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**The Life of Francis of Assisi:
Is Franciscanism Relevant Today?**

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ABSTRACT

Key Terms:

Animals; Deacon; Humility; Lepers; Martyrdom; Poverty; Service; Simplicity; Stigmata, St. Francis.

Francis of Assisi is a much-loved saint whose followers come from different backgrounds and who are inspired to live the Gospel life. Francis' story is obscure but this dissertation seeks to understand Francis' life and examines his influence through the lives of others amongst whom are:

- Mother Theresa of Calcutta;
- Anthony of Padua;
- Padre Pio;
- Maximilian Kolbe;
- Charles de Foucauld; and
- John Bradburne.

Francis' vision was unambiguous and it challenges our values. His simple faith, Catholic tradition, evangelistic principles and radical freedom were fundamental qualities, which suited him to God's call to renew His church. Those same qualities are still needed today.

Like all young men Francis loved life, was often inclined to be irresponsible and who entered military service without proper thought. Whilst imprisoned in Perugia God began his transformation and called him to, *"go and repair my house"*.

Francis saw in creation objects of love that led him back to God. He preached to the animals but his concern was for people. During the Crusades Francis was a peacemaker during the Crusades and following that example Pope John Paul II made a plea for peace between the Muslims, Jews and Christians whilst visiting Damascus on the 6th / 7th May 2001.

Francis' enduring influence comes from his own understanding of the problems of materialism that we face in the west. Western culture is one of '*super-development*' that is at odds with happiness. Status gives us prestige but also a craving for more power and possessions when we ought to be educating the poor and eliminating hunger and suffering. The result is a spiritual void in which we ask, '*is this all that there is or is there something more?*' Whilst the church's membership in the west has declined the reverse is true in the former eastern bloc countries, China, Asia and Africa and their Catholic seminaries are full.

The cults like those of Charles Manson, the Davidics, or the Jehovah's Witnesses and the 'New Age' are growing. They claimed to have sole possession of the truth. Sects, however, are not new and have been around since the church's earliest days. Francis was well aware of the heretical sects of the Waldensians and Humiliati.

Franciscanism continues growing, evolving, and renewing itself. The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal was established in the 1980's and they work extensively with the poor and marginalized particularly in New York and London. If the church is to be true to the Gospel in the Third Millennium it too must accept that challenge.

Francis teaches that Christians must not to live in a self-satisfying, self-serving way, that they must be Christ centred and that they must submit to the will of God. Lastly when they make life choices they should ask the following questions:

- Does the Father want this for me?
- Does this please the Father?

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CHAPTER ONE: **INTRODUCTION**

“The Life of Francis of Assisi: Is Franciscanism Relevant Today?”

Christianity can offer the vast riches of three centuries in the light of Franciscan spirituality to those who call upon her in their pilgrimage. Saint Francis of Assisi was challenged by the call from the Cross in the church of San Damiano's and he then recognized Christ as the true Way. In obedience he became a pilgrim in following that Way and has left for us the well-worn path that many have travelled before and yet many more will travel in the future. St. Francis is a well-loved figure in history. His followers come from many different backgrounds.

*“Spanish, Danish, Japanese, American –
people of all nationalities and cultures have
struggled to tell this medieval Italian's story
and to communicate what they see as his secret”.*

(Armstrong, 1994: 13)

His concerns are still the same concerns that we all share today. This is probably why he has had such an enduring effect on the Christian church over the last 800 years.

A devout son of the Catholic Church, Saint Francis saw himself as a little brother of Jesus of Nazareth. His example would lead to the founding of many religious orders: congregations and societies that would all call upon Francis as their patron. This Franciscan family has served the church for over 800 years. Arnold and Fry in their work (1990: 9) state that:

*“It is ironic that Francis,
who was fervent in his obedience to the Roman Catholic Church,
has been looked upon by both Protestant and Catholic reformers*

as a primary inspiration to return to the pure roots of the Gospel of Christ from which the early apostolic church first received the strength to grow and flower”.

This work has been undertaken by one who has himself been affected by Saint Francis' inspiration and by his encouragement to persevere in trying to live the Gospel life. In endeavouring to be faithful to the challenge one senses a sharing in, and becoming part of, the 'apostolic vision'. In today's world which thirsts for the spiritual, which rejects the traditional and the established, but drinks from the wells of contemporary and new age religions, St. Francis of Assisi, through his inspiring example of apostolic purity, points the way to salvation through Christ Jesus. Many of our young people in their spiritual deprivation have turned to drugs, to cults and experience-centred groups. Whilst others have committed themselves to journey on the Christian highway. Each year thousands of young Christian people flock to the Taizé Community in France, to receive true spiritual guidance from the simplicity of the worship and life style that has much in common with the Franciscan life. St. Francis' faith is neither the faith of complicated dogma nor the teachings of theologians. He possessed a simple faith that was overawed by the mystery of God made man. Francis was deeply rooted in the Scriptures, and was able, therefore, to speak not just to Catholic faithful, but also to those Protestant reformers of more fundamental leanings. The view being expressed here is that St. Francis' example of Christian living has the ability to heal the wounds of the sin of division and thereby can reunite Christendom. From this new position of church unity, Christianity can truly be more effective in discharging her duty to the poor, the hungry, the destitute and the bringing about of a fair society together with compassionate justice. His is a radical call: today we need radical solutions.

The story of St. Francis, whose name some may feel comes second only to that of Christ Himself, has unfortunately become somewhat obscure. Strange as it may seem, well meaning individuals who have tried to justify their

particular points of view by citing poor Francis are often to blame for that obscurity. Yet St. Francis' vision was unambiguous and he was uncompromising in following his call to live the Gospel life. Many from Francis' circle of friends felt him to be mentally deranged (Brother Kenneth, CGA, 1981: 128). For Catholic and Protestant alike, St Francis is seen as a "*primary inspiration to return to the pure roots of the Gospel. .*" (Arnold and Fry, 1990: 9).

The life and witness of St. Francis throws light on our anxieties (compare with Paton 1970: 15/17) and challenges us to ask ourselves why we value what we do. Francis knew and understood about the importance of materialism as well as environmental factors. In the developed world we have fallen into the trap of defining ourselves by status, the job we have, the people for whom we are responsible at work, the type of car that we own as well as by our home and the very place in which the dwelling is set. In this way we create apparent prestige. However, to continue in this self-assessment and to compare that against those possessions of our neighbours leads us to constantly crave more power and more possessions (cf. Moorman, 1963).

Against this background a spiritual void has become established. A void which all too often we don't know how to satisfy. A spiritual hunger that torments us into asking the question, '*is this all that there is or is there something more*'. So in tune with our consumer-ridden society we have created new products, which are being aggressively marketed to satisfy our spiritual hunger: the so-called '*New Age*' cults and this is investigated at depth by Carr (1991: 14 ff.). The cults' growth is alarming, whilst at the same time, our churches publish figures suggesting that their memberships are falling. One can find such published figures in the '*U.K. CHRISTIAN HANDBOOK*', published by Christian Research (formerly MARC Europe). Why do some people find spiritual enlightenment within a strange system of

beliefs and apparently not within the established Christian Churches? What, if anything, can Saint Francis' life and example teach us from his wholehearted embodiment of biblical principles which not only made him immensely popular, but caused others to give their lives to Christ after his example?

The aims and objectives of this study are to investigate the life of St. Francis of Assisi in order to evaluate his influence on the lives of others compared to the spiritual void. The specific objectives of this study are:

- to study of the life of St. Francis of Assisi;
- to clearly understand the Gospel influences that motivated Francis;
- to identify those enduring influences in the lives of other individuals both past and present;
- to assess those influences against falling church membership;
- to show that such influences can satisfy the spiritual needs of society when they are lived out in the individual's life.

The simplicity of St. Francis of Assisi's faith, his fundamental approach to Holy Scripture, and his devotion to Christ can, and does, appeal to Christians from across the denominational board.

Franciscanism provides for us fruitful and necessary challenges which, it is argued, must be faced by the Christian Church if it is to be true to the Gospel in the Third Millennium. Saint Francis' simple and uncomplicated faith, his Catholic tradition, his evangelistic principles and radical freedom were fundamental qualities that had suited him to God's call to spearhead the much needed renewal of the church. It is precisely those same characteristics, which are most urgently needed by the church of today. They contain a certain charismatic appeal to the people as well as providing spiritual impetus to spread the Good News.

As previously stated Saint Francis of Assisi is not just a saint of the Catholic Communion, for his appeal stretches across denominational boundaries.

Writing as a Catholic I shall however be consulting a number of different books by such Franciscan scholars as Moorman, (formerly the Anglican Bishop of Ripon), Armstrong (a Franciscan Friar in the Catholic Church), Paton (a Protestant from South Africa) and many others in order to construct a life of St. Francis.

I shall also need to examine the lives of various individuals, both from times past and more recently, wherein the life of St. Francis can clearly be seen to have had a dramatic effect and particularly where that effect has an ongoing and continuing action.

I shall be consulting with various individuals of today, where possible, to evaluate current material to demonstrate the ongoing effects of St. Francis' influences.

CHAPTER TWO: **THE LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS**

St. Francis was born in the Umbrian town of Assisi around about the year 1182. Pietro (*Peter*) Bernardone, a cloth and textile merchant, was his father whilst his mother, Mona Pica, was French, a native of Picardy. (*'Bernadone'* translates as "*Big Bernard*" but the actual family name was Moriconi. This is not as unusual as it may at first appear. For example my family is known as '*Scott*' and has been for seven or eight generations. But my forefather who was Norwegian held the family name of Olsen. A fisherman, he was delivered safely to the shores of the Clyde and adopted the family name of his bride.) Madame Bernardone was the daughter of a French knight of Provence which perhaps assists us in our understanding of St. Francis' ideals of chivalry and that he had felt himself to be '*Christ's knight*' protecting the honour of his '*Lady Poverty*'. For Francis '*Lady Poverty*' was the personification of his calling, which may have been based upon the Blessed Virgin Mary whom he claimed as patron of the Franciscan order and with whom he felt a strong spiritual bond. (Compare this with M. Faloci/Pulignani, editors, [1898: 7 to 13] and Thomas Celano, '*SECOND LIFE OF FRANCIS*' page 7.) According to the Franciscan tradition '*Lady Poverty*' was always held to be an excellent woman and rather like another Elizabeth. Francis' qualities of gentleness and grace were inherited from his mother.

The family was wealthy, middle-class, honourable and respected. Pietro Bernardone had many business contacts and outlets in France. At the birth of his son, Bernardone was, as usual, away from his home on business and because of this circumstance his son, who was originally christened John, would become known as Francesco – meaning the Frenchman. There is a story handed down to us about the christening of Giovanni that is contained in '*LEGEND OF THE THREE COMPANIONS*' as translated by Habig (1977).

It states that whilst the ceremony was in progress, a mendicant, who was vowed to poverty, requested that he might see the child and:

*“ . . .when the Lady Pica heard what had happened,
she was amazed and told the maid to show the
child to the stranger. When this was done,
the pilgrim took the baby into his arms with
great devotion and joy, as Simeon had once
taken the infant Jesus”.*

Thomas of Celano's mind had been concentrated by the peculiarity of the man who was christened by one name and yet called by a second. (Pope Gregory IX had commissioned Thomas to be a biographer of St. Francis' life. Thomas was Italian, born around about 1185 and had met Francis on his return from the Holy Land in 1215.) According to the '*SECOND LIFE OF FRANCIS*' he committed his meditations to paper saying:

*“The name John referred to the work of the ministry which
he would undertake. The name Francis referred to the
spread of his fame, which after he had been fully converted to God,
quickly spread everywhere. He considered the feast of
John the Baptist to be more illustrious than the feasts of all the
other saints, for the dignity of his name left a mark of
mystic virtue upon him”.*

(Habig: 1977)

However whilst Francis' father was named after the Apostle Peter, Pietro did not possess the apostle's characteristics with one exception, which was that Pietro could be both rash and emotional with a quick temper!

AS A YOUNG MAN

The family's fabric business had prospered from barter and trade. As with all adoring parents, their son had no expense spared him: fine clothes, a good education and he mixed with Assisi's other up and coming bourgeoisie families. He attended St George's School in Assisi where he had learned some Latin, was eloquent in his Italian and naturally also spoke French. The school was quite close to the Bernardone home and administered by the clergy of the church of Saint George. His education was often interrupted by bouts of ill health. Whilst today the actual building no longer exists, the visitors to Assisi will find the church of Saint Clare where the school had once stood. Francis was not attracted by the prospect of gaining knowledge or for that matter, of commerce. He would play at being a soldier with his friends and though not particularly a handsome chap, he was nevertheless popular and a recognized leader of his male companions. As a young man Francis was extravagant, generous and idle.

ST. FRANCIS THE SOLDIER

However Francis' imagination could be stirred up by legends of chivalry and the adventurous songs that went with them. When fighting broke out between the two cities of Perugia and Assisi, no one restrained Francis from going into battle. In the autumn of 1202, Francis together with his little group set off to defend their homeland with the blessings of the town's fathers. Pietro Bernardone was not the one to miss a commercial opportunity, so he equipped his son with the very best armour that he could afford. Bernardone then used this opportunity to increase the family's standing within the community of Assisi. At Collestrada the Assisian militia were defeated and Francis with his companions were captured at Ponte San Giovanni and

imprisoned in over crowded conditions in *"filthy building and treated with the harshness common at that time"* (Cristiani, 1983: 23) for a period of a year after being stripped of their fine accoutrements. This period of confinement would affect St. Francis not just spiritually, but also physically. Due to the wealthy position of Francis' family in society he was separated from the so-called common prisoners of war and confined with other noblemen. However this distinction and separation *"begins to haunt and trouble the young Francis"* (Bodo, 1984: 11).

His once luxurious life style now gave way to the bondage of a medieval dungeon, sleeping on filthy straw instead of a comfortable bed, eating scraps of stale bread and dried fish. (See also Arnold and Fry, 1988: 30.) No fine banquets here to tempt the appetite and no flagons of ale to drink: just water.

Francis' companions watched him carefully, as his manner had changed. He became polite, courteous and he would attend to the needs of those who were sick or injured. However, he himself was to fall ill, a fever that lasted for several weeks. Bernardone no doubt heard of his son's imprisonment from the Perugians for he paid the ransom demanded for his son's release. Had he not, St. Francis may well have ended his life in that damp, dirty and miserable gaol.

Upon his return to Assisi, Francis endured his discomfort as he had endured his captivity, with patience and cheerfulness. Pica, a concerned mother, naturally became an attentive nurse looking after Francis' care. But despite all her efforts, St. Francis would never recover fully. However, when he became sufficiently recovered, this would not stop him from once more setting out for military adventure joining the army of Walter de Brienne in Southern Italy. The Pontiff, Innocent III, had engaged Walter de Brienne, to free the Holy Land from Saracen's occupying forces as well as rooting out heretics.

It was at that time that Assisi was full of rumours of a certain gentleman that the early biographers failed to name. However, more recently, scholars such as Cristiani (1983: 25) have identified that gentleman to be one Gauthier de Brienne. Gauthier was the brother of John de Brienne the knight responsible for the liberation of Damietta in Egypt from the Saracens. An Assisian nobleman had become enamoured by the stories of the de Brienne family's courage in battle and set out with a small band, of which Saint Francis was one, determined to join with Walter de Brienne.

Once more in the spring of 1205 Francis set out as part of the campaign against the imperial barons, fighting alongside the papal armies. Francis was all fired up with thoughts of the forth-coming battle and even more of the glories that would come through their victory. His sleep that night contained a curious dream about a splendid palace where magnificent weapons hung on the walls. Francis thought he heard a voice calling to him and so he asked to whom did this castle belong. The voice replied that it belonged to Francis and his fellow knights. However, the second night whilst the group was resting in a Spoleto hostel, Francis' dream was more disturbing. Thomas of Celano recounts this in his '*SECOND LIFE OF ST FRANCIS*'. Basically Francis is challenged as to why he had not followed the way of the master, but instead taken to following the servant. Simple common sense would indicate that it would be better to follow the former rather than the latter. Knowing full well that God had presented this challenge, Francis asked, "*Lord, what will You have me to do?*" (Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, 1997: 16).

Once more Francis became ill, but this time he began to realise that his desire to follow a military career was not his calling and that from this point he must follow a very different road. As for Walter de Brienne, he died in June 1205 in the siege of Sarno, which is in southern Italy.

There is an interesting story in this part of Francis' pilgrimage of faith. It appears that Francis was by far better equipped, at his father's expense, than any other of the soldiers accompanying him in that particular skirmish. Nevertheless, prior to the militia's departure, Francis came across an impoverished knight who lacked entirely the necessary essentials to go into battle. Without a moment's hesitation, Francis removed his armour and gave it to the knight, together with all his battle implements.

VOCATION – COMMENCEMENT

Francis returned to his hometown of Assisi to begin a very different kind of battle, that of mortifying his own desires through service given to the sick and by giving away his possessions. Francis' response, however, came only after he had been through a long process of searching and struggle. One day Francis went to the ruined church of San Damiano, which was situated just outside of the city walls, to pray when he heard a voice calling to him, *"Francis, go and repair My house, which you see is falling completely to ruin"* (Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, 1997: 19).

The command was repeated a second time. To the grief and anger of his parents, Francis disinherited himself, and went forth wearing only the ragged clothing of beggar, which a servant of the household had given him. On these rags which Francis would wear he marked on them a cross.

Saint Mark (8:34-9:1) conveniently sums up for us the teaching Jesus gave to those who wish to follow in His footsteps. It is vitally important to understand Christ's words; but what exactly does it mean *'to take up the cross'* both for St. Francis and for the Christian today?

St. Paul, who must have prayed and lived out the teaching over years, gives us an insight into those words of Jesus:

*"We know that our old self was crucified with Him
so that the body of sin might be destroyed,
and we might no longer be enslaved to sin . . .
But if we have died with Christ,
we believe that we will also live with Him".*

(Romans 6:6, 8, New Revised Standard Version)

At our baptism, which Paul is referring to, we (or our godparents on our behalf) did indeed deny our old life and turn to God to receive His new life of grace; we were joined with Christ in His death on the Cross and in His Resurrection to new life. But God did not perfect us completely at baptism: God wants us to have the dignity of choosing to love Him above all else and so, though we have the new life, the attraction to sin remains in us. The decision made at baptism has to be made anew every day as we reject our desire to live for ourselves and turn to God in love to receive more of His life. This explains the paradox of how in losing our old life we find our true life, no longer damaged by sin.

Our problem is that we tend to live in a state of uneasy truce or co-dependency with our sin: we reject grosser forms but tolerate and even enjoy lesser ones. But Jesus chose very radical words to exclude such a compromise. When He calls us to deny ourselves Jesus calls us to reject any association with sin. When Jesus calls us to take up our cross He calls us to take it up even to death. When Jesus calls us to lose our lives for His sake He calls us to destroy any trace of selfishness within ourselves. In essence this was the call of St. Francis which he had interpreted in a very fundamental way.

Hession (1988: 21), a missionary in Africa, gives his experience of living out Jesus' words when he states in his work:

"People think that dying to self makes one miserable, but it is just the opposite. It is the refusal to die to self that makes one miserable. The more we know of death with Him, the more we shall know of His life in us, and so the more of real peace and joy. His life too will overflow through us to lost souls in a real concern for their salvation and to our fellow Christians in a deep desire for their blessing".

Francis returned to Assisi and began to repair the church dedicated to San Damiano for this is what he believed himself to be called to do. The little church of San Damiano lay on the road that led out from Assisi towards the Umbrian plains. It was built of rough stone and its architecture was typically Romanesque. Initially a group of families from Assisi came together to pay for the church's construction and upkeep. However St. Francis witnessed San Damiano's as an unloved and unwanted place of worship that had been allowed to fall into disrepair. All that remained of this little church's once former glory was an inscription, which read *Domvs Mea* (my house), over the portal and a Crucifix that hung over the place of the altar. St. Bonaventure, *'MAJOR LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS'* (2.1) relates Francis' experience before the cross.

*"There as he knelt in prayer before a painted image of the Crucified,
... he heard a voice coming from the cross and telling him three times,
'Francis go and repair my house. You see it is falling down.'
Francis was alone in the church and
he was terrified at the sound of the voice,
But the power of its message penetrated his heart."*

The little brother from Assisi took the command quite literally. This appears to be a strange calling, as much as we are able to perceive a vocation initially, but sometimes vocations can develop differently from what one felt to be the original call. For example an examination of houses or dwelling places from the first writings of St. Francis show that he was clearly troubled by his mystical call at San Damiano's. Gradually he began "*. . . to think not only of the universal house of God, the church, but also of the house that is the dwelling place of God, each Christian*" (Armstrong, 1994: 41).

Before the Crucifix, Francis had interpreted his call in a fundamental way. But the Holy Spirit's dwelling place is the hearts and souls of all mankind. We may question as to whether God had called Francis to rebuild his very soul as a dwelling place fit for the Holy Spirit? However besides the poor state of repair of the church of Saint Damiano, the church in the thirteen-century was divided, as it is today: schisms, heresies and apostasies unsettled it.

Pietro Bernardone was a prosperous textile merchant who Francis felt, would not miss some material from his storehouse. So Francis took some rather expensive scarlet cloth and went to Foligno where he sold the material. Returning to San Damiano, Francis found the priest who would still visit the little church and offered to the priest the money for the restoration of God's House. The priest was a man of discernment and readily recognized that Bernardone would not be a happy man once he realised what his son had done. So the priest politely refused the gift. Francis was not one to be easily deterred, so he threw the money onto the windowsill where it remained. He then asked permission to be allowed to stay at San Damiano. The priest was happier to accept that.

Pietro Bernardone, discovering what his impulsive son had done, was outraged. Not only did Bernardone take Francis to the civil authorities but also to the ecclesiastical authorities. This ended with Francis being

imprisoned in the cellars of his home and Bernardone also had him put in chains. This would be about 1207. However Francis' mother Pica came to his aid and released him once Pietro Bernardone had left Assisi on business.

Saint Francis left Assisi for some caves near to San Damiano's to make a retreat. Here Francis stayed for a month spending his days and nights in prayer and fasting. He contemplated on Christ's sufferings. His doting mother, the Lady Pica, sent food for him to eat. Cristiani, (1983: 39) tells how a band of urchins captured the saint and brought him back to Assisi shouting and jeering, taunting him and pelting him with garbage along the way. Bernardone was furious with the boys and gave chase. Francis on the other hand was re-imprisoned in his father's cellar.

"Francis was subjected to a harsh diet of bread and water.

Bernardone must have thought such a punishment

would bear the fruit he expected.

This hard penance should bring him to his senses."

But Bernardone was wasting his time. Francis was a changed man converted unto God and dedicated to His service alone. Once more Bernardone would leave on business and the Lady Pica would again release Francis from his confinement.

Upon returning from the business trip, Bernardone once more caught up with Francis and sought judgement from the civic authorities. However Francis claimed that the civic authorities could have no jurisdiction over him because he was a '*religious*' and thereby protected by the church. The civic court ruled that Francis should be taken to Bishop Guido to settle the matter once and for all. It was at this point that the now well accounted story of how Francis divested himself of both his father's money and the very clothing that he was wearing took place.

Bishop Guido was a wise man who had gained much experience from his many years of service with which he could call upon. Nevertheless Guido was moved by Francis' plight. The Bishop listened carefully to all the charges Bernardone brought against the *'little brother'*. Guido turned to Francis so that he may have the opportunity of responding to the charges. The bishop then spoke directly and discretely to him saying:

*"Trust in God, my son.
The Lord will come to your aid and
will help you to rebuild His Church".*
(Cristiani, 1983: 41)

After which according to the *'LEGEND OF THE THREE COMPANIONS'* (page 20), Francis said:

*"Lord bishop,
I will not only return the money that I took
from him with all good will,
but I will even give him the clothes
that he has provided for me"*

Francis removed his clothing and together with money, gave them back to his father adding:

*"Up until today I have called Pietro de Bernardone my father.
From now on I only wish to say,
'Our Father who art in heaven. . .'"*

Those who witnessed this spectacle were moved to tears. Even Bishop Guido was moved with compassion and, removing his bishop's cope, placed it upon Francis covering up his nakedness. However there was one in the crowd who was not effected. Bernardone collected up those things which Francis had divested himself of, and then took his leave.

Many of St. Francis' friends and former companions felt that he was in some way suffering from a form of mental illness once the saint began the work of repairing San Damiano's Church; whilst others looked upon Francis' actions with satirical amusement. Francis, as he begged for stones and mortar with which to rebuild the sanctuary and gathered offerings for the work, could be heard saying, *'Help me to finish this building. Here will one day be a monastery of nuns by whose good fame our Lord will be glorified over the whole Church'*. This prophecy was to come true within six years. When he was not raising funds Francis was carrying stones and acting as builder's labourer.

Saint Francis' return to Assisi is an important turning point in his life. Like John the Baptist, who could so easily have lived the solitary life in communion with God and Pachomius who was one of the greatest of the Egyptian desert fathers, Francis would have found enough work just trying to live out God's call without the complications that society can present to one. However, Francis, like them, felt it to be imperative to his call to live in society. That call is still being heard to this day. In a interview with Brother Richard, who is a friar of a new Franciscan order called the, Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (CFR), he told me of his call to live out God's call without the complications that society presents. Richard said that he was inspired by the life of the Early Church and felt that the Franciscan life captured something of the charisma of those early days.

Francis also repaired an old church dedicated to Saint Peter, and after that a ruinous chapel belonging to the Benedictine establishment at Monte Subasio. The chapel was dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels but the locals fondly referred to it as the *'Porziuncola'* meaning Little Portion. As those years surely marked Francis' transition of life, they also marked his transition from solitary in isolation to solitary within community. From one who laboured for God repairing His church with stones and mortar, to one who labours spiritually repairing His church with *'living stones'*, the people of God.

In a little more than five years the man whom the residents of Assisi taunted and teased, name called and declared mentally ill, would progress from being a builder to become the man responsible for the re-organisation of the church throughout Italy. Francis was dressed in the cast-offs ragged clothes, of Bishop Guido's gardener upon which Saint Bonaventure, '*MAJOR LIFE OF SAINT FRANCIS*', tells us Francis had drawn in chalk a large cross. This one-man builder would gather around him, noblemen and knights, townsmen and peasants, men and women in a single religious order that would bring about renewal in the church worldwide. By the end of the thirteenth century some 30,000 Christian souls had dedicated their lives to God within the Franciscan order.

The public ministry of this holy man from Assisi may be seen in three parts:

- ❖ From the conclusion of his conversion (1206) until the entry of Clare into the Order (1213). I shall say more about Clare later on. During this period St. Francis saw himself as '*God's Builder*' and sought the renewal of His Church;
- ❖ From 1213 until the convocation, '*Chapter of Mats*' (1221). During this period St. Francis saw himself as '*God's Fool*'. (This point I shall wish to come back to in Chapter 5 when dealing with John Bradburne.) During this time he desired to share with the world our Lord and Saviour.
- ❖ From 1221 until his death (1226). During this period others regarded St. Francis as '*God's Light*'.

The images given above are profoundly Christological as argued by Arnold and Fry (1990: 41) for:

*"Jesus was the Carpenter who died on the tree;
the Fool, who embodied the wisdom of God;
the Light, which shone brightest from the garden tomb early in dawning –*

so Francis was the . . . 'madman' who shared Christ wherever he went, the 'little candle' whose light was brightest when it was nearly spent."

ST. FRANCIS THE PILGRIM

Pilgrimage has played an important role in biblical history. The Holy Family made their pilgrimage to the city of David when Jesus was a child. On that particular occasion, whilst Mary and Joseph journeyed homeward, they realised that the Christ child was not amongst the crowd. They found Him in the temple talking to the elders (Luke, 2:41-50).

The practice of pilgrimage during the Middle Ages is renowned. Visiting holy shrines throughout Europe with the ultimate being a visit to the Holy Land. Indeed this is still the case today. I have made, like many Christians, pilgrimages to such holy places as St. Cuthbert's tomb in Durham Cathedral; St. Paul's Jarrow which was the site of an old monastery to which Bede was attached; as well as to other European sites for example the Marian shrines at Medugorje and Gozo. I can clearly remember how when a young man from Holy Trinity Church, Pelton, where I worshipped at the time, underwent a similar experience. He too made a pilgrimage, to the Holy Land as it happened, to sort out in his mind where God was leading him. Upon returning from his pilgrimage, his absence from the congregation was noticeable, but a year or so later he made a return. Brother Theodore as we were from then to know him was donned in the Franciscan habit having taken his first noviciate vows. People were all overjoyed to see him again and proud of his commitment to God and His church. That was in the 1975, so such journeys still have their place and meaning for us today. It is not surprising, therefore, that St. Francis too decided to undertake a pilgrimage after his spiritual experience. His ultimate destination was Rome and the seat of the fisherman, St. Peter.

There is rather an amazing story of the little brother from Assisi arriving at the Old Basilica on Vatican Hill. Francis watched intently as the pilgrims endeavoured to throw their spare coins through a barred window that was just above the tomb of St. Peter. The blessed saint, who was never known to do anything by half, immediately emptied his purse and followed suit. The faithful gasped with astonishment as each coin clanged against the bronze tomb. But that is not the end of the account. For when St. Francis proceeded to the door of the basilica he came across a beggar asking alms for God's grace. Dear Francis found that he had nothing in his purse to offer the beggar. So instead Francis made an agreement with the beggar that he could have the saint's fine clothing in exchange for the beggar's rags. The blessed saint's stay in Rome was as a pauper, living amongst the outcasts of society. ('*THE LEGEND OF ST. FRANCIS*' as translated by Salter (1905). Also this story in its various forms can be found in Reynolds, (1975: 13), Cristiani, (1983: 33) and Moorman, (1950 - 1963 publication: 9.) For Francis this had been a liberating and exhilarating experience that would help shape his mission and ministry in the future years yet to come. For he now knew in its fullness the meaning of Matthew 5:3, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" (New International Version)

When St. Francis returned to Assisi from his pilgrimage to Rome the fear of poverty had left him completely. He now embraced his Lady Poverty willingly and whole-heartedly. However there was just one remaining hurdle that he would need to overcome. That was the fear of disfiguring diseases such as leprosy together with its expulsion from society that filled him with such horror. Such fears haunted him and represented his last ounce of remaining pride.

St. Francis became a man possessed, a man in love. He declared that soon he would marry the lady who had taken him so completely over for her own. But the lady was not either of the nobility nor a woman of standing in the town.

To be sure she was not flesh and blood at all. Francis named his betrothed as none other than his blessed '*Lady Poverty*'. His beloved bestowed upon him many gifts whose values were without measure, simplicity of life, integrity of the soul, and clarity of purpose. My Lady Poverty reinforced in Francis' mind that man is more than material wealth (compare to Luke 12:15). So the little man from Assisi, forsaking all others, accepted his '*Lady*' without condition.

For a period of two years, 1206 and 1207, Francis wandered throughout Italy, asking for work in the monasteries in return for food and shelter. When he could not find any, Francis slept rough, under the stars, begging and always singing the praises of God. This was not to be an easy time for the son of a profitable cloth merchant who had known comfort and generous hospitality. One time during his journey, the saint was singing when he came across a group of ruffians that did not appreciate his song. They took dislike to Francis and beat him causing actual bodily harm. When they grew tired of their distraction, they left Francis abandoned by the way side.

THE BEGINNINGS OF A NEW COMMUNITY

Saint Francis, like his Lord and Saviour before him, from 1209 would find himself with twelve devoted followers who would assist him with his mission. Most of those initial brothers came from the middle classes, professional families of Assisi and one of them, Angelo, was a knight. Yet despite their once social standing, this band would begin to call themselves, 'Friars Minor'. These were brothers who were committed to preaching the gospel and who saw themselves through poverty of spirit as the least members of society. As

Christ and His Apostles had felt themselves to be one with, and to whom the masses flocked, so this was to be the case for these very first of the Franciscan order.

Bernard da Quintavalle, a rich gentleman from Assisi, became one of St. Francis' first disciples. Bernard had invited St. Francis to spend a night in his home where he had overheard Francis at prayer. The saint had repeated the same words over and over again, "*Deus meus et Omnia*" [*My God and my all*] (Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, 1997: 32). The next morning, 16th April of 1209, Bernard went to St. Francis and told him that he too wished to leave the world and live the Gospel life after the example of the saint.

Giles a mystic (Moorman, 1963: 46) and a farm worker (Reynolds 1983:23) came after Bernard, a young nobleman, (Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, 1997: 31) who was also a prosperous merchant and a magistrate of Assisi (Reynolds, 1983: 21) on the 23rd April. Peter Cattani, a friend of Bernard who was a student of Bologna and a doctor of laws (Cuthbert, 1948: 63) would join these two later on. Each of them would bind themselves to Saint Francis and his way of life. In this we have the very first beginnings of the Franciscan order. Gradually a band of followers grew around Francis. Whilst the exact order of who joined and when cannot now be ascertained, we do know that amongst the initial brethren were Ruffino (a nobleman), Massio, Illuminato from Acre together with his friend Augustin, and a priest called Sylvester. It is quite interesting to note at this point that Dante, '*DIVINA COMMEDIA - PARADISO*' (xii, 130) actually commemorates two of those listed when he says:

*"Here, of the earliest of the barefoot poor,
Illuminato and Augustin,
made dear to God".*

These little brothers would wander around the hills of Tuscany, and they found part-time work and served the community by their preaching and taking care of the sick. Within a year this small informal community had conducted preaching missions around the rural countryside of Ancona and also in the city of Florence.

Francis with his little group of brethren was beginning to grow and thereby some form of '*Rule*' to regulate the life of the company became necessary. Rules rather like those of the Benedictines, Augustinians or those of the other religious communities are necessary if chaos was to be avoided and for the church's recognition. Francis was always clear about the authority of the church and the respect that the brethren were to show to priests. However for Francis the established rules did not fit with his calling from God, as he understood it. So it was to God that Francis would turn for a rule. He decided to go to the Gospels. Seeking out a parish priest, Francis asked him to invoke the Holy Spirit for guidance and he opened up the Gospels at random. The first passage his eye beheld was:

*"If you wish to be perfect,
go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor,
and you will have treasure in heaven:
then come, follow me".*

(Matthew 19:21, New Revised Standard Version)

The next passage read:

*"Take nothing for their journey . . . ,
and not to put on two tunics".*

(Mark 6:8, New Revised Standard Version)

Yet again Francis turned to the Gospels and he saw:

*"If any want to become my followers,
let them deny themselves
and take their cross and follow me ."*

(Matthew 16:24, New Revised Standard Version)

Confirmed in his calling he turned to the brethren and as related in the 'MAJOR LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS' by St. Bonaventure, he said:

*"Brothers, this is our life and our Rule,
and that of all who are going to want to enter our company.
Let us fulfil all that we have heard".*

St. Francis instructed the brethren that complete poverty released them from the problems of secular life and thereby made them more able to be joyful before the Lord. The most distinctive mark of the friars was their gaiety. If asked to what order they belonged, they were to respond that they were '*penitents of Assisi*'.

Gloom and depression St. Francis felt were akin to sin. For he maintained that it did not become a little brother of God or anyone else to be sad, or have a troubled countenance. Sadness belongs to the devil! (Compare this with Reynolds, et al., 1983: 43)

This happy band of mendicants wore the simply gray robe of the peasants and subsequently became known as the Gray Friars, and they went about barefoot or wearing only sandals (compare with Matthew 10:10).

Bishop Guido and the local clergy were impressed by Francis' adherence to the Gospel life, his simplicity, humility, and his sincerity. So much so that they were happy to do what ever they could to assist the friars in their vocation.

Communities of friars sprang up throughout Italy in response to a universal demand, and within a few years missions were sent to other countries. The abbot of the Benedictine community handed over Porziuncola's chapel to the care of St Francis in 1212. The abbot's condition was that the chapel should remain for all time the head church of the Franciscan community. The chapel today is now enclosed within the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli. When the community of friars numerically outgrew the Porziuncola they moved to Rivo-Torto to a few dilapidated hovels.

DEACON

Francis, in his humility would never aspire to the priesthood, preferring to remain a deacon. Francis held priests in high regard because they were chosen to celebrate Holy Communion. Christians who are members of churches with a Catholic tradition and theology, believe that at the point of consecration the element of bread and wine, become the very body and blood of our Saviour in spiritual form. They do not see the service of Holy Communion as a '*re-enactment*' or just a representation of the '*Last Supper*'. For at that meal, Jesus said to His disciples, "*This is my body, which is given for you*" (Luke 22:19, Good News Bible) and again, "*this is my blood ...*" (Matthew 26:28, Good News Bible). Thereby for Francis, as well as those from the Catholic traditions, priests are called of God to a very holy office. Francis who had been once gay, carefree, '*night clubbing*', extravagant person, could not now have ever felt in his spiritual poverty, worthy of such an office. But the office of deacon was different. Deacons are men who preach the word, teach, and care for their parishioners. Francis definitely felt called to such a ministry. As to where his spiritual poverty would permit him to accept such a vocation, well it could be argued that all Christians by virtue of their baptism have at least some, duty to carry out such commitments.

As to when the diaconate was conferred upon Saint Francis, that we cannot be sure for it is a matter for scholarly debate. For example whilst Cristiani (1983: 39) argues that Francis received the order of the diaconate and the tonsure from the Bishop of Assisi, Guido. This took place after Francis trial in the town square by Guido when Francis handed back all his clothes to his father Bernardone, thereby permitting Francis to have the protection of the church from that point onwards. However Reynolds (1983: 29) prefers the argument that Francis received the tonsure and the diaconate from Pope Innocent III immediately after the informal and verbal acceptance of the '*Rule*' in 1210. Saint Bonaventure in his '*MAJOR LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS*' (III.10) certainly supports the idea of Francis receiving the tonsure at this particular juncture when he says, "*Fecit coronas parvulas fieri*". Though Father Cuthbert, OSFC, (1948: 101) appears to suggest that it was the Cardinal John of Saint Paul who had conferred the tonsure of the gathered brethren.

