many scriptural citations to discourage mistreatment among the brothers? Why is this not the case with other chapters?
2. What do you think Francis meant by “flesh,” “body,” “soul,” and “spirit?”

Optional Supplementary Reading: The Praises of God and the Blessing, *FAED* 1, 108-109 (*FCA:ED*)

Watch: [Session 11](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

Dr. Hammond explains that *ER* 10 to 13 form a whole that explains the brothers' care for their body and souls in their relationships with each other and with women. Both cases deal with the weakness of the body, in its health or in the desires associated with it. The first two chapters, *ER* 10 and 11, explain how the brothers should treat each other when someone in the brotherhood is sick. As in the earlier chapters, Dr. Hammond explains that the "level of need determines the appropriate care." In all cases, a brother should be cared for wherever he might be, and this sick brother should always have a companion. If the sickness truly warrants it, a brother could be left with someone, likely a physician, as suggested in the previous chapters on a legitimate use of money. By following necessity, this demonstrates the way to carry out the Golden Rule, doing to another what we would have to them do to us. In the case of sickness, this means not being left alone and given an appropriate, salutary treatment.

Following the need of the body is just of the beginning of the chapter, and the voice, likely of St. Francis speaking on his own behalf, says in *ER* 10: "I beg the sick brother to thank God for everything and to desire to be whatever the Lord wills, whether sick or well, because God teaches all those He has destined for eternal life 'by the torments of punishments'" (*ER* 10.3). This admonition turns legitimate concern for the body into something else, namely, guarding one's own will and desires and seeking the will of God. What is the lesson that God teaches? That the body is corruptible and that the soul is not. Therefore, the good of the soul must be sought even more than the good of the body.

St. Francis is no stranger to human desire, and so, as Dr. Hammond explains, he warns against two possible responses to sickness: one being disturbance or anger against God or the brothers; the other being excessive concern for curing a body that must die eventually. Both anxieties come from the Devil and draw our mind to our bodies and immediate troubles and away from our soul, which is made for eternal life, Francis chides such a brother by saying he does not really seem to be a brother at all because he loves his body more than his soul.

ER 11 continues to respond to the trouble posed by anger. *ER* 11 goes beyond anger aroused by sickness to anger in general. *ER* 7 also warned against keeping a home for oneself in a similar way, lest one brother be greedy against another. Nothing should set the brothers against each other. If some situation should arise that could elicit anger or dispute, the *ER* offers many passages of scripture to warn the brothers against fighting, all of which point to the goal of passing through the narrow gate that leads to salvation (Luke 13:24). How can this narrow gate be found among the brothers? Dr. Hammond outlines what they should not do: slander, revile, quarrel with, or grumble about each other, nor detract, gossip about, or judge one another. Specifically, they should not condemn another or dwell on the sins of another. In other words, they should not look to destroy their brothers and set them below. Instead, the brothers should observe silence and humility and strive to love one another through their deeds more than their words. As always, their humility will grow through the acknowledgement of their own sins. This, says the *ER*, is the way through the narrow gate.

In this description of what should be done, and what should not be done, Dr. Hammond points out that its similarity to Francis' *Admonition 27*, by pairing virtues and vices. Silence opposes slander and dispute; professing one's own littleness opposes quarreling; love opposes anger; graciousness opposes anger; contrition for one's sins opposes condemnation. *ER 11* derives all these sets in opposition from scripture, attesting to the divine origin of these positive and negative commands. These commands propose a struggle to undertake but promises eternal life to those who undertake it. This is the struggle that the brothers have undertaken.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

Francis chides such a brother by saying he does not really seem to be a brother at all because he loves his body more than his soul. Blood relation or the fraternity made by legal adoption are not subject to the same possibility of being broken by one's will as the fraternity of Francis' lesser brothers. Of course, to be a lesser brother is a voluntary act, with rules of its own and expectations that should be met in following a common form of life. It is not choice alone that the *ER* focuses on when it says that one who loves his body more than his soul does not seem to be a brother. They are brothers because they have entrusted themselves to God as their Father. What does it mean to have God as their father? The Catholic theological traditional has long recognized that every creature has God as creator, and that the baptized have God as their Father by sharing in Christ's sonship and so become sons and daughters of God by sharing in divine life. The lesser brothers seek to follow the Gospel life of Jesus in an intense, direct way—not by recognizing their position above others, but below others. But at the core of this vision is not self-loathing or an obsession with self-deprecation, it is a recognition that all things are in the trustworthy hands of the God, who is a Father to children, and will care for them and bring them to what is best. The poverty of the lesser brothers is this: to live in that trust and not in trusting in themselves. To hold on to one's body is still a kind of ownership, but Francis taught his brothers to hand all these things over, even their bodies, which would not last forever, and yet, could be hoped for on the last day.

Such trust in God, in turn, becomes the trust of those who share the same trust. It commends them to each other for aid and with the expectation that they will be treated in love. Those who trust in God together and treat each accordingly cannot be anything except brothers, or, better brothers and sisters. It is a bond that is represented by names and orders such as "Franciscan," or "Dominican," or "Benedictine," but it is not bound to those names. Anyone who has God as their Father, has Christ as their brother, and in Him, all who follow Him as Christians. Further, just as we have been joined to His divinity through sharing in divine sonship, he made us all His brothers and sisters by becoming descendent of Adam and Eve in his Incarnation. In this way, he recalls us to brothers and sisters to all human beings, no matter who they are and how they live. The best way to do so lies not in our flesh and blood, although it connects us together, but it lies in the choice to have God as Father, to trust in His goodness, and to trust that we can share that goodness with liberality.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 121-132

Watch: [Session 11](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

“Mercy,” writes Pope Francis, “is the greatest of the virtues.” Of course, we have seen the importance of mercy in the previous chapters that talk about almsgiving to relieve hunger and nakedness or collecting alms for the sick. Fr. Hellmann shows us another aspect of mercy in *ER* 10 and 11, which Pope Francis speaks of in *Evangelii Gaudium*, that those who are healthy must care for the sick. This does not only describe physical care, but as we shall see, spiritual care, too. Pope Francis’ vision is this: “The Joyful vision of the Gospel is to go out ourselves, ever going forward to sow good seed.” A Christian should not seek his or her security but they should seek to be converted more deeply to God through seeking out others to whom good may be done. This includes the risk of face-to-face encounters that may be uncomfortable, when seeking to know better and serve someone with a very different life, experience, beliefs, values, or virtues than our own.

Fr. Hellmann brings Pope Francis’ message together with *ER* 10 and 11: the healthy must not look down upon the sick. Those who have the capacity to help should not disregard anyone who needs help and they must be willing to seek them out. In the same way, they should not look down on the sins of another either, when bringing physical or spiritual care. For sins make us sick, and so spiritual care is also the work of healing the wounds of the sickness of sin. The healthy, as in *ER* 10, must stay with and accompany the sick. However, unlike the body, we are all sinners, and so we too, as Fr. Hellmann says, as sick, must look beyond ourselves and in humility to not place the root of our sins on another, but graciously seek help. We must reach out and be reached out to in fulfillment of Gospel Life. Casting all condemnation and pride, we must offer and seek mercy in humility.

Questions to reflect and discuss what you have read

1. What effect might staying with a sick brother have on a community of Franciscans?
2. Do you think St. Francis is right to associate sickness with divine chastisement? Can sickness be a “gift?”
3. How does Pope Francis’ teaching embody the idea, “let them not judge or condemn?”

SESSION 12: *EARLY RULE 12 & 13: Lust and Fornication*

Introduction

The rules around associations with women by the brothers in *ER* 12 and 13 might sound quite unfamiliar to us, very strict, and even disparaging towards women. Indeed, all of this may be true, even in the face of St. Francis' famous friendship with St. Clare of Assisi. Nonetheless, it is necessary to distinguish between the condemnation of fornication and the *ER*'s warnings against close, personal associations with the women to whom they ministered, especially as confessors. The Franciscans placed themselves in the position of being professed religious with a vow of chastity requiring a lifetime of continence while also being about in the world working, begging, and preaching. Opportunities for scandal, that is, to lead others to stumble into sin through a poor example or sinful acts, were numerous. Therefore, the *ER* 12 and 13 ensure that the brothers exercised great caution when about in the world.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule* 12-13, *FAED* 1, 72-73
2. WATCH: [Session 12](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 12](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *The Canticle of the Creatures*, *FAED* 1, 113-114 (*FCA:ED*)
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 133-144

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. Have you ever experienced discomfort in your life, your daily activities or work, or in your spirituality because of your sex?
2. What place does your experience of sexual attraction or sexual acts have in your own understanding of your spiritual life?
3. Do women and men interact in healthy ways, in your judgment, in your church community?

Background

Towards the end of *ER* 12, the citation of 1 Corinthians 3:17, “whoever violates God’s temple, God will destroy” thunders against any sexual impropriety committed by the brothers. When the

text says “Let us all keep close watch over ourselves and keep all our members clean”²⁶ it is not referring to members as in members of the order—that is meant clearly enough by “ourselves”—rather *membra* means body parts and, often, it refers to a man’s genitals. St. Francis is being very direct with his brothers: keep your private parts out trouble! This is what he means by clean and unspoiled by sin.

The notion of *purity* in this sense, however, has another set of connections. The language used by St. Paul in speaking of keeping one’s members, body parts, clean because they are temples of the Holy Spirit references the laws of ritual purity around the temple in Jerusalem. Participation in the temple was restricted for those who did not maintain ritual purity, that is, the care of the bodies to ensure that they would not bring anything unclean in contact with the temple. The Law, the Torah, explained in great detail that physical contact with certain things or certain actions made one ritually impure, even through no fault of their own. The limit on what animals can be eaten or used in sacrifices, detailed in Leviticus 11, is well known. These are not even always based on eating. Touching dead animals can render one impure (Leviticus 11:31), and even cooking instruments can be made ritually impure by touching these dead animals (Leviticus 11:34-35). Ritual impurity was also associated with contacting blood, and so a woman menstruating. Further, a woman after giving birth is considered ritually impure for a time following the birth and must be restored to ritual purity by the offering of a lamb or two turtle doves by the priest at the temple (Leviticus 12). This is familiar to us from St. Luke’s Gospel when Mary and Joseph bring to Jesus to the temple for Mary’s purification. Another case of ritual impurity was caused by leprosy, taught in Leviticus 13. Further, Leviticus 18 treats the sexual unions that are forbidden, including, with a menstruating woman, incest, adultery, sex between two men, and bestiality. These are seen from the perspective not principally of personal morality (that is an element), but of polluting the temple *with immorality* and death and contact with blood that has not been used for a sacrifice and rightful offering (Leviticus 17). Blood, which gives life to all things, is appointed for atonement that blood which saves must not be given over to private use. (Leviticus 17:10-14). Misuse or even mis-touching this blood requires that whoever does so stays away from God’s dwelling place, the Tabernacle, and later, the Jerusalem Temple.

St. Francis of Assisi did not lay out prescriptions about ritual purity in the *ER*, although some of those characteristics of purity seem to be connected with money as unclean. Nevertheless, elements of this older, Jewish understanding of ritual purity persisted, especially around sexual activity and menstruation.²⁷ St. Francis had inherited St. Paul’s association of immorality as a violation of one’s own soul and body as the temple of the Lord, but the sense of a bodily pollution through sexual intercourse outside of its legitimate bounds carried the sense of a violation of ritual law and the profanation of that which is sacred. For friars who have taken vows to follow the Gospel life, and pray daily the office and its substitute, the violation of bodily and spiritual purity appears as unthinkable. On the other hand, the friars’ closeness to the lepers, considered unclean by Levitical law, shows just how much the sense of ritual purity had transformed. While the lepers were still

²⁶ *ER* 12.5.

²⁷ Becky Lee, “The Purification of Women After Childbirth: A Window onto Medieval Perceptions of Women,” *Florilegium* 14 (1996 1995): 43–55, 44.

considered dangerous to their communities, they were not regarded under Church law as religiously defiled.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule* 12-13, *FAED* 1, 72-73

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. Gossip is hurtful. How can “glances” also be hurtful?
2. Why should a woman not do penance under obedience?
3. The *ER* has no tolerance for fornication. Compared to the treatment of other sins, which seem to receive a more flexible consequence, why do you think St. Francis took such a hard line?

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Canticle of the Creatures*, *FAED* 1, 113-114 (*FCA:ED*)

Watch: [Session 12](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

As with the discussion of the brothers’ need to avoid money, which applies wherever they are and wherever they may go, *ER* 12 limits their interactions with women with the same universality. Dr. Hammond lists directions given to the brothers. First, the brothers should not interact or look at a woman “in an evil way,” which Dr. Hammond explains means with lust. Connected to this is the prohibition that a brother should not interact with a woman alone, but he should be accompanied by another brother to ensure that no unbecoming interaction occurs and to avoid the scandal that would follow. Finally, for the clerical brothers who hear confessions, they must give penance and spiritual advice “in an honorable way” and he cannot “receive her into obedience.” This means that if a woman has a Franciscan as a confessor, she is in no way bound to him nor has an obligation towards him.

All of these rules exist so that the brothers may act without sin in their bodies by fornication or by “committing adultery in their hearts.” Such rules help them keep a keen eye on their own actions when out in the world. However, the *ER* does not presume that all brothers will be able to avoid such sins. Therefore, *ER* 13, the shortest chapter of the *ER*, considers what must be done if a brother commits fornication.

Dr. Hammond compares *ER* 8’s warnings about accepting money with the warnings against fornication. As money is to be avoided except for when it is necessary, the company of women should also be avoided with one exception: providing spiritual care through the sacraments. In a similar parallel, accepting money beyond true necessity and engaging in sexual relations with women are met with grievous penalties. Dr. Hammond reminds us that a brother who coveted money had no part in the kingdom of heaven. These consequences of greed and lust for money looked towards the fate of one’s soul before God. In the case of fornication, a practical

consequence follows much more quickly: the fornicator is expelled from the brotherhood, reflecting St. Paul's writings on fornication in 1 Corinthians, which were likely a later addition to the *ER*.