There is a paradox in the Christian faith. That paradox is that Jesus Christ established His rule in the hearts of Christians, so self-centredness must gradually give way to Jesus. Greatness lies in servitude; the first must be last and the last first. Power is therefore experienced through weakness (compare with 1 Peter 5:5-7). The example of St. Francis shows that through suffering we learn and are glorified. In baptism we were made partakers of Christ's death so that through Him we can have eternal life. The shameful death of the crucified became the passage to the crown glory. Augustine of Hippo once wrote, '*CONFESSIONS*' (401: 1/1) that for him God was his home and the place where he belonged:

"Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you".

(Blaklock, 1983: 15)

So as the Christian dwells upon God's eternal beauty, so they can be led towards increasing wholeness and thereby deeper holiness. St. Francis life demonstrates that the Christian has no other option than to accept crucifixion as part of their vocation. In the Cross, from the point of view of Christianity, God has acted on their behalf, offering them, in Christ, a new relationship, a new covenant, with Himself. (For a further discussion on this point, please refer to that great German reformer Martin Luther's '*AUGSBURG CONFESSIONS*', Article 7 and the '*LARGE CATECHISM*' of 1529.)

Zephaniah (chapter 3), in true prophetic style and like St. Francis, did not mince his words. He was writing probably at some time early in the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BC) before the start of religious reforms and the finding of the book of the Law in the temple. Zephaniah proclaims in uncompromising terms that the proud, the idolatrous and the violent will be utterly destroyed by God's judgement, while the poor, the humble and the needy will be saved.

Zephaniah's words are hard-hitting, and with good reason. Under the two previous kings, Manasseh and Amon the religious life of Israel had plummeted to its very lowest ebb. The prophet's message, however, is not just for the people of his own time. For what Zephaniah says about the people of Jerusalem is true of all of us. We too are guilty of not accepting correction, of not truly trusting the Lord and of refusing to draw close to God when He calls us.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council describe very accurately the extent of our fallen condition:

*"Although set by God in a state of righteousness,
men and women, enticed by the evil one,
abused their freedom at the very start of history.
They raised themselves up against God,
and tried to attain their goal apart from Him.*

*Although they had known God,
they did not glorify Him as God,
but their senseless hearts were darkened,
and they served the creatures rather than the Creator”.*
(Gaudiam et Spes 13).

Humbly, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we have to confess the truth of these words. The Good News is that God knows our weakness but does not leave us floundering in our sin.

SAINT CLARE

Whilst there are many stories about Saint Francis, there are surprisingly few about Saint Clare. Almost from the beginning of the Franciscan Order there has been both the masculine and the feminine influences which has resulted in a certain richness in Franciscan monastic life. They are in fact two sides of the same coin and therefore inseparable from each other for not only do they compliment each other but they are wholly necessary for the other's vocation. The friar's ministry on the road relied upon the contemplative activity of San Damiano as indeed the friar's life enriched Clare and her sister's spirituality. In Bartoli's book (1993: XII) as translated into English by Sister Frances Teresa, OSC, the translator suggests that, "*Francis cannot be fully understood*" without Clare.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

About the time of 1213 back in Assisi and after Saint Francis had received his audience with Pope Innocent III, a young lady called Clare (*Chiara*) requested of Francis that she too might be permitted to share in the life of the Franciscans. Clare was born on 20th January 1193 and came from a very wealthy and a powerful family called Offreduccio. Her father was Faverone di Offreduccio and her mother Ortolana. She was one of five children. Her brothers and sisters were called Boso, Penenda, Agnes and Beatrice. Clare was a beautiful young lady, blonde, slender and very graceful. She and her family had attended the same parish church as Saint Francis and his family, San Ruffino. Ortolana raised her children to fervently practice their faith. She taught them to have a spirit of humility, penance and most of all to have a charitable attitude towards the poor.

Offreduccio family, like Bernardone, had destined her to marry into one of the families from the local nobility. Indeed when Clare was only 12 years old her family had tried at that time to marry her into such a family. The Offreduccio family was related to most of the nobility of Assisi. Again in 1210 Offreduccio tried to marry Clare but she had no wish to marry and told her family that she had consecrated herself to God and was not therefore free to marry. Faverone and Ortolana were very angry with their daughter. They used forceful persuasion to try to change her mind and to accept their guidance in her life. But that was not successful even when it became violent. Clare remained steadfast and true to her vocation.

In the small Italian city of Assisi in the thirteenth century, Clare could not have failed to notice Brother Francis as he renovated its ruined churches. Her interest aroused, in total empathy with Francis' vocation, she would have made sure that he received some food and stone as he tried to do God's work.

CLARE'S VOCATION

When Francis stood stripped and renounced of all his worldly possessions and inheritance in favour of following God's call in the way of poverty Clare was only a young teenager. She had heard Francis preach at San Ruffino's during the season of Lent in 1211, and had been deeply moved by Francis' message. His message had been one of pure love, love of Christ; of the lowly, the humble; love among all Christians. Clare had felt Francis' preaching in simplicity and sincerity attractive. Clare decided to visit the Porziuncola on Palm Sunday aided by her relative Bona del Guelfuccio, where Francis and Friars Minor had taken up residence and requested his advice on how best to live the Gospel life. She met with Saint Francis and Brother Philip the Tall. Clare confessed to Francis her desire to follow his example. At this point Saint Francis had become Clare's spiritual director and for several months after Clare's visit, they would frequently meet for discussions on the kingdom of God.

Clare was coming of age when young girls in Assisi would be wed, so she needed to make a decision that would alter the whole course of her life. During the night hours with only the moon for light, Clare left her home aided by a close friend. They quickly made their way to the church of Saint Mary of the Angels where Saint Francis and the brothers were waiting for her. Having greeted each other, the little group made their way into the basilica praising God in psalms. There in front of the altar, upon her knees, she dedicated herself to God's service in a life of poverty and simplicity. Immediately the beautiful locks of Clare's hair were shorn and lay on the floor of the church. Her clothes of satin together with jewels that had adorned her person were exchanged for the simple rough gray tunic bound with a cord, her head covered with a black veil, and simple wooden clogs covered her feet. The brothers then spirited Clare away to the Benedictine convent of St. Paul of Abbatissis at Bastia. This was partly for her own safety and because they feared that the Offreduccio family would try to kidnap her, and because

it would be unseemly for a lady to live with twelve men! There she would remain until San Damiano could be prepared as a convent for her to live in, together with others that would follow in Clare's footsteps.

As expected Clare's decision to leave home and take up the religious life, particularly in the way that it had been engineered caused a great commotion in Assisi. Clare's uncle, Monaldo, arrived at the convent to try to dissuade her from carrying out her perceived vocation. When words failed he turned to physical force. However Clare uncovered her head so that Monaldo could see clearly that her head was shorn. He knew that if he touched his niece now in her avowed state to God, he would face immediate excommunication. So he returned to Assisi. Despite strong objections from her family, Clare was adamant in her vocation.

After the commotion at the convent in Bastia, Francis moved Clare to the convent at Panzo and it was whilst she was at Panzo that Clare began to miss the company of her sister Catherine. Clare began to pray that Catherine would soon join her in her search for God. Only sixteen days had passed from the time of Clare's departure from the family home when Catherine also left to join Clare. The family was furious and the male members went to find Catherine and forcibly return her home. As in the case with Clare, they failed.

Catherine was aware of her family's feelings about losing Clare to the religious life and their desire not to lose a second daughter. So Catherine immediately committed herself to the religious life with life long intention to prevent her family making any further attempts to retrieve her. Undoubtedly Francis would have learned of the violent attempts to remove Catherine from Panzo and so he went to the convent to visit both Clare and her sister. At the

end of the battle:

*"Catherine received the tonsure at the hands of Francis
and it was probably then that she was also given the
name Agnes."
(Bartoli, 1989: 57)*

Later even Clare's widowed mother would arrive at San Damiano to join the order that Clare had begun.

SPIRITUALITY

Clare and Francis' intense love of Christ united them in a common bond of a deeply spiritual relationship. This relationship that endured and even grew stronger despite the fact that they only saw each other infrequently. They were always aware that they were never really far apart. For Clare poverty and contemplation were intimately intertwined. (For a translation of St. Clare's, *'FIRST LETTER TO BLESSED AGNES OF PRAGUE'* see Armstrong and Brady, [1982: 190].)

*"All her life Clare struggled to preserve what she termed
'the privilege of poverty';
and her perseverance was rewarded when on her deathbed
she held in her hands a scroll from the Pope granting her
and the Poor Ladies of San Damiano the permission to
live in perfect gospel poverty, relying wholly on God for their sustenance".
(Bodo, 1984: 50)*

Lazzer (1920: 403-507, volume 13) states that the poor had a particular claim upon Clare's affections. She would often send to them her own food. (For a translation of the above mentioned document see Armstrong, 1988: 125-175.)

Clare had chosen the things of eternity against the worldly materialism of her day. She desired to make God's kingdom come for she knew that His kingdom had been heralded in through the death and Resurrection of Christ. Her theology was based on God's action through the Holy Spirit to bring His Son into the world through the womb of Mary. Jesus was born poor not rich and powerful so that the poor in turn would identify with Him, accept Him, and know how rich they are in the eyes of God.

When the Poor Ladies took up residence at San Damiano, St. Francis composed a '*Rule of Life*' for them along the lines of the '*Rule*' approved in 1210. This was therefore the first '*Rule*' of San Damiano. Poverty for the Poor Clares was absolute. On entering the convent the postulants were required to:

"distribute all her possessions to the poor.

Clare was the first to divest herself of her paternal inheritance . . ."

(Cristiani, 1983: 70)

The Poor Clares were to live by their own labours and by the alms given to the convent.

Clare, following in Francis' footsteps, had been drawn to the ranks of the poor. She could have quite easily entered one of the several more established convents in Assisi at that time. But that would have been nothing more than changing one form of comfort and financial security for another. She would have been cut off from and cushioned against, the needs of the poor. In short, that for Clare would have been for her to go back on her vow of poverty.

Her integrity was such that, that possibility would have never been considered. It was for Clare, as it was for Francis, an '*all or nothing*' Gospel led spirituality.

Even though Clare, in true humility, had declined the title of abbess, we are told (Pennacchi, editor, [1910: 10, 12] a translation of which may be found in Armstrong work [1988]) that under holy obedience to St. Francis Clare reluctantly accepted both the title and the responsibility of the government of the Poor Clares.

The thirteenth century was not different from any other time including the time in which we live today in that there was (is) a great spiritual thirst amongst the people. The Poor Clares were not short of aspirants. Their desire was to imitate Jesus of Nazareth as closely as was possible for them to do.

San Damiano's close neighbour is the ancient chapel of San Feliciano. In Assisian tradition Bishop Feliciano brought Christianity to the people of the town. Both Francis and Clare would have been schooled in the heroism of the martyrs of Assisi and Umbria. They would have been aware that they too were in some way following in the footsteps of the San Feliciano.

It is not uncommon or a particularly Italian tradition that children should be told stories of the ancient saints who brought Christianity to their regions. The writer was also well versed in the accounts of his ancient Celtic Saints, for example, Saints Aidan, Cuthbert, Bede, Godric, Oswald, and Hilda. However what is worth pointing out here is that the roots of Christianity in Assisi, which lay very close to San Damiano, are now the roots of renewal in the Church. Renewals not just in Assisi, or in Umbria, or even in Italy, but for the whole of Western Europe.

THEOLOGY OF CLARE

Clare's life changed entirely once she had heard Francis' sermon. She saw in him one trying to live his life to mirror that of the life of Jesus. Jesus' life, she knew, mirrored His Father's. By looking into that holy mirror Clare hoped that her life in turn would equally mirror that of her Creator. In *'THE TESTAMENT OF ST. CLARE'* (for a translation see Armstrong and Brady [1982: 226/232]) she writes:

*"For the Lord Himself has not only placed us as
example and mirror for others,
but also for our own sisters whom the Lord
has called to our way of life,
so that they in their turn will be mirror and example
to those living in the world".*

What is striking in her teaching here is that God chose the Blessed Virgin Mary as a vessel for His Son knowing that He would be born into poverty. Jesus who is a mirror of His Father and reflects His Father's image thereby proclaims that God is poor, God is self-effacing and God is powerless (at least in earthly terms of the word). The question clearly being posed here for those who study the life of Saint Clare is *'do I positively elect poverty? Do I respond to the challenge of humility in a positive way and do I prefer to be powerless or do I keep company and seek out the company of the powerful?'* Politicians claim they are elected to serve and in a way they of course do. But once elected how many succeed in their ambition to serve in humility their electorate? Poverty in life, in spirituality and in personality is not an end in itself, but merely the beginning, for it must in the end reflect its author, God.

Clare loved Jesus intensely. She regularly meditated on His Passion that was so intense that she would be driven to tears (compare with Padre Pio, Chapter 7 Part Two). In fact on one Good Friday we are told that *“she was in ecstasy, and as though dead to all things for an entire night and day”* (Cristiani, 1983: 74).

In San Damiano there was an oratory where the Blessed Sacrament was kept. There Clare would spend many hours in adoration of her Saviour. She prayed without ceasing which brought her into close communion with God.

GIFTS OF PROPHECY AND HEALING

There are many stories about the works of Saint Clare. Here I only intend to relate a few. For example Clare had the gifts of prophecy and healing. Peterson relates in her book (1993: 237) how on one occasion Francis had sent five women to Clare at San Damiano to join the Poor Clares. Clare however was not happy with the fifth of the women because she said that this particular woman would not persevere in faith. All were admitted but the fifth aspirant left after just six months. It is often said that prayer and prophecy go hand in hand. Clare certainly possessed both of those gifts.

There are many accounts of people being cured from their ailments but here I shall only mention one or two. There is the account of Sister Benvenuta of Lady Diambra who was very ill due to an infection under her arm and her breasts that resulted in fistulas so large that five fingers could be placed in them. Clare seeing that she was in great pain and discomfort had compassion on her and, *“made the sign of the cross over her, (and she) was immediately cured”* (Peterson, 1993: 308).

Amata who had a fever and swollen stomach is another example of a person being cured at the intercession of Clare. Then there was Cristiana who was cured of deafness and the five-year-old son of Lord Giovanni of Assisi who had become seriously ill with a fever (Bartoli, 1994: 168) also received a cure. Like the accounts of other saints such as Saint Theresa of Lisieux, Cuthbert, Anthony of Padua, Maximilian Kolbe, Blaise and others there are numerous such accounts.

CLARE'S ENDURING LEGACY

Clare was seriously ill and her limbs had deteriorated through illness as death drew close. Aware that time was ebbing out for her, Clare desired to prepare herself to meet her beloved Jesus. She *"gathered her sisters around her and gave them everything necessary for the future"* (Bartoli, 1989: 180). What these *'Poor Ladies'* needed for their future above all things was the final approval of Clare's *Rule*.

Despite the visits of prelates and bishops, not to mention Pope Innocent IV, it was brothers Leo, Juniper and Angelo from whom she gained the most consolation. As they consoled her sisters on 12th August 1253 – it was a Monday, Clare, with tears in her eyes, gave them her blessing after which she passed from this mortal life and joined her spiritual father and friend, Francis, together with all the company of saints in heaven.

Saint Francis felt that Saint Clare was the most *'Christ like'* person he had ever met in his lifetime. His trust in Clare's judgements was such that she would become his confidant and counsellor. Robson, (1997: 187) claims that

as from the:

“early 1220’s she was one of his main supports at a time when he was dogged by illness and plagued by the growing divisions in his fraternity”.

After the death of Saint Francis, his earlier followers, Bernard, Giles, Leo, Juniper and others, turned to Clare for guidance and hope. Her constancy and faithfulness it is claimed was a unifying factor in the:

“increasingly divided order [which] was being inspired and sustained by the community at San Damiano, which stimulated renewal among both women and men in Umbria”.

(Robson, 1997: 202)

Clare, an enclosed contemplative nun, may be seen, therefore, as taking over St. Francis’ mantle as the author of rebuilding the Church.

Her gift of discernment spread far and wide for after Saint Francis had been taken from this world to his home in heaven, Clare would:

*“advise popes, kings and queens.
She was, indeed, to be a ‘light’ that would shine
in the temple of God when Francis had begun to rebuild”.*

(Arnold and Fry, 1990: 50)

PART TWO: THE THIRD ORDER

Thomas of Celano tells us in the publication, '*FIRST LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS*', that when Francis preached in the towns and villages of Umbria, the inhabitants became enthused and desired to live the Gospel life after the example of St. Francis. When he was in Cannara in 1212 the thronging crowd wanted to leave all and follow Francis, which gave him much concern principally because the example that they ought to be following is the person of Christ. (See the description of this given by Bernard of Bessa published in the ten-volume work '*ANALECTA FRANCISCANA*', III, (1885 to 1926: 686/687). It was at that time that Francis began to form in his mind a new Order that would accommodate those who wished to become Franciscans in the world. This Order Francis would call the '*Order of Penitence*' and which would become more universally known as the '*Third Order*' and its members would become known as '*Tertiaries*'.

The '*Third Order*' was for those who could not give up all and sell their possessions to give the money to the poor. This Order was for those who had "*dependent parents, or other family obligations*" (Cristiani, 1983: 128) i.e. they were married and had children to care for, they had farms to tend to or were involved in commerce and individuals depended upon them for their living. Such responsibilities could not be abandoned and this prevented them from becoming a friar or a nun. So St. Francis instituted a new kind of religious order whose members would be known as '*Tertiaries*'. This Order was precisely for those lay men and women who wished to live the religious life within the situation where they found themselves.

For example we are told that Lord Orlando and the Lady Giacomina were not in a position to dispose of their family's estates:

*"yet the spirit of poverty had caught their hearts,
and this was shown not only in their greater charity
towards the poor, but in their mental attitude towards
the property they administered and which they held
in trust from God for the common good, seeking to
exercise their rights with justice towards others,
with regard to peace with their neighbours
and without personal avarice".*

(Father Cuthbert, 1912: 325)

In the twelfth century there began in Italy groups of lay people who would come together in associations to promote the religious life. These associations had as their aim a return to the life of the early church and the Apostles. In the main these groups were disillusioned with the church of their day and critical of its power, its worldliness and the worldliness of the religious orders and the teaching of the clergy. One such group was the Humiliati who whilst being loyal to the Catholic Church on the one hand, also wished to reform it on the other. (See Moorman [1968, special edition of 1998: 40/45.]) The Humiliati attracted both the lay and the clerical and lived by a '*Rule of Life*'. Pope Innocent III in 1201 took an interest in this God fearing movement and gave them his protection.

There is an argument as to whether such movements had influenced Francis in making his decision in the creation his new order. The Dominican historian, Mandonnet, (1898: 183/215) maintains that Francis had in mind the Humiliati when he founded the Third Order. Mandonnet further claims that Francis had not initially intended to found a religious order but an association of men and women in fellowship who desired to live the Gospel life. It was only later on that Francis devised the three orders of the Friars Minor, the Poor Clares and

the Order of Penitence. Those scholars who would support Mandonnet's view are for example:

- Paul Sabatier, see 'OPUSCULES' volume I, pages 5/6 for his article entitled '*REGULA ANTIQUA FRATRUM ET SORORUM DE POENITENTIA*' and
- G.G. Coulton, '*FIVE CENTURIES OF RELIGION*' volume II, page 149.

Amongst those who would hold the opposite view stating that Francis was not influenced by the Humiliati are for example:

- Van Den Wyngaret, see '*NEERLANDIA FRANCISCANA*', volumes V and VI, (1922/3) for his article entitled, '*EXAMEN DES THEORIES DU R.P. MANDONNET SUR L'ORDRE DE POENITENTIA*' and
- F. Van Den Borne, '*DIE ANFRANGE DE FRANZISKANISCHEN DRITTEN ORDENS IN FRANZ*' (Studien, Beiheft 8 – Munster, 1925)

What is a '*Third Order*'? Well according to article 685 of the Canon Law (1917) it is:

*"an association of the faithful who make profession to strive towards Christian perfection, in a manner suited to a secular life
according to the spirit of a religious order."*

Cristiani (1983: 129) a Franciscan tertiary himself states:

"Thus the Third Order of Saint Francis came into being and for the sake of historical clarity the year 1221 is considered to be the year of the founding of the Order."

The Third Order does not mean third class it does however indicate that it was founded after the Friars Minor and the Poor Clares. Tertiaries remain in the world and reject the materialism of their day in the same way as the First Order Friars and the Second Order Poor Clares do.

THE RULE OF LIFE

The Third Order began to attract a variety of people from the rich and powerful to the poor and humble. It was the *'Rule of Life'* that these individuals wanted to help them live a more truly Christian life and it was the need for that discipline in their lives that brought them into the Order. Pope Honorius, III, in 1221 like his predecessor Innocent III, took an interest in the rise of the Third Order and assisted in its development. According to the *'ANALECTA FRANCISCANA'* (Quaracchi, 1885 to 1926: 686) Francis was assisted by Cardinal Hugolino in the creation of the tertiary *'Rule'*, but regrettably this was lost and like the *'Rule'* of 1210 which had been given to the friars, it no longer exists. The *'HANDBOOK OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER'*, (1989: 10) proffers the view that:

*"Its essence however is contained in
his (St. Francis') 'Letter to the Faithful' ".*

We cannot know what were the contents of the *'Rule of Life'* that St. Francis had handed onto those early tertiaries but we are able to outline a few of its requirements as they appear in Francis' *'LETTER TO ALL CHRISTIANS'*. In this document Francis stated that abstinence from eating meat ought to be observed on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. There were periods when Fasting was to be observed; for example many Christians still fast during Lent. Those who were literate were to recite the Daily Office and those who could not read were to say 54 'Our Father's' and 54 'Gloria's'.

The '*Rule of Life*' that has been passed down to us was edited by Sabatier from a document at Capistrano. (See '*OPUSCULES DE CRITIQUE HISTORIQUE*' fascicules I, 1901 for the article entitled '*REGULA ANTIQUA FRATRUM ET SOROUUM DE POENITENTIA*'.) However Wyngaret in his study '*DE TERTIO ORDINE S. FRACNISCI IUXTA MARIANUM FLORENTINUM*' maintains that only the first six chapters of the aforementioned document are original. The remainder is said to belong to a later period, c. 1228. (For further discussion on this point see Borne [1925:108/ 120].)

Chapter 13 of the Capistrano '*Rule*' endeavours to bring the Third Order much closer to the First Order. For example a local fraternity of the Third Order were to request the Father Guardian of the local friary to appoint one of the friars to '*over see*' the affairs of that fraternity and to advise the tertiaries. What is not clear however, is how the appointment fits in with the local bishop (who was to advise the fraternities in his diocese and mediate where disputes had arisen) and the visitor (who had powers of dispensation and was also able to advise the fraternity).

Tertiaries living close to parishes where the friars had pastoral commitment, were to attend Mass on the first Sunday of each month. Such stipulations were the root cause of much trouble that would arise later on.

This '*Rule*' devised for the tertiaries was subsequently given the approval of Honorius III in 1221. This '*Rule*' made provisions for local groups of tertiaries to meet together on a regular basis for prayer and for '*formation*' (internal training given to the clergy and religious) with both external and internal provisions for a life of sanctity. The 1221 '*Rule*' lasted until Pope Nicholas, IV, who then revised it. This revision became necessary to bring the '*Rule*' up to date and that revision lasted for a period of nearly seventy years. This form continued for six hundred years when Pope Leo XIII once again adapted

the '*Rule*' for the time of 1883. A '*Rule of Life*' should never be a static document for if such a thing were permitted to happen, it would cease to be relevant to those who seek to live by it, and therefore it would be dead. The world in which we live has seen many changes of the way we think and live. In our modern times these changes can take place at a breath taking pace. It is therefore very important that a '*Rule of Life*' continues to reflect those changes and so in 1978 the document was once more revised with the authority of Pope Paul VI.

Tertiaries were expected to follow a few basic rules in respect to their lifestyles. For example outwardly they were expected to follow:

- Poverty of life;
- Simplicity of dress;
- Avoidance of certain kinds of entertainment; and
- Mortification of the palate.

For their spiritual growth they were called upon to observe faithfully:

- Prayer;
- Reading of the Scriptures;
- Receiving the Sacraments of the Church; and
- Daily examination of the conscience.

A distinctive habit had been designed which was to be worn by the tertiaries so that others might readily recognise them as being part of the Franciscan family.

Tertiaries were encouraged to pay their debts and never to evade paying lawful taxes. The brothers and sisters of penance were to be exempt from enlistment into the armed forces. They were never to take an oath,

except where necessity dictated it. This point had more significance in the thirteenth century than it may appear today. The populace was expected to take oaths of fealty that was the very backbone of the feudal society of that time. This oath would commit them to total service of their overlord including unswerving loyalty to their lord on the battlefield.

Each fraternity was to have a common fund from which those tertiaries that were in need could receive assistance (Cristiani, 1983: 130). In their intercessions tertiaries were to pray for both the living and the dead. They were to visit the sick and destitute and strangely so for the 12th and 13th century, they were to draw up their Last Will and Testament. Stewart, (1991: 230) in his footnote explains:

"The obligation to make a Testament must be understood within the context of reconciliation. The testament became a concrete expression of the penitents intention to make restitution and to live in peace with everyone."

A tertiary's Last Will and Testament would also ensure that he or she was given a Christian burial according the 'Rites' of the Catholic Church as well as a declaration of faith.

Fraternities of tertiaries had spread quickly to many towns and cities. Mariona (1908: 107) recalls such a group in Florence in the May of 1221 and a second group in Faenza by the December of 1221.

The Third Order by virtue of its 'Rule' became a corporation subject to the ecclesiastical authorities. Tertiaries were therefore exempt from civil or feudal jurisdiction and were the recipients of special privileges. For example the Faenza fraternity had their rights against the civic authorities upheld by the Pope in December 1221. (See 'BULLARIUM FRANCISCANUM' Volume I, 1759 to 1768: 8.) Amongst the first individuals to be received into the Third

Order was one Lord Orlando of Cattani. (Fuller information on Lord Orlando appears in Chapter 7 of this dissertation.)

The rapid growth of the Third Order resulted in different '*Rules*' being observed in various countries. However in 1289 a group of tertiaries appealed to Pope Nicholas IV requesting that he issue a standard '*Rule*' for the general observance of all tertiaries. His reply came in the form of a papal Bull named, '*SUPRA MONTEM*' containing the authorised Rule for the Third Order. This '*Rule*' has been reproduced in '*SERAPHICAE LEGISLATIONES TEXUS ORIGINALES*' (Quaracchi, 1897: 77/ 94). Nicholas removed some of the inconsistencies and re-ordered its material thereby producing an official document.

The First Order Friars were not to exercise any jurisdiction over the Third Order brothers and sisters. Gradually the Third Order began to develop and '*mature*' and began organizing General Chapters to which representatives from several fraternities would attend. They began to draw up statutes, dealt with issues of organisation and the conduct of tertiaries.

MINISTRY AND THE THIRD ORDER

Various forms of life developed from the Order as for example St. Colette was at one time a tertiary hermit. This was not an unusual way of living out one's Franciscan vocation coupled with missionary work. Some tertiaries gathered themselves together to form communities of men and women. They took the traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Groups of tertiaries began to come together, living together in Third Order houses, where they established hospitals and hospices, caring for the sick and the weary traveller (d'Anvers, 1915: 198/199). For example the '*ARCHIVUM FRANCISCANUM*

HISTORICUM' Volume I (1908: 560/ 561) refers to the work of the Third Order in a hospital at Brescia. There was also a tertiary run hospital dedicated to St. Paul in Florence. Whilst in Imola the Third Order administered a hospice, *'ARCHIVUM FRANCISCANUM HISTORICUM*' Volume VIII (1915: 23; 31; & 37). (See also *'ETUDES FRANCISCAINES*' Volume XXXIV [1922: 387].)

The tertiaries by their honesty introduced ethical and higher standards into the business world through their dealings. They actively encouraged those around them to be more devout and attentive to their spiritual lives. The tertiaries whole approach to life presented a perpetual challenge to those of a more worldly nature.

St. Francis had immense charismatic appeal and many individuals have sought the privilege of the Franciscan lay habit. Though not all were quite so willing to commit themselves to the full rigours of Franciscan renunciation as prescribed by the *'Rule'*. What is by far more important to this study is that despite the inequalities of the Franciscan life to be found in all its Orders down through the ages, they have never failed to provide the opportunity for individuals to grow in sanctity in the Church. There is not one century in which the Franciscan vocation has failed to produce saints to testify to the spiritual validity and value of the Franciscan way of life. The saints of the First Order are well known. In this study I shall be detailing the lives of Anthony of Padua from the thirteenth century as well as Father Maximilian Kolbe, OFM Conv., and Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, OFM Cap. and also Brother John Bradburne, SFO, a tertiary, all of whom are from modern times. Such impressive figures must give the Franciscan family no cause for false pride. They are however an example to us demonstrating that the Franciscan vocation is a safe course leading to holiness of life for those willing to adhere to it, and that the Franciscan apostolate is a divinely appointed vehicle for the salvation of the modern world.

One example of a tertiary from the thirteenth century that clearly demonstrates the effects that St. Francis of Assisi had on his life is Ramon Lull.

Ramon Lull was by vocation a teacher and felt that his calling was also to preach the Gospel, especially amongst non-Christians. Exploring this call, Lull had considered where he should test his vocation with the Order of Preachers, better known as the Dominicans (Moorman, 1968: 224). The Dominicans were a mendicant order and contemporaries of the Friars Minor. However Ramon had vision of a Franciscan cord and because of this experience decided that he should become a Franciscan. As Ramon Lull was a married man, the First Order – the Friars Minor who were single and celibate – was not available to him. He did however find a spiritual home with the Third Order – the teritaries.

Lull was a mystic and he wanted to share his experiences with everyone, not least with those who would not count themselves as Christian, his knowledge of the joys of contemplation and of union with Divine Love. That part of him that was a teacher knew the value of the written word. So Ramon decided to write about his experiences that are contained in a number of books (Moorman, 1968: 264) including, *'THE ART OF CONTEMPLATION'* and *'THE BOOK OF THE LOVER AND THE BELOVED'*. (Both of these books have been translated into English by E. Allison Peers and were published in 1923 and 1925 respectively.)

'THE ART OF CONTEMPLATION' aims to provide a practical guide to those who wish to practise spiritual mysticism. However *'THE BOOK OF THE LOVER AND THE BELOVED'* is a compilation of 366 pensées. A daily meditation to lead the user into closer communion with his or her Saviour. In such mystical union pain becomes joy, darkness becomes light and worldly wisdom is seen as foolishness (Moorman, 1968: 265). Lull's mysticism with its reversal of worldly values owes its originality to the inspiration to St. Francis of Assisi.

After the fall of Acre in the Holy Crusade of 1291, more and more tertiaries were being drawn in closer fellowship with the First Order. Such a traumatic episode in Christian history could not be left without some kind of response. The response to evil is spelt out by Christ on the Cross who, presumably, enabled or encouraged individuals to seek out a 'new' Christian response. For some tertiaries that response was to live in the friaries and dedicate their life in total service, as had the friars. This was the case for Ramon. Ramon Lull was a widower whose children had grown up and were independent of their remaining parent. Ramon, like Francis and St Anthony of Padua before him, felt called to go to Africa to witness to Christ, and Him Crucified as the Saviour of the world. Despite his initial nervous doubts, he left for Tunis where he at once set about his preaching activities. He:

"declared the truth of the Christian hope and the falsity of Mahomet's claims. Like many others who had gone before him, he was immediately arrested, put in prison, and finally deported from the country."

(Moorman, 1968: 230/231)

Still his missionary zeal burned within him and in 1301, he set out for Cyprus and Armenia. Once again Ramon sailed for Africa, but on that occasion he was headed for Algeria for the town of Bugia. Having learned little from his Tunis experiences, he immediately began to preach in the public square. Ramon was then 75 years old and he was very nearly dismembered by the angry crowd who had heard his preaching. However the Kadi stepped in and had Ramon imprisoned for his own safety. Like St. Paul of Tarsus, Ramon continued his mission amongst his fellow prisoners. Ramon engaged in debates with the Moslem leaders who were suitably impressed with him. Once again Ramon would be deported.

Still Africa called to him and Ramon would make one final journey there in 1314. Ramon was by then 82 years old when he once again landed on the shores of Tunis. Strange as it may seem he was well received. The Moors were quite taken by the figure of an old holy man with his long white beard. He was free to engage in debates with leading Moslems and even permitted to travel around the villages proclaiming the Gospel. He became a much loved figure in Tunis where he met with no opposition and indeed made a number of converts. But he could not settle in Tunis and left once again for Bugia in Algeria where he was martyred within a short time of his arrival.

As a tertiary Ramon Lull became, according to Moorman:

*"the most distinguished tertiary of the
thirteenth, or indeed of any other century".*

(Moorman, 1968: 225)

Besides these missionary activities and caring for people in hospitals and hospices the Third Order were also involved in education for example at Mons and the care of prostitutes (see '*ETUDES FRANCISCAINES*' Volume XXXIV [1922: 388 and 389]). The Order had been entrusted with civic responsibilities, for example at Perugia they looked after the city's administrative work. In other towns and cities according to, '*ARCHIVUM FRANCISCANUM HISTORICUM*' Volume XXXIII (1940: 55 to 113 and 319 to 365) they were responsible for the finances, organizing elections and food distribution.

In 1320's Florence the charitable works of the tertiaries commanded such great respect that the bishop, the Archdeacon of Fiesole and the magistrates declared that members of the Third Order were to be considered as '*religious persons*' and therefore exempt of taxes and duties (Piana, 1957: 49/74.).

In the fifteenth century there was a group of tertiaries known as the '*Confraternitas Caritatis*' in Toledo who became known, according to '*BULLARIUM FRANCISCANUM*' Volume III (1759 to 1768: 335 to 337) for its prison ministry work. The tertiaries would visit the prisoners, provide medical care, ensure that each prisoner received fresh water daily and that their clothes were laundered as well as raising funds for the release of debtors and for the Christian burial of paupers.

Franciscanism had spread rapidly with the friars in charge of parish churches and there were convents of Poor Clares in most towns and:

"everywhere were members of the so-called Third Order quietly witnessing, by the simplicity and goodness of their lives, to the inspiration which they had drawn from the Little Poor Man of Assisi".

(Moorman, 1963: 62)

Not every one was quite so enthusiastic about the Third Order. Some viewed tertiaries as a threat to the political and social structure of society and those in position of power would not tolerate the Third Order within their jurisdiction to the point of persecution (Cristiani, 1983: 131). For example Pope John XXII in 1319 issued a bull defending the Third Order and recommended this religious institution to all the prelates.

The fortunes of the Franciscan tertiaries have swung from enthusiastic growth to quick decline. Political influences of the day have played a part in whether the Order grew or declined. For example during the Reformation that spread over much of northern Europe, the Third Order experienced a particularly sharp decline. However particularly in the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th the Third Order began to see an upsurge in those wishing to test their vocation. The Third Order began to spread beyond its

Catholic boundaries into the Church of England where not just Anglicans, but also those of the Nonconformist Church traditions, entered into the Franciscan way of life.

THE THIRD ORDER TODAY

The *'Rule'* of the Third Order should be:

"A Way of Life, and not simply a long list of useful ascetical practices, rather negative in expression, concerned with unworldiness rather than with living in the world and living it as witnesses".

(Reynolds, 1975: 110)

The *'Rule'* of today seeks to encourage the ideals of the Gospel life by endeavouring to capture something of the original simplicity of St. Francis' initial constitution. It is meant to challenge and stretch those who live by it and thereby promote true spiritual growth, just as those Christians would have been by St. Francis in the thirteenth century.

St. Francis began his religious life as a layman and even though he was ordained a deacon, he never saw the laity as a kind of second rate form of Christianity. Since his time the world has changed and the church has also changed. But the vital role of the lay person in the pew as the representative of Christ in their respective communities has never changed! Through the Third Order Francis intended to share his religious order with that very same laity.

For example the Newcastle upon Tyne Third Order Fraternity have an ongoing project in which they have invited the Anglican Franciscan tertiaries to participate. Each Christmas posters are sent out to the surrounding parishes to the St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Newcastle inviting children to come along to the Christmas Crib Experience. Places such as Scotswood and Benwell are areas of social deprivation and much poverty. It is children from these areas who come along to St. Mary's Cathedral where their afternoon activities begin in the cathedral's centre. Here they make pictures, little animals, stars and the like which they will carry in procession into the cathedral itself, to the Christmas Crib and offer them as '*birthday presents*' to the baby Jesus. The First Order Friars from both Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches assist with the children's worship, singing carols, and teaching them about the true meaning of Christmas. After which everyone goes back to the cathedral's centre for tea and mince pies.

In his book Alan Paton (1968:24) a tertiary from South Africa argues that no Christian should ever think of himself or herself as being unfit to be God's instrument, for that is what it means to be a Christian. Paton goes on to state what the Christian's mission is in society and that some Christians argue:

*"that if we would only change men,
then society would change of itself.
That there is some truth in this, none of us doubt.
But the full truth is that we must try both to
change man and to change society, and that
there are some changes in man that cannot be achieved,
without some changes in society".*

To this view I would suggest that change begins with '*me*' (oneself). Hence St. Francis asks in his prayer '*make me an instrument . . .*' This is both a plea to God for His assistance through the action of the Holy Spirit for the

conversion of self as well as a personal dedication to the work of the Gospel. For how can I love God and hate my neighbour? For the Christian this is not possible. How can I reconcile others if I am not reconciled? It is in being reconciled that I can know the way, I know the cost and I know the benefit – that is the love of God.

The Third Order '*Rule of Life*', '*THE THIRD ORDER OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS' MANUAL*' (SSF, 1991: 62) states that:

*"Jesus is the perfect pattern of authentic love
Love is the road to God and through love we encounter
God on the way. When we stop giving, we stop loving:
when we stop loving, we stop growing. Unless we grow,
we shall never attain personal fulfilment, nor shall
we ever be open to receive the life of God."*

When an individual seeks admission to the Third Order he/she is required to commit himself/herself gradually through formation in the noviciate and latterly in profession to the '*Rule of Life*'. For most tertiaries this spiritual journey draws them closer to the Gospel. Thereby tertiary profession leads to a very real growth and fidelity to the vision of St. Francis.

Members of the '*Third Order*' also have the ability to inject into a busy and confused world that '*peace of God, which passes all understanding*', that people need and desire – and are unable to discover anywhere else but in the life of the Christian faith.

PART THREE: THE ANGLICAN FRANCISCANS

The Society of Saint Francis (SSF) is a Franciscan Order established within the worldwide Anglican Church in the twentieth century. The Society of Saint Francis is itself the result of an amalgamation of several other Franciscan Orders within the Church of England that produced the SSF as we know it today. For example the Society of the Divine Compassion, the Community of Saint Francis, the Community of Saint Clare, the Contemplatives of Blessed Mary at the Cross, and the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross, are to name but five such communities that came together to form the Society of Saint Francis. All of these societies can be said, historically, to be recently instituted religious communities that are in themselves pointers to the establishment of SSF. However the Society does not have the same historical tradition as the Order of Friars Minor. For example a brother of the Order of Friars Minor can rightly claim that he is a member of a fraternity in precisely the same way as those who preceded him in the twelfth and thirteenth century. His is a line of unbroken tradition. However the friar of SSF is still a true Franciscan because his Society was founded on the principles of Saint Francis of Assisi to which the Society has endeavoured to remain faithful.

Douglas Downes (1878 – 1957) is the person accredited with the vision to create a Franciscan Order that is known as the Society of Saint Francis. But it would be intellectually dishonest to claim in this dissertation that he was the only one with a vision for establishing a Franciscan Order within the Church of England. The Society of the Divine Compassion for example was founded by Fathers: J.G. Adderley – the son of Lord Norton, Henry Ernest Hardy (-died in 1946) better known as Father Andrew (1869 – 1946) and Henry Chappel (died 1913) in the East End of London (Plaistow) in 1894. They lived amongst the poor, ministering to them and from time to time went on foot on preaching missions. They, together with some sisters, took care of lepers in East

Hanningfield. Then there was Father George Potter (1887 - 1960) of the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross and Father Algy Robertson (1894 – 1955) who established the Christa Seva Sangha, an Order whose work was principally in India.

BACKGROUND

Douglas Downes' father was a Methodist minister from Yorkshire and his mother an Anglican attracted to the Oxford Movement. An odd combination of Christian traditions which would mould Douglas and move him to create the Anglican Franciscans. According to Father Francis, SSF, (1961: 7) he was born in Brighton on 8th April, 1878. Mr. Downes was a circuit minister, which meant that the family endured much relocation to new parishes. Douglas was a student at Corpus Christi, Oxford, which is where he first came into contact with itinerant tramps through his activities with the Oxford Intercollegiate Christian Union. Douglas was ordained in the Anglican Church working firstly at St. Mary's Church, Walthamstow. However it was during his second curacy at All Saints Church, Lambeth that he began to feel called to work with poor people.

At the end of the 1914 to 1918 World War, Douglas became a chaplain to the Oxford Pastorate and it was during this time that he met:

*"for the first time Brother Giles.
It was from him that he (Douglas) learned
of others in the Church of England who were
following the Franciscan way of life."
(Father Francis, 1961: 40)*

The principle community for men who were following the way of Saint Francis was the Society of the Divine Compassion and it was in that Order that Edward Kelly Evans tested his vocation in 1911 (according to Fr. Denis, SSF, 1964: 222, the date and place of his death are unknown. Also when interviewed on 26th November, 2001 the Brother Reginald, SSF, the Order's historian, also confirmed that the place and time of his death are unknown). It was Mr. Evans who would take the name '*Giles*' in the religious life.

Brother Giles dedicated his life to sharing the hardships endured by the unemployed men and boys that roamed throughout the country looking for work. Giles stayed in doss houses and casual wards with them so that he would more fully understand their plight. This life style comes with a high cost and thereby it took its toll on Brother Giles' life. From time to time he would need to be cared for and nursed back to health. That task fell to the '*Cowley Fathers*' (the Society of Saint John the Evangelist – another religious Order) that was established in the Church of England in 1865. The name '*Cowley Fathers*' was arrived at simply because the Order's motherhouse was in Cowley, Oxford. Around this period in the recent history of the Anglican Church they were beginning to realise their Catholic heritage and from that experience grew a number of vocations to the religious life. To meet the need of those wishing to test their vocation sprang various Orders for men and women that were not specifically Franciscan for example:

- The Community of the Resurrection (1892);
- The Society of the Sacred Mission (1893); &
- The Order of Saint Benedict (1914).

The ministry of Brother Giles very naturally intrigued Brother Douglas who was already being aware of the needs of the poor. During the college's vacation periods, Brother Douglas would join with Brother Giles in his ministry amongst the destitute. It was on one such occasion during September 1921

whilst Douglas and Giles were with the hop-pickers in Kent that Giles received a letter from the Earl of Sandwich (see Fr. Francis, 1961: 42). The Earl offered Giles a year's free rent of a farm in Dorset. The property was at Hillfield, near Cerne Abbas and it was called '*Flowers Farm*'. Giles asked Douglas to read the letter and to give his opinion as to the offer. Douglas rather liked the offer and persuaded Giles to accept it. By the autumn Giles had arrived at the farm together with two companions and renamed the property the '*Home of Saint Francis*'. By Christmas another sixteen individuals had also arrived. Amongst the first of the new Franciscan brothers were Brother Giles, Roger Fox (1896 – 1987) and Charles Boyd (Brother Reginald SSF was also unable to provide any details about Fr. Boyd when the writer interviewed him on 26th November, 2001) . Whilst still not officially a '*brotherhood*' this was in essence the foundations of the Society of Saint Francis.

SOCIAL CONSCIENCE AND FRANCISCANISM

The house welcomed '*wayfarers*' and their help with the work of the Home of St. Francis was always welcomed. Brother Douglas had hoped that from amongst those men, some would be converted and become a kind of '*Saint Paul*', carrying the message of the Good News to their fellow travellers of the road. From the very beginning the brothers and the wayfarers shared:

"an entirely common life

The friars lived with the wayfarers –

working, feeding, and praying together".

(Anson, 1955: 203)

The gardens of the Home of Saint Francis produced a variety of vegetables, flowers and fruits, which would be sold in Dorchester market. The brown

habited men with their white knotted cinctures must have caused many shoppers to stop and take a second look at those strange looking stall-holders.

The brothers began to produce a magazine called, *'The Floweret'* bringing news of their work to the many supporters and well wishers. (The Society of Saint Francis currently produces two magazines: *'The Franciscan'* and the *'Companion News'*.) In the spring of 1925 *'The Floweret'* noted the alarming increase of the numbers of the unemployed during January and February of that year. The magazine argued that reform of the casual ward systems was urgently needed and proffered that places such as the Home of St. Francis would be by far a more profitable set-up. It continued its argument by setting out some basic essentials such as warm baths, disinfected clothing, decent sleeping accommodation and better nourishment together with a mid-day meal. Time and again the government's Vagrancy Committees had urged reform, for example as in 1866, only for such reforms to be shelved for various reasons, for example the out-break of the First World War in 1914.

The socio-economic climate in Britain between 1921 – 1930 went from bad to worse and:

*"By the summer of 1930 over two million
men and women in Britain were unemployed."*
(Anson, 1955: 203)

Father Francis (1961: 57) provides for his readers some of the details of the casual wards. Upon arrival the men and women were obliged to strip and take a bath. They were given a rough textured night-shirt type garment to wear. The residents would be locked-in the ward. Two nights stay was required in order that the residents could be put to some kind of hard labour.

The tasks allotted varied from:

*“stone breaking, stone pounding,
gardening, wood chopping, oakum picking
(in which sometimes 4 lb. would be required
in eight hours), or cleaning and scrubbing.*

*The daily ration would be 1½ lb. of bread,
¼ lb. of margarine, 2 oz. of cheese,
4 oz. of cooked potatoes, and 2 pints of
tea, cocoa, gruel or soup.”*

The current residence were sent to bed by 5.50 p.m. each evening after which the new arrivals could be admitted. The bedding in the casual wards were more often as not verminous and the institution did not have any store of alternative clothing or footwear for those desperately poor individuals to replace their own worn out attire. The wards were very cold especially in the winter, as many of them did not provide even the more basic types of heating.

Brother Douglas was so appalled when he found out that on Sundays the residents were not allowed to attend services in the infirmary chapel that he went to see the Bishop of Exeter. The bishop at that time was Lord William Cecil and he decided to make an unannounced visit to a casual ward to find out exactly what was going on.

In true Franciscan spirit, following the example of Francis of Assisi's fundamental interpretation of Scripture, Brother Douglas took the message of

2 Corinthians 8:9:

*"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;
rich as He was, He made Himself poor for your sake,
in order to make you rich by means of His poverty"*

(Good News Bible)

quite literally and to heart. He had witnessed the wayfarer's condition when they had arrived at the Home of Saint Francis. He was well aware of how Brother Giles had endeavoured to take the Good News to those poor unfortunates where they were. So Brother Douglas felt that for at least a few weeks each year, the brothers should take to the road. That they should also stay in the doss houses and casual wards. In this way, as with Saint Francis of Assisi and the lepers, Brother Douglas demonstrated to the men and boys that the church really cared about them and about the conditions in which they were forced to live. Douglas saw the wayfarers as modern day lepers. Disowned by society, feared and pushed to the outer perimeters of life where they could not be seen or heard. There was far too much talk and red tape about the plight of those who roamed the country looking for work between the two World Wars and not enough practical help. By coming into contact with the tramps, Brother Douglas hoped to be able to identify from amongst them those who could benefit from a stay at the Home of Saint Francis. This was the brave and truly Franciscan venture that the Anglican friars became noted for and one that gained them great respect from all sectors of society, across the social divide and class spectrum.

Whilst on a mission in South Wales, Brother Douglas had gathered around himself a number of young men to explain to them the work of the Home of St. Francis. There was one older man in the lodging-house who was very embittered and who would have none of it. So much so that he began to hurl abuse at Douglas. But by the time Douglas had completed his discussions with the young men, it was the self-same older man who approached him with

further questioning. The older man said that he *"had no idea that the Church was doing such good work . . ."* (Father Francis, 1961: 58).

On another occasion Brother Douglas was discussing with a group of men the work, *'HAPPINESS'* by Monsignor Vernon Johnson. Father Johnson had forsaken that which the world counted as necessary for true happiness to be gained. One of the men from the group asked Douglas if he might have the book. But that particular copy had Douglas' own notes written in it. So Douglas suggested that if the ragged gentleman were to give him an address where the ragged gentleman could be contacted, Douglas would send a copy onto him. The ragged gentleman gave Douglas his sister's address and said, *"Don't put any stamps on, Brother; I'll pay the postage"* (Father Francis, 1961: 59).

There is certainly a great deal of spiritual hunger in the world today. It is true that Scripture says, *" . . . that one does not live by bread alone . . ."* (Deuteronomy 8:3 New Revised Standard Version), but man needs sustenance if body and soul are to remain together.

Brother Douglas was tireless in his efforts to raise funds and in appealing for materials needed for the erection of hostels for the wayfarers. However he followed in the footsteps Saint Francis of Assisi. In that commitment Douglas was:

*"at pains to preserve the spirit of poverty
in the friars by forbidding any appeal for
money, or for things for themselves,
saying that our reliance must be more
and more in prayer, and in humble trust."*
(Father Francis, 1961: 70)

By 1932 Douglas had began five new homes, all of which came under the auspices of the friars.

NEW BEGINNINGS

Like Saint Francis of Assisi, initially Douglas had not set out specifically to establish a religious order but nevertheless that is exactly what he had done. Humility prevented him from accepting the title of the founding father of the Brotherhood of Saint Francis. This brotherhood was the predecessor of the Society of Saint Francis, as it is known today. By 1931 the Bishop of Salisbury, Dr. St. Clair Donaldson, had received the very first vows of three friars.

The Brotherhood of St. Francis found itself in contact with other Anglican Franciscan communities including the Christa Prema Seva Sangha in India and its associate society the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ in St. Ives, Huntingdonshire. This particular Franciscan community had amongst its members Father Algy (Reverend W.S.A. Robertson) who whilst living in Poona founded a community of men living the common life, but which was made up of Christians, Hindus and Moslems. The Brotherhood of St. Francis was also in touch with the Franciscan Brotherhood of the Holy Cross that had been founded by Father George Potter. Father Potter, Father Algy and Brother Douglas met at regular intervals and the first of several amalgamations then took place. Father Algy was appointed in 1937 the Father Guardian and Novice Master of Cerne Abbas and Brother Douglas became the very first Father Minister of the Society of St. Francis. For the very first time the Order now had a noviciate that would facilitate the training

of young men who came to test their vocation with the brothers. This period of training has resulted in today's system of:

- ❖ 9 months Postulancy;
- ❖ 3 years Noviciate;
- ❖ 3 years Simple Vows and
- ❖ then progression to Life Profession.

There was also another important development at this juncture in the history of the Society of St. Francis. The Brotherhood of the Love of Christ based at St. Ives had within its constitution and make-up, a '*Third Order*'. Up until this point there had been no provision for '*tertiaries*' within the vocation of SSF. However with the amalgamation of the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ as part of SSF came also this very important development within the new emerging Franciscan Order in the Church of England. Today the Society of St. Francis boast '*three orders*', those are:

- ✓ the First Order (friars and nuns);
- ✓ the Second Order – the Poor Clares who are enclosed;
- ✓ and the Third Order (brothers and sisters of penance who whilst bound by a religious '*Rule*', but who nevertheless live within society as a whole).

During the years of the Second World War things became very quiet for the Order. Some of the younger men had volunteered their services with the Royal Army Medical Corps. Then came the rather sudden request that the Order take over the Dorset Remand Home for Boys. The accommodation at the Home of St. Francis was stretched to its limit. The work, however, was not without its moments! Some of the boys did not appreciate their new home and ran away, only to be found and returned to the brothers.

After the war the Remand Home was closed relieving the brothers of that responsibility. But a new school for maladjusted boys was opened at Hooke in Dorset, not far from the motherhouse. This became a project with which the Order would become involved in that would continue over a number of years.

Things began to happen that would see the Order grow beyond the confines of Cerne Abbas. For example the Society accepted a house in Cambridge that had been donated to them by the Oratory of the Good Shepherd. A new friary and one that would become involved in the academic life of one of England's most prestigious Universities. The Cambridge friary, therefore, reminds us of another aspect of the Franciscan spirit, in that during the Middle Ages the Conventual Friars Minor worked in many of the European Universities. And so S.S.F. began its work amongst Cambridge's undergraduates. The Order also took over the supervision of the church of Saint Benet besides accepting preaching engagements in the chapels of the colleges of Cambridge. And again the Order accepted pastoral responsibility for the parish of Saint Chrysostom, Peckham in London's East End. It was during the '*blitz*' when the friars arrived in Peckham and they immediately set about organising a canteen. Each evening they would hold services led by Father Charles who would accompany the communal hymn singing on his violin.

The Contemplatives of Blessed Mary at the Cross, was founded in 1918 by a former friar of the Society of the Divine Compassion, Father William Stirr (died 1937) at Glasshampton, Worcester. They too would become part of the family of the Society of St. Francis in 1946. The quiet meditative routine of the monastery stood in sharp contrast to that of the busy life of the friary. It was ideal to meet the Franciscans need for a place of rest, a place of retreat, a place to study and as a time for recollection.

By 1953 the Society of the Divine Compassion that had been founded in 1894 also became part of the ever-extending family of the Society of Saint Francis and with this amalgamation came the responsibility for the parish of Saint Philip's, Plaistow.

THE SISTERS

The Church of the Holy Redeemer, Clerkenwell, London was consecrated in 1888. Its architecture had followed the style of the Early Italian Renaissance so much so that one could easily forget that the church stands in the heart of London and not Florence. It was to this parish that Sister Rosina of the Sisters of Bethany would find herself. It was during her time here that she developed an intense devotion to St Francis of Assisi and longed to follow in the steps of St. Clare. John C. Hawes was a curate at Holy Redeemer at the same time as Sister Rosina's ministry there. Fr. Hawes would supported Sister Rosina and encourage her to grow and to develop her Franciscan spirituality. It is not, therefore, surprising that she decided to sever her connections with the Sisters of Bethany and to go on to establish the Community of Saint Francis in 1906.

Sister Rosina had sought to follow her Franciscan vocation together with three other sisters from the Sisters of Bethany and initially took up temporary residence with the Benedictine nuns at Edmonton. During her stay, Sister Rosina learned:

*" . . that the vicar of St. Mary's, Sculcoates, Hull,
was trying to find some Sisters to come and work
in his parish. Here was the call they were waiting for.
In 1906 they left London for Hull".*

(Anson, 1955: 495)

They were able to rent a small house in Hull, which became their first convent and was dedicated to Saint Damian. There are many similarities between this story and the account of Saint Clare of Assisi. It is true that history can and does repeat itself. Such was the beginning of the Anglican Franciscan nuns who would also become part of the Society of Saint Francis, but who have retained their fraternity's name. But they were not the only community of women that have been part of the family of S.S.F.

After the Second World War the Society of St. Francis brought together five women who wished to follow the hidden life of Saint Clare of Assisi. Anson says (1955: 526) that Mother Maribel allowed them:

“ . . . to test their vocations at St. Agnes' House, Wantage, where they shared the life of the newly established Society of the Salutation of Mary the Virgin. . . ”

though from 1947 to 1950 they would be 'Poor Clares' were guests of the Society of the Sacred Cross at Tymawr, near Monmouth. Once again history repeats itself for the Society of Sacred Cross was a Cistercian community following the 'Rule' of Saint Benedict.

The 'Poor Clares' were quickly offered the Retreat House at Freeland, Oxford, which is where their convent is to this day. In 1952 the Bishop of Oxford installed the first Mother Superior of Order that would be called, the Community of Saint Clare.

The Community of Saint Francis originally saw its vocation in the organisation of an old people's home and have always been more 'open' to the world. Today they can be seen taking a full role in the work of S.S.F. But the Community of Saint Clare have always been, and still is, the hidden life, the spiritual power house of the whole Franciscan family.

Many communities began life that identified with the mission of Saint Francis of Assisi. Today in the Anglican Church, there is just the one family, but one that has benefited from all the experiences of all the communities and some of those communities' work still continues in the name of S.S.F. The Society of Saint Francis may exist in the communion of Canterbury but the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi recognizes no denominational boundaries and influences Christians of all persuasions.

THE COMPANIONS

There is one other body of Franciscans who is part of the family of the Society of Saint Francis which should not be forgotten and without who any study of the family of SSF would be incomplete. These people are called the Companions of the Society of Saint Francis. These brothers and sisters are good Christian people who, having a devotion to St. Francis of Assisi, wish to associate themselves with the work of the Society of Saint Francis. Companions also have a *Rule of Life* for their guidance and discipline. They offer daily prayers for the work of SSF and endeavour to live by the spirit of the Gospel in the way of Saint Francis. Their *Rule* would also contain aspects of simplicity of life and service to others as well as indicating their efforts to bring other people to the knowledge and love of Jesus. All *Rules of Lives* of every kind can quickly become out of date, and therefore, dead. For this reason the Companions are encouraged to revisit and examine very carefully all aspects of their *Rule* and if and where necessary, make the appropriate revisions.

Companions inform themselves of the society's work through the magazine, '*The Franciscan*', which is sent to them three times a year. The magazine also contains a list of the many and various activities of the friars to which the Companions are always welcomed. In this way the Companions are helped to nurture and stimulate their desire for the ideals of the Gospel in their own lives.

CHAPTER THREE: *SCHOLARS AND FRANCISCANS: ARE THEY COMPATIBLE?*

THE FRANCISCAN RULE

The popularity of Saint Francis and his little brethren grew rapidly far beyond the town limits of Assisi. The early thirteenth century saw the rise of a lot of new '*movements*' that had arisen to satisfy the spiritual thirst of the people at that time. It is not surprising therefore, that questions arose about the orthodoxy of those first Franciscans. Were they just another heretical sect such as the Cathari, or were the Franciscans a lay piety sect such as the Waldensians? (I shall wish to return to this particular problem in Chapter 4.) The only person who could validate the brothers in their calling was the Holy Father himself, Pope Innocent III. In Chapter 4 I shall be exploring Francis' attitude to heresy and heretical sects.

Francis decided to take the little band of penitents to Rome. Anyone who has visited Rome cannot help but to be impressed if not a little overawed by Rome and The Vatican. However Rome in the year 2000 is certainly not the Rome of 1210 which Francis had entered. Francis in his childlike innocents and simplicity of faith had made no arrangements for the visit with either his own bishop or the curia in Rome. But where God wills there is a way and as it happened Bishop Guido was also in the city on business at that same time. Many a bishop would have been annoyed or even downright angry at the sight of Francis seeking an audience with the supreme pontiff, but not Guido. He was a little perplexed perhaps but he immediately took charge and enlisted the help of Cardinal John of Saint Paul to make the necessary applications that bureaucracy requires. Cardinal John of Saint Paul was of noble birth and a member of the Colonna family. It was he who had the ear of

the Pope and spoke to the Holy Father about the little band of penitents from Assisi. When he petitioned the Pope, he said:

"I have found a man of very high perfection who has resolved to live according to the precepts of the Church and to observe the Gospel ideal to the letter. It is my view that the Lord really wants to use this man to renew the holy Catholic Faith throughout the Church".
(Cristiani, 1983: 54),

A good cleric can discern when the spirit moves and is prepared to be led. So arrangements were made for Saint Francis to see Pope Innocents III in the church of Saint John Lateran. This was the medieval seat of the papacy. Supported by such a recommendation it would have been very difficult for the Pope not to grant Saint Francis' request.

So Saint Francis drew up a rule of life for the approval of the Pope. The little group from Assisi stood in marked contrast in their poverty to the splendour of the Pope and his court. The eyes of Francis and his brethren shone in faith, piety and sincerity. *'THE LEGEND OF THE THREE COMPANIONS'* (paragraph 50) tells how when Francis addressed the pontiff he told him the following parable.

"A poor but beautiful woman lived in the wilderness. A king, passing by, was so impressed by her beauty that he stooped to marry her; they had several sons who continued to live with their mother far from the court in ignorance of their father's high position. When they had grown to be men, she said to them, 'Have no fear, the king is your father. Go to him and he will provide for you'. When they came to court the king was struck by their handsome appearnace.

'Who are you?' he asked.

'We are the sons of the poor woman who lives in the wilderness'.

The king was glad.

'If I feed strangers at my table', he said,

'shall I not more readily feed you,

my own sons?' "

At first this parable caused a stir amongst the cardinals and the Pope.

The original rule consisted only of a few instructions taken from the Gospels. Francis' and his little band from Assisi only desire was to be allowed to live in an evangelical fashion according to the Gospels. However at first the Holy Father was unwilling to consider yet another new '*Order*' of men (or women) when the Church had available to her so many well established institutions, some of whom were in desperate need of reform. However Pope Innocent III remembered a dream that he had just recently had which caused him some trouble. In the dream the Pope has seen the Lateran basilica which was about to fall down had it not been for a poor friar who had held it up on his shoulders. We are told that the pontiff felt that he had no other alternative than to accept Saint Francis as a man sent by God (compare this with Thomas Celano's, '*SECOND LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS*' and also with the '*LEGEND OF THE THREE COMPANIONS*').

Wadding, the Franciscan biographer, said that Pope Innocent III had told of his dream to Cardinal Richard Hannibaldi Molaria, who was his nephew (Cristiani, 1983: 57). Cardinal Richard in turn relayed the story of the Pope's dream to one Brother Jerome di Ascoli who succeeded Saint Bonaventure in 1274 as the Minister General for the Franciscan Order. Brother Jerome went on to become Pope taking the name of Nicholas IV in 1288. As Pope Nicholas IV he gave the instruction to the friars that the account of Pope Innocent III's dream was to be inserted into Saint Bonaventure's biography of

Saint Francis of Assisi. That is why in some of the very ancient manuscripts the story appears but in others it is missing.

It is said that God works in a mysterious way. First we learn of Saint Francis' call at San Damiano in which the Lord says to Francis, "*Do you not see my house is falling down?*" (Reynolds, 1983: 14).

What we have here is a clear parallel between the pontiff's dream and Saint Francis call. Pope Innocent III was moved, to everyone's surprise, to informally approve Francis' *'Rule'* of 1210 by giving his verbal consent. The brethren were to be devoted to apostolic poverty and began to be called Friars Minor. They were to preach a message of repentance but were not to expound dogma. The Pope charged Francis to return to him again when the Order had grown so that greater powers may to be given to it. Francis then pledged obedience to the Pope and at the Pope's request, the company of brethren pledged obedience to Francis and his successors. They each then received the tonsure of a cleric and thereby came under the protection of the Church. It has been suggested that it was probably at that time when Francis was ordained, deacon (Reynolds 1983: 29).

The friars wore the grey tunic of the Italian peasants, tied around their waist with a rough cord. At first they lived in a small house outside the walls of Assisi, but as their numbers grew they built themselves huts made from wood and clay. In small groups of only two or three the friars would wander around the countryside, sleeping in haylofts or in the open air, preaching, and ministering to the sick and especially to the lepers. They begged for their daily bread and lived in the midst of the poorest of the poor. The friars were forbidden to accept money for their labours, but were happy to work as servants or in the fields, etc. in exchange for that day's meal. The brethren

followed St. Francis' example in preaching to the poor and caring for the sick. Each year they would gather at the Porziuncola near Assisi.

Soon afterwards St Clare, an heiress of Assisi, would wish to follow in Francis' footsteps and around her in 1212 would be established a society of women who would become known as the Poor Clares.

The rule of the Friars Minor was founded on three texts:

- *"If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor".* (Matthew 19:21; Mark 10:21; & Luke 18:22, New International Version.)
- *"Take nothing for the journey".* (Mark 6:8 & Luke 9:3, New International Version.) and
- *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me".* (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; & Luke 9:23, New International Version.)

The twelve brothers lived at the Porziuncola in a small shack and received support from the good people of Assisi. However the town's folk soon grew tired of providing for the brothers who had once been rich and had chosen to live in poverty. Bishop Guido called Francis into his office and placed the problem before him. Clearly as the Order was now growing they should need property and a means to provide for themselves. Francis was adamant that the Friars Minor were an Order of poverty. Property was more a curse than a blessing in Francis' eyes. So he remained steadfast.

Francis was well enough educated to understand Bishop Guido's point but poverty was not an area where Francis was prepared to compromise. In his 'TESTAMENT' Francis writes:

"We were very simple in spirit and subject to everyone.

I worked with my hands, as I intend to continue to do.

And I want all the other brothers also to practice an honourable trade.

Those who don't know any will have to learn one,

*wherever it may be, not out of desire for gain but
to give good example and not remain idle.
And it is only when we receive no remuneration for our work that
we must turn to the table of our Lord,
that is to say, go door to door asking alms”.*

We need to be clear that money was taboo for Francis. The brothers laboured for their daily needs and the needs of the poor and the lepers with whom they shared their daily bread. That is for their food. However those who engaged the friars would on occasion refuse to give them their just rewards. On those occasions the brothers had no other option but to go from door to door begging for their food.

To understand Francis' sense of poverty and humility we need to understand that Saint Francis fundamentally accepted the authority of Scripture. He knew that men and women had been made in the likeness of God and that Jesus claimed that men and women were not slaves, but His brothers and sisters.

*“I do not call you servants any longer,
because servants do not know what their master is doing.
Instead, I call you friends . . .”
(John 15:15, Good News Bible)*

We should compare this Scriptural quotation with:

*“Jesus called them together and said,
‘You know that those who are regarded
as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,
and their high officials exercise authority over them.
Not so with you.*

*Instead, whoever wants to become great
among you must be your servant,
and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."*

(Mark 10:42-45, New International Version.)

There could be no doubt in Francis' mind and spirituality that if the Lord came to serve then he too must serve. If mankind was made in the image of God, then to ignore the needs of poor was to ignore God, to do God a disservice, is in effect a blasphemy. For Christ regarded mankind redeemable and through Christ's sacrifice had been restored to the presence of the Father.

With the growth of the Order, it was inevitable that the original simplicity of its conception should need to be modified if chaos was not to result. This was now a growing brotherhood that needed organisation and order. St. Francis was determined to resist those who demanded a more practical approach to the Order, and were, in St. Francis' view, disposed to make provisions for the future of the Order than was consistent with perfect trust in God.

The principal point of change had come with Saint Francis absence from Italy in the Crusades. One brother, called John di Capella, had gathered around himself a number of other brothers who were unhappy with the Franciscan Rule. John di Capella we are told had intended to:

*"form a new Order,
and had even initiated steps at the Roman Curia
to obtain approbation for his plans."*

(Cristiani, 1983: 125)

This may be a significant point because later on the Order did indeed split into basically three: Order of Friars Minor; Order of Friars Minor Capuchin; and the Order of Friars Minor Conventual according to how each group interpreted the

Rule. I shall return to this point in more detail later. The dissenting brothers have even gone as far as to challenge the Holy See about the *Rule* that Innocent III had orally approved in 1210, as though the Order had been abandoned. Saint Francis had received the news of all this disquiet and unrest in the Holy Land and called a conference with the most knowledgeable brothers accompanying him to decide what should be done. Amongst those who attended were Brothers, Peter Catani, John of Acre, Elias of Cortona (who would succeed Peter as Minister General in 1221), and Caesar of Speyer. They left the Holy Land for Venice by the first available boat.

On returning from the Holy Land accompanied by Brother Illuminato in September 1220, Francis was exhausted. He was experiencing some discomfort with his eyes, a disease that he had caught whilst in Egypt. Many of the Franciscan brothers were beginning to feel that the vision of radical austerity Francis had given to the Order was incompatible with what they were expected from them as friars. That their ministry to a complex society was in some way being hampered by the *Rule*. Such conflicts were better seen with the brothers at Bologna. Francis had originally sent Brother Bernardo to Bologna in 1211. The citizens treated Bernardo as a curiosity and did not take him seriously. Laughter rather than repentance was the result of Bernardo's preaching. Bologna was a wealthy city, with an university whose reputation was known throughout Europe. Some of the friars from Bologna had now become doctors of the university. These friars had kept up their homes and their secular way of life. Yes they were attracted to the Order but did not agree with its methodology. Radical austerity was archaic to such people who, strangely enough argued that such a programme did nothing to help the Order or its mission.

Francis and Illuminato continued their journey through Florence and then on to Orvieto where Pope Honorius III had made his home. Francis preached

before the pontiff and his cardinals there. Amongst those cardinals was one Ugolino who would later play a leading role in the evolvement of the Order as

Pope Gregory IX. As this point however Ugolino was appointed protector to the Order by Honorius III. Having returned to the Porziuncola Francis quickly restored peace within the Order. As the Order's protector, Ugolino's duties included advising Francis and assisting the Order to achieve its mission. He began to instruct Francis and helped him understand the difference between the divine imperative and human reality. Cardinal Ugolino argued that radical austerity had captured and inspired other men to devote their lives to the founding of a new Order but the same vision can also lead a large Order that is still growing to disaster. Change was needed if the Order was to have a permanent home within the diversity of the Catholic Church both in Italy and elsewhere in the world.

Cristiani (1983: 102) states that Cardinal Ugolino with all his skill probably advised Francis to, "*prepare a clearly defined Rule.*" This task would involve taking up much of Francis' time, who would be assisted by Brother Caesar of Speyer, a very able and talented friar. In 1220 Peter Catani would be entrusted with the role of Minister General of the Order looking after its smooth government and administration. Elias succeeded Peter after his death.

This would leave the problem of what to do for Saint Clare and the sisters at the Convent of St. Damiano's. The Cardinal took personal responsibility for drafting both a *Rule* and a constitution that would allow for their growth. From that point they would be known as the '*Poor Clares*'. As the Lateran Council had ruled that no new Orders would be permitted, the Poor Clares would use a Benedictine Rule adapted for their purposes.

Honorius had made one more change to the *Rule* of the Franciscan Order. The Pope had imposed upon them:

“a noviciate of one year on the Order in line with what was customary in other Orders”.
(Reynolds, 1983: 75)

Francis was obedient to the Pope and had pledged as much. He did not like this change, but he accepted the ruling.

The problem, which Francis and Cardinal Ugolino were now to grapple with, is as old as time itself and one that would continue to effect the church in every age. It was a conflict of loyalties between the radicalism of the early church in which Francis had tried to establish in the Order and that of the progressive movement that would permit the Order to minister to the needs of the day. Such needs they would argue were new and therefore different from that of the early church.

Francis was worn out from the demands that life had placed upon him. He was experiencing a recurrent illness that he had first contracted in the Perguian gaol and a feeling of rejection by the very Order that he had founded. He was confused and wondered whether he had truly followed the leading of the Holy Spirit or had he been deceived.

Saint Francis argued that the Lord had called him by way of simplicity and humility, and that was the way God had pointed out for Francis and those who would be his fellow workers. God had told St. Francis that He would have Francis poor and foolish in the world and that His will was, that the friars should not be led in a different way. In the end the modernisers won the day and the *Rule* was modified. There were still some in the Order who felt that

the revisions were thorough enough. However Saint Francis felt that certain friars had gone too far and said to them that God would confound them

through their very own wisdom. That despite their desire to pick faults God would use their confusion to return them faithfully to the vision which first called them to a Franciscan vocation.

A general meeting was called where all the brothers would come together to discuss those areas which they held in common. This meeting was called the Chapter of Mats. The actual date of the Chapter is much debated.

Traditionally it is held to have been on 29th September, 1221. For other interpretations of scholarly debate please refer to, Omer Englebert, '*SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI: A BIOGRAPHY*' translated by Eve M. Cooper (1965: 189). At the Chapter the '*New Rule*' was read out to the assembly. Francis once more attacked the reforms returning to his original vision with its ensuing radical form of evangelical Christianity. Preferring not to be associated from the implementation of any reforms, Francis tendered his resignation from the Order's leadership. The brothers were stunned. They felt a sense of mourning and became very emotional. They beseeched Francis to reconsider and to remain their leader. The saint declined, he was too weary with the burden of leadership. Instead he left the Order in the hands of others that would one day be called to give an account of their stewardship. Francis however felt that God had called him to be His fool and that was the way ahead for him. Resigning from his leadership duties would permit him to spend his time in solitude. In the midst of his Order's numerous brethren, Francis was once again a solitary light as he had been before the crucifix in San Damiano's.

Francis the man who had given testimony before kings and prelates of many different countries was never to be '*alone*'. Francis the man having been the mighty mover of the church and was now an enigma resembled the experience of Elijah had been cursed with depression in the solitude of the

wilderness after the victory on Mount Carmel. He would follow the way of God's fool and yet foolishness of God in the world is not seen as wisdom!

In 1223, however, Pope Honorius III confirmed a new rule incorporating it into a papal brief entitled '*Solet Annuere*'. This much shorter and concise *Rule* would permit the organization to grow and it remains the *Rule* of the Friars Minor to this day. Thomas of Celano has referred to this *Rule* as "*the marrow of the Gospel*".

St. Francis had protested against the admission of scholars to the Friars Minor because he had feared that such problems would arise. St. Francis seemed to have had an innate distrust of the effect of learning on one's life and as such he had not made any provision for scholarly learning within community's life. For Francis learning presented him with this dilemma:

"either [he] had to choose poverty, and then his Order would be doomed to theological ignorance, or he would have to insist that his followers acquire theological science, and then he would have to renounce perfect poverty! "

(Cristiani, 1983: 106)

Yet scholars did seek and entered the Order with a true sense of the Franciscan vocation, for example Anthony of Padua (1195 – 1231) who was famed for his zeal and eloquence. Anthony was an Augustinian canon who in Coimbra, Portugal witnessed the return of the remains of five Franciscan martyrs from Morocco. They were Brothers Berard, Peter, Adjuto, Accursorio and Otto. Anthony was so inspired by their example that he in turn took off to Morocco to preach the Gospel of Christ. After falling ill he found himself in Sicily from where he went to the Porziuncola to ask to be received into the Friars Minor. I shall return to Anthony of Padua under Part Two of this Chapter.

Saint Francis was not opposed to higher learning and it would be unfair to suggest that he was against theological science. The university system was just in its infancy and Francis had grown up without its benefits and thereby did not realize the fullness of its fruits. But Francis felt that such schools of learning were not meant to be part of the vocation of a Franciscan, as he understood it.

Many pictorial images have been associated to Christians and Christianity. They are said to have been the salt of the earth, the leaven, the branches and seed, living stones, and a holy priesthood. The image of God's builder had become important to Francis because like the Old Testament prophets Ezra and Nehemiah, he felt himself also called to rebuild God's house. But the image of God's builder was not the sole image that Francis felt to be important, because the image of *'the fool'* had also dominated his thinking.