Dr. Hammond brings a final point to our attention: in *ER* 12, the woman who does penance cannot be received into obedience. In the case of the expelled friar, he is removed from obedience upon expulsion. Once he is outside this obedience, he can do penance.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

ER 12 and 13's warnings about interactions with women, lust, and fornication are stark. Women readers may rightly find that the warnings against looking at and interacting with women diminishes a regard for their own personhood among men or an implicit reduction to being sexual objects and temptations to men. Nevertheless, St. Francis' fears are grounded in the reality that the way we use our bodies, and the bodies of others, can isolate our very selves from others too. Moreover, he knows that our bodies shape our actions, as do the bodies of others. We are animals. We are rational animals, with a spiritual soul that can know invisible truths and act morally and produce works of beauty. Nevertheless, like our brother and sister animals on this Earth, we have a shared desire for food, reproduction, power, security, and affection that runs through our bodies' instincts and reactions. In this way, for many people, the desire for sex, like the desire for food, simply arises from our biology. However, because we are spiritual, we can recognize our physical and emotional desires and even, with training and much patience needed, cultivate habits and virtues that allow us to choose whether to act according to our bodily impulses. We must also learn to see the people, who are also spirits, in the bodies that we react to in the world. If we do not, we may try to make them into objects, even slaves, through which we can fulfill our desire for pleasure or power. If we do so, we will probably find ourselves as minds enslaved to our bodies. We should instead be like the brothers, as servants and ministers to our bodies, guiding them, and others through to them to do what is best for body and soul together.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 133-144

Watch: [Session 12](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

Fr. Hellmann notes that while the *ER* has been explaining the shape of Gospel life this whole time, women enter the picture for the first time in *ER* 12. The *ER* was intended for the brothers, and so its focus on men is not surprising, but to give a full picture of how human relationships fit in Gospel life, it must address how the brothers are to interact with women and how to keep the Gospel

commandment to not commit adultery in one's heart. As Fr. Hellmann's explanation of Pope Francis' teaching shows, this Gospel command is as important now as it was in the time of St. Francis.

Fr. Hellmann explains that poverty and humility resist power and control over other people. They also help in overcoming lust. Pope Francis explains that we are "plagued" by concupiscence that makes other people into objects that fulfill our desire for pleasure, and in the reference to this chapter, especially sexual pleasure. The Pope sees this as a form of narcissism; a form of self-obsession.

Fr. Hellmann explains that marriage itself, where sexual activity can occur and be enjoyed rightly, is not even just an arrangement to satisfy our affections, feelings of love, and desires for pleasure. Rightful sexual activity, which is indeed a form of chastity, expresses a deeper communion of life between husband and wife. Without this deeper bond, Fr. Hellmann sees a host of sins stemming from the mere pursuit of sexual pleasure, including pornography and human trafficking, which destroy human relationships.

It is in this way that Fr. Hellmann and Pope Francis help us better understand the reason behind the brothers' celibacy: they are to live in communion with each other and with the poor rather than in the mutual self-giving of husband and wife. In this way, the brothers' celibacy is a chastity that keeps them from either turning each other into a vehicle of their own personal pleasure or from developing an exclusive relationship in contradiction with their communion with each other and the poor. Hence, Fr. Hellmann tells us, fornication finds zero tolerance among the brothers.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. In what way can and should the rules laid out in *ER* 12 and 13 be applied to other states of life in the Church? How can it be applied to the world today more broadly?
2. What is the primary goal of chastity and having control over our sexual appetites?

PART 7: LIVING IN THE WORLD EVANGELICALLY

SESSION 13: *EARLY RULE 14 & 15: Peace and Poverty*

Introduction

In these two chapters, *ER* 14 and 15, the brothers are instructed to entrust themselves to divine providence and radical generosity when they travel, and, furthermore, that they should not use or keep animals except in serious circumstances. These two chapters prepare for further instructions on how to live in the context of an evangelical mission to non-Christians. Thus, they lay the groundwork for the important work of preaching in deed and in word. We are invited to consider with them how we may undertake that work in our day.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule* 14-15, *FAED* 1, 73
2. WATCH: [Session 13](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 13](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *The Canticle of Exhortation for the Ladies of San Damiano*, *FAED* 1, 115 (*FCA:ED*)
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 145-156

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. Do you prefer to visit the house of another or have someone visit your house?
2. How do you respond when you are wronged or have something taken from you?
3. Have you ever become attached to an animal kept for food or as a pet?

Background

In previous chapters, we saw that the Franciscans' life was not entirely novel when compared to the religious life led by the Benedictine monks who shaped the image of what total dedication to God looked like for Latin Christians in the Middle Ages. When we read about the missionary method of the Franciscan brothers and its embodiment of the Sermon on the Mount from the synoptic gospels, we can see how much the brothers relied on hospitality, since they could not take provisions but were obliged to bless on those who would take them in and receive their generosity. The brothers' trust in God to provide shows how hospitality was conceived not only as a human friendliness but as a participation in a divine work. Who can forget the story of Abraham's hospitality to the three visitors in in Genesis 18, who have been interpreted as angels or even as God? They, in turn, announced the fulfillment of the covenant in the coming birth of Isaac and remind us that in receiving our neighbor, we receive the Lord. Hospitality, especially in sharing a meal, is even seen as the sacrificial meal of our Eucharist, echoing all previous sacrifices that involved the sharing of the offered food to worship and be in the presence of God. It was, after all,

a tent—the tabernacle—that God set up for the Israelites in the desert of Sinai so that they might draw near to Him through their bodies.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the *Rule of St. Benedict* continues in that long tradition to regard hospitality as a disposition and work of great importance. Whereas the Franciscans *relied* on hospitality, the *Rule of St. Benedict* describes the ways that the monks should *offer* hospitality to guests and visiting monks from other monasteries. The doorman or “porter” of the monastery was a very important role taken by an older monk. He was charged with being available to all who would come to the door of the monastery to provide information and access if needed.²⁸ Whenever someone would arrive, he would either exclaim “Thanks be to God” or ask for a blessing—an act of humility before the visitor. From there, if guest were to be taken in, the more senior monks would greet the guest and they would pray together “in order to be at peace.”²⁹ The guests, of whom the poor and pilgrims of particular concern, are welcomed as Christ with prostrations since “it is Christ who is really being received.”³⁰ The practice of this hospitality included reading the Law (Ten Commandments) to the guest, giving the guest a place to sleep (the monasteries were instructed to have ample space in the guest room), and the guests are to dine with abbot at his table.³¹ A superior monk may break his fast except for on the most important fast days to attend to dining with guests. The other brothers are not to break their vowed silence and converse with guests unless permission is given.³² The Benedictine rule summarizes the spiritual significance of hospitality by teaching that great care should be given in the reception of the poor and the pilgrim since “Christ is especially received in them; for, fear of the rich is its own honor”³³ (My own translation, commentary on Rule 53).

When we look at the *ER 14* from the perspective of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, the lesser brothers find themselves in the reverse position of the monks on account of this poverty. Where the porter would await a blessing, the brothers say, “Peace to this house.” Where the Benedictines make an exception to eat with the guest, the Franciscan guests make the exception to eat whatever is placed before them. In this position the Franciscans are situated in the likeness of Christ, who is received in receiving the poor. In other words, the Benedictine form of hospitality carved out a clear way for the brothers to practice the imitation of Christ.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule 14-15, FAED 1, 73*

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

²⁸ *Rule of St. Benedict*, 66.

²⁹ *Rule of St. Benedict*, 53.

³⁰ *Rule of St. Benedict*, 53.

³¹ *Rule of St. Benedict*, 53; 56.

³² *Rule of St. Benedict*, 53.

³³ This translation is my own. For further commentary, see the commentary on Rule 53 in Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016).

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. Aside from trust in God, what do you think St. Francis expected his brothers to achieve by embracing poverty during their travels?
2. Are there certain “possessions” of today that are like horses of the past? What is the point of the restriction?

Optional Supplementary Reading:

Watch: [Session 13](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

Two very different chapters in the *ER* make up this pair, as Dr. Hammond notes: *ER* 14 being woven almost entirely from Gospel citations and *ER* 15 having no scripture citations at all. Their topics are equally as different: leaving peaceably in the world, on the one hand, and excluding the ownership and use of animals except in the usual cases of necessity. Nevertheless, these two represent two features of Gospel life close to St. Francis’ heart: peace and poverty.

Dr. Hammond identifies five behaviors the brothers must adopt when going about in the world, each based upon a Gospel citation. First, Luke 9:3 and Luke 10:4 commit the brothers to bring nothing on the journey and to live as “pilgrims and strangers”³⁴ with nothing of their own in the world. Second, whenever the brothers enter a house, as taught by Luke 10:5, they should say “Peace to this house,” a greeting similar to that which Francis enjoined in his Testament,³⁵ and extending their goodwill upon anyone and everyone. Third, as is familiar by now from *ER* 3.12 and 9.13, the brothers can eat and drink whatever is placed before them (and according to their need) when they are visiting a house, as in Luke 10:7. Fourth, drawing from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:39 and Luke 6:29, the brothers must not return violence for violence. The fifth and final instruction carries this farther; when stolen from, the brothers turn over what was stolen as a gift to their attacker, as in Luke 6:30. In this way of peace, the brothers commit themselves to the generosity of others, and by the same peace they even transform the violence of others against them into generosity.

In summary, these behaviors turn many expectations on the head, like the beatitudes. They offer a pattern of life conformed to the kingdom of God in the midst of this world. They do so through, in addition to charity, the divine love that we have by grace for God and our neighbor, through poverty. It is that poverty which is emphasized in the treatment of the brothers’ relationship to animals in *ER* 15.

ER 15, as Dr. Hammond explains, forbids the brothers from keeping animals for any reason. This even includes keeping animals in the care of another. No reason can justify keeping an animal,

³⁴ St. Francis, *Testament*, 24.

³⁵ St. Francis, *Testament*, 23.

neither for food, for clothing, or even companionship. Nor is use permitted for animals that are not owned, such as riding the horse of another. Of course, the *ER* grants exceptions for the sick brother who might need to use an animal, but this no great diminishment of the surprising ways of Gospel life. Certainly, the rules about animals reflect that keeping pets and having animals to ride was a sign of wealth and status. However, forbidding all private use or ownership of animals turns the status of these sons of Adam, who was given dominion over all the animals, upside down.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

In the *ER* it is quite clear that the Franciscans could not keep pets or use animals as if they owned them. Indeed, this is likely to keep them from living the kind of life the wealthy did with knights on horses and noblemen going hunting with their dogs. Yet, the many stories about St. Francis and his closeness with all creatures, which he saw as his brothers and sisters because they came from the same creator God and depended upon sister Mother Earth (such as the *Canticle of the Creatures*), prevent us from interpreting these rules as disdain for these creatures. On the contrary, these stories often describe animals approaching Francis and he displays tenderness towards them.³⁶ One story in particular shows Francis very nearly owning a pet, a hare that was given to him and for which he had great affection. Whenever he would place it down it would immediately return. At last, Francis commanded the friars carry it way far from where men lived. Francis observed his own rules, surely, but he found a closeness to these creatures. Why?

If Adam was given dominion over the creatures, we see in a St. Francis a kind of renunciation of that domination. Rather a poor man, in so many of the stories about the animals, commends them to the worship of God and even preached to them.³⁷ He savored God in them and knew that as they had God as their source that they had God as their end.³⁸ It was St. Francis' understanding that all creatures, no matter how simple, belonged to God and not to him.

To recognize that all creatures belong first to God may not rule out any use or legal ownership of animals, and Francis did not demand of those outside his order. Indeed, later Franciscan rules allowed Franciscan houses to keep cats and birds to catch mice.³⁹ Nevertheless, St. Francis' radical love for all creatures entrusted all of them to the providence of God, just as he entrusted himself and his fraternity. It is, perhaps, a call for us to see and treat every being of every kind as God's.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 145-156

³⁶ *Leg Maj* 8.6-11.

³⁷ *Leg Maj* 12.3-6.

³⁸ *Leg Maj* 9.1.

³⁹ *Constitutions of Narbonne*, III.

Watch: [Session 13](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

Fr. Hellmann applies the words of Pope Francis to describe the kind of missionary life the early Franciscan brothers undertook in going forth into the world; they are to go forth as poor *for the poor*. They do this, of course, by setting out without provisions and without ambitions, but also with joy. The brothers are to be received anywhere and to receive everyone who comes their way, even if the person might cause them harm. It is in this way that the brothers live a life that makes them closely connected with those on the margins of society, or, as Pope Francis identifies them, “the throwaways” of society. The brothers in St. Francis’ vision of Gospel life embody the nearness to those who *seem* to have nothing to offer. And so, to use contemporary language, these brothers risk the vulnerability of a face-to-face encounter. It cannot be said that Francis did not perceive this vulnerability—it is on account of these poor brothers’ real vulnerability that they are forbidden from striking attackers and reclaiming the goods they use from thieves. It is among these people that they should find *joy*.

For this reason, Fr. Hellmann sees in the brothers the kind of missionary life in the church that is “God’s leaven in the midst of humanity.” This missionary life raises the church up to be a poor church *for the poor*. What would such a church be and how could such a church be rebuilt, as Fr. Hellmann says? It is the church that does not serve the amassing of material wealth, or political power, or spiritual haughtiness. It is the church that announces its messages of salvation and mercy to all people and announces the dignity of those who the world has overlooked. In the friars, or those who take up life cut from the same cloth, all can see a Church where they are welcomed, loved, and offered mercy – whose only price is faith.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. Could you recommend this form of religious life today, in general or in the place you live? What might the response be? Could it apply to all Christians?
2. If the *ER* were written today, what do you think St. Francis would have told the brothers not to use except in cases of necessity?
3. How do the “words and deeds” from these chapters challenge consumer society?