It is true that usually the Scriptures condemn folly, regarding foolishness as a synonym for sin. (See for example Psalm 14:1 or Luke 12:20.) However the Bible also recognizes that we live following *'the fall of humanity'* and for that reason things can appear to be the reverse to what they actually are. Saint Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians thus:

"We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ!"

We are weak, but you are strong!

You are honoured, we are dishonoured!"

(1 Corinthians 4:10, New International Version)

Thereby we are inevitably drawn to the conclusion that sometimes folly can also be a virtue. But the dividing line is rather fine!

As I have said in Chapter Two, there were those, both friends and enemies of Francis, who felt him to be foolish, to say the least, and suffering from a mental illness at the worst. We can draw a parallel to Jesus for the Scribes and the Pharisees had often accused Him of being insane or possessed by demons. But Francis' little band of brothers said that he was merely a '*fool for God*'. Francis, like Saint Paul, had no time for the wisdom of this world when it went against being a '*fool for God*'.

His behaviour was certainly unconventional; some would say even nonconformist. On the one hand he would have a brother lead him through Assisi to the square at the end of a rope proclaiming that he was God's donkey needing bit and bridle. On other occasions he could be deeply depressed. Yet before the Pope and his counsellors, Francis filled with great elation quite literally '*jumped for joy*'. There can be no doubt that Saint Francis was most certainly '*God's fool*'. So why do we often feel so uncomfortable when in the presence of such saints? Which pastor would be pleased to invite the likes of Francis of Assisi or Paul of Tarsus on to their church's council? Francis was not a man of means but he did mean what he said!

Deep down inside each one of us we fear the likes of Francis. We cannot let them loose on our church councils for the '*normal business*' would go out of the window. If more radical commitments became common place on our church agendas would our congregations be able to meet them in a realistic way? Positive discrimination in favour of issues such as the poor and marginalised would be a wonderful witness, but what happens to other commitments that the church may have that also demonstrate our commitment to the community?

St. Francis' cautiousness towards scholastic pursuits contrasted sharply with the rise of another group of friars that had arisen about the same time, the Dominicans. This Order of Preachers had established colleges not only for the instruction of their brothers but also for the edification of the parochial clergy. Their priests needed to be schooled in polemics if they were to combat heresy. The Dominicans produced some of the best known theological scholars in the history of the western world, for example Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274). As time progressed however, the Franciscans and the Dominicans became very similar in outlook as the Franciscans began to find it necessary to train young novices which therefore necessitated the founding of seminaries. Following the example of St. Francis of caring for the sick and the lepers, it produced a need for the Franciscans to know more about medicine.

Both Orders became active in the founding of schools for the training of their initiates at their main Friaries or Priories. Such schools could be found for example in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK and in Paris and Bologna on the continent. Those centres of learning produced such Franciscan scholars as Bonaventure (1221-74) and Roger Bacon (c. 1214-92).

Saint Francis was first introduced to Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221), a Castilian, at the Lateran Council of 1215. Dominic, like St. Anthony of Padua, had been in an order of Austin Canons. Francis and Dominic, ten years older than Francis, were very much kindred spirits, despite some rather obvious differences. Dominic had entered the religious life as a boy and had been a priest for fifteen years. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic did

not see each other as competitors, instead they:

*“were immediately in complete sympathy,
and had no trouble recognizing their perfect fraternity
of intentions and methods.”*

(Cristiani, 1983: 95)

Both the Friars Minor and the Order of Preachers were on the verge of receiving the church's full approval for their Orders' ministry. They were at the same stage of development. The Council may have sounded to Francis and Dominic's ears fairly negative as the Council considered that there were sufficient *Orders* and convents of various kinds, some of which were in desperate need of reform and renewal. So the Council were opposed, at least in principle, to the establishment of new Orders. However the Friars Minor and the Order of Preachers were to be the exception. This exception was probably at the Pope's specific request as both Orders had been well received and achieved much. Thereby each Order had been given the Pope's protection. But the Dominicans, unlike the Franciscans, were not to have a new *Rule* but were to accept the '*Rule of St. Augustine*' as adapted by the Premonstratensians.

Cardinal Ugolino was a very intelligent man and was adapt in the interpretation the sign of the times. He saw the need for both the Friars Minor who would be a formidable force in repulsing the Waldensian heresy whilst the friars of the Order of Preachers had already proven their worth in combating the Albigensian heresy. The Friars Minor were mainly laymen with some priests where as the Dominicans were specifically formed as a group of trained priests who would be effective in the combat of heresy.

Reynolds (1983: 53) states that:

*"Dominic knew of the rapid spread of the
Fratres Minores and he recognised Francis
as a kindred spirit when he declared,
'You are my comrade and we will run together.
Let us stand together and no enemy shall
overcome us.'"*

Armstrong in his work *'ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WRITINGS FOR A GOSPEL LIFE'* (1994: 118) has translated a passage from the *'LEGEND OF PERUGIA'* (114) from which we can gain a very good insight into Francis' feelings and sense of calling embodied in the *Rule* of 1221. Some of the brothers had gone to see Hugolino to ask him to persuade Saint Francis to adopt one or other of the existing monastic rules. Armstrong quotes:

*"My brothers, my brothers,
God called me to walk in the way of humility
and showed me the way of simplicity.
I do not want to hear any mention of the rule of
St. Augustine, of St. Bernard, or of St. Benedict.
The Lord has told me that He wanted to make a new fool
of me in the world,
and God does not want to lead us by any other than that."*

By the time of 1223 Francis had grown tired to trying to maintain his vision against the arguments of the intellectuals of the Order. In all fairness there is something to be said for both Francis' integrity as well as the need for reform. The Friars Minor were no longer an intimate little group of men, a vast Order with all the demands that such orders have to contend with from both within the Order and from society at large. It also leaves a question over why some

had decided to join Francis. Had they not been truly captured by his vision and the vocation of a Franciscan? If the rules and teachings of Augustine, Bernard and Benedict were so appealing to them, why had they not found their vocation within the monastic establishments that embraced them?

The Poor man of Assisi could not lay down his original vision, so instead he retired from his leadership of the Order and left for the hermitage on Monte Alvernia where the blessed saint would receive the stigmata (that is the bodily representations of Christ's wounds).

Note: (A Copy of St. Francis' 1223 Rule is to be found in Appendix A)

CONVENTUALS OR OBSERVANTS?

The difficulties that had surrounded the revision of the *Rule of life* of the Order of Friars Minor was to cause further difficulties for the Franciscans in 1245. The crux of the argument was this, should the Order of Friars Minor be permitted to own the property where they lived or not? Should they remain faithful to the original ideals of St. Francis of Assisi? Those of the brethren who favoured remaining true to St. Francis' original *Rule* found support for their view in the writings of a contemporary mystic, Joachim of Fiore (1132 – 1202). Whilst those who felt that for the Order of Friars Minor to continue to develop and grow they needed to own their friaries had as their champion Pope Innocent IV (1243-54). The Pope's support for the latter camp may well have little to do with the welfare of the Order and more to do with the political concerns of his day. Pope Innocent held that the Franciscan property belonged to the church! The church, in her infinite generosity, held the property in trust for the brothers so that their good works might prosper. Here we have an example of observing the '*word*' of the *Rule*, but not necessarily the '*spirit*' of the *Rule*. It was, at best, merely technical formula meant to provide the best of both worlds.

For the more cynically minded and worldly-wise they could argue with some justification that this '*arrangement*' would have led to the church possessing more land and properties thereby increasing the power and influence of Papal authority in the secular world. The Vatican has never been short of its shrewd politicians!

The split between each of the factions within Franciscanism widened. Another attempt to resolve the difficulties also came by way of a papal decree in 1279, but it was very much in the style of that of Pope Innocent. Needless

to say that it was not successful. It was inevitable that the Order of Friars Minor, being unable to resolve their differences, would split into two

Franciscan orders. At the end of the thirteenth century the division was along established lines. Those who preferred the compromise solution had been offered through two papal decrees the Conventuals. The Conventuals wished to observe the spirit of the Order but in practice actually avoided the burdens caused through poverty. Then there were those who wished to remain faithful to St. Francis' ideals, insisting upon a life of poverty and the renunciation of their inheritances. They became known as the '*Spirituals*' and who would later become known as '*Observants*'. In 1517 this division would become formally recognized with the '*Observants*' having the larger number of adherents and the '*Conventuals*' with a small following.

The Council of Vienne (1311-12) during the reign of the Avignon Popes, brought about a tentative solution. However compromises can lead to unhappiness for both parties and this case was to be no exception. The Spirituals shifted their position to a more entrenched and radical stance. So much so that Spirituals wished to sever all links with the Order of Friars Minor. But Pope John XXII in 1317 issued an order to both parties that they were to be reunited. Those who refused to obey the papal edict became the victims of the Inquisition! In fact there were four '*Spiritual*', '*Fraticelli*', who became martyrs for their cause being executed in 1318.

It is true to this day that Franciscans accept that Christ and His Apostles practised poverty and it was from this ideal that St. Francis took his model. The question now arose that if the church also acknowledges this, should not the church's hierarchy remain aloof from worldly entanglements? This is a very dangerous premise especially for the papacy and the position of the pope as head of the church with his cardinals who were seen as princes of the church. It also calls into question the wealth of the church and demands accountability. Pope John XXII reaction in 1323 was to condemn the

Franciscans doctrine of poverty. Some of the Franciscans leaders were excommunicated.

PART TWO: ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA

Saint Anthony of Padua was born of noble family in Lisbon, Portugal on 15th August, 1195 and was baptised, Ferdinand. He was the son of Martino de Bouillon and Teresa Tavera. Martino was a descendant of the first Frankish king of Jerusalem, Godfrey de Bouillon. Through Anthony's grandfather's side of the family, Vincenzo de Bouillon, he would have inherited the title of governor of Lisbon. Anthony childhood years were spent in a sumptuous palace quite close to the cathedral in Lisbon. He attended Lisbon's cathedral school during that time.

He entered St. Vincent's priory at Lisbon of Canons Regular of St. Augustine having attained the age of 15. After two years he transferred to the motherhouse of the Order in Coimbra, the Priory of Santa Cruz. Here he would received a very good education. Here it was that religion and letters went hand in hand. Amongst the brothers who were tutors there were:

*"Don John and Don Raymond,
both Doctors of the University of Paris".*
(Stoddard, 1978: 19)

This was a famed school with a reputation for its learning. Here Anthony would study theology, the Church Fathers, history, religious controversy, Sacred Scripture and here he would have available to him the literature of pagan antiquity. Learning came easily to Anthony; his memory was so good that once he had learned a tenet he never forgot it. As a scholar he was devoted to his books, but his studies never interfered with his duties to God in the acts of prayer and worship.

It was to Coimbra that the remains of the first Franciscan martyrs were brought for burial in 1220. Near to Coimbra at Olivares there was a Franciscan Friary dedicated to St. Anthony of the Desert. The brothers practised absolute poverty as Francis had taught them and they would go around the town begging for food. The friars would also seek food from the Augustinian Priory, which is where Anthony first came into contact with the mendicants. When Anthony had heard the story of the martyred friars he was inspired by their example.) There were other reasons for his leaving the Augustinians for he had become:

*“dissolved in ecstasy, saw his soul in its flight
through purgatory, ascending dove-like into the realms of bliss.”*
(Stoddard, 1978: 22)

Anthony was 25 years old when he began to be aware of his vocation as a Franciscan. He requested from his Prior that he should be able to transfer to the Franciscans. Anthony is reported as having said on applying to the Franciscans:

*“With all the ardour of my soul do I desire to take the
holy habit of your Order, and I am ready to do so
upon one condition –
that, after clothing me with the garb of penance,
you send me to the Saracens, so that I also may
deserve to participate in the crown of your holy martyrs.”*
(Stoddard, 1978: 22)

Like St. Francis and in the example of the five martyred friars, Anthony wished to go to the land of Islam to preach the Good News of Christ Crucified. Many years later one Father Charles de Foucauld would burn with the same zeal (see Chapter Four – Part Two).

ANTHONY THE FRANCISCAN

Immediately after receiving the Franciscan habit, in place of his white Augustinian habit, he threw himself with great fervour into the dangers and privations of the friars and set out for Morocco. Here Anthony undertook missionary activities for the conversion of the Muslims in Morocco. Within the year he had become ill and had to return to Portugal together with his faithful companion, Brother Filippo. The pair managed to gain passage on a ship, which floundered in a storm at sea, and instead of Portugal, Anthony found himself on the Island of Sicily at Taormina. From Taormina Anthony and Filippo made their way to Messina where there was a community of Franciscan brothers.

Messina was good for Anthony for it provided him with the much-needed rest in order for him to recover from his illness. In fact he found a new lease of life! It was also at Messina that Anthony learned of the fourth general chapter of the Franciscan Order. Anthony, together with Filippo and a small group of the Sicilian friars decided that they would attend the meeting. Anthony was resolved to place himself at the disposal of St. Francis himself for he felt that by carrying out the holy friar's will, he could do no wrong.

The fourth general chapter was held at the Porziuncula where some two thousand, friars from all over Europe had assembled. Anthony was very much an '*unknown*' among them and in a crowd went unnoticed. He had hoped that he would be given some task that would keep him close to his seraphic father, but none was forth coming. Anthony approached Brother Gratian, Provincial of Romagna, and offered his services, not as a scholar for Anthony had not spoken of his learning, but as a porter, a sweep or someone

working in the kitchens. Brother Gratian perhaps “noticed that he had a breviary . . .” (Ling, 1995: 49) and asked if Anthony was a priest? Anthony replied that he was. Brother Gratian was aware that within his province was a small hermitage on the slopes of the Appennines, a secluded place called Monte Paolo, which is close to Forli. Here there were six lay friars that made up the community. Brother Gratian required a priest for that community thereupon:

*“he was ordered away into the mountains to say Mass
for the recluses in a very little house hidden in a lonely place.”*
(Stoddard, 1978: 28)

Anthony was happy to share the life of the brothers and insisted that he must be allowed to do his share of the ‘household chores’. He also found a small grotto that had been used as a storage place for the brother’s equipment and requested that he may be able to use it for himself. As Francis had once hidden himself away, so would Anthony. Here he grew in spirituality through contemplation and meditation. Here he would write his commentary on the Psalms of David.

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

An ordination of the mendicant friars of the Franciscans and Dominicans was to take place at Forli. The Benedictines had been asked to give the address at the ceremony but had declined the offer. The bishop asked Father Gratian to find him a preacher. Gratian had been aware that there was more to Anthony than he was letting on. As if prompted by the Spirit, Gratian turned to Anthony and requested that he should make the address. Anthony modestly

declined. He felt that he was not experienced enough to preach to such a learned congregation. But Gratian was not going to accept Anthony's excuses and directed him under holy obedience to give the address on the topic Christ's obedience and His Crucifixion.

Somewhat over awed Anthony obeyed his Provincial. Hesitant and quietly he began but soon his voice was filled with the fire of his devotion and with his eye firmly fixed on heaven he spoke as one divinely inspired. The assembled members of the congregation were amazed at his discourse and the skill with which it was delivered. From that point we are told that he "*found himself conspicuous in a life of publicity . .*" (Stoddard, 1978: 35).

Father Gratian immediately gave Anthony the appointment of '*Preacher to the Province of Romagna*'. Not only did St. Francis approve of the appointment, but also having been suitably impressed by the reports that he had received, gave Anthony his blessing to preach anywhere and everywhere whenever the opportunity offered itself.

St. Francis was unaware of Anthony's scholastic background because Anthony in all humility had not made the Order aware of his background. Hence St. Francis sent him to study theology at the Monastery of St. Andrew which was a house of the Augustinian Canons Regular. The very Order in which Anthony had first tried his vocation. At the monastery Anthony would study under Abbot Thomas who was seen as one of the best, if not the greatest living doctor in all Italy. Anthony, together with one or two other fortunate friars would reside at a nearby friary and go to classes at the monastery.

Anthony applied himself to his studies and pleased Abbot Thomas but was equally careful to attend to his duties as a Franciscan. He:

*“preached the Lenten sermons in Milan and other places
near at hand; and that on these occasions his lucid
exposition of the Scriptures astonished and delighted his hearers.”*
(Stoddard, 1978: 38)

Pere Hilaire records for us in the Lucerne manuscript, ‘ST. ANTOINE’ this testimony about Anthony:

*“His soul was like a fair garden fertilized by the showers of divine grace,
where bloomed the sweetest flowers of Heaven,
spreading around their fragrant odour.
These flowers were meekness and humility,
poverty and penance, fervour and zeal, wisdom and prudence.
Beyond all praise were his eloquence, gracefulness of his manners,
his nobility of character, his gentleness and kindness.
. . . . In a word, he was indeed the beloved of God and men”.*

His zeal for souls permitted him no rest. As he travelled, preaching as he went, he would have reached Rimini where the Cathari had a stronghold.

Anthony’s needs were simple for he was a friar of poverty and his austerity brought him to the attention of the Cathari. But even so why should they listen to an agent of the papacy? Like St. Francis, Anthony was never short of a congregation and found a ready assembly amongst some fish. So we are told that he called to the fish saying:

*“Fish of the sea and the river,
listen to the word of the Lord,*

since the heretics refuse to hear it."

(de Serranne, 1998: 14)

The story continues that a large shoal of fish gathered and holding their heads above the water, faced the saintly friar. He told them that they should give thanks to God their Creator for He had provided them with such a bountiful home as the water they lived in. He recalled for them how the Apostle Peter had received his treasury tax from the mouth of one of their number. How they were Jesus' food both before and after His Resurrection. The fish we are told showed their respect towards Anthony to which he proclaimed:

"Blessed be the Eternal God,

behold, the fish of the waters are worshipping him

instead of the men set in their errors.

These creatures devoid of reason listen better to the

divine Word than men devoid of faith!"

(Serrane, 1998: 16/17)

At the sight of such a wonder, the people of Rimini crowded around Anthony and in great penitence sat at his feet. He outlined to them the wonders of the Catholic faith and converted them. He prolonged his stay in Rimini and invited the leaders of the Cathari to come and explain to him their difficulties with the Catholic faith.

His abilities were to have far reaching effects not only for Anthony personally, but also for the Franciscan Order. There were heretical groups causing the church much concern, namely the Cathari in Italy and the Albigensians in the south of France. The secular clergy had become somewhat lax and the religious orders quite wealthy and so the Cathari and the Albigensians took full advantage of both situations to gain converts to their dogma. St. Dominic, whilst he too had been an Augustinian Canon Regular, had been both surprised and shocked by how much ground the heretics had gained in

France whilst he was on a diplomatic mission. This had persuaded him of the need for an Order of Preachers to provide authoritative teaching for the people. But after St. Dominic's demise who was to fill the gap? Yes there were many able preachers within the Dominican Order, but none apparently to take his place as it were. Anthony was to be that person.

From 1224 to 1227 Anthony would become a spearhead against the Albigensian heresy in southern France. God had called him to this service and everything that had gone before was in preparation for this vitally needed work. His mission was to combat the heresies of his time. With great strength of character Anthony rose to the challenge. His education had provided for him well enough to be able to meet the most well read heretic, and to be capable of stating his case in French "*on his own ground and outdo him in argument*" (Ling, 1995: 55).

Thomas Celano says in the '*FIRST LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS*' that Anthony was to tutor the friars in their efforts to combat the heresy and Anthony certainly did tutor the friars at Arles. Anthony was in much demand and equally so employed at Montpellier and Toulouse (de Kerval, 1904: 119). Within a short time of waging his campaign against heresy he became known as '*Anthony, the Hammer of Heretics*'.

WORKER OF WONDERS AND MIRACLES

As with many other stories of saints there are many accounts of miracles that had happened as a direct result of their prayers. I have in this section only related a few by way of illustration.

There are reports that saint Anthony could be seen in two places at the same time, bilocation, for example as at Montpellier. (I shall refer to bilocation again in reference to Padre Pio – see Chapter 7, Part Two.)

Anthony had been requested to preach at the Easter Sunday services in the cathedral of Montpellier when, in the middle of his sermon, he remembered that he had also made a commitment to celebrate Solemn High Mass at a local convent. What was more troubling to him was that he had not made any arrangements for another priest and he felt that this was an act of disobedience. So mortified:

*“he bent down a little over the pulpit
and covered his head with his hood as if he intended to doze off.
At the same instant, he could be seen singing the Alleluia
in the convent chapel.”*
(Serranne 1998: 22/23)

He remained so for sometime and the assembled congregation was somewhat amazed. All of this time he was clearly visible to them. Once he had fulfilled his obligation at the convent chapel he recovered himself in the pulpit and completed his sermon with incomparable eloquence.

There are many-recorded incidences of bilocation in the stories of the lives of saints. For example Martin of Tours; Ambrose of Milan as well as for St. Francis at Arles. (The story relating to St. Francis can also be found in the *‘FIORETTI OF SAINT ANTHONY’* Chapter 8 – The Appendix.)

The city of Toulouse, besides being another Albigensian stronghold, also had an university. Anthony turned his attention towards the city and went to the friary there where he taught theology as well as his preaching commitments.

He was elected at the Provincial Chapter of Narbonne during September 1225, as the Guardian of the friary at Puy-en-Velay. It was during his time here that an expectant mother asked Anthony what would be the sex of her unborn child. After a short period of prayer, he turned to the woman and told her that her baby would be a boy. Then he added that the child would grow up to be a Franciscan and a martyr.

There is a story that has been passed down to us of a bad tempered notary who was annoyed at Anthony for bowing to him when they meet in the streets. The notary felt that Anthony was mocking him. So the notary demanded an explanation from Anthony. Anthony explained that God had revealed to him that the notary would one day be martyred. A fate that he had once hoped but which God had other ideas about. Surely enough, as Anthony had prophesied, the notary was martyred (Stoddard, 1978: 57).

After Anthony had resided in Le Puy for several years the bishop called for a crusade. However at the Synod of Bourges held in the November of 1225 Anthony was in charge of several friaries in the Province. The Synod had drawn senior clerics from all over the region including one Raymond VII, Count of Toulouse. The main item for the agenda of the Synod was to call for a campaign against the Albigensian heresy. Anthony preached at the gathering but his problem was that the presiding bishop, Simon de Sully, was no friend of the Friars Minor. However Anthony knew that the bishop was guilty of many misdeeds and without directly referring to such, aimed his sermon at the bishop. The bishop approached Anthony once the sermon was over in a troubled state, *"repenting in tears, confessing his faults and promising amendment"* (Ling, 1995: 79).

Saint Anthony, like Francis before him, had the gift of peace and brought many that were in dispute back into fellowship with each other. To those who he found to be imprisoned unjustly, he would fight for their liberation. St.

Anthony would return to the rightful owner all that he found that had been taken from them through usury or violence. The impact of his teaching was such that many:

*“having mortgaged houses and fields,
placed the money at the feet of Anthony, and,
with his advice,
restored them to those whom they had cheated
through extortion and bribery”.*

(Robson, 1997: 236)

After his death the zealous enthusiasm for the saint put an end to hatred amongst old enemies.

One famous story about Anthony is about how the Cathari invited him to dine but they had also poisoned his food. Anthony received a divine premonition that all was not well and reprimanded his hosts for their evil intentions. They responded by stating that Christ had once promised that should His followers eat or drink any deadly things, they would not be harmed. If he was truly a follower of Christ and believed the Gospel that he preached then he had nothing to fear. So Ling (1995: 60) goes on to say that he made:

*“sign of the Cross over the dish,
Anthony began to eat
As the hours went by without his showing
any symptoms of poisoning, the threat of death receded,
much to his relief and the frustration of his enemies.”*

Those who witnessed the miracle were once more counted as amongst the faithful of the Catholic Church.

(For an in depth account of Saint Anthony's life before 1225 see both,
A. Callebaut, *‘SAINT ANTOINE DE PADOUE: RECHERCHES SUR LES
TRENTÉ PREMIÈRES ANNÉES’* [A.F.H., 1931] and

D.G. Benvenuti, *'LA CRONOLOGIA DELLA VITA DI SANT' ANTONIO'*
[Assisi, 1931].)

After which he returned to northern Italy. Over the next four years Anthony enjoyed extraordinary success as a preacher. His sermons reveal, according to the *'ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CATHOLICISM'* (1995: 64), *"a profound knowledge of Scripture, often focused on social problems."*

Anthony became the leader of the Franciscan Order in the northern province of Italy. He became one of the first theologians of the Order. Pope Gregory IX commissioned Anthony to produce a series of sermons for feast days. Anthony died at the age of 36 in 1231 and was canonized one year later in 1232.

He was both a preacher and a teacher. A charismatic figure that had the ability to draw large crowds would come to listen to his preaching in the open air because no church was large enough to accommodate them. They listened intently to his attacks on the two great enemies of the poor, usury and avarice. His gentleness of demeanour was a living witness to all that came to hear his message. He practised what he preached, and the crowds love him for it.

ANTHONY'S LAST DAYS

Anthony was at home in Padua. He loved it and its people as much as St. Francis loved Assisi. When he first arrived in the town he found it to be a sensual and sensuous place. The town's folk lived a dissolute life, which Anthony fearlessly attacked and called upon them to repent of their ways and

turn to Christ. If he appeared strict with the populace, then those in office came under his close scrutiny for Anthony believed that those in public office ought to set an example for those who they thought were responsible. He had no time for petty political squabbles. Anthony was gentle in his firmness and he patiently argued his case so convincingly that they listen to him. Woe betide those who did not!

Anthony's message was one of peace and he practised his message. If there were disagreements between families, Anthony would be the arbiter. His war was not one of human making, for his war was a holy war against the evils of this world and, like St. Francis, by the grace of God he was triumphant. Day and night we are told that Anthony would be "*in the pulpit or the confessional, or by the bedside of the sick and dying*" (Stoddard, 1978: 80/81). He was devoted to the people and paid little heed to his own physical needs. (For a contemporary comparison see Chapter 7 Part Two, Padre Pio.)

It was in Padua that St. Anthony would face his final trial, to leave his beloved people behind as he prepared to face his Maker. Anthony had become aware that his death was soon to take place. He wanted to ascend a nearby hill that overlooked the city, and as St. Francis had blessed his beloved Assisi, so Anthony would bless Padua.

Whilst upon the hill Anthony had made a small retreat where he could quietly contemplate (compare with St. Francis on Mount Verna) and there he was attended by Brother Luke Belludi and Brother Roger who would also keep watch with him. Anthony's waking hours was spent in prayer and contemplation. The accounts of St. Anthony's last hours states that he:

"spoke not, nor was he ever known to smile:

he was absorbed in preparation for his final flight".

(Stoddard, 1978: 84)

Such was his austerity that he collapsed from lack of food. Brother Luke and Brother Roger seeing him and not realising his medical state thought that he was in ecstasy. However once they saw the shadow of death in his face they realised at once that all was not well and hastened to help their spiritual father. Upon recovery and noting the concern on the brothers' faces, Anthony elected to be taken to the friary at Padua where he might die peacefully and in the company of his brothers.

Anthony was so weak that he was unable to make the journey unaided so the brothers requested a local peasant that he would transport Anthony in his cart. Even so the journey was tortuous for Anthony and when the party reached Arcella, Anthony needed to rest. Brother Innoto seeing the friars approaching went out to greet them. Brother Innoto had by then realized how serious Anthony's condition was and *"begged him to allow himself to be taken to the Minor's house at Arcella"* (Purcell, 1960: 199).

The friars stayed at the friary that adjoined the Poor Clares Convent. Here lived four friars who were chaplains to the nuns. It was with them that Anthony and his faithful companions would find their lodgings.

Not long after his arrival at the Poor Clares convent Anthony became aware that death was approaching fast. He made his last confession and receiving Extreme Unction, Anthony together with the other friars, recited penitential psalms and said prayers for the dying, after which he was given Absolution. He, like St. Francis before him, became filled with great joy and sang in a loud clear voice to the amazement of the others, his favourite hymn, *'O gloriosa Domina'*.

Anthony stared fixed heavenwards as though he could already see the heavenly host. His companions became unsettled and Brother Roger supported the saint in his arms and asked Anthony what was it that he could see. He replied still held in rapture that he could see God. This spiritual state continued for about half an hour after which he fell asleep from which Anthony did not wake.

As in life Anthony continued to perform many works of wonder. Immediately after his death there is an account of how:

*“Anthony of Padua appeared to his friend,
the celebrated Thomas Gallus, abbot of Vercelli”.*

(Robson, 1997: 56)

Don Thomas had been sitting by himself in his room. Anthony spoke to his former teacher saying:

*“See, Father Abbot,
I have left my burden near the gates of Padua,
and am hastening to mine own country”.*

(Stoddard, 1978: 86)

A severe throat problem had troubled Don Thomas and after Anthony had spoken to him, stroked Don Thomas throat. From that point the Abbot was cured and Anthony disappeared from view.

Don Thomas had been startled by these events and went into the corridor to see if Anthony should be there. But those waiting there assured the Abbot that they had not seen Anthony. The Abbot then knew that Anthony had gone to his heavenly reward.

The Church at this time had, what may be felt by the Church of today, an unhealthy desire to obtain either the body of a saint or at least some part of a saint's body. These would be installed in a church where they would attract pilgrims who would wish to pay their respects and request that the saint would intercede on their behalf for a specific problem. Usually a request for healing. This said it is not surprising that the Church tried to keep Anthony's demise a secret. Anthony had wished to return to Padua but like his spiritual father, Francis that was not to be the case. Like St. Francis a huge argument arose as to who had the right to bury Anthony. As he had died at the convent of the Poor Clares, they staked their claim that it was they who should inter him at Acrella. The Friars Minor at Santa Maria Friary in Padua said that Anthony could not be enshrined at Acrella for Padua was Anthony's desired final resting place. So the mortal remains of Anthony became the subject of a messy dispute which was finally settled by the Bishop who ruled in favour of the Santa Maria Friary in Padua. It had emerged, or at least so we are told that:

"Anthony had bound a companion to ensure that he was buried in the friary at Padua".

(Robson, 1997: 252)

I cannot see any immediate reason for this not to be the case. As St. Francis had desired to be buried in Assisi, then Anthony as a dutiful son of Francis would be inclined to follow his master's example by being buried in the city that had meant so much to him, namely Padua.

On 18th June, 1231, five days of Anthony's death, his body was with all due reverence taken to Padua. After the customary rites of the church, Anthony's body was laid in a marble sarcophagus supported by four columns. From this shrine has emerged a deluge of claims of miraculous healings. The blind have had their sight restored, the deaf found that they could hear the lame could walk and the sick had recovered from their maladies.

Perhaps one of the most strangest events to occur is in relation to Anthony's own deceased body. His life had taken its toll. He was wasted and haggard and his skin was like parchment. But those who saw his remains after death say that he had been fully restored to the flower of youth. He wore the innocent smile of a child and the beautiful fragrance of a dew-drenched rose lingered about his remains!

It may seem strange that a 13th century saint such as Anthony is still as popular today as he was then and together with that popularity that the faith continues to spread. There are many other saints. Some from when the church first came into being, for example Saint Stephen (Acts 7:54 ff.). More recent examples are Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Mother Theresa of Calcutta all of whom have their followers and all of whom are known in particular areas of life. Yet Anthony of Padua is known all over the world. The question is why? Perhaps the reasoning behind his popularity could be summed up as this:

*"first reason of his popularity in life must be
found in his identification with the men of his time".*

(Purcell, 1960: 211)

Those people loved Anthony not because he was a great theological scholar or because that his learning could put the heretic on the spot, but simply because Anthony was a man who preached the Gospel – nothing more than that. He preached the Gospel in a way and with words that they could understand and with such conviction that the most learned of men were charmed by him.

In the 21st century we live in the '*Age of the People*'. There are many false prophets, gurus and teachers about all of who will offer the illusion of riches and material ease if we would but follow them. That man "*does not live by bread alone . . .*" (Matthew 4:4 – New Revised Standard Version) is an anathema to them and something that they scoff at. Yet Anthony was a man who dedicated his life to the establishment and spread of truth. In today's world what the people need and require from a saint is both truth and holiness. The contemporaries of Saint Anthony found in him the fulfilment of both of those qualities. He was indeed a holy man.

*"He not only preached truth but he was
himself sincere and true".*

(Purcell, 1960: 214)

This is the reason why Anthony is still able to influence the lives of those who walk this earth nearly 800 years after his death.

CHAPTER FOUR:

MISSION AND THE COMBAT OF HERESY

A MATTER OF PROBITY

On the feast of St. Matthias, 24th February 1208, Francis attended Mass at the chapel where the Gospel reading was taken from the Gospel of Matthew. He felt the message was directed towards him. Francis knew with complete confidence that was the way he must take:

*"As you go, proclaim the good news,
'The kingdom of Heaven has come near'.
Cure the sick, raise the dead,
cleanse lepers, cast out demons.
You received without payment;
give without payment.
Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts,
no bag for your journey,
or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff;
for labourers deserve their food".*
(Matthew 10:7-10, New Revised Standard Version.)

Pietro Bernardone was very angry with his son, Francis, because the saint had interpreted the Gospel to mean that possessions should be distributed to the poor by way of alms. Leaving home St. Francis wore a ragged cloak and a rope-belt which he had taken from a scarecrow. He begged from those who were wealthy, shared with the poor his meagre collection and preached to them the Gospel of Christ. The people were attracted by St. Francis' charm, humble and kindly character. However Francis was quite capable of being firm and uncompromising especially in his reaction to the developing tendency towards heresy which threatened the spiritual health of the church of his day.

Saint Francis was becoming evermore aware of the need to '*repair God's church*' in its fullest meaning. By 1213 Francis was convinced that God wanted him to be an evangelist, to reawaken the faith of those Christians who had strayed from the path that would lead to God through Christ.

MISSION

Where and with whom did the Christian missionary movement begin? With some justification we may say Jesus Himself for He sent His disciples out in two by two to proclaim the Good News (Mark 6:7). This zeal for preaching to the populace was cemented at Pentecost (Acts 2:1 ff.). Jesus of Nazareth had given that promise to His followers when He said that they would receive power from the most high (Luke 24:49) to become His witnesses throughout the land. Pentecost's saw three thousand new converts (Acts 2:41) for the early Church. With that event Christians are aptly reminded that mission is all about forgiveness of sins, of salvation and the increase of the body of Christ, His church.

St. Francis had a burning zeal to preach Christ Crucified to all who would listen and receive the message of the Good News. He had been led to his vocation by a series of events not least of which that he had been struck down with a fever upon returning home from his military involvement. We are not told exactly what the nature of his fever was. For fever was a '*cover all*' term used to name a multitude of diseases. It was this period of illness that had provided Francis with time to reflect.

It is strange how we react to illness. Some people see it as purely a medical problem with no further thought and nothing to be gained from it. There are others who see it as the work of the devil or evil forces at large. Then there are those who will even see it as a divine judgement for past sins. Not least

of these explanations has been, if there was a God, why should He allow such to happen? As a person who has suffered from a very serious illness, and continues to suffer, I have had all these explanation given to me. However I have always firmly believed that a loving Father would never ever visit upon His children such terrible sufferings. I have also firmly rejected the atheist proposition. God, I believe, continues to act in His world and uses events, situations and experiences to bring about our greater good. This was the case for St. Francis.

Further to this argument we also have an interesting parallel to St. Francis' situation and experiences with one St. Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius would walk this world some three hundred years after St. Francis. Ignatius was born in 1491 in northern Spain and died in Rome in 1556. He too had been born into a wealthy family. He too had sought adventure and fame with a military career and he too would suffer from war wounds and would require time to heal. It was during this confinement that Ignatius had requested if he might be given some literature to read. But there was no secular literature available and the only book that was available was:

*"a volume of the lives of the saints
and it was through meditating on those
that Ignatius was led to a change of life".*
(Reynolds, 1983: 10/11)

Ignatius went on to found a very influential religious order – the Jesuits – that would be very much involved in missionary work.

Francis saw in Jesus the centrality of Christian spirituality. New Testament teachings show that Jesus is the **way** to God for the Christian, for example:

*"Jesus answered him,
'I am the way, the truth, and the life;
no one goes to the Father except by me' ".
(John 14:6, Good News Bible)*

Conversely God's way to the Christian is also through His Son. Christians are Jesus disciples and He leads them to God. St. Francis delighted in the simplicity of Jesus' life, in His care for those afflicted with leprosy and other illnesses especially where those diseases had led to the sufferer becoming an outcast from the community in which they had lived. Francis desired to follow the *'naked Christ'*.

For the Christian Christ is the Son of God, God made man (John 1:1-4). The New Testament emphasizes a positive, world-affirming discipleship. The Christian cannot escape from time, earth and history any more than could Jesus of Nazareth whom they seek to emulate. Christians feel called to encounter the world as a witness to Christ and to be Christian affects every aspect, no matter how small, of the follower's life.

The Franciscans missionary pursuits added a challenging chapter towards their work. Francis felt very drawn to witness for Christ in the lands of Islam. It is strange how *'coincidences'* keep reoccurring when God's plan is being worked out. For at the time Francis felt this to be his desire and it was also the time of the Crusades. The Muslim peoples were created in God's image just as the Christians. To destroy the image of God is blasphemous and therefore Francis could never agree with the wholesale extermination, *'ethnic cleansing'* as we would understand it today, of the Muslims. No, for Francis they were to be converted to Christ and brought within the family of God. Perhaps to some Francis' efforts seemed foolish. But then he was God's fool.

There is some evidence to suggest that there is:

*“reason to believe that in the first half of the year 1212
Francis visited Rome once more to obtain the
Approval of Innocent III for his new missionary enterprises”.*
(Arnold and Fry, 1988: 54)

Remembering that he had pledged obedience to the Pope when the early *Rule* had been presented and accepted, and that he was a faithful son of the Catholic Church, there is justification to accept the trip as genuine.