SESSION 14: *EARLY RULE 16 & 17: Nonbelievers and Preaching*

Introduction

St. Francis and his order of lesser brothers were committed to preaching by their words and deeds among Christians, and they also looked to spread the Gospel to the wider world. This was commanded by the Gospel and St. Francis eagerly desired to answer that call (although he only successfully reached the Middle East to preach among the Muslims once). However, he ensured that the others would have instructions on what to do if they undertook missionary trips. In our day, Christians still undertake missions to majority non-Christian populations and in historically Christian lands. St. Francis explains both then as today how we might preach the Good News in humble living or with words.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule 16-17, FAED 1, 74-76*
2. WATCH: [Session 14](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 14](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *A Letter to the Entire Order, FAED 1, 116-121 (FCA:ED)*
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 157-168.

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. Do you live in a population that does not embrace Christianity in a widespread way? What challenges have you faced?
2. Do you consider yourself to be living a missionary life?

Background

When the *ER* was finalized, sometime around 1221, many factors had come together that shaped its treatment of missionary work outside of Latin Christendom. The Franciscan order had grown tremendously; learned men now joined its ranks.⁴⁰ Such men would have had the formal training that enabled them to be familiar with or even skilled in reading and teaching the scripture and theology. At the same time, the Fourth Lateran Council, an ecumenical council convened by Pope Innocent III, forbade the founding of new religious orders and established and codified an office

⁴⁰ William J. Short, "The Rule of the Lesser Brothers," in *The Writings of St. Francis of Assisi: Rules Testament and Admonitions*, 17-140; *Studies in Early Franciscan Sources*, eds. Michael W. Blastic, OFM, Jay M. Hammond, Ph.D., and J.A. Wayne Hellmann, OFM Conv, vol. 2 (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2011), 102-104.

of preachers to assist bishops in Canon 10 and Canon 13.⁴¹ Preaching had become more regulated and a close eye was kept on the newer religious orders, about which disputes would arise later in that century. Freer preaching, as in the earliest days of St. Francis and his first brothers, could not be sustained under the requirements of council and the sheer number of new brothers who would require oversight. Preaching, therefore, became regulated by ministers, who were themselves instituted by St. Francis in response to the same needs in 1217.⁴²

At the same time, the Fifth Crusade was being fought in the Middle East, meaning there was both considerable conflict and contact between Latin Christians and the various Muslim states in the Middle East, as well as contact with oriental Christians and Jews. These wars enabled the friars, Franciscans as well as Dominicans, to travel on missions with the armies. It is also this war that casts St. Francis' rules about preaching in an important light. The friars were to live peaceably among people with whom Christian nations were at war. St. Francis himself attempted to travel to the Middle East three times, succeeding only once, and knew the promise and dangers that awaited Christian missionaries. Nevertheless, after Francis' day, while some Franciscans would preach to encourage the crusades and preach to convert Muslims to Christianity, they would never take up the policy of forced baptism at the sword that some Christian armies did.⁴³

For all these reasons, clarifying the Franciscan method of preaching was of critical importance in the *Early Rule* given to the lesser brothers.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule* 16-17, *FAED* 1, 74-76

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. How might people, “preach by their deeds?”
2. What does “live spiritually” among nonbelievers mean to you?
3. What might the result of preaching with words be?

Optional Supplementary Reading: *A Letter to the Entire Order*, *FAED* 1, 116-121 (*FCA:ED*)

Watch: [Session 14](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

⁴¹ Ibid., 102.

⁴² Ibid., 104.

⁴³ Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches Toward the Muslims*, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), <https://search-ebcsohost-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=791532&site=ehost-live>, 141.

Summary

ER 16 and *17* consider a topic very close to St. Francis' heart: missionary trips to non-Christians, especially in the Holy Land. Dr. Hammond immediately draws attention to a similarity between the entrance of the brothers into the order in *ER 2* and the later decision to pursue missionary work: both are to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Similarly, in both cases, it is the minister who must decide whether the request should be accepted or denied. However, if the request to go on a missionary trip is made by someone "fit" for the task in the judgment of the minister, he is obliged to allow that brother to go, and is liable to judgment if he should not. Yes, the minister has a care for the brothers' well-being, and the brother's request should be prudent. Nevertheless, the minister is a servant, and first serves the will of God, which moves in the brother. Therefore, the discernment is very serious, but the minister must not serve his own interest, goals, or point of view in it.

ER 16 lays out two ways to live a missionary life among non-Christians if it is undertaken: the path of living amongst them and evangelizing by deed and the way of preaching. In this first way, the brothers would simply live amongst a people and admit that they are Christians and "submit themselves to every creature," subjecting themselves as lesser as they would in their native lands, however, now even submitting to non-Christians. Dr. Hammond observed that this was unusual for the time. After all, this was the era of the crusades in which Christians and Muslims met on the battlefield. Admittedly, Christians, Muslims, and Jews lived side by side in the Middle East and Spain, but it was not without tensions. Here, the brothers eschewed all conflict, even arguments or theological quarrels.

In the second way, the brothers would preach Christian teachings aloud. While Muslims then as now confess the one creator God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they do not recognize the Trinity or Jesus' divinity. If, by preaching, anyone should come to profess Christianity, *ER 16* instructs that they may be baptized and become Christians. The brothers may preach with confidence because Matt 10:32 pronounces that "Whoever acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father." Through their preaching, the brothers will be acknowledged by God.

Dr. Hammond notes that these two ways are parallel and complement each other since:

The first way emphasizes deeds by (1) the brothers subjecting themselves to all, (2) for God's sake, and (3) confessing they are Christian. The second way emphasizes words by (1) the brothers proclaiming the Trinity and Christ, (2) for God's pleasure, and (3) confessing Christ before others. (Hammond, Session 14 Video)

In this way, the brothers preach by their deeds and their words, "living spiritually." First, performing deeds that may draw interest and open an avenue to preaching. The deeds support the words, but both acts are pleasing to God.

ER 16 is not unaware of the opposition or violence they may face in living among others or preaching, and so ends with a reminder of how Jesus Christ faced opposition, threats, and persecution unto death: He loved those who hated Him. The scripture citations encourage the

brothers to do the same and leave their fears and anxieties with the Lord. They, in summary, are to be sheep among wolves and as sheep, followers of the shepherd.

ER 17 moves from the manner of living to the work of preaching in greater detail. It has four parts: the first deals with preaching in word and deed; the second acknowledges that any good deeds or good words are first from God; the third states that words without deeds belong to the flesh but not to the spirit; and finally, it concludes with a prayer of praise for God in all things said and done. Dr. Hammond explains that the theme of the unity of works and deeds repeats every section, but in a different way each time.

The first point establishes that all preachers must preach in accord with the “rite and practice of the Church,” a point clarified at the Fourth Lateran Council. They must not contradict the acts and teachings of the Church and accord with its manner of worship. Further, they must only preach if the minister discerns that they should have this office, and they should not hold on to it as if it were a possession. Nevertheless, the example of the lives of the brothers can always be considered a form of preaching too, even without words.

Second, Francis, speaking in his own voice, pleads with the brother in the name of “that love, which is God,” to be humble and not to exalt in their preaching or in their deeds. These deeds are only good through God, and if they were left to us alone, whatever good we do would be perverted by our many vices. Dr. Hammond observes that this section carefully balances between the positive and negative statements, explaining what to do and what to not do, and that God is all good and we have many vices. The text ends bridging these by saying that we must rejoice in our afflictions suffered for eternal life. This applies not only to preachers, but to clerical and lay brothers, who may preach, pray, or work according to the role they hold in the order.

Third, *ER 17*, warns the brother against vainglory if they are not humble. If one should have the words of preaching, but not the deeds preached about, he would have a “spirit of the flesh.” To have an “interior spirit,” one must perform the deeds of religion. Thus, without exterior action, the interior world is empty and merely feigning religion.

Finally, the concluding prayer and exhortation draws together all of these points. In contrasting to the risk of vainglory, and in accord with the need for humility, all glory and praise and honor is given to God, the source and end of all preaching. The end of preaching is the worship of the good God from whom all things come. In the face of evil words, deeds, and blasphemy, the brothers must do the opposite: they must speak well, do good, and glorify God. In short, where there is darkness, the work of preaching in word and deed is to shine the light.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

The exhortation and prayer at the end of *ER* 17 may have stood as the conclusion of the primitive form of the early rule.⁴⁴ If so, the discussion of preaching would have been the climax of the *ER*. It is in preaching, by deed or by word and deed together, that the initial inspiration of the brother would come to fruition. In the brother, the movement of the Holy Spirit would manifest. This would not be the self-glorification of the brother, nor would it be our glorification as independent agents. Rather in being who he was, or who we, women and men, are meant to be in the fulfillment of the Gospel, God, and the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, would be seen in us. And whoever sees Jesus Christ, sees the Father (cf. John 14:9). This is why Francis teaches us and prays that all good would be referred to God and not to ourselves, because to preach truly is to become a mirror of the eternal light and saving love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is true for the friars, but it is true for every one of us, too. Yet, to be this mirror is not to become famous or well known, but simply to live as recognizing Christ in our actions and words, which may not always be seen by the world. Rather, it is God who first sees our acknowledgement of Christ in the face of the world. It is this one that the Father will recognize, in whom the Father will see the life of His Son. Whatever fruit can be drawn from this faithfulness cannot be measured by us; it should be left in the hands of God's providence. All good is, after all, to be credited to God. Any other disposition, St. Francis warns, however holy it might feel, is nothing more than vainglory.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 157-168

Watch: [Session 14](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

Fr. Hellmann sees *ER* 16 and 17 as further refinement of the way of acting in the world in Gospel mission among non-believers, an intensification of the same Gospel principles they apply elsewhere in their lives. It is an intensification because the brothers are tasked with understanding people outside of their culture and carry the unique burden of representing Jesus Christ and the Gospel. They will represent what it is to be Christian. Here, it is more necessary than ever to not be boastful and attribute what is good to the God of Jesus Christ.

This expectation of an intense following of the Gospel in word and deed, through humility and submission to others, is echoed in Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* Chapter 3. Fr. Hellman singles out a saying from that chapter that encapsulates what Christians in missions to non-believers must remember: "God has found a way to unite Himself to every human being in every age."⁴⁵ Fr. Hellmann draws an implication: if God has been close to every people and every age, we must submit ourselves to all in mission outside our culture, learn from them—since God has not been

⁴⁴ Short, 108.

⁴⁵ *Evangelium Gaudium*, 113.

apart from them—and even learn about them. If we listen carefully, as Fr. Hellmann encourages, the non-believers can even evangelize us.

In bringing Christianity to other lands, as the Franciscans strove to do, Pope Francis reminds us that Christianity does not need to be identical to the expressions found in Europe. He stresses that listening and submitting to others is especially important to opening real dialogues across cultures. These dialogues are meant to make witnessing to the Gospel, to the salvation that Christ brings, possible. The need for dialogue and understanding across cultures does not replace preaching, as some may fear, but preaching must be done well in speaking truth with both courage and sensitivity that comes from loving the people to whom one might preach. This is a preaching that differs from homilies given in the liturgy, which are meant to lead both the preacher and the assembled community to receive and meet Christ in the Eucharist. Preaching among non-believers is to introduce them to Jesus Christ as the God-Man and the Trinity, from whom creation and salvation flow. Attending to the context of preaching is critically important to delivering that message.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. The Church has undertaken much more extensive interreligious dialogue since the Second Vatican Council. How does attitude of greater respect and listening complement our command to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth.
2. How do the two ways of being a missionary described by Francis fit in the life of the Church today? Are they compatible?

PART 8: THE BROTHERS CATHOLIC IDENTITY

SESSION 15: *EARLY RULE 18 & 19: Ministers and Brothers*

Introduction

Sometimes, St. Francis is thought of or depicted in a romantic or sentimental manner as an eccentric with little concern for the Church as a structure and authority. In reality, this could not be further from the truth. While St. Francis' actions and manner of preaching and living as an imitator of the Gospel life shown by Christ may have startled many in the Church and even caused frustrations for bishops who found the early Franciscans appearing in their dioceses, Francis was zealously devoted to following the leadership of the Church and adhering to the Church's teachings and laws. For St. Francis, this belonged to his humility and receptivity. We too, in looking to St. Francis' vision of Gospel life, must keep in mind not only our local communities, but our responsibility to receive the teaching and decisions of the Church.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule 18-19, FAED 1, 76-77*
2. WATCH: [Session 15](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 15](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *A Letter to Brother Leo, FAED 1, 122-123 (FCA:ED)*
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 168-180

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. How do you find the experience of meeting Christians who are not part of the Catholic Church?
2. Have you ever invited or challenged—or been challenged—to become Catholic or to follow the teaching of the Catholic Church if you already were?
3. Have you ever been part of a gathering of people from across many regions?

Background

In the days prior to the Protestant Reformation, the great splits in the Church between denominations in Western Christianity had not yet appeared. Schism between the Patriarch of Constantinople and Rome in the 11th century often resulted in animosity and distrust between the Eastern (what we now call Orthodox) and Western (what we now call Catholic) Churches. Nevertheless, both sides relatively held the same understanding of the Trinity, Christ, the Church, and the sacraments. Over time, attempts at a formal reunion would occur at the Second Council of Lyons and the Council of Florence, and on some occasions Catholics and Orthodox faithful would

receive the sacraments from the other's priests. In short, the divide between the East and the West was between two large populations over smaller points within a larger agreement about the institutional shape, practice, and belief of the Church.

In the West, however, before the Reformation several heretical movements appeared to challenge the legitimacy of the Catholic Church as an institution, along with its practices and its understanding of the Christian faith. One prominent heresy was found among the Cathars (a name derived from the Greek word for "pure"), also called the Albigensian Heresy, that looked down upon material creation as an evil and denied the divinity of Christ, who was instead an angel who taught the right form of life to escape evil matter. They taught that extreme renunciation of all goods, even food (especially meat and dairy), was the duty of the most advanced Christians. This sometimes resulted in suicide by starvation.⁴⁶ The Fourth Lateran Council had these Cathars in mind when it explained Catholic teaching.⁴⁷ In their extreme form of renunciation and their view of importance of the Spiritual above the evil material, one can imagine how certain similarities could be drawn with the spirituality of St. Francis.

On the other side, another movement, the Waldensians, anticipated the Protestant reformers in their critiques of the worldliness of the Church's clergy, and questioned many of its practices that were not found in the scriptures explicitly, or at least, in their interpretation. Their founder, Peter Waldo, a merchant, sold his goods and gave them to the poor. He preached, often against the corruption of money in the Church, and sought papal approval. He never succeeded in gaining the approval—but he was never excommunicated, although his later followers, the Poor Men of Lyon, would be excommunicated for their critiques of the Church structure, the inefficacy of sacraments celebrated by "unworthy ministers," and their own sacramental practice, in which they set up their own clergy to celebrate the Eucharist annually.⁴⁸ In many respects, the Waldensian movement anticipated the Franciscan movement, and compared against their history, the Franciscan emphasis on Catholicity remains important to note.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule* 18-19, *FAED* 1, 76-77

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. What would a meeting of the ministers most likely need to discuss? Why do you think it was part of the rule to ensure that these meetings happened?
2. The early brothers faced the "obstacles" of mountains and seas that kept them apart; what are "obstacles" today that keep people apart? Why is personal time together important?

⁴⁶ "Cathari," in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 247; "Albigenses," in *Oxford Dictionary*, 30-31.

⁴⁷ *Oxford Dictionary*, 31.

⁴⁸ "Waldenses," in *Oxford Dictionary*, 1434-5.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *A Letter to Brother Leo, FAED 1, 122-123 (FCA:ED)*

Watch: [Session 15](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

ER 18 and *19*, which were likely added to the primitive form of the *ER* after the Fourth Lateran Council, begin with a section outlining the Catholicity of the brothers, that is, their submission to the practices, teaching, and clergy of the Catholic Church. These chapters also address what to do if a brother is found not submitting to and embracing such Catholicity. These chapters do not plead for the exciting promise of Gospel life and its renunciations and rewards. Nonetheless, as the Franciscan order (or even *religion*, in the older sense of the word as discussed above) is not a merely personal occupation but a movement in and for the Church, it proved important to clarify the necessary Catholicity of that brotherhood.

ER 18 enshrines Catholicity in the manner of the government of the order by the ministers. As the Order of Friars Minor developed structures similar to the older religious orders of the day because of its growth in size. The Fourth Lateran Council, in Canon 12, required all religious orders to have meetings of their members, or chapters, on regular occasions.⁴⁹ Accordingly, the Franciscans fulfilled this duty in three ways. First, a minister could meet with all of his brothers on the feast of St. Michael the Archangel every year. Second, ministers within the Italian peninsula could visit the Pentecost chapter in Assisi every year. Finally, the ministers who come to Assisi from afar, over the Alps or across the sea, may come once every three years. This last rule year shows just how much the order had grown in a short time, beyond St. Francis and beyond Assisi to include brothers and their ministers (instituted along with provinces in 1217) in France, Spain, Germany, and the Middle East. However much the situation changes, as usual, this time can be shortened if it is for the good of the order.

While the *ER 18* organizational scheme is derived from the Catholicity of the order and its embrace of the Lateran Council's laws, *ER 19* places a much more explicit demand for Catholicity from the members of the order. It requires that all brothers live as Catholics. If anyone should depart from the Catholic life or teachings, he would be expelled after being given the opportunity to amend his ways. As the Lateran Council taught, an orthodox Catholic must follow the teachings on the Trinity, Christ's union of divine and human natures, the necessity and power of the sacraments, and obligation to say or attend the liturgies of the Church. A second requirement is also placed on the brothers: to regard the clergy and religious of other orders as masters "in all that pertains to the salvation of our soul and does not deviate from our religion." This respect is noteworthy because it makes no distinction about what is owed to good or bad clerics. This also recalls the heretical Cathars, who did not regard immoral clergy or religious as possessing any authority. The Catholic, and thus Franciscan, position was to treat such clergy and religious with respect on account of their administration and office that accomplishes the Lord's work despite their unworthiness. The Lord

⁴⁹ William J. Short, "The Rule of the Lesser Brothers," 108.

remains the brothers' master at all times, even when operating through sinful, scandalous, ministers.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

The Franciscan commitment to Catholicity is rooted in the heart of St. Francis of Assisi. Religious movements carry both the promise of deep spirituality and the risk of pernicious exclusivity that puts its members above their fellow Christians. In St. Francis' life, and in the *ER*, we can find many signs that he understood his spirituality as *ecclesial* and *Catholic*. Francis desired to follow the Gospel without any reservations or even legitimate accommodations. He yearned to follow and imitate Christ (*sequela Christi*) as far as possible, so much so that he raised ecstatic union with God in this life and was marked with Jesus' wounds. However, none of these special qualities can be understood without seeing his life as one of being lesser, submitting to everyone, and serving the church.

Francis heard the call to rebuild the Church, not to overthrow it. He looked to the Pope and the Bishops for legitimacy, even if he surpassed them in spiritual insight. His life, and his death, did not belong to himself alone, but was meant for others. Nor was his order for his own sake, and he handed its administration over readily. Francis did not think he was doing something new, but something very old: living the Gospel itself. He clung to what came before and what it offered to the Church around him. His Catholicity embraced continuity across time but also solidarity with his fellow Catholics and those to whom he went to preach in the Middle East.

Anyone who takes St. Francis as an inspiration for the spiritual life cannot take poverty, or penance, preaching, or even the love of God through creation apart from a grounded desire to receive the wisdom of those who have come before us, to serve and know those around us, and to be involved in the Church wherever you are. Otherwise, it would not be truly humble and poor; it would really be private possession in disguise.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 168-180

Watch: [Session 15](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

What should we take away from the teaching of *ER* 18 and 19? Fr. Hellmann suggests that we see the importance that even as the brothers go forward in mission, they remain in open communication with each other through their chapters and that they remain connected to the wider Church. In chapter, older monastic communities took time to "treat the things of God," to discuss the

following of God together, and this provided an opportunity to shape their identity, their manner of acting, and their manner of speaking. The friars' radical commitment to absolute poverty as a protection of their relationship as brothers also served to form the Franciscans' identity as their order grew.

Fr. Hellmann connects the third chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium* with *ER* 18 and 19. He explains that Pope Francis' vision of spiritual accompaniment is well represented in those sections of the *ER*. Pope Francis explains that nobody who preaches the Gospel can do it alone, and if they should, they will become detached drifters. Spiritual accompaniment is to be with and listen to other people present wherever they are preaching. Genuine listening, whether it is in chapter or with another, opens one up to docility to the Holy Spirit. Such docility and real listening, in turn, lays the groundwork for real compassion and then real spiritual encounter. While this art of listening can take hold anywhere, Fr. Hellmann points out that Pope Francis sees it as especially necessary among missionary disciples.

This closeness between missionary disciples is grounded in the deepest meaning of Catholicity, which is, to quote Fr. Hellmann, "to desire ever deeper communion with the Spirit of the Lord in the Body of Christ." Pope Francis explains that in this communion, the believer is someone who remembers the great cloud of witness, and Jesus' accomplishment of the Paschal Mystery itself, and this memory is even the source of the Gospels themselves. It is this remembrance that also finds fulfilment in the memory of the Eucharist, which Christ commanded to be celebrated in memory of Himself. By this memory, we encounter the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and in Christ's presence in His body the Church, and in the world that he created and has redeemed. By communion with each other, in docility to Holy Spirit, we will become more attentive to this memory and so, as Fr. Hellmann says, more deeply integrated with the clouds of witnesses.

Mission springs from this communal and sacred memory, not from a privatized faith or individualistic spirituality. Genuine mission springs from being a Catholic in communion and, by God's grace, extending that communion to others through spiritual accompaniment among the preachers and those to whom they preach.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. What place does the Eucharist hold in your life? What is the place of Confession? What do these have to do with your life in the wider Church?
2. What would a meeting of the ministers most likely need to discuss? Why do you think it was part of the rule to ensure that these meetings happened?
3. Why was the insistence that the brothers be Catholic so important? Should it not have been obvious? Why would it still be important today?

SESSION 16: EARLY RULE 20 & 21: Penance and Praise

Introduction

In *ER 20* and *21*, we find St. Francis' very simple guidance on how to receive the sacraments, what to do if a priest cannot be found, and the example of a simple way for all brothers to preach. These sections are simple and practical, but they reflect the similarly simple duties of Franciscan life: stay close to God, to the Church, and call others to salvation. These simple practices are offered to us today as a way of life even for those who are not members of the order.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule 20-21, FAED 1, 77-78*
2. WATCH: [Session 16](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 16](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father, FAED 1, 158-160 (FCA:ED)*
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 229-240

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. How do you prepare for confession?
2. Has public confession or a shared experience of admitting one's own sins every been a part of your spirituality?
3. How do you prepare for communion?

Background

In contemporary Catholicism, the practice of private, frequent confession has eclipsed the other ways in which the confession of sins had occurred in the past ways of practice and spirituality. It is true that as St. Francis knew and taught, the power to absolve sins belonged to the bishop and his priests. Thus, the assurance of the forgiveness and the remission of sins came through the ministers of the Church alone. To be freed of the guilt and consequence or punishment that follow sin remains an important dimension of penance. However, there are and were other aspects of penance, too, that involved different practices within the life of the community.

Since the Church is the body of Christ and we are its members, sins inflict a wound in that body. As in a plant or animal, a wound in one part of the body affects another part of that same body. The practice of non-sacramental confession to another, bearing one's sins to another helps to heal breaches in communities and to exercise humility and vulnerability with one's fellow Christians.

One way that this practice remains in a ritual way is the use of the *Confiteor* in the Roman Rite Mass, in which we confess our sins to God, the saints, and our brothers and sisters. In the older form of the Roman Rite, the *Usus Antiquior*, and other related uses of the Roman Rite, such as the Dominican Use, an absolution was given after the *Confiteor*. However, it was only ever regarded as remitting venial sin. In other words, it was not aimed at making unworthy penitents worthy to receive the Eucharist in a state of grace, but rather, to reconcile communicants and better dispose them to an intentional and humble reception of the sacrament. Such a confession sets one in a right spirit.

Another non-sacramental practice of confession was practiced in monastic communities. As we have seen before, the Benedictine Rule offers helpful example in western monks. These monks would publicly admit to their mistakes in saying the office or arriving late, while the commission of other faults in the course of life in the monastery required a monk to confess to the abbot and other brothers and to “offer to make satisfaction.”⁵⁰ Graver faults associated with being a malicious resulted in being cut off from the community until penance and reconciliation with the community had been undertaken.⁵¹ In this context, the confession of sin and making amends prioritized humility, willingness to be corrected, and preserving brotherhood in God.

The communal work of repentance, correction, and reconciliation should not be opposed to the importance of sacramental confession. For the Franciscans and other religious, it represented a healthy and normal part of living humbly with one another.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule* 20-21, *FAED* 1, 77-78

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. How are giving and forgiving are expressions of penance and praise?
2. How are the “Franciscan Ps” interrelated: Praise, Penance, Poverty, Peace?”

Optional Supplementary Reading: *A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*, *FAED* 1, 158-160 (*FCA:ED*)

Watch: [Session 16](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

⁵⁰ *Rule of St. Benedict*, 46.

⁵¹ *Rule of St. Benedict*, 23-29.

Summary

ER 20 continues the trend of applying the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council to the life of the brothers since they are, obviously, Catholics. That council looked to ensure that Catholics maintained an active sacramental life. Thus, it imposed, in Canon 21, a yearly obligation to confess one's sins and receive the Eucharist, typically at Easter time. As noted in the previous chapter of this handbook, the heretical movement challenged the Church's sacramental practice, however, a genuine desire to ensure that the spiritual lives of the faithful were being nourished motivated this canon. The forgiveness of sins and the fullness of participation of the Church's life in the reception of the Eucharistic sacrifice could not be neglected, especially not for those who voluntarily undertook religious life. St. Francis himself had a deep devotion to the Eucharist and a tremendous desire that his brothers would, too.

Accordingly, to be fit for eternal life, and to be prepared to receive its anticipation on Earth through the Blessed Sacrament, the brothers were required to confess their sins. *ER 20* opens three ways to confess sins. First, confession to a Franciscan priest. If one is not available, then to a priest outside of the order. Finally, when no priest is available, the brothers should confess their sins to one another. This last form, however, would not receive sacramental absolution, however, it does reflect a longstanding monastic practice discussed above. Hence, Francis enjoins on the brothers that they should always seek a priest even after confessing to their brother to have the certainty of knowing their sins are forgiven and to be able to complete a penance in connection with their sins. No mention is made of the worthiness of the priest to hear and absolve sins. Instead, as Dr. Hammond point out, contrary to the heretical movements of the later Middle Ages discussed in the previously, Catholic priests, sinful or not, are simply able to forgive sins.

Dr. Hammond points out that the rules of the Fourth Lateran Council about communion and confession were likely minimums that did not reflect the actual practice of the brothers. Rather, he suggests, the brothers received absolution and communion more frequently. In fact, Dr. Hammond cites St. Francis' encouragement to the brothers to receive communion daily. In this way, the brothers would be able receive the "means to eternal life" with humility and respect if they confessed when necessary.

ER 21 shows another kind of response, in a clever way, to the demands of the Fourth Lateran Council. That council had made it clear that a preacher should have proper training to preach. Not all of the brothers would have had an education that prepared them to preach. The praise and exhortation to penance in *ER 21* offers a workaround so that *any brother*, educated or not (and even without permission from the minister), could preach a standard and simple sermon. Thus, while many brothers would be limited to preaching with deeds, this stock sermon would allow them to preach without worrying about introducing moral and doctrinal error and, if they were on a missionary journey, to undertake both forms of missionary work as described in *ER 16*.