St. Francis Assisi made three missionary trips to the Muslim world. But in each journey Francis was thwarted by misfortune. Francis left Tuscany for the Holy Land during late 1212. Ships in those days were reliant upon prevailing winds and sails as a means of power. Unfortunately the winds were against Francis and the ship was driven on to the Adriatic shores of Yugoslavia. From there he managed to obtain passage back to Italy.

In 1213 he travelled across land to Spain. During that particular time the more southerly provinces had been colonised by the Muslims. Whilst in Spain Francis endeavoured to preach his way southwards. His companion on this missionary venture was Bernard da Quintavalle. Having reached the southern shores of Spain Francis intended to find a passage to Morocco where he had planned to preach the Gospel to the sultan, Muhammad ibn Nasr. This attempt also was thwarted, though not as a result of unfavourable winds, but because of illness. So once again Francis was obliged to return to his native Italy. There are several friaries in Spain each of which claims that Saint Francis himself had founded their religious house. Equally the Spanish have a tradition that states that Saint Francis made a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella to visit the tomb of the Apostle. Whilst there is no firm

evidence for or against this tradition, Santiago de Compostella has had a long history of attracting pilgrims even to this day, and knowing Saint Francis it is conceivable that he would make a pilgrimage whilst in Spain to the tomb of Saint James.

We know from the accounts of St. Francis' life that it was from the friars' Pentecost Chapter of 1224 that he sent a mission to England (Reynolds, 1983: 38). Amongst those missionary brothers was Angellus of Pisa who had been amongst the first to join the Franciscan Company at the Porziuncola. Angellus entered the order at the same time as Albert, a future Minister-General to the Order and Elias of Assisi who would later cause Francis some problems with his revisions of the *Rule*.

After five years in 1219 St. Francis journeyed to the Middle East with the purpose of converting the Sultan of Egypt to Christ. Francis set sail from the port of Ancona together with twelve other brothers from the Order bound for Acre. Little is known of this adventure. We know that the evangelising party left Acona in June and probably reached Acre, Syria by the midsummer. The island of Cyprus was a stronghold of the crusading knights held by the Order of Saint John. The ship would have needed to dock for supplies and Cyprus would have been a safe haven for that call. In what is today a country with a strong Greek Orthodox culture, there still remains a Franciscan presence. For example there are Franciscan Friaries at Limasol and Nicosia (Dove, 1997: 72/73). Arriving in Syria Francis together with Illuminato travelled towards Egypt journeying through the Crusader held states. But this attempt was also to be unsuccessful, but in a very different way.

Francis would also send his friars to Spain, Hungary as well as to the East. To accomplish their missionary work the friars needed to study foreign languages so that they could at least communicate with the people. A product of this activity led to the establishing of new friaries in North Africa, the Middle East and in Eastern Europe.

As the friars embarked upon their missionary activities, friaries began to be established in France, Spain and Portugal. However they met with rather less success in Germany, Hungary and the neighbouring countries. This was partly because they did not know the language and partly because they had no credentials. *'THE LEGEND OF THE THREE COMPANIONS'* (XVI) provides this account for us, that they:

"were expelled in the fear that they might prove to be infidels, for that, albeit the said Lord Innocent III had sanctioned their Order, and Rule, yet had he not confirmed it by his letters, for which reason the brethren endured many trials from clerics and laymen. Wherefore the brethren were compelled to flee from diverse provinces, and thus straitened and afflicted, sometimes even robbed and beaten by thieves, they returned with great bitterness of spirit unto the Blessed Francis."

CRUSADES

Saint Francis' evangelistic energies had up until this time been spend in Italy. However in July 1212 the Spanish enjoyed a great victory against the Moors in Las Navas di Tolosa. Such stories no doubt fired Francis' missionary zeal to spread the faith to Islam. Pope Innocent III spoke forcefully for a Crusade against the Muslim infidels at the Lateran Council. Francis was the first to respond. As ever he burned with zeal to win souls for Christ. Such was his keenness that he

*"did not wait for any organized Crusade;
he decided to go to Syria."*

*When he had made up his mind to go anywhere,
he just went;
there were no detailed preparations”.*
(Reynolds, 1983: 49)

During this period he left Peter Catanii as his deputy. We know exactly what Francis had in mind, it was not the sword but the word of God.

They had set sail from Ancona but a storm broke out and the sailors were obliged to seek safe haven in Dalmatia. Francis had no prospects of ever gaining passage on another ship bound for Syria. Penniless, the two holy friars were smuggled on board a ship by sympathetic sailors and returned home to Italy.

The Fourth Crusade had been a total failure and so once again Pope Honorius appealed for another Crusade. The Pope was also urging the Church to reform itself for he was concerned about the threats posed to the Church from existing heresies such as the Cathari (or Albigensians) and the Waldensians.

Francis set off with Brothers Masseo, Peter Catanii, Illuminato and a few others, on foot for Ancona where they arranged for a ship to take them to their desired destination. During his absence, Francis had appointed two Vicar Generals to over see the Order. Brother Matthew of Narni (who remained at the Porziuncola) and Brother Gregory of Naples (who was to be itinerant). Their journey was to take them via Cyprus to Acre and from there onto Egypt.

During the holy war between the Crusaders and the Saracens of Egypt,
Francis felt called to the role of peacemaker and in 1219 he set off east to test

that call. There is a contemporary account relayed by a crusader about St. Francis:

"He is so loveable that he is venerated by every one.

Having come into our army,

he had not been afraid in his zeal for the faith to go to that of our enemies.

For days together he announced the word of God to the Saracens,

but with little success".

(Brother Kenneth, 1981: 130)

The Crusaders were encamped along the walls of Damietta. From August 1219 to February 1220, Francis and his companion Brother Illuminato stayed with the Crusaders to whom they also preached the Gospel of Christ. He was deeply shocked at the behaviour and the morals of so-called '*soldiers of Christ*'. His theme as ever was one of repentance for sins committed together with amendment of life. In Chapter Two, 'Saint Francis the Soldier', page 7, the name of Walter de Brienne and his influence came into the young Francis' life. How Francis had desired to serve with Walter at Spoleto. By strange coincidence Walter de Brienne's brother, John, was king of Jerusalem during Francis stay in the Holy Land. Once again Francis would be '*at war*' but this time he was a soldier of salvation, bringing the Good News for those with ears to hear, for this time he was a '*chaplain*' not a knight!

Francis was appalled by what he witnessed. The Cross of Christ, the very symbol that was to bring hope, love of neighbour, compassion and understanding was being used to bring death and destruction. Both Crusader and Moslem in the name of God were committing atrocities. The same God which ought to have made all men brothers! August 24th, 1220 the Crusaders were preparing to make their final assault on Damietta. Saint Francis pleaded

with the Crusader's commander not to go ahead with this sortie for he feared the worst. His pleadings went unheeded and as a result the Crusaders were slaughtered and the Muslim victors were offering gold in the market place for Christian slaves.

After reinforcements arrived the tables were to be turned. This time it was the Christian knights, who massacred the men, raped the women and sold the children into slavery. The Muslim troops under the command of Malik el-Kamil had no alternative but to retreat backward sixty miles, in a southerly direction. Malik el-Kamil then sent an order offering gold for every Christian head brought to him. It was under these very dangerous conditions when Saint Francis felt called to preach the Gospel to the Sultan and begged permission from Cardinal Pelagius to be able to do so.

Francis, this little figure of harmlessness clothed in rags and in total trust in God's protection, together with Brother Illuminato crossed through the lines singing at the top of his voice. Immediately they were captured and it is surprising that they were not killed on sight. The Sultan's soldiers probably thought that these two bare-footed Christian souls were insane, and therefore according to the traditions of Islam, should not be harmed. Francis shouted as loudly as he could that he wanted to see the Sultan. The soldiers wondered whether they were emissaries with a message of peace. Perhaps they were right, but the peace he offered was not quite what they had expected! They were taken to Sultan al-Kamil whom far from being some kind of savage barbarian; he was an intelligent and a man of high breeding. Islam views Christians as one of the peoples of the Book and thereby Sultan al-Kamil was happy to listen to what Francis had to say.

Having gained his audience, the Sultan enquired of Francis if he desired to convert to Islam. This offer Francis soundly rejected and offered instead to show the way of salvation to the Sultan. The Sultan listened courteously to Francis as he outlined the teachings of Christ. Then the Sultan and Francis spoke of God in a long discussion as well as of Jesus of Nazareth. The Qur-an teaches that Jesus was a prophet of God. Then Francis offered a trial by ordeal as a test of faith. The Sultan's esteemed mullahs and he would walk through fire; the one who completes the walk has the true faith. The Sultan, however, was afraid that he would not find the mullahs to accept the challenge. So he declined, but Francis insisted and said that he alone would walk through the flames and thereby give a clear demonstration that his claims for Christ were true. This was also declined by the Sultan who by this time had become most impressed by the little ragged man from Assisi. The Sultan wished to bestow upon Francis many valuable gifts, which Francis in his desire to follow his '*Lady Poverty*' could not accept. Francis and Illuminato were escorted back to the Christian lines.

Perhaps the most valuable gift St. Francis received from the Sultan was the special permission needed from him to visit the Holy Land. Francis was able through the generosity of the Sultan to visit the Grotto at Bethlehem as well as the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (Arnold and Fry, 1988: 56).

Francis returned home to Italy in the autumn of 1220 though by now Francis:

" . . was a sick man.

*He had contracted conjunctivitis and
probably suffered from Malaria and
there were intestinal disorders".*

(Reynolds, 1983: 75)

Regrettably neither Christian, Moslem nor Jew have learned very much from this period in the earth's history. The events in Kosovo or Bosnia are just recent examples of conflicts between the peoples of Islam and Christianity. Serbian Orthodox Christians have been found guilty by the world of mass genocide of their Muslim brothers and sisters. In Lebanon the Mullahs proclaim war against the Jewish people inciting their followers to eliminate all Jews. Yet Islam, Judaism and Christianity proclaim and pray to the One God, albeit from slightly different traditions. Jesus taught His followers to love their neighbour (Luke 6:27-36). Scott argues that (*'OTHER FAITHS: ISLAM – AN EXPLANATION OF MUHAMMAD'S ROLE IN THE EARLY DAYS OF ISLAM AND WHAT THIS MEANS FOR MUSLIMS TODAY'*, A Paper submitted to Westminster College, Oxford, 1993) when Muhammad laid down the foundations for a nascent state and religion in Madina:

*"he established a kind of 'bill of rights' as well as obligations for all people, Muslims, Jews and others.
Muhammad appealed for a transformation of a person's character.
He granted religious freedom to all individuals."*

The Qur-an states this obligation on the Islamic world quite clearly:

*"Let there be no compulsion in religion.
Truth stands out clear from error. ."*
(Qur-an 2:256)

Muhammad believed that compulsion was incompatible with religion because:

1. Religion depends upon the free will and faith of individuals.
2. Truth and error can be clearly seen and it demonstrate Allah's mercy so that there could be no doubt in the mind of man;

3. As Allah's protection is continuous, Allah is able to lead man from darkness into light.

Regrettably even this teaching has not prevented Muslims from killing those who come from a different tradition and adhere to a different faith.

(For further information on this particular point see Akbar S. Ahmed, *'DISCOVERING ISLAM'*, Routledge, 1988.)

To some of us Francis' actions in crossing the boundary into the enemy's stronghold can seem like naivety at best or an act of sheer madness. Francis was God's fool and the Beatitudes given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount does proclaim that:

*"Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called the sons of God".*
(Matthew 5:9, New International Version)

Francis brought the message of the love of Christ and sought in every way to bring the peace of Christ. Francis' behaviour was therefore in total obedience to the Scriptures and probably the most rational action taken during the whole campaign by either side. His example of taking the Gospel to Islam in poverty and humility rather than by sword and killing would be used again by another little man wearing simple clothing, Father Charles de Foucauld. His example inspired others and led to the founding of the Little Brothers of Jesus. I shall come back to Father Charles and his experiences with the Arabs in Part Two of this chapter. For Saint Francis the Crusades were an opportunity to spread the Good News, nothing more and nothing less.

St. Francis found that certain innovations had been introduced into his little community of brothers, bringing it closer to the old-established monastic foundations. Cardinal Ugolini, a friend and patron, and the Roman Court had urged such changes. St. Francis seems to have consented against his better judgement, and in September 1220, Francis laid down his office as the brother's superior. His last years were spent in protest. Almost everything that was done in the Order after 1221 was done without consultation with its founder or against his wishes.

To understand the church's position on authority, a view which St. Francis of Assisi was passionate about, one needs to know something about the background to this question. This particular section intends to give a brief explanation about the problems of probity for the church. The church down through the ages has always been challenged sometimes quite rightly, however, at other times by those who would seek to mislead the faithful. It was particular by this point that had determined the saint to preach the true Gospel. For St. Francis had also taken to heart (Reynolds, 1983: 21) a verse from the Matthew's Gospels 10:7:

*"And as you go,
proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand".*
(The New Jerusalem Bible)

He preached the simple message, based upon the Gospels, and that was of repentance.

From this point it was only one short step to realize that there were a large number of people, who had never heard the Gospel, and who did not even know of Jesus and His sacrifice on the Cross.

THE PROBLEM OF HERESY

This part of the dissertation attempts to explore Heresy and the problems caused by heresy. From the very beginning of the Early Church's development, the fathers of the faith were faced with views that did not express adequately the nature of true Christian belief. The problem had arisen because of a system of beliefs held by the Docetists who proclaimed that Jesus appeared to be a man and that He was really God masquerading as human. This view can be a tempting way of explaining the problem faced by the Christian faith relating to the nature of Christ. The problem is that this view, and other heresies, do reappear and gain attention of Christians throughout the church's history. The Church continually needs to assert strongly that Jesus of Nazareth was both God and man.

In the thirteenth century the problem facing the church was not a lack of vocations but a lack of committed and dedicated clergymen. There were large numbers of learned clerics who were lured away, or even pressed into service dealing with such matters as the law. Other clerics came from noble families or the rich classes and despite being charged with a number of parishes in their pastoral care, they were very rarely seen serving the needs of the local populace. Those clergymen who did live in the parishes were often ill educated and sometime idle (Moorman, 1977: 47). Religious orders attracted still other men to join their ranks but because of their cloistered life, they were inaccessible to the people. These were the problems of the church in St. Francis of Assisi's life time and of which Moorman claims in '*RICHEST OF POOR MEN – THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI*' that he knew the need of reform and renewal:

"as were any of the heretics. He knew that people

wanted to hear the Word of God, and that the poor

were often neglected. But never for one moment

did he think of setting up something which would want to act against the authority of the Church”.

To Francis the Church was everything for the Church was God's instrument to carry out His work. Thereby no good work could be carried out without it. He told the Friars Minor to work collaboratively with the priests. Francis firmly believed that the Franciscans were sent to assist the clergy in their mission to save souls.

However a number of sects did arise out of the situation to fill the needs of the people. These sects took a different line to that of St. Francis. Amongst these sects were groups such as the Cathari (Albigensians) and the Waldenses. The Cathari took root and spread through their intolerant missionary activity throughout Italy, particularly in the northern regions of Italy. For example the Cathari (also known as the Patarines in that region) had a large community in Romagna (Robson, 1997: 171). Robson states that from the last quarter of the twelfth century onwards they attracted the presence of:

“notable personalities within its communities favoured a penchant for controversy and doctrinal discussion. Cathars became famed for their skills in argument, however much their Catholic opponents derided the folly and illogical nature of their beliefs.”
(Robson, 1997: 170)

To bring to a standstill the flow of Catholics who were leaving their churches the friars would need all their skills to proclaim the Gospel faithfully and explain the Church's teachings all of which would need to be backed up by their adherence to a lifestyle of evangelical perfection. This would not be an easy mission for them. They would be engaged in debating issues with people that were thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures and who knew all to well the problems of the Church.

These sects were very quite rightly critical of the Church in her neglect of her children. They went further and proclaimed that the Church was beyond hope and cut themselves off from the Church. They told people not to listen or obey the bishops and the priests. People should not pay their tithes, attend services or receive the sacraments. They said that when people complied with the Church they were being misled and were acting contrary to the Will of God and thereby their actions were not in keeping with the teachings of the Gospels.

During the early days of the Franciscan Order, Saint Francis and his friars were being compared to Peter of Waldo (Valdes of Lyon) and the Waldensians. Waldo was a wealthy and successful merchant and banker. Ten years before the birth of Francis, Peter Waldo in 1170 founded the Poor Men of Lyons. After his conversion in 1173 to the apostolic life as depicted in the Gospels, Waldo, like Saint Francis, gave away all his wealth to the poor and took up the life of a beggar and preacher. Those who followed this group's teachings were known as Waldensians. This group preached privately in the streets. However when he and his followers approached Pope

Alexander III in 1179 for recognition, the Pope:

“urged these Poor Men of Lyons to be obedient to the local bishop and priests and would not grant them permission to preach in public”.

(McBrien, 1995: 1322)

Alexander's decision was apparently based on the ground that the Waldensians were laymen and could not therefore *“legitimately preach the Gospel”* (Smith, 1996: 1129). The Waldensians nevertheless continued to preach in southern France and Italy and gained many followers. The Waldensians lived secular lives, married, and earned their living through their trade or skill. However they refused to take oaths as well as bearing arms.

In 1184 they were proclaimed as heretics and subjected to persecution, which only resulted in the Waldensians redoubling their efforts and becoming very critical of the Roman Catholic Church, accusing the Church of apostasy. The Waldensians were not the only lay group to have sprung up for there were others who shared their ideals, many of whom had lapsed into heresy. In fact such movements:

“were expressions of a recurrent theme in the history of the Church – ‘back to the Early Church’, and ‘back to the Gospels’. The Fratres Minores were another example of this periodic longing for a return to a simpler form of religion away from the elaborate ecclesiastical institution”.

(Reynolds, 1983: 41)

Interestingly enough there are still communities of Waldensians to this day.

Another such group was the Humiliati. They too promoted poverty as a way of life, serving the poor and the imitation of Jesus. The Humiliate could be priests, or married men and women who lived as families. Sometimes the individuals could be single, and earned their livelihood through humble employment and wore simple, undyed clothing. They would not consider earning their living or being employed in the business of lending money in return for large interest returns. This they felt to be immoral. The Humiliati were situated mainly around northern Italy.

One of the developments with the Humiliati was that some priests and some of the single laity came to together to live as a community (compare with page 34 of this dissertation – Ministry and the Third Order). By 1201 Pope Innocent III:

*“organized the Humiliati into three ‘orders’
(clergy, laity, and married ‘tertiaries’) and
allowed them to preach morality in public,
although not doctrine.”*
(Edwards, 1997: 227)

But the Humiliati grew to be rich and lax. One of its better-known adherents was Charles Borromeo who endeavoured to reform the group and recapture its original vision to lead the Gospel life. Charles was assaulted in 1571 and the movement was then suppressed.

The Cathari were another group who caused problems for the Church. This group’s belief was called the Albigensian Heresy after the town of Albi where most of the followers lived. The name Cathari is taken from a Greek word that means pure. There is a school of thought (Cristiani et. al.) that suggests that

the Albigensian heresy can be traced back to Manicheism. Mani came from Babylonia and belonged to a sect called the '*Encratite*'. These people felt themselves to be '*the pure*' ones, hence their white clothing. Mani believed himself to be called to be a prophet and his:

"teaching rests on a conception of uninterrupted divine prophecy".

(Cristiani, 1959: 62)

Mani identified himself with the Paraclete in such a position, therefore, that placed him beyond the reach of accepted Christian teaching. Manicheism is a mixture of Parseeism, Buddhism, Babylonian neturist and Christian Apocryphal Prophecy.

Mani's teaching was quite simple. There were two powerful entities, God and Satan. God creates man good, but Satan entices man into the state of evil. It was this dualism within the individual human being that presents the eternal conflict between the Spirit (good) and the flesh (evil). Jesus took human form (Docetism), so argues Mani, in order that mankind could be saved. Jesus is the Prince of Light but Satan is the Prince of Darkness. Jesus liberates the particles of light from within the person from the realms of Darkness in the body. It is true to say that not everyone shares the same level of light liberation.

The Cathari followed the practice of the three seals:

- Of the Mouth – abstinence from wine, meat and impure conversation;
- Of the Hand – avoidance of servile work; &
- Of the Belly – absolute continence.

The followers practised strict asceticism, so much so that their neighbours could not help but to take notice of their devoutness. There were two main groups of devotees: the '*perfects*' and the '*believers*'. The perfects did not marry for to marry would remind them of their mortality and thus place a barrier between them and that, which was spiritual.

As Manicheism developed it became anti-cleric, anarchic, anti-militaristic and communist. They refused to take oaths, enter into military service and once the '*perfects*' had become gravely ill, they would kill themselves by slitting their wrists, ingesting poison, or by starvation. They feared that if they became cured they would be separated from their regeneration.

The '*believers*' were a lower form of disciple and their sole commitment was the adoration of the '*perfects*' by providing for their needs, e.g. food. However should they too become extremely ill, they were also expected to practice euthanasia.

We should not therefore be surprised that people could be, and can be, confused and led astray. The Catholic Church was most concerned by the growth of such sects and it must be said, still is. Pope Innocent III sent a letter to each of his prelates on 19th November, 1206 with the following instruction:

*“ . . .to choose men of proved virtue . . .
Modelling themselves on the poverty of Christ,
and poorly clad, they are to seek out the
heretics and try, with God's grace,
to snatch them from error”.*
(Cristiani, 1959: 64)

St. Francis responded to the Innocent's request by sending St. Anthony of Padua (1224 – 1227) to spearhead his campaign against the Albigensian heresy in South France. St. Francis and St. Anthony of Padua both encountered heretics and both engaged in debate with them. Their approach was different for St. Francis in Umbria used simple exhortation, whereas in northern Italy St. Anthony used apologetics. It was St. Anthony's effectiveness in proclaiming the Gospel message that had brought him to the attention of St Francis in the first place. St. Anthony had greatly benefited from his education from his earlier days with the Canons Regular of St. Augustine in Lisbon and Coimbra. Now St. Francis wanted his friars to have a similar advantage, so he asked St. Anthony to instruct the Friars Minor in theology.

Saint Francis' evangelistic zeal, his missionary outreach and his desire to have a religious input to the Crusades amounted to one thing, to preach of the Gospel of Christ Crucified. There were a lot of false religions, some emphasising an aspect of the Christian faith and often blowing it out of all proportion. Some church groups had fallen away from the mainstream because they could not agree with a point of doctrine, as for example the Holy Trinity, or the Divinity of Jesus Christ.

Heresy has been a problem for the church since its earliest days and not particularly something that had arisen in the Middle Ages. Ignatius of Antioch, who died c. 115, maintained that Christ was a real man with flesh and blood. In 177 AD the then bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus defended Christianity against the Gnostic heresy. Gnosticism basically is a form of Christianity that has been combined with various theories, philosophies, myths and the personal views of Gnostic leaders. Gnostics were not Christian, but more likely pagans who had accepted that kind of adulterated Christianity.

The word '*gnosis*' is Greek for knowledge and the Gnostics:

*"regarded themselves as original thinkers
who could not conform with the faith
of simple believers".*
(Cristiani, 1959: 12)

A modern day equivalent may be some 'New Age' sects that try to mix the faith of the Druids with Christianity and produce a hybrid religion. Irenaeus defended the orthodox Christian tradition against the Gnostic systems, which he ridiculed. In describing the substance of this tradition he quoted from a large number of the books from the New Testament, as we know it today. Irenaeus' writings contain "*a good many of the seeds of Western Catholicism*" (Freund, 1982: 66). St. Irenaeus believed that the only true example of how a Christian should live his/her life can be found in the historical Jesus of the Gospel tradition.

The Second and Third Century church fathers needed to come to grips with such false teaching. Tertullian and Origen were amongst some of the best theologians and teachers of their time. Tertullian was a lawyer and anxious to expose the false charges against the Christians. Origen was the author of '*CONTRA CELSUM*' (AGAINST CELSUS). Each tried to explain the teachings about Jesus in secular ways that would not involve Biblical jargon. Tertullian and Origen used simple words such as '*person*', '*nature*', or '*substance*'. They laid emphasis on the Trinity which they explained as consisting of three eternally distinct '*persons*'. Origen was to continue this line of thought with, when the Christians spoke of Jesus as the Son of God, they are not saying that the Son did not exist before the Father or in some way of being born from the Father. Origen stressed that the Son of God was

the 'Word'. In this we have an example of man endeavouring to explain that which is beyond explanation – the nature of God!

The questions surrounding the oneness of God and the person of Christ involve issues of the divinity of Christ. Apologists such as Justin Martyr (C.114 – 165) developed the idea of Jesus as the 'Word' or the 'Mind' of God. This point of view meant the Christ was in some way an intermediary between God and His world. The problem with this is that it detracts from Christ's co-existence making Him into a second rate divinity. By the fourth century however, theologians had overcome this particular tendency.

Arius was a Libyan theologian and a priest in the fourth century that taught that the Father only was true God that would spark off many Trinitarian controversies. He had a strict belief in a monotheistic God and an uncompromising view of Divine transcendence that made it *"unthinkable to regard the divine Logos in Christ as equal to God"* (Smith, 1996: 71).

For him the Father 'created' Jesus. Such views were reported to the bishop of Alexandria and Arius was excommunicated. Arius travelled around the Middle East and found support for his teaching amongst prominent church leaders such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Eusebius of Nicomedia. His school of thought became called Arianism and it quickly spread.

Arianism rejected the Divinity of Christ because the primary characteristic of God is to be 'unbegotten' (Greek – *Agennesis*). If both God and Jesus were 'unbegotten' Arius argues, then we have two gods not one. He supported his argument with references to Scripture, for example Proverbs 8:22 and

Colossians 1:15. Christ has a higher dignity than man, but is lower than God. Jesus was a mediator with salvific powers. A kind of superhuman in fact!

This erroneous position needed to be countered so the emperor Constantine convened the ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. The Council ruled *“that they were ‘the same being’ (or ‘consubstantial’ or ‘coessential’)* (Hazlett, 1991: 184).

Arius was exiled to Illyricum. The Council stated that the Son was begotten, not created, of the Father and of the same substance (Greek – *homoousios*). This Creed is still professed by Christians to this day and is called the Nicene Creed. The scholar Athanasius devised this formula of faith. The Church had now established the Son as fully divine. Foremost in bringing about the decline in Arianism were the Cappadocian Fathers namely: Basil of Caesarea; Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus.

By 327 AD Arius accepted a controverted formulation of the faith and *“presented Constantine with a written statement of his beliefs”* (McBrien, 1995: 94). Athanasius, like Irenaeus (see above), showed how the hope of salvation depended upon Jesus being truly God as much as He was truly human. Jesus was God who had become man for the salvation of mankind. Only God could restore His creation to full fellowship with Himself. It would take both the Councils of Constantinople (eastern) and Aquileia (western) in 381 AD for the term *‘homoousios’* to become accepted as the *‘norm’* for the whole Church. The Eastern Church faith as defined by the Council of Chalcedon 451 AD. subsequently came into agreement with the western church that Jesus exhibited two *‘phuseis’*, human and divine within *“a single hypostatis”* (Hazlett, 1991: 185).

Saint Francis of Assisi would never have countenanced the teaching of Arius let alone the founder of the Unitarian Church in the UK, John Biddle (1615-62) who during the Reformation also rejected the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the divinity of Christ. Mr. Biddle's teaching commits a similar error to that of Arianism that the Early Church had condemned. Biddle said that Jesus Christ was a man who had been empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Unitarianism equally rejects the concept of God the Holy Spirit – thus the case as argued by Biddle for the empowerment of Jesus by the Spirit does not stand up, for it falls by his own proposition. Unitarians today often try to argue the case of the Holy Spirit in philosophical terms only – but then how can anyone be empowered by that which is merely a philosophical term? Unitarianism believes that the Father alone is God – for a comparison see Arianism above. The Unitarian church has survived to this present day and may have given a new lease of life to Charles Taze Russell's sect, the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Apollinarius of Laodicea (c. 310-390) school of thought emphasized the unity of the person of Jesus as one incarnate nature of the divine Logos. This theory however is a denial of the full manhood of Christ, which is as repugnant to the Christian as the denial of His Divinity. Apollinarius maintained that Christ did not possess a human soul, a human consciousness. This was because he held a very literal interpretation of John 1:1-5 – *'the Word became flesh'*. This view combined with his strong opposition to Arius gave way to the development of Apollinarius' theory of Logos-flesh (*Greek – sarx*) model. He argued that *"the divine logos became embodied in human flesh"* (McBrien, 1995: 72). Apollinarius saw the divine Son as being totally responsible for the thought and actions in Christ. Otherwise who could possibly have any confidence in a saviour imbued with human fallibility?

Despite being Christendom's champion against the Arian heresy, Apollinarius was not excommunicated once, but twice. Basil of Caesarea took up the gauntlet and denounced Apollinarius' Logos – flesh theory. There can be no doubt about the church's teaching on Christ – Jesus was human in body, mind and soul, therefore not superhuman, but a perfect human in fact.

The churches of Antioch and Alexandria in the east came up with two different approaches in the fourth and fifth centuries. These teachings have often reappeared in the church's history for example amongst some of the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century. Whilst Cyril of Alexandria felt that the formula had come from Athanasius:

“modern scholars have shown that Cyril was unintentionally quoting the condemned Apollinaris”.
(Edwards, 1997:107)

- The Antiochenes' view emphasis lay in the importance of Christ's complete obedience as man, in His victory over sin and temptation for the salvation of the Christian. This school of thought stressed:

“One Lord Jesus Christ perfect (i.e. complete) God and perfect Man; begotten of His Father before the worlds as touching his Godhead, born of the Virgin Mary as touching His manhood; consubstantial with His Father in Godhead, and with us in His manhood”.
(Hall, 1991: 220/221)

One person in two distinct natures combined in one Christ.

- For the Alexandrians the emphasis was on the *“one incarnate nature of the divine Word”* (Hall, 1991: 220/221).
-

Christ added flesh to his person (complete humanity with rational soul). This union was therefore '*hyperstatic*'. God rescued of sinful mankind through Jesus' Incarnation. This portrayal of Christ subscribes to something that adopts the Antiochene school of thought, 'two natures' and allows the biblical texts to be distributed between them thereby retreating from the position of Anathema 4. Eutyches, a monk from Constantinople, forwarded this view. The Alexandrians retained a strong position on the unity of Christ's person by suggestion a hybrid solution, a fusion of the of the divine with the human in one entity. The divine '*physis*' (nature) totally absorbed His human nature. Jesus' human life was the setting by which God worked His salvation of mankind. The problem with this school of thought is that it totally ignores and neglects Jesus' human life and His human experiences.

The ensuing struggle which resulted from these two competing schools of thought led to the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. The product of this council was the famous statement that has remained as a fundamental tenet for the church even now. The council stated that Christ was fully man and fully God. That those two '*natures*' (*physeis*) were united in one '*person*' (*prosopon or hypostasis*) without confusion or change and without division or separation. Whilst they are distinct, they became one in the person of Jesus Christ. In other words Christ was truly one person with duality of natures.

(For further information on this subject, please see:

1. Grillmeier, '*CHRIST IN CHRISTIAN TRADITION*' Volume 1, Revised Edition, Mowbray's, 1975 and
2. Kelly, '*EARLY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES*', Fifth Edition, A&C Black, 1977.)

Despite the hard work of the Council of Chalcedon the Alexandrian party still wished to alter the terminology to '*one-nature*' (not two) of the Incarnate

Christ. A battle of words which led to the split of church with the Egyptian and the Syrian churches (the Coptic Churches) breaking away. This Council did not therefore bring about a resolution to the debate about the '*two-natures*' doctrine amongst the scholars of the Orthodox persuasion. However as Christendom divided between the churches of the East and those of the West, each had inherited the Chalcedon doctrine.

Today the challenge that the Church faces comes from so called New Age religions and other sects that claim to be '*Christian*'. They take aspects of the faith and provide their own interpretations usually aided by some form of conspiracy theory. Today there are also problems raised by syncretistics who seek to join together what individuals perceive to be the best bits from the various world religions to form a new religion in the hope that it will be acceptable to all and embraced by all. This of course can never be for it is a pipe dream and in any case who is to decide which are the best bits and by what authority? It is often much easier to persuade individuals that the truth is being withheld from them, even when the explanation is somewhat contrived, for no matter how many times the truth is given it will only appear to confirm the theory. For an example of modern day sophistry see Richard Andrews and Paul Schellenberger's '*THE TOMB OF GOD – THE BODY OF JESUS AND THE SOLUTION TO A 2,000 YEAR OLD MYSTERY*' Little, Brown & Co., first published in 1996. The mission of the Franciscans entrusted to them by St. Francis to spread the true Gospel is as necessary now as it ever was. New Franciscan Orders have arisen to meet this challenge head on. The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal accept this challenge in the inner cities and through their Youth Mission gatherings. The Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate similarly accept the challenge turning their attention to publishing and the media. St. Francis perceived the need to take the Gospel to the people. His friars continue to discharge their duty.

During the Crusades for the Holy Land in 1219 St. Francis felt called to take the Gospel message of peace to knights. A message that he also felt that God wanted him to take to the Sultan and the Sultan listened courteously to Francis as he outlined the teachings of Christ. St. Francis did not convert the Sultan from Islam to Christianity but he did inspire Charles de Foucauld some six hundred years later to continue his mission to the Muslims.

PART TWO: Father Charles de Foucauld

Father Charles de Foucauld assists with the question – *‘how can we help Christ’s light to shine in our lives?’* By choosing to live for Him every day. By inviting the light of Christ into our lives, and letting Jesus show us the way to repent of our sins and to find healing. In the sacrament of reconciliation we allow the light of Christ to shine into our innermost being, convicting us of sin and leading us towards forgiveness and healing. Fr. Charles de Foucauld had a great grasp of Christ’s light and how it brings us in touch with reality especially when he writes, as quoted in *‘BIBLE ALIVE’* magazine (published in November 1999 and which appears in the February 2000 issue):

*“Now that life is almost at an end for us,
the light into which we shall enter at our death
begins to shine and show us what are the
realities and what are not”.*

Charles de Foucauld was born in Strasbourg during 1858 (the year of the Apparitions at Lourdes) to an aristocratic family. Napoleon III was the Emperor and Catholicism was enjoying a revival after the horrors of the Revolution and the interference of the first Napoleon. Charles’ parents unfortunately died before he was six, and his grandfather looked after Charles and his younger sister. When Charles left school he decided to be a professional soldier. Charles had already lost his faith by 1876 when he was enrolled at the St. Cyr military academy. Here he failed to distinguish himself and was known to be overweight and lazy. He graduated as an officer in the cavalry and became a great dandy, notorious for high spending and luxurious dinners and a life of privilege on predictable lines. Then Charles’ regiment was sent to Algeria.

In Algeria Charles incurred the displeasure of his commanding officer by bringing his mistress into the country posing as Mme. la Vicontesse de Foucauld, his wife! He decided to leave the army. It was his first major setback. No sooner had he resigned his commission than an insurrection broke out in North Africa and he realized that he had lost the chance of active service. So Charles rushed to the French War Office in Paris and re-enlisted, accepting all the army's conditions. He fought the campaign as a changed character, but resigned again as soon as it was over. Clearly Charles was an unstable man, searching for the meaning to his life.

Next he decided to become an explorer. After the North Africa campaign he set his heart on exploring Morocco, which at that time was completely closed to the West. This was dangerous work. Charles so we are told:

*"learned to speak Hebrew and Arabic fluently,
disguised himself as a rabbi and spent
eighteen months lost to the world in Morocco."*
(Gibbard, 1974: 2)

With a companion Charles penetrated deep into the heartland, keeping meticulous records and proving to be a high-calibre cartographer, so much so that on his return to Paris he gained an award, the gold medal of the Geographical Society.

After his return to Paris, Charles became engaged to the daughter of a distinguished geographer. However this girl had no 'de' before her surname and the de Foucauld's were opposed to Charles' relationship with her. Finally his cousin Marie, now Mme. de Bondy, dissuaded him from continuing the association any further. It was also Marie who introduced Charles to the Abbe Huvelin.

RETURN TO THE FOLD

As a youth Charles had, like some many young people today, lost his faith and parted company with the Church. At the age of 12, he saw the collapse of the empire and the introduction of the anti-Catholic Third Republic. Being pious was no longer '*a la mode*'. However, while he was in Morocco he had observed the simple Muslim tribesmen, and was struck by their faithfulness to their regular and simple prayer routine. Charles has been quoted as saying to a friend "*Islam pleased me because of its simplicity of dogma, hierarchy, moral code*" (Antier, 1999: 93). (For further references on this point see Nieger, number 13, 182)

On his return to Paris Charles was restless, sensing that he was missing the purpose of life but unsure what to do about it. He would drop in and out of churches, but found it hard to focus. He would often pray '*My God, if you exist, help me to know it*'. He admired believers, especially his cousin, and this admiration made him reflect that if it produced characters so intelligent and virtuous, then just maybe religion is not absurd after all. After a sleepless night Charles went in search of the learned and renowned preacher the Abbe Huvelin at St. Augustine's church in Paris. He thought that perhaps he could

enrol with Abbe Huvelin for a course of instruction. Charles himself tells us next what happened in his, *'MEDITATIONS OF A HERMIT - SPIRITUAL WRITINGS'* (1930):

*"I was asking him for instruction in religion.
He told me to kneel and confess,
and told me straightaway to receive holy communion."*

Charles made his confession there and then, received communion, and underwent a total conversion. From being the most confused of agnostics Charles became the most fervent of Catholics. He afterwards said in *'LETTRES A HENRI DE CASTRIES'* (Grasset, 1938 – page 96):

*"As soon as I believed that there was a God,
I was clear that I could then do nothing except live for Him.
My religious vocation dates from that same hour as my faith."*

Very quickly Charles sensed Jesus as a real and living person. His desire was to love Jesus totally. To love his Saviour meant that Charles needed to be able to identify with Him in *"poverty and insecurity sharing with Him the lowest place that no one could ever take from Him"* (Gibbard, 1974: 3). This ideal would become de Foucauld's life's pilgrimage.