Dr. Hammond explains that this stock sermon, the exhortation, promotes praise for God and penance for sins committed in four parts. The exhortation first praises the Trinity. Second, it exhorts following the Gospel and doing penance while there is still time before death and the final

judgment. This penance has four points of guidance: 1) what you give you will receive (Luke 6:38); 2) forgive and you shall be forgiven (Luke 6:37); 3) if you do not forgive others, your sins will not be forgiven; 4) confess your sins (James 5:16). Penance, as presented in this exhortation, centered entirely on humility and forgiveness. Its third point warns that those who do penance will enter heaven, but those who do not will be damned. The fourth and final point exhorts all to avoid evil—and this will make penance unnecessary if it can be done. Dr. Hammond summarizes that penance begins with the worship of God and then with the friars imploring and offering forgiveness. Those who do penance will find salvation while those who do not will find their way to the devil. To begin with true worship, however, is the way, through penance, to avoid evil and remain in communion with the good and God, who is goodness itself. As Dr. Hammond says, penance reconciles and sin alienates.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

The relationship between penance or reconciliation (which we commonly call confession), and the Eucharist, embraces many dimensions. Sacramental confession and absolution render us fit to receive the Eucharist in a state of grace. However, confession in its sacramental and communal forms also heals the breaches within the Church and the wider world by acknowledging wrongs done to each other and to bear our weaknesses among those who will help us. Confession has a vertical direction, between God and man, but also a horizontal dimension, between the one who confesses and God's creation, his own brothers and sisters.

The Eucharist, the Church's sacrifice wherein we offer and consume the true body and blood of the Lord given for the life of the world through Jesus' Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, also has both dimensions. The Church, clerics, and laics, offer this sacrifice together through the ministry of the priest. It is first and foremost an act of worship, but the sacrifice and glorifying gift to God is nothing other than God's saving love in Jesus—crucified, resurrected, and ascended. In that sacrifice we offer in the Eucharist, we find the saving love that has knit us together into Christ, joined us together in His Body—the Church—by His very offering of life through His body that Mary conceived and birthed. Thus, we find in that very vertical offering of God (the Son) to God (the Father) through the God (the Holy Spirit) the horizontal healing that makes broken humanity into a holy sisterhood and brotherhood.

Sacramental Confession prepares us to partake in the Eucharist, but our confession to each other in that same Eucharist prepares us to embody the union between Christians that the sacrament empowers. This the reason why peace is offered from the altar and to each other after the sacrificial Eucharistic prayer: it is this Eucharist that heals us and unites us to God and each other. This bond of reconciliation and mutual love is itself central to the sacrifice; it is the great gift that Jesus has offered to the Father on the cross: the humanity glorified and restored in Jesus Himself. This great gift, if it is to be found in us, too, can only take root where humility, penance, and a heart for reconciliation are found.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 229-240

Watch: [Session 16](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

Fr. Hellmann sets St. Francis' direction on the sacraments in *ER 20* alongside Pope Francis' reflection on the sacraments in the life of the Church in *Evangelii Gaudium*, since both treat the sacraments as necessary for those who are going into the world in mission. It is true that St. Francis regards these sacraments with gravity and holy fear. For in them the poor man of Assisi knew he could meet and eat his Lord and be healed, transformed, and glorified by God. At the same time, Pope Francis pleads with the members of the Church not to let the magnitude of the sacraments become a stumbling block. Fr. Hellmann brings these two perspectives together to help us think of the sacraments within the broader life of the Church, the Gospel life, which has been spoken of throughout the *ER* and proposed to us still as a guide to living in Christ today.

Regarding penance and reconciliation, St. Francis placed a very high importance on the acknowledgement and the forgiveness of sins. Of course, sins and repeated sins can be discouraging and even shameful. Pope Francis consoles that although we may grow tired of asking for God's forgiveness, God never tires of forgiving us. Sacramental confession is a means of asking to receive that forgiveness, but it cannot be forgotten that even confessing our sins to our brothers and sisters is a way of trusting in God's forgiveness, and every moment of confessing sin and seeking forgiveness should be, says Pope Francis, a rich encounter with God's love. It is not confession and the sacrament that should hold first place in our hearts, but God's forgiveness that empowers that sacrament. Therefore, confession should never be seen—or administered—as something frightful. Nonetheless, it must be approached with humility, as St. Francis always reminds the brothers.

The Pope sees two ways in which reverence for the Eucharist can be twisted into a stumbling block. First, by being treasured in such a way that they eclipse the need for the members of the Church to go out to meet the world in mission, sharing the joy of the Gospel to those who have never known (or perhaps forgotten it). Second, he teaches, with a now famous saying, that “the Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, it is not a prize for the perfect but, rather, powerful medicine for the weak.”⁵² For St. Francis, who was a daily penitent, this reception of this spiritual medicine of the Eucharist was never a prize or trophy. It was the pledge that the union of God was accomplished in a hidden way, even in his imperfection, he would, through perseverance, be experienced in its fullness at his death and in the resurrection.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

⁵² *Evangelii Gaudium*, 47.

1. What does the Eucharist have to do with mission and living the Gospel Life?
2. Do you think the “Praise and Exhortation” would make for a good sermon or not if it were preached in your Church or publicly in your community? How do you think it would be received?

PART 9: TEN ADMONITIONS ON SALVATION

SESSION 17: EARLY RULE 22, PART 1: *The First Admonitions*

Introduction

St. Francis of Assisi admonishes his brothers to keep to the path of Gospel life in *ER 22*, drawing extensively upon citations from scripture. It is the beginning of the conclusion in the final form of the *ER* or *Regula non bullata*, and rather than introduce anything new into the vision of Gospel life, it recapitulates the themes and instructions given earlier in the *ER*. In this session, Dr. Hammond and Fr. Hellmann give an interpretation of its first half, or lines 1 to 18. In the next session, they will consider lines 19 to 55.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule 22.1-18, FAED 1, 79-80*
2. WATCH: [Session 17](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 17](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *The Admonitions, 1-14, FAED 1, 128-134 (FCA:ED)*
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 193-204

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. Have you ever left on a journey not knowing when or if you will return?
2. If you could leave a final message to those closest to you, what would it be?

Background

If the admonition in *ER 22* was written on St. Francis' third missionary trip, his only successful landing, it would be helpful to outline St. Francis' other missionary trips. Francis tried to travel to the Holy Land on two previous occasions, both of which were thwarted by unfavorable circumstances.

The first of these mission trips occurred in 1211 when Francis tried to reach the Holy Land by a boat that departed from Italy. Unfortunately, a storm interrupted the journey and the boat carrying Francis and another friar landed on the opposite side of Adriatic Sea, likely around Dalmatia. Francis then tried to find a ship that would take him to Ancona on the Italian shore, and when one captain refused to transport the two friars, they stowed away. As it happened, that ship also suffered from the winds at sea. However, the boat remained stuck on the Adriatic Sea and Francis ended up providing enough food during that time for himself and their reluctant hosts.⁵³

Two years later, Francis remained undeterred in his desire to go to the Holy Land. On his next journey in 1213, however, he travelled west instead of east. He travelled by land through Spain to

⁵³ Thompson, 45-6; *Leg Maj* 9.5.

Morocco, perhaps in response to his troubles at sea in the previous attempts. However, Francis fell ill during the trip and was forced to return home.⁵⁴

The third and final trip in 1219 brought Francis successfully to Egypt with the crusading armies in Damietta so that he could meet the Sultan Malik al-Kamil. The crusaders did not seem to make much of Francis and their leader, the Cardinal Pelagius Galvani of Albano, only reluctantly let Francis and his companion brother cross through enemy lines. When they did, the Sultan received them, perhaps hoping that the friars carried overtures of peace and diplomatic relations. Francis, however, was committed to preaching the Gospel, and disputes with the Sultan's religious advisers eventually gave way to a personal discussion with the Sultan. He seemed impressed with Francis, although he never accepted Francis' message of conversion to Christ. After an offering of gifts, which Francis turned down to the wonder of the Sultan and his court, Francis was allowed to return. He returned to the crusaders and then to Italy, neither as a successful missionary (in the strictest sense) nor a martyr. Afterwards, Francis would never again try to reach the Holy Land.⁵⁵ St. Francis' journey to the land of the cross would not, ultimately, lead to another direction, up the slopes of Mount Laverna where he would receive the stigmata on his body and an unspeakable experience within towards the end of his life.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule* 22.1-18, *FAED* 1, 79-80

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. In what way do we make our "external" enemies our friends?
2. How are we to let the "dead bury their dead"? Does this not seem like a heartless command?

Optional Supplementary Reading:

Watch: [Session 17](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

The admonitions of *ER* 22 have been considered either a testament left to the brothers before departing for Egypt or, on the other hand, a statement intended to summarize Gospel life.⁵⁶ Dr. Hammond accepts both as true: it is a set of principles, but it also looks to the possibility of St. Francis' martyrdom. However, such a possibility of martyrdom was also a part of the general principles of Franciscan life.

⁵⁴ Thompson, 48-9; *Leg Maj* 9.6.

⁵⁵ Thompson, 66-71; *Leg Maj* 9.7-9.

⁵⁶ Short, "The Rule of the Lesser Brothers," 114.

No matter what the occasion of writing, the structure remains straightforward. The first admonition concerns one's neighbor, the next five concern keeping interior purity and guard over one's heart, and the final four are exhortations to praise God.

The first admonition, on loving enemies, follows in Jesus' footsteps. Jesus called Judas, his betrayer, a friend. The brothers are to do the same. Dr. Hammond explains that when the brothers are hated, persecuted, or even killed, they should love their enemies because those enemies are actually giving a great gift: the opportunity to imitate Jesus by responding to those same attackers with the love and patience Jesus showed them. If they do return love for the hate they receive, the brothers will win the prize of eternal life. In this way, the brothers are not only to love those who hate them because they are their fellow creatures and images of God, but because they are, in an upside-down way, gift-givers. This perspective, though so unnatural to our defensive selves, surely helped the brothers to show genuine love to their persecutors when it would be very easy to hate them instead.

The second admonition warns for a careful guard over one's body and one's heart. Francis' words sound hard: "hate your body with its sins and vices." Dr. Hammond expects that modern listeners would be confused or disturbed by this claim. However, St. Francis is speaking in the biblical idiom of St. Paul, in particular, in Romans 8 where the flesh and the way of nature is opposed to the life of the spirit, the higher part of life. St. Francis linked the body with the flesh, and so too the body with the sins. In another way, the body is the instrument of the spirit, also called the heart. What the heart desires, it accomplishes through the body, thus, sins are actualized through the body. Such sins would lead to the devil and to hell, and so they must be hated, and the means of performing them hated too. Francis reminds the brothers, however, that the sin is not caused by the devil—it is the brothers who sin starting in their hearts. The body does not sin, but sin begins with a wrong desire. All sort of sins listed in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 begin from within, and not even the devil makes them happen. The answer is not to harm one's body, but to turn from the misuse of one's body by loving God and one's neighbor in the way that God intends.

The third and fourth admonitions use the parable of the sower and the seed, joined together from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These two admonitions are that we should not become dry earth that cannot receive the seed (the word of God), and that we should let the dead (those who will not receive the life of the word) bury their dead. Both draw upon the understanding that desire shapes action. Dr. Hammond explains that St. Francis' understanding of the parable aligns in a way of measuring how much one's desire has been transformed by the word of God. Since the brothers have left the world, they should be totally open to leaving all earthly desires and anxieties behind and should let the dead bury the dead, meaning, they should not become entangled in the worldly desires of others.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

If St. Francis left these admonitions behind for his brothers before setting off on his journey to Egypt, we might see them as a reflection of a moment when Francis was trying to leave the world he knew behind in two ways. Obviously, travelling to Egypt after two failed attempts to reach the Middle East, meant leaving the world of Christendom behind. Christendom was that loose and often factious confederation of states in which the leaders and most (but not all) of the people professed Christianity in its Catholic or Orthodox forms. Francis was leaving a land whose customs he knew and in which he had gained a reputation, respect, ecclesial support, and a vast fraternity that accepted him as a brother. Instead, he would be both a pilgrim going to the land where Christ and the Holy Family hid from Herod, and a preacher among the Muslims.

St. Francis was also going with the knowledge that he might die. St. Bonaventure, in his longer biography of St. Francis, *Major Legend*, narrates that Francis hoped and expected to be a martyr.⁵⁷ He was leaving the world of his bodily life behind to serve, to live the life of spirit, and to spread the Kingdom of God. He was going on the road, striving to be one who could not only receive the word of God, but share the work of spreading it. He was seeking a life most fully alive; he was letting the dead bury their dead by going out to his own death to bring others to life. As Bonaventure said, his love for Christ and desire to imitate Christ burned like a bundle of myrrh in his heart.⁵⁸ Ultimately, his will was ready to follow Christ into a world beyond the flesh, as his own admonitions encourage the brothers.

However, even though he fancied himself ready to be one and longed for it, Francis would not die a martyr. Francis returned to his earthly homeland alive and with his body intact—and with a new friend in the Sultan. That experience leads us to a third way of reflecting on the meaning of admonitions: to follow God’s will, even beyond one’s own expectations for holiness and the shape of God’s providence. St. Francis’ desire for martyrdom had to die an even deeper death to the world. In time, the Stigmata imprinted on his body would show that his death had occurred deep inside, in his heart, dying with Jesus Christ who is alive.⁵⁹ In this way, he was a pilgrim, journeying in his country, and even journeying in his own soul, on the way to heaven and into the peace of complete trust in God.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 238-240

Watch: [Session 17](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

Fr. Hellmann sees that the admonition joins together the love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self. To be more precise, he sees it as rooting the love of neighbor and self in love of God.

⁵⁷ *Leg Maj* 9.5-9.

⁵⁸ *Leg Maj* 9.2.

⁵⁹ *Leg Maj* 9.9.