Charles went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Abbe Huvelin sent him there, and it was there that the next step became clear to Charles. Charles entered an austere Trappist monastery situated on a mountain called Our Lady of the Snows in Ardeche, in southern France as being most likely to

provide the '*lowest place*'. The day before he entered the monastery was spent, after taking Holy Communion, with his cousin Marie de Bondy. In his letter to her upon entering the monastery, he once wrote:

*"How I remember your clock which ticked away
our last minutes together".*

(de Foucauld, 1966: 34)

He felt so close to his cousin that he took for his name in religion, Frere Marie Alberic. His cousin Marie would write to Frere Marie every single week over the next forty-seven years.

From there Charles requested that he might go to Akbes in Syria, to a daughter monastery which was the poorest house in the Order. The life was extremely rigorous and hard, but not as hard as it was for the poor people at the gate: he at least knew where his next meal was coming from, while they did not. His austerity and deep spiritual life increased his love for all his friends. Despite the poverty of Akbes, his deepening love for those around him drew him inevitably to the conclusion that yes he was poor as compared to the western way of life of his cousin and friends, but to the poor, Charles appeared to be rich. This thought would trouble him and change the direction of his life in a radical way.

More and more Charles desired to spend his life with the most abandoned and abject people, sharing not only their hunger and hardship but also their insecurity, and this he could not do as a Cistercian. (Compare Charles' spiritual search to that of St. Francis' desire for his '*Lady Poverty*'.) There was another problem appearing on the horizon. The Order felt that Charles should study theology as a preparation for ordination. He felt that as a priest

people would respect his office, but with that very attitude he would then become even further removed from his '*lowest place*'. He had a vision of a '*new Order*' an *Order* that would follow in the footsteps of Jesus, living precariously and simply supported only from the efforts of one's own labour. (Compare this with the St. Francis and the first friars who earned the bread that they ate.) This new *Order* would not draw distinctions between priests and lay brothers. There should be no monastic hierarchy, and each brother would spend long hours in prayer but the liturgy would be simple in order that those who lived outside of the *Order*, the lay people, would have no difficulty in understanding the service. Charles felt that such vocation could be found within the Trappists themselves. We have a clear similarity between Father Charles' desire to embrace poverty and live simply and that of the spirituality of Francis of Assisi. In the early days of St. Francis founding his new Order these characteristics were the hallmarks of the Franciscans. Father Charles six hundred years later felt himself called to follow the example of St. Francis in his desire to reform the religious life and especially for those who would follow in his (Fr. Charles') footsteps. By the time of Father Charles the Franciscans had become an '*established*' institution. Equally the founding of the Franciscan Order in the Anglican Church (Society of St. Francis) that had captured the spirit of Francis' *Rule* and attracted large numbers of men seeking to live out a Franciscan vocation. By the late 1960s and 1970s, however, it too had become '*established*'. A second Franciscan styled Order in the Anglican Communion began in the late 1960 in an attempt to redressing that balance called the Community of Glorious Ascension (CGA). They sought out areas of the city where there was great deprivation to establish their priories. The brothers lived in total poverty and earned their daily bread through their own labours. They lived in the poorest areas of the cities where hardship could be expected. Finding employment was difficult for them, but they shared in that difficulty with their neighbours and in so doing

identified with their local community. The local community therefore came to acceptance the brothers as one with them. In this way the brothers were able to share their Christian faith with the poor. When I asked Brother Kenneth why he found his vocation in CGA and not in SSF, what he told me was precisely that SSF had become *'too established'*. Be it Francis of Assisi, Father Charles de Foucauld or Brother Kenneth, the same spirit moved them and their identity with the poor was identical.

Finally, with the abbot's blessing, Charles left the monastery and became a wandering holy man, what the Russians would have called a *'starets'*. Father Charles' hidden life had led him to discover an increasing love for Jesus, for Jesus with the Holy Family at Nazareth, Jesus living a life – as Charles pictured it – of extreme poverty and simplicity, humbly concealed in the Galilean countryside. So Charles made his own way to Nazareth and for a time became the handyman of the Poor Clare Sisters there, living in a shack in their garden. He spent long hours in the chapel, day and night: the Blessed Sacrament became the centre of his existence. This was to be the turning point in Charles' life. Here too he would receive the Franciscan cord on March 10th 1899 from Father Voisin. Father Voisin was the chaplain to the Poor Clares a Franciscan and lived at the Mount Tabor Friary that was six miles away from the convent. It was Father Voisin who sent him to the convent (Antier, 1999: Chapter 8).

A UNIVERSAL BROTHER

Charles was ordained to the priesthood in 1900 and went back to Algeria. His vocation was becoming clear to him. Charles was ready to carry the message

of the love God to the ends of the earth should God wish that from him. He very much felt called to work for the conversion of the Algerians. For Charles preaching the Gospel was *"not by sermons, not by instructions, but more and more by simply loving"* (Gibbard, 1974: 6).

Disarming those around him by love. Charles wished to be regarded as, *'le frere universel'*, a universal brother. It was a new idea to bring the loving, caring presence of Jesus to the very heart of Muslim society, and to let unconditional friendship and affection speak for itself. The French army, running the interior of the country, did not oppose this move. The Catholics among the officers and soldiers would gain enormously from the help and advice of such a priest, and one moreover who knew the military life from the inside. His daily routine at Beni-Abbes included:

from one p.m. to two, written meditation on the Holy Gospel;
at seven, explanation of the Holy Gospel to some soldiers.

He had many friends at the garrison and they were always ready to serve at the Masses that he celebrated. Charles settled at Beni-Abbes, an Algerian oasis within sight of the Moroccan border, building himself a little house and a rudimentary chapel. He cared for his neighbours who became ill and he also looked after the poor even to purchasing slaves from traders to set them free. Charles was appalled by slavery and on several occasions petitioned the colonial authorities to abolish the practice.

The other part of Charles' vocation, as he discerned it, was to found an order of Brothers who would live the same life as that of the local people. Scratching a living from the barren soil with home-made tools, keeping an open house, welcoming all the neighbours as true brothers and sisters, and at the same

time spending much of their time in prayer and contemplation. He wrote a *Rule* for his new order, planned out the first monastery for them with great exactitude, like a professional architect, even designed a habit . . . and waited for recruits. They never came in his lifetime.

This was the story of Charles' life, and his perpetual disillusion. He longed for companions from Europe who would share his vision of kindness, of total self-gift in the service of neighbour, of smiling welcome for the sake of the Gospel, of the conversion to Christianity of those territories where France ruled. They never came. Inevitably, Charles became more and more a solitary. Not a lonely one, because the villagers and the soldiers were constantly visiting him. He had, however, no colleagues. He had dreamed of community life in the desert, and finished up living a religious life with a strict, self-imposed timetable but no companions.

After two years at Beni-Abbes, in 1904, Charles was requested to move further south into the heart of the Sahara, to Tamanrasset. He had to negotiate this new move with the church authorities, and they were initially doubtful about it. Charles made his way ministering to garrisons en route and established a new hermitage. It was a long narrow building, which housed at one end an altar made out of packing-cases upon which the Bible always lay opened. At the other end was the door where he would welcome all, at any time, who called on him.

He knew that the transfer was a right move and that the hand of God had gently led him on, to Tamanrasset, an island of mountains in middle of the Sahara, which became his home. It was a lonely place for the nearest garrison was four hundred miles away.

Brother Charles had heard of the Touaregs a savage semi-nomadic people. He was determined to make his motto – *‘to cry the Gospel with my life’* – a reality in the context of these people. Surely nowhere on earth were there people more abandoned, spiritually destitute as well as physically poor? *‘Nazareth est partout’* was Charles’ favourite saying for he wished to capture the spirit of the Holy Family’s home life and practice it for himself. Live it he did in great humility and with all its love amongst a forgotten people, a Touareg amongst Touaregs. He dedicated his life to them.

Charles settled among them, gained their confidence, and even began to compose a French-Touareg dictionary, a work of immense difficulty as well as an anthology of their proverbs and love-songs. To this work he gave eleven hours of each day. Brother Charles’ dream was to make the Gospel accessible to those who knew nothing of it. For several years Charles was deprived of the Eucharist, because although he was a priest, he was not allowed to celebrate Mass without another person present: those were the rules at the time. Even at Christmas there was no Holy Communion for Charles to receive. A hardship indeed for most Christians and particularly for one whose life had been centred on the sacrament.

Although the Blessed Sacrament was the great love of his life, he knew in his bones that it was even more important for him to be a Christian presence to the Touareg. (Eventually, though, the required permission came through, something which afforded Charles immense consolation.)

At the beginning of the 1914-1918 Great War things were quiet in the Sahara Desert. However by 1916 things were not so quiet and he decided to move into an old fort at Tamanrasset. Charles had made provision to shelter the

local villages in his house in case of an armed raid, and this involved holding a small cache of arms. One day someone called out which led Charles to believe that the post had arrived. Instead hostile tribesmen greeted him, tied him up and then shot him in the head. Father Charles was murdered rather than martyred. A passing band of tribesmen had stopped, searched his house, found the guns, decided that he was a hostile and dangerous Frenchman, sacked his house and shot him before riding on. Although the tribesmen of the Sahara were not actively engaged in the war, the whole military balance of the region was disturbed by the withdrawal of European troops to fight at the front in Europe. Charles' body lay undiscovered for three weeks. The monstrosity with the Host still contained within it had been taken from the chapel and lay only a few yards from his mortal remains.

CHARLES' LEGACY

Throughout his life Charles had the habit of nocturnal adoration, and when he caught himself nodding off to sleep he would keep awake by writing. A collection of these writings, the *'MEDITATIONS OF A HERMIT - SPIRITUAL WRITINGS OF CHARLES DE FOUCAULD'*, translated by Charlotte Balfour (Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1930) shows how profoundly important the Gospels were to him, and how he founded his prayer on imaginative contemplation of Jesus as found in the passages of Scripture. In Syria, we find Charles singling out in each evangelist the passages that touch on the soul's personal encounter with God, on prayer and on faith. From Nazareth he leaves us lengthy, impassioned meditations on St. Luke. As he travelled across the desert from oasis to oasis, Charles was dreaming of his translation of the Gospels for the Touareg. Brother Charles always maintained that *'If we do not live the Gospel, Jesus does not live in us.'*

Charles de Foucauld failed as a religious founder. No one would join him. He failed as a missionary. The wave of conversions he longed for never even started. By worldly standards his life was one of non-achievement. However, in the years that followed his death, something major began to stir. The copious writings he left behind him, including his many letters and reflections on Scripture, began to have an impact. The warm human contacts he had nourished – with soldiers, with his cousin, with friends who shared his dream, with his bishop as well as with the Touareg – were, in retrospect, inspiring and unforgettable, and the news of them spread.

Before long the religious order for which he had longed took shape. It still exists to this day. It is called the Little Brothers of Jesus. Rene Voillaume together with four other young priests came together in a simple monastery at El Abiodh in the desert. In 1927 Brother Charles' mortal remains were relocated to El Golea, a Christian village in Algeria, Brother Voillaume was greeted by Sister Magdeleine, who founded the Little Sisters of Jesus. Until that day neither Brother Voillaume nor Sister Magdeleine had been aware of each other's existence! Now there are a number of other associations, of lay people, of priests, of men and women all over the world, for example the well known Christian author Carlo Carretto (1934 – 1983), who have discovered for themselves that Brother Charles' way of living the Gospel made sense for them.

The Little Brothers and the Little Sisters can be found today in the dechristianized slums of the world, for example in Marseilles, as well as in the Third World. They live in small groups of four or five and no matter how short of living space there maybe, one room is set aside as a chapel. When they go out to work, they are dressed as any other labourer, a characteristic that was also adopted by the Community of the Glorious Ascension mentioned

earlier in this section. They live simply that other may simply live. The Little Brothers and Sisters experience true poverty in all their religious houses. But their poverty is not a type of:

*“grim stinginess,
but a poverty ‘gentle, tender towards suffering,
glad and open-hearted, and always ready to give or lend’.”*
(Gibbard 1974: 9)

There are now over two hundred brothers that have responded to the call from at least twenty different countries. These brothers live and work in some thirty different countries that include both North and South America, Pakistan and India, Korea, Vietnam, Japan and the Middle East.

Brother Charles' life was a witness to the need of prayer in thanksgiving, intercession and communal liturgy, of contemplation, the *‘thinking of God with love’* and of the need for daily bible study. Charles was most definitely a man with a vision and so moved by God to establish that vision that some have described Charles as a *“Saint Francis of Assisi for our time”* (Six, 1993).

Not long ago, the cause for the beatification of this singular, strange, loving, charismatic man, viscount, lieutenant, mapmaker, Trappist, tramp, hermit, a Franciscan, composer of dictionaries, and universal brother was introduced.

CHAPTER FIVE: **LEPERS - THE CHALLENGE**

CARING FOR THE SICK AND THE OUTCAST

Tradition has it that one day on a road, which led away from the town, Francis saw in the near distance a leper. He was well aware that the Scriptures recorded that Jesus loved the lepers and the outcasts of society. He was not afraid to touch these poor unfortunates and show them affection, as well as healing. Francis was filled with conflicting emotions. One of fear and revulsion, the other of love and compassion. At this point in his struggles Francis became aware that it was not merely enough just to provide alms for those poor diseased individuals. He knew that Christ had taught in the Gospels that:

*"I tell you the truth,
whatever you did for one of the least
of these brothers of mine,
you did for me."*

(Matthew 25:40, New International Version)

A strange power gave Francis the strength to go up to the leper and not only to embrace his brother, but also to kiss the leper's hand. The sight and smell of the leper's decaying flesh no longer held him in mortal fear. Instead he now envisioned the Christ of the Cross. Upon looking up again, the leper had disappeared from view. Francis' embrace of the leper was proof positive of his discipleship of Christ. Shortly before his death, Saint Francis wrote the following in his 'TESTAMENT':

*"The Lord first demanded of me, Brother Francis,
to do penance in this way.
When I was still living in my sins,
I experienced strong revulsion at the sight of lepers.
Now the Lord Himself led me to them,*

*and I showed compassion for them.
 And when I went away from them,
 what had formerly been bitter to me
 was changed into sweetness,
 both for my soul and my senses.
 And very soon afterwards I abandoned the life of the world."*

St. Bonaventure later argues through the medium of his, '*MAJOR LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS*' 1.5 (Habig, 1977) that this meeting between Francis and leper was a meeting between none other than Christ and His servant. Today perhaps we might feel the same kind of fear if we to come into contact with a person suffering from AIDS. It has the same power to isolate and segregate those who fall victim to its ravages. Sometimes we see only the sin and not the person! This analogy can assist us when trying to put ourselves in Francis' position.

Francis had just won:

*".. a brilliant victory over his natural instincts,
 over his innate fastidiousness,
 over the selfishness that is so natural to men.
 This was to be the wellspring of all the graces
 God had in store for him."
 (Cristiani, 1983: 18)*

Francis had been appalled and sickened by the sight of those unfortunates who suffered from leprosy, a disease that eats away human flesh. St. Francis said about this, '*OPUSCULA S. FRANCISCI*', ed. Quaracchi, 1904:

*"The Lord gave to me, Brother Francis,
 thus to begin to do penance.
 For when I was in sin it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers,
 and the Lord Himself led me among them,
 and I showed mercy to them.*

*And when I left them,
what had seemed to me bitter was changed
into sweetness of body and soul."*

Francis knew and understood that spirituality is not something that you have in the same way, as we may possess a book. Spirituality for him was a living, vibrant, and a growing relationship between the individual and the Almighty. As we wish to learn more of the nature of God, as He bestows His love upon us as His children, therein lies an encounter where we relate to the eternal Creator, before whom we are laid bare, and with whom we cannot have anything other than a deeply personal and intimate relationship. Thereby spiritual growth is a gift of God, but we are also required to work at it. Good works alone do not earn salvation. The new life that God gives us, He gives freely, but we do have responsibilities as the stewards of that gift. It is as Gordon Catherall puts it in his important book on the nature of the contemporary church, that the church (i.e. Christian folk) was always intended to be:

*"that dynamic community of people who were totally
given to Christ and who took His command to leave
all and follow Him to the cross seriously".*

(Catherall, 2000: 6)

In contemporary life the newspapers and television are sadly never short of images of suffering. The last twelve months have been no exception. How easy it is to recall the brutality of Kosovo and East Timor, or the tragedy of the earthquakes in Turkey and Taiwan, or the empty, beseeching hands of the starving or homeless. These images form a window in which our own lives momentarily cross over into the world of others – a world that we can retreat from at a moment's notice, but which leaves our hearts troubled. Maybe we

are troubled by the extent of the suffering and our inability to stop it, or by the realization of what one human being can do to another; or may be we are troubled because it causes us to cast a critical eye over our own actions and attitudes towards each other. Whatever our thoughts are, we in essence are realizing the desperate need for the kingdom of God to be established on earth as it is in heaven.

The answer to this for the Christian is the need for Jesus to be in their lives, in their words and in their works. This is what the people responded to for example in Mark's Gospel, 3: 7-12. In Jesus, they had come into contact with something unique, something beyond all that they had ever known: a mystery, the Word of God made flesh and dwelling among us. For the Christian it is to come in contact with that mystery in a deep meaningful way. Having been touched in that way they find healing and thereby their lives have been transformed.

"In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear."
(Gaudium et spes 22).

The word '*mystery*' should not discourage the Christian into believing that they cannot come to know Jesus. Jesus invites them to know Him, because it is in knowing Him that they shall come to love Him, and in loving Him that their lives (so they believe) will show forth the kingdom of God in the world. To know Jesus is much more than learning a certain number of facts, as true as they may be, for even the demons know the truth. Really knowing another person in depth demands our participation in and relationship with that person. The Christian participates in their relationship with Jesus through prayer and the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist the Christian believes that he/she receives Jesus into their lives

in a unique way. The Christian acknowledges in receiving Holy Communion their commitment to receiving a share in the mission of Jesus and to proclaim the kingdom of heaven to a world in desperate need. This was confirmed by the late Father Michael Hollings in his work, *'LIVING PRIESTHOOD'* (1971) in which he argued that the sacrifice of the mass could only be understood in terms of the every day lives of God's children, especially those who suffer.

Saint Francis had begun to tend and care for the lepers after his two years wondering around Italy (see Chapter Two, St. Francis the Pilgrim section). Having arrived at Gubbio Francis offered his help at a local lazaret. Despite his mystical experience at meeting a leper on the road that so deeply affected him, Francis did not find a sense of spiritual fulfilment for which his soul was now looking for. At San Damiano the call had been to repair God's house. So after his two years of searching, he decided to return to Assisi and try to be a builder in order to understand more fully what it was that God was calling him to.

Leprosy is a terrible and devastating disease that we see time and again in both biblical times and the Middle Ages. The disease still destroys people's lives today. In 1974 six Christian organisations working in Bangladesh launched a programme in three areas: Education; Economic Development; and Health. Within the health project they aimed to bring hospital treatment for 700 leprosy sufferers. Sister Mary of Lourdes, FMSA, has spent most of her life nursing the victims of leprosy in Africa from the first part of the twentieth century until nearly that century's conclusion. In her interview with me she stated that:

"I certainly had St. Francis' revulsion and fear along with this, I must have shared also his overcoming of fearful repulsion of the disease."

Her life and witness teaches us that patients should be welcomed and loved and cared for as though we were nursing Jesus of Nazareth Himself. Jesus treats the sick as whole people, body mind, spirit, unconditionally. Sister Mary of Lourdes learned from her missionary activities that evangelism is more than giving out pills, it is the giving of oneself, totally, unconditionally, and embracing those we look after, not in a patronising way, but as our own brothers and sisters. People who are experiencing suffering should be treated with compassion. A problem shared, so we are told, is a problem halved.

*"Suffering is not God
Suffering, if it is accepted together,
borne together, is joy."*
(Spink, 1997: 144)

Saint Francis of Assisi came to understand that point very well indeed. A point that would help change his whole life's direction, and this stills plays an important role in the life of the Franciscans today. Indeed when the author interviewed Brother Nicholas of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal he said that God had created him to live a life dedicated to the poor, the homeless and the marginalized. He went on to say that his way of living was an example of how Jesus' calls us to do in the Gospels and that those who came into contact with him began to realize that they were valued and loved individuals in Christ.

TENDING THE SICK

Throughout the Christian era there have always been those willing to take seriously Christ's commission to preach the Gospel and heal the sick. That ministry of healing has often been directed towards those who society shuns and rejects. The lepers are held up as the ultimate example though there remain many human disorders, which attract just as much, or more, social stigma – AIDS for example. John Bradburne, whose life's story I shall be relating in Part Two of this chapter followed the example of Francis of Assisi and gave his life willingly caring for the victims of leprosy.

In Jesus' time lepers did not just have to contend with their awful disfigurement. Under Mosaic Law they were physical outcasts – untouchables forced to live apart from society. The law decreed that anyone touching a leper would become ritually defiled himself.

Leprosy was, and still is, one of the most repugnant and most feared diseases of ancient times. In its most virulent form it was considered so serious that the rabbis regarded the healing of leprosy to be as difficult as raising the dead. However, the term '*leprosy*' was used in the Old Testament to denote a broader range of skin diseases, some of which were curable; and so the law stipulated conditions to be fulfilled if the disease was to be recognized as cured. It is also conceivable that those who did not have leprosy when they were originally quarantined would latterly succumb to the disease.

Perhaps the worst effect of leprosy was that people suffering from any of the diseases covered by the term had to live isolated from society. They were forbidden to enter a dwelling, and if anyone approached they had to cry '*Unclean, unclean!*' (Leviticus 13:45- New International Version).

In Mark's Gospel, 1:40-45 we see Jesus approached by a person who is normally denied any contact with healthy people. In those surroundings Jesus must have shied away from the sick man, fearful of contamination. Jesus, with a word and a touch, heals him. How did Jesus react to the man's presence? Some ancient manuscripts rather than saying that Jesus was '*moved with pity*' (Mark 1:42), says instead that Jesus was '*moved with anger*'. Commentators reflect that this reading may portray Jesus' anger against the power of evil seen as present in the illness.

Despite the laws of Leviticus, the leper comes to Jesus with great faith, and his healing rewards his faith. Jesus shows that He regards compassion as more important than the ritual prohibitions against contact with the diseased and Jesus gives hope even in a hopeless situation! Nevertheless, Jesus is obedient to the law in complying with the regulations surrounding the proof of a cure; and so Jesus tells the leper to go to the priest and make the stipulated offering.

The Christian gains from this a profound insight into the physical reality of the Incarnation. Jesus reached out to touch the sick man, making real a bodily contact. This is not the disembodied God of the Old Testament but God who is manifested as a human being in Jesus, meeting face to face with a leper in such a tender and merciful way. There is something wonderful about the holy Son of God touching the untouchable.

Sister Mary of Lourdes, FMSA explained further to me that with leprosy,

"Ulcers, commonly a development of peripheral nerve damage occur with the consequent loss of sensation and motor function in the limbs must be prevented if possible, or treat."

Leprosy begins to rot away the body while the person is still living. The symptoms may vary but quite often nodules appear on the skin, which then becomes ulcers. Leprosy is primarily a disease affecting the peripheral nerves with the subsequent secondary signs and symptoms of bone damage, facial change (the collapsed bridge of the nose), the eyes become infected and pulpy, severe ulceration, loss of motor function through nerve damage leading to permanent disability. The face can become “*a single hole as the nose and mouth are eaten away*” (MacNiven-Johnson, 1999: 20). It is perhaps not surprising that in St. Francis’ day, they had inherited all the fear and revulsion of the disease that we read about in the Scriptures.

There was no known cure for leprosy in Jesus’ time. The leper was totally alone, aware there was no one who could help him in his predicament. Perhaps having seen Jesus heal others, he recognizes the authority Jesus had over sickness and this gave the leper the confidence to throw himself on Jesus’ mercy. Jesus healed the leper by stretching out and touching the leper and, by remaining undefiled, demonstrated His power over sickness and the law. That precious touch of Jesus brought God into the closest relationship with humanity. God, who became one of us, reaches out and touches us at the deepest point of our human nature. So through the Christian healing ministry, God in Christ Jesus meets the sufferer at the point of their greatest need (Lawrence, 1993).

Lepers were the supreme outcasts of Jesus’ day. Their presence was feared and hated. Yet Jesus was there for the leper as He was for others despised by society. As we try to follow Jesus’ way, we may ask ourselves who are the outcasts today? Who are those from whom people shy away, in

fear and from a desire for self-preservation? Being an outcast in this sense perhaps applies most clearly to those with AIDS; those who have a mental handicap or mental illness as well as those who were formerly residents of one of Her Majesty's prisons. Whether consciously or not, it's all too easy for us to flinch away from those who are ill. But people need compassion and care.

In a sense, as sinners, we are just like that leper of old. The question is, can we appreciate the awful disfigurement of our sin, for which there is no human cure? Do we recognize our desperate need for healing? The Christian claims that only Jesus can show us our true state and it is only then that we, like the leper, will understand there is no one else to turn to. Then we can ask forgiveness by throwing ourselves on the compassion and mercy of God who always responds, *'I will; be clean'* (Mark 1:41). We can then begin to experience the power of the Lord Jesus in our lives. Just like the leper, Jesus can heal us. The Good News that the Christian can proclaim is that no one is beyond redemption; no one is beyond the loving embrace of the Saviour. The leprosy of sin poses no problem to Jesus, the Master Physician. In the church there must always be room for failure and forgiveness. In the world there is little or no room for either but they must always be present in the church.

The care of lepers is *"more than any medical or social work"* (MacNiven-Johnston, 1999: 6). Sister Mary of Lourdes, FMSA, in caring for the lepers sought to give them back their sense of dignity. The lepers in the Buluba settlement were given training opportunities in farming, carpentry, handicrafts and making clothes. Those who devote themselves to the care of the outcasts are certainly blessed. One of the great turning points in the life of St Francis was his embrace of a leper. Reflecting on this moment later, he said *"What was bitter became sweet"* (Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, 1997: 17).

PART TWO: John Bradburne – Vagabond of God

John Bradburne was born in the Cumbrian village of Skirwith in 1921. His father was an Anglican clergyman and he grew up in a cultured, middle-class family. Amongst his family's relations was 'The Winslow Boy' (1946) author Terence Rattigan and Christopher Soames, the last Governor of Rhodesia. John was educated at Gresham's and from an early age he was immersed in literature and he also had a great love of poetry. As a result of his literary preoccupation, John became very gifted in that field as well as an articulate man. John was one of five children that populated the Cumbrian rectory. Philip and Mary were older than John, whilst Michael and Audrey were his younger siblings.

In 1941 John Bradburne was commissioned as an officer in the 9th Gurkha rifles. The Indian regiments were actively recruiting and given John's schooling and that his mother was born in Lucknow, India, John was ideal for them. Shortly after his commission he set sail for India. John's initial military service was in Malaya and when the Japanese invaded, John's platoon was isolated in the jungle, and the men separated into small groups in order to avoid capture. He lived in the jungle for a month, evading the Japanese patrols and living off roots and wild fruit. After several abortive attempts, John succeeded in sailing across to Sumatra to the safety of the last British destroyer. John was carried aboard, ravaged by sunstroke and malaria, bound for recovery and recuperation in Bombay.

Upon returning to active service, John joined the regimental centre at Dehra Dun, in the Himalayan foothills. There he met John Dove (later to become Father John Dove S.J.), who was to be his lifelong companion. Father John came to know John Bradburne better than anyone else, and quickly developed a great admiration and affection for this charismatic, cultured and fascinating young man. Even at this time, though, John had an

inner restlessness, a searching for something that would provide him with inner fulfilment. Yet when it came to praying he:

*“did not seem to need to quieten his body
or his mind. He had already acquired,
as though by natural gift, the ability to
find God in almost all things.”*

(Dove, 1997: 15)

DEMOB AND COMING HOME

It was at the end of the war that John's restlessness came even more to the fore. After demobilisation, John took a job with the forestry commission in Somerset. Even allowing for the post-war economic depression, it was a strange occupation for a highly literate and sensitive young man. By his own admission, he was unsuited to the work and lacked organization and manual dexterity.

John's restlessness and searching led him to leave the forestry commission in 1947 and move to be near the beautiful abbey at Buckfast, where he initially worked in the abbey garden. He regarded this time as a spiritual oasis and received from the Benedictine monks' instruction that would enable him, to his great joy, to be received into the Catholic Church on the last Sunday in the October of the same year. (The Feast of Christ the King.)

It seemed for a time as if his life was taking a more conventional and domestic turn. John felt the call of the cloister and became an aspirant of Buckfast Abbey (the Order of St. Benedict). It was decided that he should at least spend some time as an English teacher in a school for boys. He met an attractive older woman and fell in love, as he had done before. All of this seems entirely unremarkable, since with his magnificent command of English he would have made an excellent teacher, and with his charm, wit and good looks he would have made an attractive partner. Yet the restless yearnings within him was not satisfied and he seemed to undergo an inner turmoil, finally deciding to leave the school and his potential wife-to-be, somewhat precipitously in the middle of the summer term.

John's life became progressively more focused and developed in a spiritual way (in 1949 John went on pilgrimage with Fr. Dove to Lourdes), though in a practical sense he became a wanderer. John once again felt the call of the cloister and approached the Carthusian's Charterhouse at Parkminster in Sussex where he became a postulant. After only a short period of time (19th September 1950) he left the Carthusians. Dom Andrew Gray, prior of Parkminster had become very fond of John and had hoped that he would remain at the Charterhouse. However John explained to Dom Andrew of his desire to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There was a sign that appeared to confirm John's searching. Dom Andrew had become aware that a lady in the parish had decided not to go on a pilgrimage to Rome, which would then leave a vacant place. There was a Jewish guest at the Charterhouse who then generously offered to pay for John's place. This seemed to put the seal of God on John's decision. At least he would get as far as Rome.

Dom Andrew provided John with the name of a Franciscan friar to contact when he had arrived in Jerusalem. Once more the hand of God was to be

seen in these events for upon John's arrival in Rome he went to the church of St Anthony to pray. There to his complete astonishment he met the said friar that John was to contact in Jerusalem. The good friar himself was on a pilgrimage to Rome. John used this meeting to ask the friar as to what would be his recommended route for him (John) to continue his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This would be one of several pilgrimages that John would undertake on foot, through Italy to the Holy Land, settling temporarily in various towns and villages on the way.

The Franciscan influence in John's life and the guidance of St Francis himself can readily be seen at this juncture. Not only do we note that the friar that John was to meet in Jerusalem was in fact in Rome when John arrived there, but also when John boarded the ship S. Philip Grimian, Fr. Carmel, OFM, also joined the vessel at Calabria, Scilly. John served at the mass celebrated by Fr. Carmel during the voyage. When the ship docked at Cyprus, Fr. Carmel invited John along to the Limasol Friary. John also receives hospitality at the Nicosia Friary. When John arrived in Haifa, Israel, once more the Franciscans at San Antonio would play a part in John's pilgrimage. Brother Amelio, a tertiary Franciscan, owned the very café at which John choose to eat at in Nazareth. These latter incidents were not planned, but merely gifts of God's good grace. John gave various possessions to Brother Amelio to express his gratitude and also to become more perforce – truly Franciscan.

Whilst staying in Jerusalem John requested lodgings with Our Lady's Fathers of Sion in the monastery of St Pierre. They were pleased to offer him a bed for the night and the following morning gave him directions so that he could continue his pilgrimage. Whilst John was waiting for his guide to arrive, Pere de Conde came up to him and suggested that he might like to remain at St Pierre in exchange for odd jobs that needed to be done around the place.

John readily agreed. As with anywhere where John lived for a while, he became quite at home and enjoyed his surroundings. So much so that he was invited to join the noviciate and go to Louvain for his formation. This prospect excited him greatly and in preparation for which John set about learning both Latin and French. Instruction and communications at Louvain were all in French. As ever with John his time with the community of Our Lady's Fathers of Sion and their mission to the Jews was short lived and the time came for him to move forever onwards.

Once he lived in the organ loft of a village church and played the organ in the far reaches of the night, no doubt to the confusion of the local people. Then in the Advent of 1955, John enters the postulancy of the Order of St Benedict, Prinknash. The abbey as we know it today was not yet built and John together with other postulants slept in a cabin at the rear of the mansion that had housed the monks. That was until Good Friday 1956 when the inevitable happened and the spirit moved John on towards his destiny. His wanderings led him to be a sacristan at Westminster Cathedral and then a caretaker at the cardinal's summer home. Even in these idyllic surroundings, John was not free from his inner turmoil and he left his post to join his friend Fr. Dove, who was now a missionary in Africa. He still sought solitude and prayer and in 1962 he asked Fr. Dove if he knew of a vacant cave that he might inhabit.

JOHN ARRIVES IN AFRICA

Fr. Dove approached initially Fr. Boniface Gaynor, OFM, who was the Guardian of the Franciscans in Zimbabwe if there was a possibility of John, who was a member of the Third Order of St Francis, assisting the Franciscans

in their work in Africa. Fr. Boniface said that he would welcome John's help at the mission station of Mount-St.-Mary, Wedza. Next Fr. Dove needed to approach Archbishop Francis Markall, SJ (a Jesuit as was Fr. Dove) with the idea of John assisting as a lay missionary in Africa and for the appropriate contract to be drawn up. The archbishop was able to do this and so Fr. Boniface paid for John's airfare, which in those days came to £65.00, the fare of an immigrant, which is exactly what John would become. John left England for Africa on the feast of the Transfiguration, 1962.

John had often identified with St. Francis of Assisi during his searching for the will of God in his life. Indeed the blessed father's guiding hand can be seen in John's life. It is not surprising therefore that John had become a member of the Third Order of St Francis. By now John had developed a *Rule of Life* based upon a life of prayer. Father Dove tells us that John's routine of prayer each day was:

"according to the rule of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi, namely, the Little Office of Our Lady".

(Dove, 1997: 249)

The following is an example of John's daily office:

Matins	Upon waking in the night;
Lauds	First light;
Prime	Sunrise;
Daily Mass & Communion	Soon afterwards;
Tierce	Mid morning;
Sext	12 noon;
None	3.00 p.m.;
Compline	bedtime.

The '*Lectio divina*' is the common practice of many religious institutions, particularly during the Middle Ages. No doubt the time spent with the Benedictines and the Carthusians had given John a great love for such a rigorous and disciplined routine of daily prayer. Many brothers, nuns, and monks today, myself included, use the modern Divine Office for daily prayer consisting of the offices Morning, Midday, Evening Prayers, and Compline. Daily attendance at Mass with reception of Holy Communion should also be undertaken where that is possible and it is by the grace of God and inspired through the Holy Spirit that John was called to such dedication. He left behind for us an example of how to live the Christian life, especially to those of us who follow in the way of St. Francis.

John's life in Africa seemed to have an element of consummation to it, as if he had finally found the place where God wanted him to be. After work in various missionary posts in what was then Rhodesia he was introduced to a leper settlement at Mutemwa. Mutemwa is flanked by Mutemwa mount to the left, Chingo mount to the right and in the distance the Inyanga Mountains. The community consisted of approximately one hundred square huts built in lines next to some Jacaranda trees. Rhodesian social welfare provided the princely sum of £3.50 per month, per person for the food consumed.

John knew from his first visit that he would be staying. In 1969, when John came, such settlements were much smaller than they had been because the advent of the drug Dapsone had rendered leprosy a treatable disease. The eighty people who resided there did so because they were so disabled, blind or so disfigured that they would be unable to re-enter society, and had no homes or families to go to. John felt irresistibly called to minister to the poorest and most helpless.

Since 1982 leprosy has been treated with a multi-drug therapy one of the ingredient being dapsone. It has been possible with the introduction of this new regime to halt the progress of leprosy within six months for those patients who had the more minor forms of the disease. Treatment can take up to two years for the more serious cases costing approximately £20.00 per patient. The World Health Organisation had hoped to eradicate leprosy, as it had with smallpox, by combining the treatment with education and health checks in local clinics. Some of those who suffered from leprosy lived in outlying villages in inaccessible areas. This together with wars and the fear of AIDS hampered further progress. Scientists in the 1990's began to see that more resistant strains of the bacterium to the drugs being used making *"the World Health Organisation's stated goal to eradicate leprosy by the year 2000 an impossibility"* (MacNiven-Johnston, 1990: 55).

Medical help came from some Italian lay missionaries that had taken up residence at All Souls Mission Hospital. Principally Dr. Lisa Guidotti and sisters Catherine and Maria were responsible to provide medical care to the lepers.

John's commitment to minister the residents of the colony was complete and he soon became immersed in caring for them. After breakfast John would visit each member of his community attending to their more personal requirements. Sometimes he would bathe them, then cut the finger nails and toe nails of those who were unable to do so for themselves, bandaging their chronic wounds, building fires for others and making up their beds or changing their dressings and fed them. Whatever was needed for their comfort and whatever he could do to ease their burden he would accept as his task. In fact as we are told through the annals of 'CATHOLIC LIFE' John had *"improved their hygiene and housing, driving away the rats, which used to creep in and gnaw their insensate limbs"* (March/April 2000: 47).

On his visits he would also distribute provisions and in particular clothing and anything that had been given to him. He gave all to the lepers with a willing heart. Very little of what his friends had generously supplied John with was ever kept for his own needs. For John the lepers took primary consideration and his own needs were nothing compared to theirs.