Because love of God is the source of the truest love of neighbor, Fr. Hellmann shows how Pope Francis can characterize missionary joy—which is rooted in love of neighbor—as a joy that “never closes itself off.” It is offered to everyone. For this reason, Fr. Hellmann connects this joy to the admonition to love our enemy. Mission is the zeal to serve God in the world by serving others and preaching the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ by words and deeds. It can be carried a great distance, as when St. Francis himself went to Egypt to preach the gospel. However, it even crosses the great distance between enemies. Missionary joy does not even close itself off to enemies. Fr. Hellmann explains that this joy does not see sin in another—not that it assumes that others have never sinned—but it does not define anyone by their sin. Rather, missionary love sees God in that person. It may result in being betrayed, hurt, or even killed by such a person. Pope Francis acknowledges this risk and says that we must be ready to put our lives on the line and be ready to accept martyrdom.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. Which of Francis’ admonitions discussed in this session challenges to you most vividly?
2. How are we – body, heart, mind, spirit, soul – our own worst enemies?
3. Why must we worry more about what comes out of ourselves than what goes in when we consider purity of heart?

SESSION 18: *EARLY RULE 22, PART 2: The Second Admonitions*

Introduction

In the second half of the admonitions of *ER 22*, St. Francis of Assisi warns his brothers against the assaults and snares of the devil. St. Francis has a keen eye for the ways that we might be tricked or trick ourselves into committing and justifying sin. His approach, however, is not weighty or cumbersome by imposing many rules. Instead, Francis warns us through a simple principle of watchfulness over our minds and desires, applicable to us today as much to his brothers eight hundred years ago.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule 22.19-55, FAED 1, 80-81*
2. WATCH: [Session 18](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 18](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *The Admonitions, 15-28, FAED 1, 134-137 (FCA:ED)*
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 205-216

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. What do you think St. Francis hoped his brothers would learn from his admonitions?
2. Do you think St. Francis should have included anything else to remind the brothers?

Background

The admonitions in *ER 22* are not a restatement of any of the particular rules or primitive legislation presented in the *ER*. Rather, they are a restatement of principles largely through the citation and paraphrase of the Gospels. This approach is consistent with the wider spirit of the *ER* as a rule of life that does not introduce systems of legislation but prefers to explain how to live the Gospel life as a community. It is reflective of St. Francis' reluctance to introduce anything beyond the Gospel, and, furthermore, suggests Francis' reticence to exercise direct leadership over others. It is telling that Francis eschews any command to follow the *ER* in his admonitions and instead points to Christ as the teacher and shepherd.

Francis' leadership has been characterized as only effective because of his holiness and operating as model for imitation rather than command.⁶⁰ Fr. Augustine Thompson, OP, reflecting on the history of modern scholarship of Francis, contends that Francis was not a reformer of structures

⁶⁰ Thompson, 40-1.

and systems in an era when Church reform was a major concern.⁶¹ His goal was never the placement of strictures on his brothers or anything else but the clearing away whatever impeded following the Gospel. An outstanding example of Francis' attitude is given on the occasion when he learned that while he had been in Egypt, the leaders he placed as his vicars imposed new dietary restrictions and expanded the days of abstinence from meat. Francis, reportedly, heard this rule as he was sitting down to eat some meat and did not abide by the rule and instead ate as the Gospel allowed.⁶² When he returned, he was deeply distressed. However far from resisting rules, he was always deferent to authorities in the Church. His purpose, which he proposed to his brothers, was to be lesser. In effect, this was the entire purpose of the *ER*, a rule meant to be hardly a rule at all and certainly not any exercise of personal authority on St. Francis' part.

Read Primary Reading:

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. Why are rewards or assistance so dangerous?
2. Do you think Francis compiled the “scriptural” pastiches for reflection purposes or as “rules?” Could the confusion between reflection/rule cause problems? What problems? Why?

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Admonitions*, 15-28, *FAED* 1, 134-137 (*FCA:ED*)

Watch: [Session 18](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

The previous session looked at four of the ten admonitions in *ER* 22 that focused on purity of heart and receptivity to the word of God. The remaining six admonitions warn the brothers against giving a space to the devil and his demonic trickery and describe how to make a fitting place in their own hearts for God to dwell.

Picking up from the parable of the sower, Dr. Hammond frames the ways that the devil can trick the brothers as ways that the word of God is prevented from bearing fruit. In lines 19 to 25, Francis begins by admonishing us that we should “beware of the malice and craftiness of Satan, who does not want anyone to turn his mind and heart to God” (*ER* 22.19), and ends with the warning to “be very much on our guard that, under the guise of some reward or assistance, we do not lose or take our mind away from God” (*ER* 22.25). Francis spoke of the need to avoid *evil* earlier in the admonitions, but now he warns against those evils that appear good to one who is actively and

⁶¹ Thompson, 210-11.

⁶² Thompson, 70-1.

intentionally seeking God. How might such an evil come? Dr. Hammond explains that, for Francis, seeking a reward for doing good corrupts one's intention of doing good. A heart that does good for its own sake is a good heart, but a bad heart that does good in the hopes of an earthly reward, is not a heart fixed towards God, no matter what its exterior actions might show. For the friars to work, preach, or do any other good act with the expectation to gain something (besides the legitimate needs of their body), is a deception, a will under the wiles of Satan and turned away from God. This is not a danger that goes away. For when overcome, the risk can return as the demons in the parable of the swept house that come back in sevenfold force.

The next two admonitions correspond to what a brother should do if he does not turn away from God through the desire of a reward. First, he begs his brothers "both the ministers and the others, after overcoming every impediment and putting aside every care and anxiety, to serve, love, honor and adore the Lord God with a clean heart and a pure mind" (*ER*, 22.26). It was the cares and anxieties in the world that brought about the desire for reward, but if these are overcome, it is possible to seek God with a pure heart. When the brothers serve, love, honor, and adore God, they are doing that which God truly wills, and then they will be able to observe the next admonition: "Let us always make a home and a dwelling place there for Him Who is the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (*ER* 22.27). How is such a dwelling made? By keeping a pure heart and remaining steadfast in prayer, especially in the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father, and the prayer "We Adore you O Christ and we praise you." God is spirit and is approached in the life of the spirit. We raise our souls to God, which God makes possible through grace. In this prayer, Dr. Hammond notices that St. Francis gives it a Trinitarian shape. The brothers pray to the Father through Jesus Christ, the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, they adore the Son, Whom the Father desires that we worship. Thus, our hearts and souls become a place where the love and relationships between the persons of the Holy Trinity dwell to the point where the Trinity, in turn, shapes our own actions to accord with and share in the divine life.

In the ninth and tenth admonitions, as Dr. Hammond enumerates them, the brothers are called to look towards Jesus as the shepherd and then to adore the shared glory of the Father and the Son. In the ninth admonition, Francis bids his brothers to recall that Jesus is the shepherd, their only true shepherd, and the guardian of their souls. It is Jesus who lays His life down to keep them safe. All of what Francis bade the brothers do in the previous exhortations must and can only be entrusted to their true guardian, Jesus. Wherever they may go, Jesus will be with them, and whoever keeps Jesus' word will have their prayers heard too. However, the brothers must remember that among themselves they have no Teacher and no Father but God in heaven. Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life, and not any brother, not even Francis, offers the full model of life. Rather, Jesus alone shows the path of life and the spirit against the way of flesh and death. His is the way that leads to glory.

The final admonition begs the brothers to "hold onto the words, the life, the teaching, and the Holy Gospel" of Jesus, who became human so that he might beg the Father on our behalf for the Father to reveal the Glory of the Father and the Son. St. Francis is referencing the "High Priestly Prayer" of John 17, which concludes the Last Supper in that Gospel. *ER* 22 compresses that prayer into a shorter form, however, its thrust remains the same (although where Jesus speaks of the Apostles

in John 17, the context here places Francis' lesser brothers in their place). Thus, the prayer becomes one in which Christ, who is the true shepherd and guardian, prays that the mutual love and glorification of the Father and the Son would be revealed in the brothers, who Jesus entrusts to the Father, so they may be united to the Father and Son and share in the same love and glory. How will this happen, practically? Dr. Hammond explains that St. Francis has adopted this prayer to express his conviction that if the brothers cleave to God by following in the footsteps of Jesus in word and deed and entrusting themselves the Father's providence (which are only possible through the Holy Spirit), they will glorify God, be glorified by God's own glory, and enjoy God's glory into eternity.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

At the beginning of the *Early Rule*, St. Francis emphasized the particular form of life of the lesser brothers that was centered around self-renunciation and asceticism. That ascetic life of penance was meant to guide the brothers into living in the Kingdom of God now by embracing the Gospel life. Now, towards the end of the *Early Rule*, he speaks freely about the goal of that asceticism, the privilege of that kingdom, and the fruit of Gospel life: participation in God's glory.

Purity of heart is the link between the humility and self-renunciation taught earlier in the *ER* and its fruition in worshipping, delighting in, and sharing in God's glory. Humility, which seeks to be higher than none and to take nothing beyond need (a very demanding practice that may not be possible for all), is never meant to be a prize or adornment that serves our status or self-esteem. No, St. Francis lived and taught this path as a way to reorient ourselves to the world, to see and treat the world differently so that we can reshape the desires of our heart.

For those who live a Franciscan life, or at least a life that seeks to imitate St. Francis in an ordinary life in the world, we are faced with this question: do we relate, or want to relate to the world, in a manner that seeks purity of heart. How can we ask this question without becoming puffed-up with pride or scrupulous? Fr. Hellmann treats the topic of our interior lives below with Pope Francis' considerations, and that is certainly very important. Another way is to ask whether there are any parts of our lives in which we keep the Gospel at arm's length and carve out a space for ourselves alone.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 205-2016

Watch: [Session 18](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

The Pope and the Poor Man

Fr. Hellmann summarizes the latter part of *ER 22* as focused on having a clean or pure heart in which God can dwell. It is not, first of all, our exterior words and deeds that are considered in this part, but their source in our interior life. Fr. Hellmann says that it is our own relationship with ourselves that forms the basis for our relationship with God. When we look inside of ourselves, we can often see so many different desires and objectives moving us around to all kinds of action, and this may be a distraction from what is truly important. It is these distractions, especially when they become self-centered, that St. Francis sees as a way for the devil to maneuver our focus away from God. We must, therefore, be careful about what we let in through our senses so that we can take care of our interior life.

Fr. Hellmann connects similar thinking from Pope Francis, who warns that “the devil tries to choke out the word.” What happens when our selfishness or self-gratifying desires fill our hearts? The Pope explains that we lose the place for others and, in turn, lose the place for God. On the other hand, when the word of God, that truth taught to us by and in Jesus Christ, is received in our hearts, we have the opportunity to live above the ways of the world—as Fr. Hellmann says, to live on a higher plane. Why? God’s love alone can transform us to be a fitting place for God to dwell in us so that we may act according to God and enjoy God. We cannot achieve this by ourselves, but we can hear the word of God and turn to it and trust what it teaches us. We can rest in the knowledge that if we wait in openness for God, God will, or has already started to, transform and elevate us. Of course, such an elevation is not an alienation from others who have not yet taken this path. On the contrary, this mystical path is to have God’s love live in us so that God will be our all in all. When we have a pure heart and God can be seen through all creatures and all creatures can be seen and loved in God. There, Fr. Hellmann tells us, our love of God and love of neighbor will be fulfilled.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. What are the goods things that may be distractions in our lives, or rather, treated in a way that makes them distractions?
2. Why would St. Francis end these admonitions with the glory of God? Why should we be reminded of this?

PART 10: INVITATION TO THANKS, PENANCE, AND PRAISE

SESSIONS 19 & 20: *EARLY RULE 23: Francis' Great Thanksgiving*

Introduction

In most manuscripts, the *ER* has been transmitted to us with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving placed after the admonitions but before the final chapter. Like the admonitions in *ER 22*, the prayer of *ER 23* was an addition to the rule. Although it was not written as part of the *ER*, it stuck because it provided a fitting conclusion to the rules of life for the Lesser Brothers, whose lives were supposed to be rooted in prayer. It is a long prayer that praises God in many ways and for many different reasons. It reduces the goal of people and all things to God. The prayer is also a summary of St. Francis' overall vision of the spiritual life and the order of the created world of nature and society, a great act of worship of God, of *glorifying* God, through the creatures that God has created, saved, and redeemed. Francis was a penitent and humble man in his life on earth, but before all else, he was and remains a worshipper and lover of God together with the communion of saints on earth and in heaven.⁶³ Sessions 19 and 20 will be presented here in a close connection to treat this prayer as one entire prayer. Fr. Hellmann's videos have ceased until the very end of the course, so that our full focus can be devoted to this prayer and the final commendation in *ER 24* (although appropriate readings from *Evangelii Gaudium* are still provided). As you prepare for these two sessions, consider reading, or perhaps even praying, the prayer of *ER 23* in its entirety before engaging with material in these sessions. In this way, you may approach what St. Francis prepared for us not primarily as an exercise for study but as words by which we might be raised up to God.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule 23, FAED 1, 81-86*
2. WATCH: [Session 19](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 20](#) (Dr. Hammond)
4. WATCH: [Session 20](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. *Exhortation to the Praise of God, FAED 1, 138 (FCA:ED)*
2. *A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father, FAED 1, 158-160 (FCA:ED)*
3. *The Joy of the Gospel, nn. 217-240*

I. READ THE FIRST HALF OF THE PRAYER: *All Give Thanks to God for God* (Session 19)

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. For what do you give thanks most frequently?

⁶³ Short, "The Rule of the Lesser Brothers," 114.

2. Have you ever thanked God for God?

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule* 23.1-6, *FAED* 1, 81-83

Watch: [Session 19](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

Dr. Hammond sees the structure of the prayer of *ER* 23 as broken in two major parts, 23.1-6 and 23.7-11, each of which is further subdivided into two minor divisions. He identifies the thrust of the first division as praising God, who is all good and almighty, and the thrust of the second part as a call to everyone to respond to God with praise.

In this long prayer, the words *gratias agimus tibi* appear seven times, with a little variation. These words are found through the liturgy of the Church, in the *Gloria*, the hymn of praise often heard at the beginning of Mass, but also in the Preface, its dialogue, and the Eucharistic prayers. These words express that our worship is a response from our gratitude and joy on account of some good. In the first case, before any thing else, St. Francis' prayer thanks God simply because God is God. Before any other reason, God rightfully receives worship, but it is not because of anything on our account. Nevertheless, as Dr. Hammond explains, through *ER* 23.1-4, the prayer turns to God's graciousness to us as another reason for our thankful worship and it follows the pattern of salvation history: thanks for our creation, for our redemption through Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection, and then for Christ's second coming in which the damned and the saved will each receive their recompense. The final judgment looms heavily in St. Francis' thought and he uses penance as the measure for who will and will not be saved. Those who do penance will be saved, but those who neglect penance will not be saved.