Indeed the degree of intimacy and genuine love that he exhibited in these duties is in itself startling. He held daily communion services in the chapel hut and preached in Shona, the local dialect. It was strange to hear his Shona translations of well-known Christian hymns being sung with passion while he hammered out the melodies on the harmonium. He loved the residents with a fulsome, selfless love.

The lepers came to love and trust John and began to call him 'Baba John', which means 'Father John'. I suspect this was more to do with his parental care for his little flock. John had not been ordained to the priesthood and perhaps the lepers would not understand if he had been, for they would not have been familiar with Catholic traditions. After distributing Holy Communion from the tabernacle, John would stand at the door of the chapel handing out medicines to those in need, and he would endeavour to chase away any gloom from their faces.

It might seem strange that John could make enemies by working for the poor in this way, but he did so. Firstly, he made enemies in some of the surrounding villages because before John's arrival local thieves used to steal the lepers' meagre possessions. Secondly, he fell out with the committee who was responsible for administering the Mutemwa settlement. In essence he refused to reduce the rations for the lepers in accordance with the committee's instructions. He also refused to comply with the committee's dehumanising rule that each leper should wear a number around his or her neck. John was summarily dismissed as warden of Mutemwa.

Death was not an uncommon thing at Mutemwa. In such a small intimate community, it meant that one and all were effected. One day John found old Bofu propelling himself along to his ablutions with his head raised high in expectancy. Bofu's face was radiant and he wore a big smile. John enquired of Bofu as to why he was so joyful. Bofu responded that he had witnessed the passing of his friend. Immediately before his friend's death, Bofu had seen his friend bathed in light. Commenting Fr. Dove said that "*John and his lepers were one in their expectancy*" (Dove, 1997: 230).

John always experienced a sense of peace when he had guided his charges 'home'. John did not grieve their passing but saw death as a victory. He would preach on Philippians 3:21 explaining that in death they would be given their just rewards, a new and glorious body. The leper's faith and acceptance in this message can only be compared to Hebrews 11:13 (Good News Bible):

*"It was in faith that all these persons died.
They did not receive the things God had promised,
but from a long way off they saw them and welcomed them,
and admitted openly that they were foreigners and refugees on earth."*

John refused to leave the area and conducted services in the chapel hut, though he was excluded from the settlement itself. He took up residence in a tin shack, continuing to watch over the lepers and care for them as best as he could. There was no water or sanitation, but John lived there without complaint in searing heat, washing in a local pool and spending his days in prayer and meditation. Though John was basically sociable, he did at times relish his solitude, resenting visits and interruptions. He allowed a swarm of wild African bees to nest in his hut, under his desk. They never bothered him and certainly discouraged all but the most determined visitors.

A SERVANT AND A POET

Throughout his life, but particularly at this time, John wrote poetry. His work is prodigious, at least 6,000 poems. It would be fair to say that not all these poems are of equal worth and some will feel more appealing than others according to the individual reader's tastes. He had a particular devotion to Our Lady and uses much word play on her name, referring to her freely as Miriam, Admire I am, Eva, Ave and Maria. For example:

*In that I've always loved to be alone
I've treated human beings much as lepers,
For this poetic justice may atone
My way with God's, whose ways are always helpers;
I did not ever dream that I might go
And dwell amidst a flock of eighty such
Nor did I scheme towards it ever, No
The prospect looms not to my liking much;
Lepers warmly to treat as human beings
Is easy to the theorist afar,
Near to my heart from bondage be their freeings,
May it be flesh not stone, O Morning Star!
Miriam, shine, sweet Mistress, in thy name
Salvation wake, lepers make leap, unlame!*
(Dove, 1997: 200/201)

Poetry, of course, provides a window into the poet's soul in a unique way, and it can be startling – perhaps even a little disturbing – to see the intimacy with which he refers to the Mother of God. Not all of John's poems were about his

faith. Some of his poems tell his readers about places that were special to him. For example here is one about Chigona:

*"When every morn I walk through this enclosure
Wherein our sheltered leper-folk abide
I look upon Chigona's bright composure
Backed by an azure sky where falcon's glide:
And then meseems our village is a ship
Riding at anchor on the ocean's lips.
(Dove, 1997: 211)*

Whilst others give a glimpse of his deep feelings of care and concern for his leper-folk, for example:

*"Four blind philosophers – Domenico
Peter, Thomas and Zachariah called,
Sit as in senate roundly while I go
Giving Communion where Christ is walled:
May evermore these four adorers sit
Where Gospel-Makers sing and merit it.
(Dove, 1997: 215)*

Photographs of John in the late 1960's and early 1970's show a rather different face now. Gone is the clean-cut military appearance. The initial impression one gains is of wildness, the long hair and beard framing a careworn countenance. The gaze is direct, unswerving, unsmiling. Even so, the eyes are gentle.

Father Sean Gildea, OFM, was the Father Guardian of the Franciscan order in Zimbabwe during John's latter days at Mutemwa. Father Sean had been deeply moved by John's truly Franciscan spirit. The way he worked caring for the lepers, the absolute poverty in which he lived, all of these reminded him of St. Francis himself. Father Sean has said of John that he was "*. . more Franciscan than the whole lot of us put together*" (Dove, 1997: 255).

Such was the impression left on Father Sean on that one day that he went to Silveira House and left his own habit with Father Dove and asked him that the next time John visited Silveira House that he (Fr. Dove) should '*clothe*' John. This Father Dove did and the simple ceremony of John's clothing brought great joy to God's vagabond.

BROTHER JOHN BECOMES A MARTYR

By August 1979 the civil war in Zimbabwe was spreading towards the trading post of Mutoko that situated seventy miles outside of Harare. The magazine '*CATHOLIC LIFE*' says that there were two white men left in the region:

*"One was Father David Gibbs,
a priest at All Souls Mission.
The other was John Bradburne,
an Englishman who looked after lepers
at their settlement in Mutemwa".*

(March/April 2000: 46)

Indiscriminate violence spread through communities, with opportunities taken to settle old scores. John stayed close to the community even though he knew that guerrillas were all around the area. John had no interest in politics. His concern was for the well being of the lepers. At midnight on September 2nd, ten youths of the '*mujibhas*' came to the compound and asked John to come outside to pray with them. (Mujibhas were not fully accepted into the guerrillas' militia, but they were the eyes and ears of Robert Mugabe's soldiers.) John knew that prayer was not their intention. They took him prisoner and led him to another village guerrilla camp where he was mocked and interrogated. After twenty-four hours of this treatment, the commander said that John could be released; though he was not to return to Mutemwa but was to leave the country so that he could not bear witness against them. John refused. He was still released, and made his way back towards his beloved people. Details are sketchy, but gunmen followed him and one emptied the magazine of a high velocity AK47 rifle into his back. John slumped to the ground, dying. It was all over in seconds. The magazine, '*CATHOLIC LIFE*' of March 2000, provides for us the following account:

*"In the early hours of September 5th,
 Father Gibbs found John Bradburne's body
 beside the main road.
 He was wearing only his underpants. ."*
 (March/April 2000: 46)

In the same article we are told that John's executioner is now a businessman in Zimbabwe!

ONE LAST SURPRISE

John still had one surprise left in store. When he first arrived in Africa, he confided to a friend that he had three wishes. One was to serve leprosy patients, the second was to die a martyr, and the third was to be buried in the Franciscan habit (John had been received into the Third Order of St Francis). Arguably the first two had been fulfilled – but the third?

Placed on John's coffin were three white flowers representing his devotion to the Holy Trinity. In the course of the funeral service bizarre occurrence took place. Halfway through the service *"three drops of fresh blood fell from the bottom of his coffin to the floor"* ('CATHOLIC LIFE', March/April 2000: 47). A priest covered them with a cloth. The undertaker was aghast, sensing that his business would be ruined by what would be regarded as improper preparation of the body. The ceremony continued but the body was taken back to the mortuary at Salisbury and the casket was reopened:

"the body inspected.

It was dry and there was no sign of any issue of blood".

('CATHOLIC LIFE', March/April 2000: 47)

However it was noticed that the body had not been clothed in the Franciscan habit in accordance with John's wishes. This was remedied, and it seemed that John's three wishes had been granted.

Was John Bradburne a saint? There are many aspects of his life that challenge our preconceived ideas about the nature of sanctity. In a way, his inner struggles and idiosyncrasies make his holiness more appealing. Perfect, plaster saints may have been the stuff of nineteenth-century hagiography but their apparently effortless perfection makes them

unapproachable – somehow superhuman. John Bradburne was ordinary, but intensely single-minded for God. Some aspects of his life were certainly unconventional – he styled himself a '*strange vagabond of God*'. His wanderings were a symptom of his inner searching and he found the presence of God in the poor and the disadvantaged. Who knows what scars his war service may have laid upon him? Vietnam veterans have often undergone a similar experience to John Bradburne. They find themselves to be misfits in conventional society.

Brother John, sfo, was very fond of eagles. No one knows why for sure. Perhaps this may be in part because the crest for St. John is an eagle. He was also well aware that the Shona people believed that the Bateleur eagle was a messenger from God. Whether that fact had any further influence with John we can never really know. On one occasion John had been entrusted with the care of an eagle whilst its owner went abroad on business.

Unfortunately, or not depending upon one's view of captive wild animals, the magnificent hunter bird made its bid for freedom and managed to escape from John's devoted care. John was beside himself and frequently searched the surrounding area to find his charge. When he did find the eagle it was dead. Wild animals that have lived in captivity do not survive in the wild unless they have been properly and carefully released. True to John's nature the bird was given a funeral and accorded proper respect and decorum fit for a government official.

Strange as it may seem, there are two recorded incidents that happened after John's death. A year and a half had passed and Fr. Dove celebrated a memorial mass for John's intentions at Silveira House. Afterwards he witnessed two wild eagles on the ground beside the north front room that had once belonged to John. Now it is extremely rare to see wild eagles on the ground, let alone by a building inhabited by human beings!

On a second occasion Fr. Dove tells the story of how he, together with Agnes and Judith Countess of Listowel visited John's grave at Chishawasha. At the grave side Fr. Dove had began to say a pray for John and:

*"on looking up saw a most beautiful Bateleur eagle
circling low close to us with the white under-feathers
of its wings shining in the sun. He circled 3 times
and then headed off in the direction of Mutemwa.
I kept silent, but the others all said that John must be
Very pleased with our prayers."
(Dove, 1997: 177)*

Such accounts would appear to lend credence that God's hand had been truly upon John and his ministry. They certainly have had a profound effect on those who witnessed them. So much so that John's cause for beatification is actively sought.

Many people claimed that Brother John has come to their aid since his death. One such account has been published in a church weekly newspaper, 'CATHOLIC HERALD' tells of a man who suffered from a "serious brain tumour and (he) prayed to John Bradburne and knew as he prayed he would be well" ('Catholic Herald': 1st September, 2000). Before his operation the doctor took one more scan to ascertain the exact location of the tumour. The scan now showed no sign of any tumour. The man's doctor has proclaimed that this certainly looks like a miracle.

The John Bradburne Memorial Society's Newsletters continue to report similar accounts of healing attributed to the intercession of Brother John. One such report in the edition of Summer 2000 Newsletter Sister Mary Vincent of the Dominican Convent in Harare where a family that was known to her had

heard thieves trying to break into their home one evening. The situation in Zimbabwe today is as precarious as it was in John's time. The family was afraid for their own safety and began to pray and in particular asked John Bradburne to assist them in their distress. The article continues:

*"an extraordinary thing happened,
a swarm of bees descended on the thieves
and they flew off leaving their tools.
Some must have been badly stung."*

As related elsewhere in this chapter, John had a particular affinity with bees and that they had taken up residence in John's hut. Yet John was never stung by any of them. John certainly had his hand in protecting that family by sending his bees to their aid. It is not inconceivable that the family could have all been murdered had not the bees come to their protection. What is more the bees are still protecting them for they have taken up residence in the family's veranda. The family now feels quite safe and greatly honoured that John Bradburne came to them in their hour of need.

What are we to make of the events at his funeral? Those who were involved appear to attest to the truth of the incident. What does it all mean? Those who knew John see it as a fulfilment of his three wishes. As in life, John Bradburne leaves behind him a legacy of questions as well as answers. What is beyond doubt is his life of selflessness, holiness and prayer – a life that is made more accessible to us by John's very humanity and imperfections. Nor did his work at Mutemwa cease with his untimely death. The Mother of Peace Community now runs a sanctuary near Mutemwa for children and families who are victims of AIDS. His words, too, live on in his poetry, conveying to us the love that he had for his adopted family of lepers for whom he had given his life in caring service.

There have been growing numbers of pilgrims, not just from Zimbabwe, but from many other countries too, who arrive at Mutemwa. On the anniversary of Brother John's death *"over 6,000 people paid tribute to his memory with a candle-lit procession and an all night vigil, Midnight Mass was celebrated on his prayer track"* ('CATHOLIC LIFE', March/April 2000: 47). Increasingly Mutemwa is becoming a holy place where devout pilgrims arrive to offer prayers and sometimes thanksgivings for having been cured from a variety of illnesses.

Fr. Dove when asked to sum up and described John's call said this:

*"... It was the spirit of love who led him to love
what we should call poverty.
He was so like St. Francis of Assisi".*
(Dove, 1997: 253)

Perhaps it could be said of John, *"My heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee"*.

CHAPTER SIX: **TOTAL DEDICATION OF LIFE**

In the middle of the severe winter, 13th January 1982, an airliner crashed into a freezing waters of the Potomac River in Washington DC. The survivors fought for their lives as rescue workers struggled against the odds to save as many as they could. An onlooker, distraught at the plight of one passenger who, weak from exhaustion was drowning, jumped into the water to save her. An able swimmer, he managed to keep her afloat until a helicopter pulled her to safety. A film crew captured the man's heroism but then witnessed to their horror as the rescuer himself went under. He was seen no more. He had given his life so another could live. The then President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, whilst commenting on his action in television news reports, quoted the words, *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"* (John 15:13 – New Revised Standard Version).

Love is, by its very nature, self-sacrificing. It involves dying to self in service of others. Love is courageous, selfless and willing to lay down its life. Jesus came to show us the way of love. His love is not as the world often understands the word. The love He showed was not sensual or self-seeking; neither was it manipulative or egotistical, or controlling or demanding. Jesus' love is a heavenly and divine love, a love that seeks not to be served but to serve. Mother Teresa of Calcutta expressed beautifully the nature of this love:

"The work is only the expression of the love we have for God.

We have to pour our love on someone.

And the people are the means of expressing our love for God."

(Muggeridge, 1972: 98)

God's love poured into our hearts compels us to love. It empowers us to love until it hurts. This was a theme of *'HEALING AND WHOLENESS: MYTH OR MIRACLE'* (Ph.D. thesis, unpublished work) by William Baldwin who states that, *"Love itself can be a painful experience as those who know true love can testify"*.

It calls the Christian to reach out. To be kind, affectionate and loving towards their nearest and dearest is a wonderful thing (and for it we should be grateful). The Christian is called to go even further. God's love is of an altogether different dimension. For Jesus' command is, in essence, very simple, *"This is my command: Love each other"* (John 15:17- New International Version). There is to be no restriction on this love. God's love can even enable the Christian to love those who they don't like, those who irritate and annoy them. God's love, therefore, has the power to transform the way we think about others. Jesus warns His followers about this tendency in John's Gospel (15:18-21). Jesus says that if we belong to the world then the world will love us as its own (John 15:19). That true discipleship results in the Christian experiencing tension in his/her life. This tension, put simply, is a kind of tug of war between the world and the kingdom of heaven. The world wants us all as its own, embracing the world's ideas and living in worldly ways, whereas Jesus calls the Christian to be His disciples who are witnesses for Him and follow in His ways.

In interview on October 11th, 2000 with the author, Brother John Paul, who is currently a novice with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, explained how he had once worked in the Circus Circus casino in Reno from 1985 to 1989. At that time Brother John Paul had a wide circle of friends, all of whom were carefully selected. His life was based around money, prestige, and consumerism. John Paul wanted to be seen by others as successful and well liked. A family bereavement left John Paul with many questions, not least the

age-old question, *'what is the meaning of life? Why am I here?'* The pondering of such deep questioning led him to God. Seeing life from his new perspective meant that he recognized the shallowness of his former life style and thereby he had begun to make true spiritual growth. He joined a lay community whose role lay in youth evangelism and whilst serving with that community John Paul began to see that his vocation lay as a Franciscan friar. John Paul went on to relate how conducting a Youth 2000 Retreat in Edmonton, Canada, two teenage boys had attended the retreat, but felt that some of the more exuberant forms of worship were 'suspect'. This was alien to their spirituality. They had not yet come to know Jesus in a truly personal way. They had become afraid that they might be drawn into some kind of cult that used mesmerism to recruit its young converts. During the Saturday evening healing service when the Blessed Sacrament was revealed and taken to those who were attending the retreat and to those who were in need of healing, the two teenage boys had also come into contact with it and underwent a conversion experience. The Holy Spirit had opened their eyes. For the first time they could see clearly that which had been hidden from them. Their new-found faith began to give them answers to at least some of their many questions. They were now becoming aware of the work of the Holy Spirit and in that awareness they were also seeing areas in their lives that needed to be changed.

This challenge is fraught with difficulties, as Saint Francis was to find out for himself. The world tries to overwhelm those who would faithfully follow in Christ's footsteps. It is easy to lose direction and become confused. For Francis the remedy was simplicity in its essence, humility and repentance, to acknowledge one's need of God's grace. It is God's desire that His faithful people should be as lamps shining in the darkness, giving light to the world.

Jesus reminds His disciples, then as now, that, “*Servants are not greater than their master*” (John 15:20 – New Revised Standard Version). To be a follower of Jesus does not protect one from persecution in one form or another. In one sense, this can be simply a sign that the Christian’s witness is a true witness. St. Jerome, the great biblical scholar, warned against growing comfortable and complacent. Jerome’s teaching says that a persecuted Christian is more alive, alert and effective than one who is not.

Saint Francis whom many in the town of Assisi, friends as well as neighbours, called a fool and a madman knew that to live the Gospel life is to be counter-cultural and to swim against the prevailing current. His example teaches that in doing this he did not want to provoke hostility but simply to testify to the Gospel truth.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS CRIB

In many homes and most of our churches at Christmas time the familiar sight of the crib is there displayed to remind us of Christ’s humble beginnings in this world. Saint Francis of Assisi provided this simple visual aid for Christians in his desire to spread the Gospel. It was the Christmas of 1223 and Francis was in Rome for the approbation of his *Rule* by Honorius III. The saint by now had a reputation that preceded him for he was much loved by the people. In Rome those same individuals clamoured to see the poor man of Assisi. Even in ‘brother Jacqueline’s’ home he was not to find any peace. Jacqueline was a wealthy lady who lived in Rome and had befriended and supported Francis and his work. So he left Rome for Fonte Colombo in the Sabine Mountains. Here lived a man called John Vellita who had given the Franciscan Order a rocky piece of ground covered with trees facing the town of Greccio as a retreat. Francis invited John to come to see him at the retreat just prior to the Christmas.

John Vellita was also one of those individuals who supported the work of Francis and his order in whatever way he could. So Francis asked Vellita to locate a cave that was close by. In the cave Francis instructed John to place a manger, and some animals, such as cows, sheep, an ox and ass. Francis had been impressed by his visit to Bethlehem and he was determined in some way to recreate the scene of the Nativity. The humble beginnings of our Saviour had left Francis overcome with great emotion. By recreating the scene in a cave Francis felt that he could truly celebrate Christmas. John readily agreed to do what he could and went about his duties with enthusiasm.

The local populace was no doubt alerted by these arrangements that something was going to take place and no doubt awaited with much curiosity to see what transpired. On the night of Christmas Eve they became aware that the brothers were processing from where they were to the cave. Inevitably perhaps a few at first grabbed their torches and decided to go and see for themselves. A few more joined them and eventually a large crowd found their way to the cave at the entrance to which the brothers stood with their lighted candles. When the people arrived what they saw was:

"a table . . . placed above the manger for the Mass.

Beneath this improvised altar lay the

Infant God, between the ox and the ass."

(Cristiani, 1983: 148)

No one had ever seen such a sight since the birth of Jesus Himself. John Vellita was certain that he saw the real baby Jesus asleep in the manger in place of what would have been a small doll or statue. When Francis took the baby doll into his arms, John felt that the doll had somehow become a human infant. Then he felt that the infant awoke and looked into Francis' face, smiled

at him, fondling his face and beard. Had the night, so charged with emotion, tricked John in seeing the impossible? Was he tired and half-asleep dreamed the whole thing? We can never know the answers to these questions for not even John himself was altogether sure what happened on that Christmas Eve in 1223.

Francis was a deacon and it was his duty to both read the Gospel lesson and to preach the word of God. His homily was on the love of the Supreme God. He spoke from his heart and not of dogma or obscure points of theology. Brimming over with great joy Francis told of how the King of kings was born in a stable at Bethlehem. Francis moved the people with his words and encouraged them to give of themselves even more fully to their Lord and Saviour who had been born to them that blessed eve. It is clear that God takes ordinary things of life and does extra ordinary things with them (Baldwin, 2000).

At that site in Greccio a church has arisen and above the grotto now stands an altar. Where once a crowd of local people had gathered to celebrate Christmas now pilgrims come from all over the world to receive the Blessed Sacrament to nourish their bodies and souls.

The celebration of Christmas 1223 was one of Francis' last great joys. He was to suffer much from this point onwards. He suffered from haemorrhages with its ensuing loss of blood and he was almost blind as a result from his venture in the Middle East. If that was bad enough, his doctors had subjected Francis to red-hot irons laid across his forehead to cauterize veins in some medieval attempt to restore his vision. The end of his life was approaching even though he was only forty-one years old. Life expectancy at that time was poor and individuals may have thought themselves fortunate to reach

forty years old! He was not a particularly healthy person and in his youth he had suffered from fevers on several occasions. Francis had never stinted in his religious observances and it was beginning to tell. At the hermitages in Carceri or on Mount Alverna Francis slept on the cold bare earth. Long fasts, unbelievable privations, lack of sleep, and the bitter cold of winter nights, such things are not conducive for the building up of a healthy body. Should he ever be enjoying a good meal and suspected as much, Francis would sprinkle ashes over his plate. There is only so much that a human body can endure. During the time he had followed his vocation, Francis had ruined his body.

Francis was a great orator, a gifted preacher, but now he was too weak to give an address in public. The little man from Assisi who had preached to the masses from the Alps to the Sahara, before kings, prelates, sultans and scholars was now driven inwardly following the path of a hermit. Those who had been effected by his preaching and teaching described him as '*a light*', as a person who had become transparent to Christ. What strength he had was reserved for prayer and meditation. Even so it was in this period of his life that Francis wrote his great works, the '*TESTAMENT*' and '*THE CANTICLE OF BROTHER SUN*'.

After the Chapter of Mats, Francis was left by himself partly because there was much in-fighting within the Order and partly because he was too weary to be able resolve such differences. He made a retreat to the hermitage at Fonte Colombo. It was during his stay here that he would have one last attempt to set to paper another set of directions for his brothers with which he hoped to bring the factions together. Although this writing has been preserved for posterity, it was the only *Rule* never to be approved by papal decree. Francis had left for all mankind a valuable legacy, born out of prayer

and spiritual struggle, which during his lifetime even his closest friends had failed to recognize. The friars' rejection of radical Christianity, preferring a more moderate way had left Francis bereft. Not because he felt a personal rejection, but because he felt that such modifications to radical Christianity was a serious alteration of the Gospel imperative.

SAINT FRANCIS' LAST MESSAGES

Saint Francis in the last weeks of his life set out five letters, which are:

1. The Letter to All Christians;
2. The Letter to the Chapter of Pentecost, 1224;
3. The Letter to All Ecclesiastics;
4. The Letter to All Guardians of the Franciscan Order; &
5. The Letter to All Authorities.

These letters contain no new startling teaching, but are quite simply a reaffirmation of what the saint had always taught and maintained. We are told that, *"most critics agree that there is nothing new in these letters"* (Cristiani, 1983: 151).

But as they are the last written documents of the poor man of Assisi they are of historical value. In them Francis restated that we must love and serve God. That we are to be truly penitent, go to confession, actively to make restitution and seek for greater conversion in our lives. He advocates prayer and abstinence, both physically and morally. Humility and that the friars should

not crave temporal learning. That we are to love our enemies and seek after their welfare. Lastly but not least, to receive Holy Communion regularly. Saint Francis possessed a deep love and devotion of Holy Communion that is best summed up in his own words taken from his, '*TESTAMENT*' when he says:

"Here on earth I see only the most holy body and blood of the Son of God. I shall therefore honour these sacred mysteries above everything else".

Care had been taken in the composition of the letters and Brother Caesar of Speyer, his secretary, would have aided Francis.

In 'The Letter to All Guardians of the Franciscan Order', or if you like to the brothers in charge of each community, Francis addresses the duties to be undertaken by the brethren in particular their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. He also reminds them of their special work, the Divine Office and on a slightly less spiritual note, Francis instructs all the brothers of their tasks in keeping churches, sanctuaries, and sacred vessels scrupulously clean!

Francis' social conscience is noted from his 'Letter to All Authorities'. Being aware that he was to be a good example to those amongst whom he had lived, Francis reminds the civic authorities that they in turn were to set a good example to the populous whom they served. They were to receive the sacraments of the Church regularly and suggested that they, in turn, might use their office to find a way to make public announcements on the need for prayer and to praise God.

The writer is reminded when researching this aspect of Francis' last letters of a trip that he had made in 1992 to the Arabic State of Qatar. He noted that five times each day the muezzins would call the people to prayer. The first call was about 4.30 a.m. and the last call was usually about 9.00 p.m. It appeared to me that the mosques were plentiful, of varying sizes and some more lavishly built than others. Every street corner seemed to have its own mosque and even labourers working on the main highway systems miles out of town had their own 'mobile mosque' in the form of a port-a-cabin. Yet no matter where the people were, in the street, at the camel races, at home, wherever, they would stop what they were doing once the call had gone out, face Mecca, and go through their prayer routine including prostrating themselves on the bare ground.

The call of '*God is Good*' reminded one of the need for prayer and so one used the call to praise God as a Christian. This set me thinking, why is it we do not seem to hear the peel of church bells in our country that often? Modern buildings do not even seem to incorporate a bell tower anymore! Also what would happen if in this '*supposed Christian State*' that we live in, if the churches were to ring bells to remind the people of God and to pray to Him five times a day? One wonders how long it would be before some individual would complain and just how the other faiths would interpret the Christian call to prayer? It was a comforting thought while it lasted but I endeavoured upon my return to England to ring the church bells, just a little, each morning at 9.00 a.m. before the Rector, Assistant Curate, Church Army Captain and myself said matins. I don't recall any fuss! Then again the bells were not that loud either. It also needs to be said that the practice of ringing church bells still occurs, frequently before a service, especially at wedding or a funeral. In some parishes the bell may be rung at the point of the Elevation of the Host so that those of the faithful who unable to attend church may offer their prayers in union with the whole church.

Is it possible that Francis too had also a similar experience from his visit to the Moslems? Had that experience influenced his request upon the civic authorities to make a public announcement for the need for prayer? A practice that is widespread in the Catholic traditions of Christianity today is the recitation of the Angelus that has its roots a little latter than Francis' letter but on the agenda for the General Chapter of Pisa in 1263's such a practice was recommended. Whilst the General Chapter had endeavoured to comply with the saint's last wishes, the Order had grown, and inevitably there were some changes with which Francis in his desire for simplicity and poverty could not approve.

There was one more letter not listed above. It was a deeply touching note from one friend to another of a more simpler and intimate nature. This was Saint Francis' letter to Brother Leo. Visitors to Spoleto Cathedral can see this very precious letter that has been preserved down through the ages for our children and for us.

PART TWO: MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

The aim of Matthew's Gospel, writing as he did for a Jewish readership initially, is to lead his readers into understanding, through linking Christ with David and thereby affirming His messianic claim, that He is the Son of God. This is accomplished through the unfolding the hints and clues in and around Jesus' miracles and teaching that discloses His identity as the Messiah. His Gospel, therefore, becomes a narrative with the clearly defined purpose and mission of revealing who Jesus really is. For example Matthew 17:22-27 develops this revelation when he uses the title '*Son of man*' (Matthew 17:22). This title would have been familiar to Matthew's early Jewish readers as a reference to Daniel's vision of the one to whom kingdom is given (Daniel 7:13-14). Then we have Jesus comparing Himself with the children of kings who, unlike ordinary citizens, do not have to pay taxes. The message to Matthew's readers is clear. The Temple was the house of God and Jesus, as God's Son is therefore not obliged to pay any of the temple taxes.

The divinity of Jesus Christ has been a long-established belief on which Christians are able to base their daily lives with confidence. A confidence in which they know Jesus as their Saviour, Redeemer, and King of kings and Lord of lords – or do they? It is often far easier to know a great deal about Jesus in an academic way than to actually to know Him in a truly personal way.

St. Francis of Assisi's life had a very simple mission that was to know God's only-begotten Son in a deeply personal way. St. Francis frowned upon academic learning, not because it was not a good pursuit, but because it could and can prevent his friars from experiencing Christ in a very close and personal way. The challenge to those who would follow his example in becoming a true disciple of Jesus was to enter into a deep and abiding

relationship with Him. The questions that Franciscans, indeed any Christian, should ask of themselves are:

1. *How well do I know Jesus?*
2. *Do I have a relationship with Him?*
3. *Is He the Lord of my Life?*
4. *Am I prepared to get to know Him better through spending time in prayer, reading Scripture and celebrating the liturgy?*

St. Maximilian Kolbe was a man who followed Francis' example and whose life expressed a positive response to all those questions. As a prisoner in Auschwitz, Maximilian knew and followed his Lord so faithfully that like his Lord; he was willing to give up his life so that another might live.

Maximilian Kolbe was born at Pabianice, which is near to Lodz, in Poland on the 8th January 1894, the second of son of a poor family; his father (Julius) was a weaver. His mother, Maria (nee Dabrowska) was a midwife and also managed a small grocery shop where Maximilian would help. Julius and Maria were devout Christians and took the child to the church where he was given the name of Raymond. Maximilian's older brother was called Franciszek and his younger brother was Josef. The family could only afford to send Franciszek to school. Maximilian stayed at home to help his parents. However it was a local pharmacist who, realising his intelligence, took an interest in Maximilian education and began to teach him Latin.

Maximilian was a venture-some, enterprising, intelligent and a very lively child and like all children everywhere prone to mischievous pranks. He would often hide behind a wardrobe in a room where there was a small altar with the

picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa placed upon it. After one such prank his mother had issued such a rebuke that *“her words took effect and brought about a radical change in the child’s behaviour”* (Craig, 1997: 5).

When asked to explain this sudden change, Maximilian stated that he had seen the Mother of God who had come to him holding two crowns, one white the other red. The Blessed Virgin Mary asked Maximilian which he would choose for himself. The white crown was the road of purity and perseverance whilst the red crown led to martyrdom? Maximilian decided there and then, even at that tender age, that both were to be his destiny. Blessed Virgin smiled and then disappeared. After this experience Maximilian would never be the same again.

MAXIMILIAN ENTERS THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR

In 1907 both Maximilian and his older brother entered the junior seminary of the Conventual Franciscans at Lwow near to his birthplace. It was during his education here that Maximilian showed that he had a gift for mathematics, physics as well as a passion for things military. These gifts produced different ideas of what Maximilian might achieve within the Order. Some felt that he would become a brilliant scientist whilst others argued that his real strength lay in being a strategist. Perhaps the latter group may have got things partially correct for at one point Maximilian felt that his future lay outside the Order fighting for his beloved Poland rather as St Francis had join the campaign to save Assisi.

God's ways are not our ways the prophet Isaiah instructs us (Isaiah 55:8). Before Maximilian had the opportunity to leave the Order, his parents had decided that they too should enter the religious life for all their children had received the call of God and were now in seminaries. Maximilian could not in his heart of hearts leave the Order after such a rare family sacrifice. In September 1910 Maximilian was received as a novice and officially took the name '*Maximilian*'. Between 1912 and 1915 he continued his studies in Rome, initially at the Gregorian College where he majored in philosophy and then between 1915 to 1919 at the College Serafico where theology was his subject. In each subject he graduated with a doctorate. On the 28th April 1918 Maximilian, then aged 24 was ordained also in Rome. However he was more interested in acquiring true sanctity and a profound appreciation of the exalted dignity of Mary the mother of Christ. In this regard Holbock tells us that Maximilian had once said:

*"It is an excellent thing to study Mariology,
but let us always recall that we become better acquainted
with the Immaculata by humble prayer and in the loving
experience of everyday life than through wise definitions,
argumentation, and subtle distinctions,
even though these are not to be looked down on by any means."
(Holbock, 2000: 197)*

A truly Franciscan sentiment that is in keeping with the spirit of Saint Francis' own views.

Maximilian had never lost that one time desire to be a soldier and involved in some military campaign somewhere but by now his interpretation of that impulse changed from one of the world to one of spiritual warfare against all the evil that he had witnessed roundabout him. His horizons had become

broader and his country of Poland smaller in comparison. Now he saw worse things than earthly slaveries and so the fight was on, but not for him the sword. He saw religious indifference as the deadliest poison of his day, and that situation is as true today as it was for Maximilian. His new military mission was to combat that indifference.

PROTECTOR OF OUR LADY

With his immense love for, and devotion to, Our Blessed Lady Maximilian established, together with six companions, the '*Militia of Mary Immaculate*', (Crusade of Mary Immaculate) on October 16th, 1917. The aim of the organization was to fight evil with the witness of a good life, prayer, work and suffering. His goal was to convert the sinner, heretics and particularly freemasons to the faith of Christ and His Church through the love of the Blessed Virgin. The Catholic Church is suspicious about freemasonry and it was a crusade that Maximilian felt called to, that is to do battle as a soldier of Christ.

Maximilian, as did Padre Pio and St. Francis of Assisi, began to have health problems as he entered this creative period in his life. His problems were diagnosed as advanced tuberculosis and he feared that death was overshadowing him. The doctors had told Maximilian that his illness could not be cured. He gave himself more and more to Our Lady to be used as an instrument of her will. Mild mannered and patient, Maximilian was known to be able to lose his temper when necessary to defend the honour of Mary the mother of Christ.

After the First World War Maximilian set about forming cells, in particular groups of people committed to his crusade all over Poland. Despite one collapsed lung and the second being badly damaged, Maximilian engaged in frenetic activity and by 1922 was publishing a monthly newsletter under the title of the *'Knight of the Immaculate'* in Cracow. A move to the Grodno Friary was advantageous for him. The friary possessed a small printing press and the newsletter's circulation grew from a mere 5,000 copies to 70,000 by 1927. The number of Catholics joining the crusade meant that it was not long before even Grodno Friary became too small for Maximilian's needs. However Prince Jan Drucko-Lubecki donated some land just west of Warsaw in the village of Teresin. Maximilian promptly erected a statue of Mary Immaculate on the site and the Franciscan friars began the hard work of constructing a new home.

The new friary at Teresin was consecrated on December 8th, 1927 (Feast of the Immaculate Conception) and given the name of *'Niepokalanow'*, which translates as 'City of the Immaculate'. This particular friary's work was totally dedicated to Our Blessed Lady and the monastic spirit flourished in total obedience to the *Rule* of St. Francis of Assisi. Niepokalanow is most probably the single largest friary in the world today, yet it began life as ramshackle huts with only tarpaper roofs. Soon men from all over Poland would sense that their vocation lay at Niepokalanow. To cope with the demand, so we are told, a new junior seminary was built to "*prepare priests for the missions capable of every task in the name of the Immaculate and with her help*" (Craig, 1997: 9).

After only a few years from the time the friary was consecrated more than a hundred seminarians were resident at Niepokalanow! Amongst those who were offering themselves to God's service, as Franciscan brothers were doctors, dentists, builders, mechanics, tailors, printers, farmers, cooks and

cobblers. In fact a whole variety of professions that would be needed to spearhead missionary activity. By 1939 at the outbreak of World War Two the friary housed, some 762 brothers, of this:

13 were priests; 18 were novices;

527 were brothers; 122 were boys in the junior seminary; &

82 candidates for the priesthood

(Craig, 1997: 9).

Whatever the successes or failures of the Christian Church, Jesus has always reminded His followers that *"the harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in"* (Matthew 9:37, Good News Bible).

It was not just the growth in vocations that Niepokalanow witnessed, there was also new printing presses capable of photogravure and binding that could produce 16,000 copies of the newsletter each hour needed to keep pace with the circulation requirement of 750,000 copies each month. The newsletter, however, was not the only thing that came off the presses. A new Catholic newspaper called, *'The Little Daily'* was launched achieving a circulation of 137,000 copies on weekdays and 225,000 on Sundays. Maximilian was determined to utilise the media to its fullest to convert the sinner and on December 8th, 1938 he launched a radio station. Perhaps the strangest feature of Niepokalanow was the birth of its own fire brigade staffed by the friars themselves. Such an innovation was probably a measure of Niepokalanow's success, protecting it from those who would burn it to the ground.

There can be little doubt that Father Maximilian was having an effect on the spiritual lives of the Polish people. Parish priests across Poland had reported

that their congregations had grown and become more faithful (Craig, 1997: 10 compare this with Ricciardi, 1982: 109). They attributed this phenomenon to the papers and radio broadcasts of Niepokalanow. After the Second World War the Polish bishops had communicated to the Vatican that Father Maximilian's enterprises had singularly prepared their people to endure the horrors that had befallen Poland at that terrible time.