ER 23.5-6 continues the expression of thanks into begging for those above to praise and thank God on our behalf. Dr. Hammond explains that this part of the prayer, or *laud*, moves through three acts of begging: begging God, begging the angels and saints, and then in *ER* 23.7 begging all the Church to praise God. While this last part belongs to the second half of the *laud*, it is important to include in this series of begging. In the first half of the *laud*, Francis looks *upwards*, while in the second half he calls on all humanity to turn to and give thanks to God.

Each time Francis begs, he begs for worthy worship for God. Thus, he begs that Jesus Christ, the Son, in the Holy Spirit, would give worthy thanks to the Father on our behalf. And indeed, who else is better suited to worship God but God, and to do so on our behalf, and who else is worthy to utter the name of God, as the prayer says? Nevertheless, the *laud* makes it clear, as Dr. Hammond explains, that everyone of every kind, in heaven and on earth, is called to worship God. St. Francis' vision is that of a universal worship grounded in the worship offered by Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, the worship of Mary the Mother of God, of the angels, and of the saints we are raised into Jesus', God the Son's, worship. By invoking each saint, or order of saints or angels, the *laud* adopts the form of a litany, like the litany of saints used in the Roman Liturgy.

In this litany, including that which is placed in the second half after the “Amen. Alleluia!” that punctuates the first half, Dr. Hammond notices that there are thirty members in the first litany consisting of heavenly powers and saints, while the second half has forty earthly orders. This number, seventy in total, reflects the seventy elders of Israel and the disciples sent by Jesus. It also reflects a division into the heavenly realm, symbolized by the Trinitarian number three, and the earthly realm, since in St. Francis’ day it was taught that the earthly world was composed from four elements. Finally, this number also reflects the number seven, which was a reminder of the days of creation, the sacraments, and many other lists of sacred importance. These numbers, and their echoes of the number seven, symbolize both the Old and New Testaments along with the universal nature of the praise.

After all these orders are listed, Francis prays that they would be joined to the lesser brothers’ prayers. Dr. Hammond points out that the English translation moves this part of the litany towards the beginning of *ER* 23.7. This may seem like a nitpicky point of Latin grammar, but it was intentionally placed at the end in its original Latin so that the lesser brothers would be shown in all of their lowliness, behind everyone. They are thus placed nearest to the penance that makes salvation possible for such poor, useless servants. It is their voice that says throughout: we have been created, we have fallen, we have been redeemed, and we can be saved if *we* serve all those who come before us and do penance.

II. REFLECT ON THE FIRST HALF OF THE PRAYER

Reflection

For St. Francis, the world we see with our eyes, this world that God joined in His Incarnation, sits within a greater cosmos around us, above us, and beyond us. The brothers, and each of us, are called to serve God within a wider church that includes every kind of person and to worship with them. Our divisions are rooted in sins and vices that have become bad habits. Thus, to worship together properly, in unity, should help us strive to overcome these divisions by striving against our sins in doing penance. Our model should be the Church above, that blessed community of the angels of every choir, and the saints who have gone before us. They pray with us, but also for us, so that we may become like them and joined with them more intimately, even though we still pass through this earthly life. Finally, together with the angels, saints, and our living sisters and brothers, we utterly depend on and owe all things to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are the source and end of our lives individually and all together, and their love, who is the Holy Spirit, enlivens our love.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. How do you envision and understand the relationship between the saints and angels and our life on earth? What can we learn about this relationship from St. Francis?
2. What challenges you most in the first part of Francis’ Doxology? Why?

III. READ THE SECOND HALF OF THE PRAYER: *All Give Penance and Praise to God* (Session 20)

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. For what do you pray most frequently?
2. Have you ever felt unworthy to pray, or have you been prevented from praying due to some other fear?

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule* 23.7-11, *FAED* 1, 83-86

Watch: [Session 20](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

When Dr. Hammond turns to the second half of Francis' laud, *ER* 23.7-11, he points out the dialogue that weaves throughout the prayer. It is the dialogue between God's infinite goodness and our lowliness and need for that goodness. It is this lowliness and need that the Franciscan life is meant to embody.⁶⁴ It is a willing embrace of our lack, which is open to be fulfilled by God's generosity. Dr. Hammond sees the story of our lowliness as set within salvation history as it is narrated in this prayer. We did not create ourselves and God did not cause our fall, so we have a strong need for our nothingness to be brought into existence, and our sin to holiness. God does fulfill, and abundantly. God sustains our existence, but more, has redeemed us from the sins that we committed against Him. Further, God will bring those who undertake penance to share in His glory. As Dr. Hammond points out, in this dynamic, salvation is God's total gift of Himself to us, which calls for our total gift of ourselves to God in thanksgiving. Of course, St. Francis acknowledges that we are not worthy of being a gift equal to God's goodness. The good news of the Gospel, however, is that through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we can be made into a living thanksgiving. The laud of *ER* 23 is about praying for nothing less than that God's goodness would make us a worthy return for that goodness.

Where can this goodness be found in us? *ER* 23.8 tells us: in us, who are ungrateful and wretched, goodness will be found when we serve God with all our soul, heart, body, and every power (especially our power to desire) all of which God has given. What we have been given, we must return. This dynamic continues throughout the latter half, in lines 9-11. If we are ungrateful for what we have received, then we should begin to desire nothing but the good that *does* fulfill us, from the one who is holy and full of pardon. Similarly, if we should happen to desire the all-good God, then no matter how we are or where we are (a point now familiar from elsewhere in the *ER*), we should never turn from the presence of God. Rather, we should "humbly believe, hold in our

⁶⁴ Short, "The Rules of the Lesser Brothers," 114.

heart and love, honor, adore, serve, praise and bless, glorify and exalt, magnify and give thanks to the Most High and Supreme Eternal God Trinity and Unity.”

Finally, this dynamic ends a balance of positive and negative description of God, who is the savior of all those who believe in, hope in, and love Him. Seven attributes state how God exceeds our knowledge as “without beginning and end, is unchangeable, invisible, indescribable, ineffable, incomprehensible, unfathomable” (*ER* 23.11). Nevertheless, we can and must worship and be united to this God beyond knowledge who is “blessed, praiseworthy, glorious, exalted, sublime, most high, gentle, lovable, delightful, and totally desirable above all else forever” (*ER* 23.11).

If penance is so necessary, as the laud itself expresses, why does it not occupy a more extensive space in this prayer? Dr. Hammond has an answer: the heart of penance and the goal of penance is to praise God and to bring God’s presence into our recollection at all times, while acknowledging our need and lowliness. This is the path of following Jesus Christ and His Gospel and take our place as least among all. In this end, this lowliness is not self-hatred or self-debasement, but tasting the Glory of God in the littleness that God made His own in becoming human and taking us as brothers and sisters, so that we may be children of God. In this wonderful work we have much for which we are thankful.

IV. REFLECT ON THE SECOND HALF OF THE PRAYER

Reflection

Do we desire God? This question is raised urgently and frequently throughout the latter chapters of the *ER*. For St. Francis, it is the question whose answer makes all the difference in our lives. Perhaps it is possible to believe that the Gospel is true, and even hope for its accomplishment in a distant way and yet, not desire God now, or rather, not desire to be God’s. St. Francis challenges us to examine our desires, for what we desire is what we love.

At the same time, St. Francis always reminds us that we are ungrateful and unprepared for God when we consider the infinite value of the gift God gives, which is nothing other than sharing in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some Christians, in the face of this disparity, may be given to despair or an unsettling concern to make oneself worthy. It is impossible for us to do so by our own power, and even St. Francis recognized his unworthiness. His answer was penance, in which he recognized his failings, confessed them sacramentally and to his brothers, and entrusted himself to God’s grace.

If we feel hopeless at our weaknesses or too proud of our successes, we can look to St. Francis’ way: attributing our good to God and entrusting our weaknesses to God’s providence. We must cooperate, but it is God who will save us, even from the disorder or confusion in our desires. St. Francis called all to penance, not to leave them in dread, but so that he, taking the place of the lowest, may give others hope that they too can turn and trust in Jesus Christ, the Word spoken by the Father to gather us in through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. If we are made in God's image, and God is all good, then why does Francis call us, "miserable and wretched, rotten and foul, ungrateful and evil ones?"
2. What challenges you most in the second part of Francis' Doxology? Why?

V. FINAL CONSIDERATION ON THIS PRAYER

Watch: [Session 20](#) Video (Fr. Hellmann)

Fr. Hellmann's last reflection before the conclusion likens St. Francis' prayer at the end of the rule to a Eucharistic prayer. As a Eucharistic prayer offers thanksgiving for all that God has done in offering Christ our Passover to the Father, St. Francis' prayer offers thanksgiving for all that God has done in offering his life and the lives of the brothers, in Christ, to God, together with all the saints, looking forward to the world to come. This prayer—and the wider Early Rule—challenges us, as the Eucharist does, to love nothing but God, or rather, to love all that we love in loving God. For this reason, Fr. Hellmann suggests that the Early Rule, with this prayer that almost draws it to a close, offers the most succinct yet comprehensive vision of Gospel Life.

PART II: CONCLUSION AS INTRODUCTION:
THE TRINITY AS THE BOOKENDS TO THE *LIFE*

SESSION 21: *EARLY RULE 24: This Life is for Our Salvation*

Introduction

The concluding chapter of the *ER* does not add new regulations, insights, or admonitions except to insist that the rule should be kept as it is. Like a period at the end the sentence, it behooves the reader to see everything that came before as one united idea composed of many parts. Dr. Hammond's reflection on the end of the rule will help us to see how St. Francis hoped his brothers would make use of and profit from it and how we might look upon it as a guide today.

Primary Material for Study

1. *Early Rule 24, FAED 1, 86*
2. WATCH: [Session 21](#) (Dr. Hammond)

Supplementary Readings

1. *The Praises to Be Said at All Hours, FAED 1, 161-162 (FCA:ED)*
2. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 241-252

I. READ THE RULE

Questions to Consider Before Reading

1. Have you ever been entrusted with some great task or commitment? If so, did you ever want or perhaps try to change the terms of the commitment?
2. This *Early Rule* was replaced only two years after its completion. Are you more comfortable with rules that are adapted frequently or with rules that remain stable?

Background

As Dr. Hammond mentions, this chapter, now found as the conclusion, may have initially been included as a letter introducing the *ER*.⁶⁵ As we have seen in other chapters, material was added to the core of the *ER*. This does not mean that the received version presented in this course is somehow a corrupted or inauthentic version. On the contrary, the addition of new sections to the final version demonstrates that this document was not only read, but it was used in a community and reflects its changing needs, at least according to St. Francis' understanding. Therefore, it is not just a legal document; it is also a relic of the attempt to live the Gospel life and dwell in the kingdom of God.

Read Primary Reading: *Early Rule 24, FAED 1, 86*

⁶⁵ Williams, 134-5.

II. UNDERSTAND THE RULE

Questions to Engage what you have read

1. How does this “life of salvation” compare and contrast with Christian life today?
2. Francis says to not delete or add to the “life,” but what would you delete or add to the life to make it “speak” to the world today?

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Praises to Be Said at All Hours*, FAED 1, 161-162 (FCA:ED)

Watch: [Session 21](#) Video (Dr. Hammond)

Summary

Dr. Hammond summarizes the final chapter of the *ER* as, “this life is our salvation.” Like many last things, it echoes the beginning. There are several similarities that he finds between the Prologue and *ER 24*: First, it includes the invocation of the Trinity. Second, it identifies *ER* as a form of life. Third, it places a great emphasis upon obedience, both by imploring that the brothers follow this rule, but also because St. Francis himself communicates this rule under obedience to the Pope, and to God. This mention of the Lord Pope is a reference to the prologue, as is the direct mention of Francis by name. After all, this way of life was born out of that poor man of Assisi’s straightforward attempt to follow the Gospel.

This conclusion is longer, however, than the prologue and contains important warnings not contained in the prologue. Francis commends this life to the brothers as their way to salvation; it is a form of life by which they can be assured of salvation. In turn, this requires that the brothers learn to love this life if it is to truly profit them, and Francis entrusts the brothers to God’s care. How can they do this? They will do so if they “teach, learn, retain, remember, and put into practice” what is found in the rule, and if they do not add or remove anything from the rule but instead treasure it. In short, they will love it when they internalize it, live it, and instruct others in the way—presumably by word and deed.

This form of life ends where it begins, in the name of the Lord, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yes, the practice of beginning a legally-binding document with the phrase “in the name of the Lord!” does not appear until later in the *ER*, but the same sense is found in the very beginning of the prologue, “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”—for these are the revealed names of God. *ER 24* ends by glorifying God in the names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The beginning of the prologue is, thus, mirrored by the ending of the conclusion. Dr. Hammond explains that this is most appropriate since the Trinity is the source and goal of Gospel life. Furthermore, salvation is to share in and be conformed to the life of the Trinity.

III. REFLECT ON THE RULE

Reflection

Fr. Hellmann, in Session 19, looked ahead to this final chapter, and saw in it the reaffirmation of a “tall order,” a life that demands much. For all that this short rule demands, rooted in the life of God, it also offers, in Fr. Hellmann’s opinion, the most succinct and yet comprehensive vision of the life proposed to us by Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

Fr. Hellmann is right, the *ER* does present a tall order and defines the objective of living as a profound form of selflessness. Yet, if we dwell not only on the rigor of taking nothing away, we might also spend a moment to reflect on the gentleness of adding nothing more. As we saw when St. Francis returned from the Middle East to object to the imposition of new penance, St. Francis refused to impose upon his brothers, or anyone, more than the Gospel asked. The brothers are also prevented from adding any further obligation. In the same way, we should be careful that we do not give in to imposing more than the Gospel asks on ourselves or on our neighbors. The measure of holy living can never be our own preferences, it must be through Christ. Our understanding of Christ is limited, flawed, and sometimes even backwards.

Optional Supplementary Reading: *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 241-252

Questions to Reflect and Discuss What You Have Read

1. St. Francis exhorts his brothers to “teach, learn, retain, remember, and put into practice” what is found in the rule. How can we follow each of these five actions today?
2. What do you want to “teach, learn, retain, remember” from reading the rule in this course?

PART 12: CONCLUSION: THE GOSPEL LIFE, THEN AND NOW

SESSION 22 & 23: Living the Joy of Gospel Life

Introduction

We have reached the end of the *Early Rule*, which affords us the opportunity to look back upon the vision of life as a whole. In Sessions 22 and 23, Fr. Hellmann and Dr. Hammond's final reflections upon the whole message of St. Francis in articulating Gospel life. Helpfully, Dr. Hammond articulates ten points to summarize that Gospel Life. You may see other aspects in St. Francis' vision and method of following Jesus Christ to add to this ten-fold list. Each point on this list invites us to reflect upon and consider the implication of St. Francis for our lives and our communities. Take time with this list and these questions; they do not need to be answered all at once. If you are completing this course as a community, you may consider meeting more than once to discuss them.

Primary Material for Study

1. WATCH: [Session 22](#) (Dr. Hammond)
2. WATCH: [Session 23](#) (Dr. Hammond)
3. WATCH: [Session 23](#) (Fr. Hellmann)

Supplementary Readings

1. A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, *FAED* 1, 163 (*FCA:ED*)
2. A Salutation of the Virtues, *FAED* 1, 164-165 (*FCA:ED*)
3. *The Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 253-288

I. TEN POINTS ON THE GOSPEL LIFE

Watch: [Session 22](#) (Dr. Hammond)

Summary of the Gospel Life of the Brother's

When Dr. Hammond reviews the way of life proposed by St. Francis in the *ER*, he distills that vision of following the Gospel simply and directly into ten distinct points. These eight points offer direction to us, too, whether we are religious, clerics, or laypersons. These ten points also present an opportunity to reflect or discuss how we follow this Gospel life, how we fall short of it, and how we might strive after at it.

These ten points are drawn from the whole fabric of the *ER*, not only as a text, but as a tool used by St. Francis and his brothers to express the way of living an evangelical life in their historical context of the early 13th century. The *ER* addressed a religious and social movement, or rather,

taught people who wanted to embrace a *religio*, a dedicated way of living religion as a community and how to engage their culture not on their own terms but on Jesus Christ's. Thus, it treats almost all the areas of human life, except perhaps those inside the family. It speaks of God and the world, the spirit and the flesh, virtue and vice, sacraments and penance, saints and sinners, poverty and pride, prayer and preaching, and especially, the way to peace through letting God's love for us transform our love for God and neighbor.

Consider, carefully, these ten points that summarize St. Francis' vision of Gospel life and take time to answer the questions offered:

- 1) Gospel life is centered on Jesus' teachings and actions, and those who follow this life must strive to imitate and embody them.
 - a. When we look through the Gospels what are Jesus' most important deeds and teachings for us to recognize? Should the choice vary for each person or do some stand out above all?
- 2) Gospel life requires that one listens to, that is obeys, the words and teachings of Jesus in order to have a genuine relationship with Jesus.
 - a. How can we follow Jesus' teaching and imitate Jesus' deeds in our state of life? Can all of Jesus' deeds be imitated since he is God and we are not?
 - b. What is the difference between an obedience or listening? Which lays the foundation of a genuine relationship and one which does not?
- 3) In Gospel life, God is set above all creatures. Conversely, after God all humans are equal and so should relate to each other in a spirit of humility rather than haughtiness.
 - a. Can we have any meaningful relationships with the rest of creation if God is absolutely prior?
 - b. How can we live our obligations to our family, communities, or other relationships with integrity if we treat all equally? Does the Gospel challenge these relationships and bonds?
- 4) Gospel life sees that manifest needs exceeds the demands of any rule.
 - a. What place should rules have in our lives? What purpose do they serve if they can be superseded?
 - b. Is fulfilling needs our highest rule? What are the needs that humans have that must be fulfilled?
- 5) Gospel life produces good work, but this good work and its fruit belongs to God first, who works through humanity.
 - a. Should we ascribe any good at all to our efforts or those of other human beings? What would the implications be if we do and if we do not?
 - b. What is the difference between a good or bad fruit? How can we tell?
- 6) From the perspective of Gospel life, the interior life, where the heart desires, and the exterior life, where we act with our bodies in the world, are connected, so that our interior peace will propagate peace in the world, and right action in the world will bring inward peace.
 - a. Which should we prioritize? Although both are important, which do you think the Gospel demands us to prioritize: interior peace or exterior action?

- b. Peace is not necessarily the absence of discomfort. How can we tell the difference?
- 7) In Gospel life, others are placed before oneself and we are to be open and subject to others and be prepared to forgive their offences.
 - a. In striving to live the Gospel life, can and should we distinguish good and harmful ways of putting others before ourselves?
 - b. What does caring for ourselves look like in Gospel life?
- 8) For Gospel life, penance is forgiveness—forgiving others, asking for forgiveness, and being forgiven—and results in restored relationships and finally blossoms in thanksgiving for the restoration. This restoration is living in fulfillment with God’s plan for creation.
 - a. What is involved in real forgiveness? How often do we prefer to have offenses simply forgotten rather than forgiven?
 - b. Is it harder to forgive or ask for forgiveness?
- 9) Embracing poverty in solidarity with the poor is central to Gospel life.
 - a. What does poverty mean today, where you live? Would it have different standards than in the time of St. Francis of Assisi?
 - b. Are embracing poverty and living in solidarity with the poor different?
- 10) Finally, the Gospel vision of life subverts the status quo, the expectations of what life should be.
 - a. What are the most important ways in which living according to the Gospel challenges what we expect to do in our lives?
 - b. What is a habit that you could adopt to reinforce your pursuit of Gospel life?

II. REFLECT ON GOSPEL LIFE

Optional Supplementary Reading: *Joy of the Gospel*, nn. 254-276

Watch: [Session 23](#) (Fr. Hellmann); [Session 23](#) (Dr. Hammond)

Dr. Hammond’s and Fr. Hellmann’s Closing Reflections

Throughout this course, Dr. Hammond and Fr. Hellmann have led you through the *Early Rule*, explaining its teachings and context while also leading us to see how this eight-centuries-old text can speak today to all Catholics, even all Christians who seek to follow the Gospel. To clarify and expound its enduring relevance, they have turned to Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, “The Joy of the Gospel,” which urges us to renew our lives in the Church by not being pleased with our participation or following the rules of the Church, although these are important, but by becoming like Christ and by seeing Christ in all women and men of our age.

Dr. Hammond hopes that all those who have taken this course will discover that learning from the *ER*, from St. Francis’ other writings, and from Pope Francis’ exhortation bears fruit in their own lives. What would this fruit be? Nothing short of becoming more like Jesus Christ in our desires

and actions. It does not necessarily mean joining a Franciscan order—but you cannot rule it out. It does mean that the life that St. Francis sought, grounded in humility, embracing penance, and praising God, should become ours. And if it is ours, it should become more deeply so as we return to the Gospel, to the Sacraments, and to the world that God has made and drink from the fountain of life, Jesus Christ.

It is also a life that locates humility, penance, and praise in a radical life choice: the choice of seeing to the poor and choosing solidarity with them. Fr. Hellmann exhorts us to heed Pope Francis' call to open our eyes to poverty, both human suffering and solidarity in embracing poverty. In this way, Fr. Hellmann believes that we will find real joy in the Gospel. For when we embrace the poor in the way that God has embraced our fallen human race, with tenderness and zeal, we will find that we share in God's own joy. However, Fr. Hellmann warns that this embrace cannot only be exercised towards the poor we see. We must also embrace the poor we do not see and challenge the forces in the world and the structures of society that impose destructive destitution. Following the words of Pope Francis, we must also recognize the poor beyond our human family, that is, the world created by God that has been put at risk because of human greed—*our greed*. Unlike the human poor who can beg, this world cannot, and if we do not care for it, we shall bring great destruction upon the rich and poor—but especially the poor. Furthermore, we will be forgetful of the great gift of creation in which the Creator, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have placed us. For the Gospel life that sings out in gratitude, such ingratitude is a great ill that must be remedied through our humility and by recognizing our fundamental poverty as *creatures*. We depend upon God for our very being. That was the truth that St. Francis embraced and Pope Francis intends for us to realize.

The life that Dr. Hammond and Fr. Hellmann describe is not easy. Fr. Hellmann spoke earlier in this course about how the Eucharist should not be seen as a prize for the perfect. Similarly, the Gospel life is not an achievement, a human conquest and mark of success. It is not a life that can boast about perfect fasting and prayer, but one that repeatedly turns to penance and to start again and again on the path of holiness. This is the life of humility that Christ taught us through His incarnation – when God, to be our savior, became a man, a creature, and our brother. The humility we embrace will preach, as Dr. Hammond remarks, when one sees the fruit of embracing the Gospel life not as a private good but as a choice that manifests life in God to others and invites them to the same joy.

Concluding Questions

1. As the course comes to an end, what are some of the dominant questions that have emerged during the process of the course about St. Francis' vision of Gospel life?
2. Have you learned what you expected to learn at the outset? What did you expect to learn?
3. How are the gospel world views of St. Francis and Pope Francis the same and how are they different? Does their vision comfort, challenge, and/or convert you?

SESSION 24: Afterward

Fr. David B. Couturier, OFM. Cap.

Introduction

Whether you have reached the end of this course individually or you are gathering as a study group one last time, this is your opportunity to look forward to the next steps in receiving and learning from the Franciscan Tradition to help you in seeking after the peace which surpasses all understanding.

Questions As You Conclude

1. As you have spent time reading *Early Rule*, what did St. Francis understand joy to be? What did you come to understand peace to be?
2. You have thought much about the Gospel. Has thinking about the Gospel life shaped or recast the way you envision or speak to God?

I. A Final Reflection

You have now finished this foundational course of study of the *Gospel of St. Francis*. In this course, you have been guided by three Franciscan experts: Fr. Wayne Hellmann, Dr. Jay Hammond, and Dr. Luke Togni. In their videos and lecture notes, they have provided you with context, analysis, and insights into the vision of St. Francis of Assisi. You have entered the world of the early friars who had responded so generously to the Lord's call to leave everything in the world, to possess nothing of their own, and to trust one another in their fraternity with Christ. Now after this study, what comes next? What should you do next?

I believe the first next step is a prayer of gratitude. Gratefulness begins with the realization that you have been called by the Lord and you have been chosen to enter into the intimacy of Franciscan fraternity and to walk in the footprints of the Lord Jesus. This call, intimacy, and walk leads one to a comprehensive and thankful prayer for four things: (1) for creation, (2) for one's eternal life, (3) for one's redemption by the Lord and our Brother Jesus, and (4) for being led by the Holy Spirit toward the glory of the children of God.

Gratitude is the key to a new consciousness. It is the recognition of being blessed and gifted by the Lord. It is also an awareness of sufficiency in the embrace of God. It is an appreciation for all that we have and all that the Lord has promised to supply "grace upon grace" for those who believe. St. Bonaventure used to call this recognition and the gratitude that it engenders the "logic of love." This logic of love helps us to see life truthfully, holistically, honestly, and, one might say, realistically and gently. Being grateful helps us to use our gifts and talents generously. It also aids us in handling our weaknesses humbly. Gratitude brings both perspective and patience to our walk in faith. Even our struggles, the ones we cause and the ones caused by others, give us an opportunity to trust beyond ourselves, to care beyond our self-satisfactions, and to develop a greater empathy for others who struggle as well or even more so than we do with pain and vulnerability. Gratitude makes us aware and capable of love beyond the moment.

Questions on Gratitude

1. What is the connection between poverty and gratitude? How would you explain it to somebody unfamiliar with the Franciscan tradition?
2. If it is possible to see poverty leading to gratitude, is it also possible that gratitude may lead to poverty?
3. Is there anything from this course for which you are grateful that you hope to share with others?

II. Learning Forward

As you finish this course either as a personal formation program or with others, recognize that you are not alone. There are brothers and sisters around the world who are taking this same course and joining in the same process of inner transformation. This course is one expression of the global fraternity to which you belong as a Franciscan. You are not alone. There are sisters and brothers all around the world, in a great network of faith, who are as thirsty as you are for the living waters that only the Lord Jesus can release. Whether they live in the greater urban centers of the world or in the great rural plains and farmlands all across the planet, these sisters and brothers are searching with you in a great communion and network of faith.

The life of faith and fraternity is progressive. It is about taking one new step toward the Lord after another, always doing the next best thing we can to glory in the Lord.

The Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University in Western New York (USA) will continue to provide resources for your learning. It is our mission to provide the kind of Franciscan learning that people today need and want. You can track our course offerings, seminars, and workshops on our website: www.sbu.edu/franciscaninstitute. You can check out our books at www.franciscanpublications.com. You can learn about the latest articles on Franciscan history, spirituality, and theology at the Franciscan Connections blog that we run with our great friends at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, www.franciscanconnections.com. The Franciscan Institute has also partnered with the Commission on the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition to make the early sources available for free on their website and ours at www.franciscantradition.org.

Questions About Further Study?

1. As you have studied the *Early Rule*, did you discover a desire or discern a need to know some aspect of the faith or theology more deeply?
2. Do you have a responsibility to form others around you in the faith or the Franciscan tradition? If so, how do you prefer to prepare yourself to teach?
3. What are the needs for the education in your life or in your community? Have you ever reached out to the Franciscan Institute before? What would you like to learn more about?

Thank you for your commitment to the Franciscan ideals. May God continue to bless and keep you.

Peace and all good,

Fr. David B. Couturier, OFM. Cap.
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