MAXIMILIAN THE MISSIONARY

Even though the Niepokalanow junior seminary had just begun in 1929 and its first students not yet ordained to the priesthood, Maximilian in the spirit of St. Francis felt called to the missionary work in other lands. To those who presumed to point out that Niepokalanow did not train candidates for such apostolic activity, he merely referred to Francis' example in risking himself to bring peace in the middle east, even though the Order had no such experience of missionary work.

Maximilian received the Father General's permission for his intended missionary work, though as to the matter of finance, in that too he followed the example of his patron St. Francis and trusted that God would provide for his needs. And so on 26th February, 1930 he, together with four other friars, left Niepokalanow for the Far East. They arrived in Japan on 24th April having travelled via Port Said, Saigon and Shanghai. Archbishop Hayasaka was most pleased to welcome the little band of brothers particularly after Father Maximilian agreed to fill the vacant chair of philosophy in the Archbishop's

diocesan seminary. By this time Maximilian had gained two doctorates, (one from the Pontifical Gregorian University where he studied from 1912 to 1915 and the other from the Pontifical Theological Faculty where he studied from 1915 to 1919).

True to the early days of Francis and the Order, not to mention Niepokalanow, the brothers' residence was somewhat rudimentary. A hut, whose walls and roof were flimsy became their home and they slept on straw and used strips of wood for a table. Such hardships were not exactly unknown to Franciscans and certainly conditions in which the brothers thrived. Yet after only one month the friars were producing their first *'Knight'*, publication called the *'Seibo no Kishi'* on their own printing press, no mean feat for they spoke no Japanese and as already stated, they had no money! One year later Japan had its own Niepokalanow built on the slopes of Mount Hikosan – *'Mugenzai no Sono'* which when translated means, 'the Garden of the Immaculate'. St. Francis of Assisi would have approved of such a friary for it was established amongst the poor and at one with the poor. Some of the Japanese people felt that the friars were a little crazy to be building their new home in Japan on a slope that faced away from the town. However it was the will of God and Maximilian's obedience to His will was to prove very fortuitous, for when the atomic bomb had been dropped on Nagasaki, Mugenzai no Sono only sustained minor damages, broken windows and no more than that. Mugenzai no Sono today is the motherhouse for the Franciscan Order in that particular province.

Maximilian was a wise missionary who respected the people and their customs. He looked for what was good about Buddhism and Shintoism and entered into debate with the local Buddhist priests many of whom he counted amongst his friends. He had learned his craft from the example of Apostle Paul of Tarsus. He found a common base from which to meet the people and explain the Gospel to them.

By 1931 Maximilian had established Mugenzai no Sono's noviciate and by 1936 a junior seminary. Maximilian's beloved paper the '*Knight*' soon had a circulation which was six times greater than its nearest Japanese Catholic rival at 65,000 copies. Perhaps its success was because the paper was aimed at the whole community and not just the Catholic population. He had "*won over the Japanese people by his evident humility, simplicity and poverty, by his prayers and sacrifices*" (Holbock, 2000: 204). Father Kolbe quickly found helpers amongst the population, many of whom were Protestants. Indeed it was a Methodist who first translated his articles from Latin and Italian into Japanese.

The stress caused by founding a new community house in Japan was beginning to take its toll on Maximilian's life. But he was not going to let that deter him from his vocation to convert sinners. On May 31st 1932, Maximilian left Japan for pastures new – Malabar where he founded his third Niepokalanow. The spirit is often more willing than the flesh to deliver and unfortunately no priests could be found for Malabar and Maximilian's superiors requested that he should return to Japan.

Still he felt himself called ever onwards. There were still multitudes of peoples who needed to know the Good News and he desperately wanted to bring the message of Christ crucified to them. On one occasion Maximilian went to Moscow via Siberia for he had a vision of publishing his '*Knight*' in Russian. He even studied the Russian language and Marxist philosophy. Like St. Francis before him, Maximilian was truly loyal to the Pope. John XXIII held that even in political systems believed to be inherently evil there can be found some good. Maximilian embraced this teaching and passed it on to the young novices in his charge.

Maximilian returned to his homeland of Poland in 1936. He had felt that he may have suffered martyrdom in Japan and if his failing health, (his violent headaches and the abscesses that covered his body which were a reaction to the Japanese food), are used as a yardstick, then perhaps he did indeed experience a kind of martyrdom. The sacrifice of his life would be demanded later!

HITLER INVADES POLAND.

Just prior the outbreak of the Second World War Maximilian prophesied that the friars would face hardship and suffering. He went on to instruct them to bear such sufferings in love and acceptance for in that way they would be drawn closer to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Maximilian may not have been martyred in Japan, but now in Poland martyrdom awaited him.

The Nazis invaded Poland during 1939 and by the 13th September Niepokalanow was also occupied. Maximilian, together with the other friars, was arrested on the 19th by the Gestapo and deported to Lamsdorf in Germany and later on to Amtlitz. Later they were to be released on the feast of the Immaculate Conception that is the eighth of December. From the very moment of Maximilian's arrival back in Poland he received a new call from God. He was to organize sanctuary for some 3,000 refugees of whom 2,000 were Jewish. Craig (1997: 14) records for us his words to the friars:

"We must do everything in our power to help these unfortunate people who have been driven from their homes and deprived of even the most basic necessities. Our mission is among them in the days that lie ahead".

Given such a message by their Father Guardian the brothers immediately went about housing, feeding and clothing the refugees. Everything that the friary had was pressed into service without stint. It was inevitable that such activity would come to the notice of the Germans. The Polish peoples' captors kept a close watch on Father Maximilian!

In the only edition of the '*Knight of the Immaculate*' that Maximilian was allowed to publish in 1941 he told his readers that no one could ever change the truth. That truth should be sought and embraced. Real conflict was that which took place within the soul of man and that the two irreconcilable armies were those of good and evil. Battlefield victories counted for nothing if man himself is defeated in his inner struggle with sin. Father Maximilian may have never known such an inner personal defeat, but he would know the cruelty of man and the world.

On 17th February, 1941 he and four other brothers were once again arrested and detained in the Pawiak Prison. The Nazis' purpose was clear, to liquidate selected individuals, in particular the leaders of the Polish people. At Pawiak Maximilian was abused, singled out from amongst the Pawiak's other inmates for '*special treatment*'. An SS guard noticing his brown habit and the rosary suspended from his girdle enquired if he believed in Jesus. Maximilian's affirmative response was greeted with a blow from the guard. The question was put to Maximilian again, and again he professed his faith and again he was beaten. The questioning of his faith continued and the beatings became less merciful until eventually the SS guard had Father Kolbe's habit removed from his person and he was obliged to wear prison clothing. After he had suffered terrible beatings and humiliations over a period of three months Maximilian was transported to Auschwitz on the 28th May, together with three

hundred other prisoners. Maximilian was to be treated in exactly the same way as other Catholic priests and so he *“together with other priests, was sentenced to hard labour in Block 17”* (Holbock, 2000: 205).

The prisoner numbered 16670, which was emblazoned on a striped convict's uniform, was Father Maximilian Kolbe. His assigned work was to carry stone construction blocks that were used for the crematorium walls. However by late May Fr. Kolbe, together with other priests imprisoned at Auschwitz, were held in the Babice section that was controlled by a former criminal called *‘Bloody Krott’*. Commandant Krott, who was determined to put them to hard labour, considered priests as lazy parasites. Craig reliably tells us that:

“despite his one lung, Father Maximilian accepted the work and the blows with surprising calm.

Krott conceived a relentless hatred against the Franciscan and gave him heavier tasks than the others”.

(Craig, 1997: 15)

The priests were forced to work all day without a break. They were cutting huge tree trunks. Then would have to carry all of which was accomplished at a running speed. Just to ensure that there was no slacking amongst the imprisoned Catholic clergymen, they were regularly beaten in a vicious way by the guards. On one occasion the Commandant found the heaviest planks of wood and personally loaded them onto Fr. Kolbe's back and ordered him to run with them. When the friar collapsed from the strain, Krott began to kick Maximilian in the stomach and the face. Then the Commandant ordered the guards to give Maximilian fifty lashes. Father Kolbe became unconscious from such inhumane and barbarous treatment and Krott had him thrown in the mud where Maximilian was left for dead. His brother priests spirited Father Kolbe away into the camp's infirmary. Despite his own personal suffering,

Father Maximilian made himself available to the others whilst he was in the hospital and heard their confessions. Here in the nightmare conditions of an extermination camp at a time when faith disappears, he reminded those around him of the love of God. He showed them compassion and never thought of himself. Hunger raged in their bellies and what food was available to the prisoners was all too little setting one inmate against his fellow inmates as their will to survive became paramount. For they had dreams of freedom and being reunited once again with their loved ones. Yet Maximilian stood back when the food arrived allowing others to eat before him and thereby frequently went without food himself. Why would he do this? It seems hard for us to understand such selflessness. Even when he managed to obtain what meagre rations there was, he would share it with other less fortunate prisoners. Maximilian's aim was to give himself for the good of all men.

His brother priests felt deeply for his plight but were never allowed to assist Maximilian by the German Guards. Maximilian himself feared more for the safety of his fellow inmates than for his own situation. He asked the Blessed Virgin to give him the strength that he needed and believed that she answered his prayers. In a letter to his mother he allayed her fears for his health and assured her that good Lord was everywhere, even in the hell hole of Auschwitz where He in His infinite mercy and love looked after all the prisoners. The prisoners would gather around Maximilian to hear him speak of God and His love for His creatures. Words can be cheap, but Maximilian's words were never doubted for his words were lived out in his life. Craig has recorded for us Father Zygmunt Ruszczak memories of the Franciscan:

*"Each time I saw Father Kolbe in the courtyard
I felt within myself an extraordinary effusion of his goodness.
Although he wore the same ragged clothes as the rest of us,*

*with the same tin can hanging from his belt,
one forgot his wretched exterior and was conscious only
of the charm of his inspired countenance and of his radiant holiness.”*
(Craig, 1997: 16/17)

The end came for Maximilian in Auschwitz. No longer able to work from total exhaustion caused from re-occurring fevers, he was sent to Block 14. On a July evening in 1941 a prisoner managed to escape and got clean away from this same block. The Camp Commandant decreed that the reprisals would have to consist of ten men. Prisoners from the camp would be executed. Amongst those men was one Franz Gajowniczek who as recorded by Holbock *“repeated over and over the names of his wife and children”* (Holbock, 2000: 206, et al.). As the ten were picked and marched away to the starvation bunkers, prisoner numbered 16670, one Father Kolbe, stepped forward and said:

*“I am a Polish Catholic priest.
I would like to take the place of this man,
since he has a wife and children.”*
(Holbock, 2000: 206)

The exchange was approved and as Scriptures says that, *“no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”* (John 15:13, New Revised Standard Version).

In the *‘death block’* they were ordered to strip naked and the slow starvation process commenced in darkness. There were no hysterical outbursts, no screaming, but the prisoners sang praises to God as they awaited their release from their mortal tormentors. By the eve of the Assumption only four

prisoners were left alive. The jailer came to finish off Maximilian as he sat in a corner praying. A hypodermic needle containing carbolic acid was injected into the veins of his fleshless arm. Maximilian Kolbe was cremated in the same way as all the other prisoners at Auschwitz. Those extermination camps with their crematoria have left the civilized world horrified!

Father Kolbe's death was not a sudden, last minute act of heroism. His whole life had been a preparation for it. His holiness was a limitless, passionate desire to convert the whole world to God through the example left to him by Francis of Assisi and sustained by his beloved, *'Immaculata'*. In summing up Maximilian's life, the newspaper, *'L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO'* (18th October, 1982: 1 and 12) said this of him, "*He died a martyr of love, giving his life for another.*" Franciszek Gajowniczek attended Maximilian's canonization Mass held on 18th October, 1982 at which Pope John Paul II presided.

The life and witness of Maximilian was to have a profound effect on the life of another Polish priest who was also a martyr. Father Jerzy Popieluszko was a diocesan priest, (as compared to those who had felt that their vocation lay within one of the Franciscan Orders) and who was a victim of the Communists. Fr. Jerzy held Maximilian in high regard and endeavoured to be as faithful to Christ as had his hero. It was Maximilian's example that gave Fr. Jerzy the courage to speak out against the state and uphold the rights of the poor. This ministry would inevitably lead Fr Jerzy into conflict with the Communist Polish Government and to his death. (See Sikorski, 1999: 8.)

There was yet another Franciscan who suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Nazis. This Franciscan was a nun, Sister Restituta Kafka of the 'Franciscans of Christian Love'. *'Sister Resoluta'* as she was commonly

called by her friends, was a nurse working in the operating theatre of a hospital in Vienna. The Germans demanded that she remove all the crucifixes that she herself had placed in each room and ward of the hospital. Neither she nor the Order was prepared to comply with the German's demands. This attitude did not go down well. She became a marked woman!

Years later the Nazi's found amongst Sister Restituta's belongings a poem, written by a soldier mocking the Nazi regime. She was arrested and tried on the charge of high treason. It was a show trial and the court sentenced her to be beheaded on 30th March, 1943. From her prison cell, Aid to the Church in Need's newsletter, '*MIRROR*' (April, 2000 edition), tells us that she wrote, "*God does not ask more of us than we can bear.*"

CHAPTER SEVEN: **CHARISMA AND THE STIGMATA**

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Saint Francis in his total poverty of life, total absence of material goods, was totally happy and content possessing an air of great joy (Moorman, 1977: 82/83 and Bodo 1984: 31). Yet most of us would say that whilst we are often happy, real joy is elusive and all too rare. Each day we are assailed by advertisements that attempts to replace in our worship the God of Heaven, with the god of consumerism. The television, newspapers, posters - all vies for our attention, shouting their message to us and seeking to attract our attention. Their techniques may vary but the underlying point is usually the same – *'buy this product and you will be happy'*. In his novel, *'THERAPY'* (1995), David Lodge tells the story of a successful businessman who seemingly has all that money can buy. Yet he is discontent. To cure his frustrations he pays privately to see a psychotherapist who undertakes to unravel his problems, without success. It is clear therefore, that what money cannot buy and His psychotherapist cannot provide, is true joy and real happiness. Yet ironically poverty, not riches, was apparently the way forward for Saint Francis' as his life bears witness.

The strange thing about joy is that it is never solitary. Francis knew that to be completely happy it always requires the involvement of two parties – ourselves and God or ourselves and others. In other words, whenever we experience genuine joy, God is there. Joy is infectious – we want to share it with others and others flocked to Francis, both lay and those with vocations. There is something infinite about joy, there is never a fear that there won't be

enough to go around. However joy and selfishness are incompatible. For example Brother Peter who is a novice with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. His particular Franciscan Order came to London and established a friary there in June 2000 from the United States of America. In an interview with the author, Brother Peter told him that before he had become a friar, he had attended a Youth 2000 Retreat led by Brothers Stan, Harold and Pierre and it was during that retreat that he underwent a kind of conversion experience. The Holy Spirit had bowled Peter over and his heart was on fire with zeal and desire to live the Gospel life, giving himself totally, completely and wholly to Christ.

Jesus used the perfect illustration of childbirth in John 16:20-23 to explain the life-changing effects of real joy. All the agonies of labour that the mother experiences are swept away and forgotten when her child is born. The wonderful gift of new life and love eclipses everything else. The sorrows are transient, but the joy is everlasting. In this sense, joy is indeed a foretaste of heaven and Francis was totally captivated, totally engulfed by that vision.

Jesus was trying, so the Christians believe, to explain to the disciples about the new relationship that they were to have with Him. He was referring to His forthcoming agony and desolation of His Passion and death. Even so Jesus said that when He returned, His followers' joy would be complete. Christians maintain that His promise of an intimate, personal relationship was for all, through the ages, who seek Him. Francis had discovered this and was completely immersed in it. Francis' message was a challenge to those who would listen to it. Did they really believe this? After all he was evidence of it. Deep within Francis soul there was a craving for a closer union with Christ for therein he could find more joy. He wanted the people to understand that craving, and that often his behaviour seemed odd, but it challenged thought and understanding. When Scripture speaks of God's love it is never sterile or

restrained. Rather, it is passionate, reckless, and even jealous. Chapter two of the Song of Songs speaks of a love that is full-blooded, intimate and ardent. There is nothing cosy or safe about this kind of love. It is the burning desire of lovers who seek nothing but ever-increasing closeness with each other. Is this how they, and we of today, viewed Francis' relationship with Jesus and is this the kind of relationship that we should be seeking for a better world?

Like so many other saints Francis had a great power over animals. He once preached to the birds of the sky and according to Cristiani began his sermon:

*"My very dear brothers the birds,
you are deeply indebted to God,
and it is your duty to praise Him
and celebrate Him always and everywhere,
for He has allowed you to fly freely wherever you please".*

(Cristiani, 1983: 136)

While Francis spoke *"all these birds began to open their beaks, flap their wings, stretch their necks and bow their little heads to the ground in deep respect"*. In his account on the life of St. Francis contained in his book entitled, *'EVERY MAN'S BOOK OF SAINTS'* Brother Kenneth, (1981: 131) states that when Francis rescued a hare from a trap he said to the hare *"Come to me, brother hare,"* and it ran to him. After which the saint took the hare into his arms and stroked it. When Francis placed the hare on the ground, the hare would not run away, but kept returning. Brother Kenneth also relates how one day a fisherman who had rowed Francis over a lake gave him a large fish, which he accepted as a gift and immediately returned the fish back to the water, bidding it bless God. (See also Thomas of Celano's, *'FIRST LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS'*)

The 'FIORETTI' recalls that when Francis, together with the company of friars, arrived at Alviano, his preaching had such powerful effect that the whole populace wished to be invested within the Third Order of St. Francis. We are also told that the town housed a large population of swallows. The screeching chirps of these birds prevented the people of Alviano from hearing clearly the saint's message. So Francis turned to the birds and said most gently:

*"My sisters, the swallows,
I think it's my turn to talk now!
You have done enough singing and chatting.
Come now and listen to God's word,
and be still and silent while I preach!"*
(Cristiani, 1983: 138)

We are told that the swallows immediately became silent and remained still until Francis had completed his sermon.

This account of Francis' authority over nature is of a similar order to that of Jesus when He had commanded the storms and wind to desist on Lake Tiberias (Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25; & Matthew 8:18, 23-27).

Another trait that Francis had which was similar to that of Jesus is that he would use everyday things in a parable form to teach a basic principle. For example when he taught about poverty he would refer to the larks enquiring whether they needed more than a drink of water. The food they found in the fields for them to be content and sing the praises of God. They should be content with the gifts God provided for them to sustain them and not pandering after illusive wealth and power.

In August 1224 Francis retired to a lonely mountain spot among the Apennines called La Verna, for forty days' fast and prayer before Michaelmas. On his way, while they rested under a tree, some small birds settled on his head and shoulders, and around his feet, and showed their delight by singing and flapping their wings. St. Francis addressed the birds saying, *'I believe it is pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ that we should stay in this lonely mountain, seeing that our little sisters and brothers, the birds, show such joy at our arrival.'*

Like so many other saints, Francis also possessed the gift of healing. It is often difficult to distinguish in this area the facts for embellishments woven into the story by dedicated followers who read more into the situation than was actually the case. Certainly in the twenty-first century, our scepticism (which is often a lack of faith) would hamper the creditability of such accounts. We demand scientific proofs, which whilst this is not a bad thing for testing the genuine from the fraud, faith and miracles however go beyond the realms of science. Modern technology and ever more powerful computers do not always help; sometimes such things hinder us if we should place too much store by them. Our faith in technology can generate neurosis because of the stress and the speeding up of life that subsequently results from it. Sometimes people need to withdraw from the pressures of daily living to find peace and healing.

After the Stigmata, Francis and Brother Leo left La Verna to return to the Porziuncola. Francis was riding on a donkey and was completely lost in thought from his experiences. It was an easy trip for Francis. As they passed through the towns and villages, the local people would rush out to welcome the holy friars. They took refuge on their first evening at the hermitage of Monte Casale. It was here that Francis healed a brother of the hermitage who had suffered from epilepsy. The account of this journey contains numerous other examples of Francis healing the sick people from the locality.

MOUNT LA VERNA

Saint Francis failed expedition to Syria during the Fourth Crusades may seem as though God was not with Francis. But out of each situation God brings about a greater good. Having returned to Italy, Francis and Brother Masseo began to preach in the local villages as they travelled back to the Porziuncola. When they reached a small fortress town called Montefeltre in Romagna, just fifty miles north-west of Assisi and not far from the present day Republic of San Marino, they found much festivity. The town's folk were celebrating the knighting of their lord. Francis and Masseo were sensitive to the festivities and had no wish to disturb the celebrations. Among the invited guests to this joyful occasion was one Lord Orlando of Cattani who owned the citadel of Chiusi who had long wished to consult Francis for spiritual direction. Orlando was so pleased with Francis that he gave him Mount La Verna that is in Tuscany just twenty miles east of Florence. Wild and desolate, it would make an ideal retreat for the friars. Unusual for Francis, he graciously accepted the gift and the deeds bear the date of 8th May 1213. On the rocky plateau at the top of the mountain had been erected a few huts made of branches and mud. However some time later one Count Orlando had a small church built there that is dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels – the same name given to the little church at the Porziuncola.

St. Francis began his fast on 15th August and was much troubled with temptation from the devil, as well as saddened by changes within the Order. The Cross and Passion of his Master were the special object of his devotions. St. Francis had spent the night before the feast of Holy Cross, September 14th, in prayer. In the morning the saint began to contemplate with great devotion the Passion of Christ, and His infinite love. Then Christ appeared to St. Francis on His Cross, borne of angels.

"Francis was filled with great joy because of the beauty of the face; and then with exceeding pity and sorrow because of the pain and suffering which was there. Suddenly in a moment of great agony the Seraph smote him as it were in body and soul the Seraph spoke to him as a friend making clear many things which hitherto had been hidden from him."
(Cuthbert, OSFC, 1948 :407/8)

Francis was filled with inexpressible joy, and then, when the vision disappeared, with physical agony. Looking to see the cause, St. Francis found that his hands, feet and his side bore the wounds of Christ Crucified. However we may account for the Stigmata, it cannot be dismissed, for there is too much evidence to vouch for it. St. Francis had always set his face against singularity or any kind of excess amongst the brethren, and after receiving these marks the saint always covered up his hands with the sleeves of his habit, whilst his feet were covered by shoes and socks.

'THE THREE COMPANIONS' states that whenever Saint Francis meditated upon the Crucifixion and Christ's suffering, his heart would be *'fused'* with the sacred heart of Jesus. Saint Bonaventure believes that this was the beginning from when he *"bore in his soul the wounds of the Lord Jesus"*. Union with the Cross of Christ would therefore become a typically Franciscan sentiment.

Sensing that the end of his life was now quickly approaching, Francis made some preparations that had included revisiting places, which had meant so much to him. Places such as Assisi and San Damiano where Saint Clare and her sisters were now in residence. The dilapidated church was not only

repaired in bricks and mortar but also with holy souls. He could not have known what would be the outcome when he had accepted the call from the crucifix. Despite his doubts and questions, he followed his Lord in whatever way Jesus saw fit to lead Brother Francis. He was haunted by the discrepancies between his vision of what the Order should be and what the Order had become.

Saint Francis health appeared to be a little improved in the summer of 1224 so he decided that he should go to Mount La Verna to keep the feast of the Assumption. After the feast Francis intended to keep a fast of forty days and forty nights in preparation for the feast of Saint Michael, September 29th. As ever Francis was accompanied by a little band of brothers that included Leo, Angelo, Masseo, Silvester and Illumainato.

THE LAST DAYS

Francis had undergone very painful surgery; he had spent some time in a cell of reeds made by St. Clare, in her convent garden. Nearly blind he had composed his famous canticle and set it to music, teaching the brothers to sing it. St. Francis also wrote his, '*ADMONITIONS*' and his '*TESTAMENT*'. His '*TESTAMENT*' was really a kind of autobiography in which Francis recalled some of the high points of his vocation. He wrote about the lepers, San Damiano, Sister Clare, the early friars and of course, his '*Lady Poverty*'. He underwent the operation that was calculated to cause excessive pain, but said he felt none. It was not successful.

He had a vision of a church that would be faithful to the Cross and of bishops

and priests so dedicated to their Lord and Saviour that they would lay down their lives for the world's sake and finally that his Order and the renewal that had begun with him would remain forever true to the image of the Crucified. He found no answers to his questions at San Damiano's and he thereby retired with his brothers to the mountainous retreat of Mount La Verna.

On one side of the mountain, Count Orlando had prepared a site for the saint. The journey up the valley of Rieti was not easy going and very strenuous. The saint's strength left him several times during the journey and by the time Francis had reached the small cliff, he was not able to walk. The brothers were concerned for their spiritual father and requested a loan of a donkey from one of the local peasant farmers so that Francis may ride for the remainder of the journey. Cristiani records for us the conversation that took place between Francis and the peasant.

"Are you the Brother Francis that everybody is talking about?

Francis said he was indeed.

In that case, the man answered,

*you'd better make sure you are as good as people say you are,
because many have put their trust in you!"*

(Cristiani, 1983: 153)

The saint fell to his knees and kissed the peasant's feet for he had been so deeply moved by this innocent plea to goodness.

Brother Leo built Francis' traditional 'hut' under a beech tree. There the saint asked to be left alone with only bread and water being brought to him once a day. It was in that place whilst deep in prayer that Francis found the answers that he had been so desperately searching for.

Biographers, theologians, historians, psychologists and physicians have all tried to explain what had taken place on September 14th, but all have failed in some degree to give the full answer. What Francis experienced was something that was of an intensely personal nature between God and His creature. Francis himself did not confide in his brothers what had happened to him and in fact he had tried to hide its results.

Francis, who had requested that his hut be built under a beech tree away from the rest of the little community, now wished to become even more isolated. This time he chose a spot at the bottom of a rocky gorge. An isolated spot that could only be reached by crossing over a canyon on a tree trunk. Brother Leo was the only one permitted to approach the saint in this way, but then only twice a day. On each occasion Leo needed to ask permission from Francis before approaching him. One evening having made his customary call, Brother Leo received no response. Afraid to return to the community lest the saint be in danger and equally afraid to disobey Francis' instruction, Leo was left in an unenviable position. What should he do? He endeavoured to catch sight of Francis to place his mind at rest. What he witnessed was the saint deep in prayer. Francis was disturbed by Leo's intrusion and reproved him for his lack of obedience. However all was well and Francis soon began to explain to Leo the meaning of his meditations.

On the morning of the feast of the Holy Cross, September 14th, Francis prayed with his arms extended. Once again we have recorded for us the prayer of the saint:

*"O Lord Jesus Christ,
there are two things I shall ask of You before I die!
First, that I may experience in my soul and in my body
the sufferings You endured, O sweet Jesus, in Your Passion!"*

*And second, that I may, insofar as possible,
 feel in my body the boundless love that You, the Son of God,
 felt and which impelled You to want to suffer so many
 tribulations for all of us miserable sinners!"*
 (Cristiani, 1983: 157, et al.)

It would appear that his prayer was granted.

The actual scene of the Stigmata is somewhat reminiscent of the experience of the prophet Isaiah. An angel, with six gleaming wings, just hovering over the cliff, came close to Francis whilst he was deep in prayer. He felt an intense passion, both pain and joy, with fright, joy and sorrow all at the same time, and became unconscious. Upon recovering he discovered that the marks of the Crucified Christ were implanted upon his own person from which drops of blood would flow. He began to burn with a consuming love and felt himself to be transformed in someway into the person of the Blessed Saviour.

Was this God's seal of approval for the ministry and life that Francis had led? Had not Francis endeavoured to conform his life in all the ways of Jesus Christ? Francis' favourite theme for meditation was certainly the Passion of Christ.

From that time the miracle of the Stigmatisation has been granted to some holy individuals throughout history. But none so pure and perfect as in Francis of Assisi. Later on in Part Two of this chapter I shall cover the life of arguably the most famous of all stigmatists in the twentieth century, Padre Pio.

He was a very ill man and the Stigmata had further weaken his body's life force and yet his very soul had become stronger. Francis' health steadily deteriorated over the next year. His doctors tried all that they knew to try to assist his recovery or to make him more comfortable, all without success. Some of the procedures were extremely painful and to the modern physician completely without foundation. Yet Francis was a man of superhuman will power and an indomitable spirit and he endured all without complaint. Finally the brothers decided to take Francis to Sienna to spend the winter months. Francis left Mount La Verna on 30th September, 1224. Ascending La Verna had proven difficult before, going to Sienna must have been a nightmare. Francis became unable to hold down any food and his limbs had become swollen.

In the last weeks and months prior to Francis' death he had become visibly weaker. The people held him in great respect and revered their little saint. Pope Honorius III, who was obliged to take up residence in Rieti due to an outbreak of violence, sent his own doctors to tend to Francis' medical needs. They tried all kinds of medieval therapies that seem to us to be more in the realm of torture than of any medicinal value. These included bloodletting, blistering agents, and various kinds of plasters. They even applied burning pokers to Francis temples! He had high temperatures and a fever resulting from such conditions that no doctor in the thirteenth century could possibly hope to cure.

The little band arrived in Siena but there was to be no improvement of Francis' health for him there. At one point the brothers were convinced that the saint was dying and sent for his confessor, Brother Benedict of Prato. Francis asked Benedict to write down his blessing for all the brothers and reminded them once again of their duty to love one another and to be faithful to '*Lady Poverty*'. It was in this state that Francis begged his companions to return him to his home of Assisi. He desired to return '*home*' in both senses of its meaning.

Brother Elias was equally keen that Francis should return to Assisi, though perhaps for more practical reasons. As the populace already revered Francis as a saint, Elias was afraid that should Francis expire before arriving in Assisi, then some devout individuals might take the opportunity to seize the holy person's body for the purposes of that medieval desire and distasteful practice for holy relics!

On arriving in Assisi Francis first act was as peacemaker bringing reconciliation between the Podesta and the Bishop. This event brought about the stanza of forgiveness, which was then added to his Canticle of Brother Sun.

CANTICLE OF BROTHER SUN

Saint Francis in acknowledging God as his Creator and Father had understood his place within nature. God is the Creator of all things and thereby all things are related through the same Father. Hence '*brother the birds*' or '*sisters the larks*'. There is no trace of pantheism here. He held no sympathies with the theories of the insensibility of nature, the inevitability of fate, or the uselessness of praying to God. He was an obedient son of the Catholic Church as stated previously and is demonstrated throughout this dissertation. Everything about the saint speaks of faith, hope and love. When he looked around him he saw God's generosity, His teaching and the call of His infinite love. When we understand his position and feel ourselves to be surrounded by, and soaked up in, the beauty of nature that God created, we are aware of God's love. This is the position we need to understand if we are to understand Francis. His Canticle of Brother Sun is his most famous and important legacy that he has left to us and is an exquisite expression of Francis' faith.

There are precedents in Scripture for the writing of canticles for example, 'The Canticle of the Three Children in the Furnace' which had been a particular favourite of the early Christian church. Indeed in the Daily Office Book (as taken from The Divine Office as renewed by decree of the Second Vatican Council), the Canticle for the first and third Sunday morning in each month is taken from Daniel 3:57-88 and it calls upon various aspects of nature to give praise to the Lord. Then of course there are those well known of all hymns, the Psalms. These too were the prayers and praises of Saint Francis that nourished his soul. It was in this tradition that he turned his mind to poetry to give expression of his praise to God. He had promised the friars that one day he would write such a canticle.

It was the summer of 1225 and Saint Francis was very ill and suffering greatly with his life force ebbing away. Even so his heart leapt with joy in praise of God. In the hut that had been built for him by San Damiano's he prayed to God for the strength he needed for the task ahead. He informed the brothers that the time had come for him to set about composing such a hymn of praise. Francis then intoned what was to be the first stanza of the Canticle of Brother Sun. Like all great things, inventions of science, innovations of technology and academic thought, it appears deceptively simple and yet it takes a great person to see that which we fail to see. I shall record the actual canticle in Appendix B at the end of this dissertation.

It was not until the doctors had told Francis that he would soon die that he composed the final stanza, '*Welcome Sister Death*'. With this the canticle was now complete. This hymn of praise demonstrates his simple faith. Everything comes from God and leads to God; God is the source of all things and therein lies all joy and love.

His final recommendations to the brothers were of obedience to their superiors and the *Rule*, of poverty and the practice of reciting the Daily Office.

When told by the doctor that his death was only a short time away, St. Francis said, "*Welcome, sister death*" (Moorman, 1963: 113). Francis called around to his brothers asking them to sing to him of Sister Death. So they came and chanted the Cantic of Brother Sun, including some new verses on Sister Death. Brother Elias was horrified and remonstrated with the saint, believing such cheerfulness unseemly in the presence of death. But St. Francis would have none of it and responded:

*"Allow me, brother, he cried, to rejoice in the Lord, both in His praises,
and in my infirmities, by the grace of the Holy Spirit,
I am so united and joined to my Lord that by His mercy
I may well rejoice in the Most High."
(Moorman, 1963: 114)*

The saint requested that he might be carried to the Porziuncola to die. On the way Saint Francis past by the leper hospital that held so many memories for him. He requested the brothers who were carrying the litter to stop and summoning up his strength he raised himself, taking one last look at Assisi then Saint Francis gave the city his blessing.

They brought him to the Porziuncola and there '*Brother Jacqueline*' came to comfort the saint. Having learnt of Francis' impending death, she had left Rome in haste to be at his side. Francis requested that the Gospel be read to him one more time. Francis told the brothers to lay him down on to the bear, cold earth. Also having completed that, they were to sing to him the Cantic of Brother Sun throughout which, so we are told, Francis kept repeating with his dying breath, "*Be blessed, Lord my God, for our Sister Death!*" (Cristiani, 1983: 163, et al.)

It was the evening of Saturday October 3rd 1226 when the doctors came to Francis and enquired of them when the gates to eternal life would be opened for him. Ever true to his vocation, Francis told the friars to sprinkle ashes over him and together with them who kept vigil with him sang Vespers. At the completion of the Psalm 142, Francis in a weak and weary voice began to intone the versicle, *"Bring me out of prison, so that I may give thanks to your name"*, (Psalm 142:7, New Revised Standard Version) after which he fell silent. St. Francis died on the night of October 3rd, 1226, praising God right up to the end. In their work on the life of Saint Francis, the Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate state that:

*"Although it was past dusk, his sisters,
the larks, had gathered above the friary in great numbers.
At the moment of his death they flew around singing
sweetly in praise of the Most High".*
(Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, 1997: 81)

(Compare this to the incident recorded in Chapter Five, Part Two, concerning John Bradburne and the Bateleur Eagles and the Bees.)

PART TWO: PADRE PIO

Ruffin (1991: 18) proclaims that Padre Pio is:

*“one of the most significant figures in Christian history,
a man of prophetic and apostolic stature,
who, through great personal holiness and enlightened wisdom
and through spiritual gifts inexplicable by science,
tended to confirm the truth of the Gospels
and who, without travelling more than a few miles
from his friary in fifty years,
yet seemed capable of transforming lives to a degree
unimagined by the most successful evangelical preachers.”*

He was a Franciscan friar of the twentieth century.

Padre Pio was a man who lived the greater part of his life, which witnesses to the fact that the things of God transcend time, culture and even technology in the twentieth century. In his life he exhibited signs and phenomena that most people associate with Saint Francis of Assisi, or with the medieval mystics.

Yet Padre Pio of Pietrelcina saw the advent of the telephone and the television. He was also responsible for building, what remains, the most advanced hospital in southern Italy, together with its very own training school in nursing and radiology.

Padre Pio was born on 25th May 1887, a son of a poor peasant family and given the name of Francesco Forgione. They lived in the southern part of Italy in a village called Pietrelcina. His parents were simple, illiterate folk and his father travelled to Pennsylvania, U.S.A. to work on the farms of Forgione's relatives in order to earn the money needed for Francesco's education in the seminary. Later on however, Forgione would work on the

railways at Long Island. Pio's brother Michele would one-day join his father there and also find work with the railways. Indeed Forgione was able to earn money needed from his work with the railways to pay for Pio's education with sufficient left over to purchase two more smallholdings and livestock for the family back in Pietrelcina. Pio was the fourth child of eight children and, according to Gallagher (Fount, 1995) the second son of Grazio and Giuseppa. He lived at 27 Vico Storte Valle and his father farmed five acres of land to feed his family.

From aged 10 in 1897, Pio had felt the call to the religious life and declared that he wished to enter the Franciscan Order of Capuchin to follow in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi. Gallagher states that the older people of the village would:

*"later testified that they had remarked that
the Forgione boy prayed a lot and some said
they had seen him praying the rosary
while he guarded the flock".*

(Gallagher, 1995: 11)

Indeed the Forgione family prayed as a family in the morning and in the evening. Gallagher continues by stating that:

*"It is generally recorded that he attended Mass everyday,
regularly serving as altar boy,
and paid frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament.
If the church was closed,
he would still kneel on the steps in front of it
to adore the sacred presence within".*

(Gallagher, 1995: 18)

Padre Pio during his early years was dogged with health problems. (This should be compared to Maximilian who had also health problems. Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko, who saw in Maximilian an example by which to live out his vocation, was equally hampered by poor health.) We can perhaps draw a comparison between him and the patron saint of his order, Saint Francis, who had also experienced health problems. Pio would be sent to a particular friary only to become ill and needed to return to his home in Pietrelcina. Many attempts were made to diagnosis his malady, but often the doctors would give conflicting answers. For example in December of 1916 Pio was admitted to the Holy Trinity Hospital in Naples where the diagnosis was recorded as, *"infiltration of the pulmonary apexes"* (McGregor, 1981: 157/158). Where as the Caserta Military Hospital on the 18th November, 1915 the doctors decided that his condition was, *"Tuberculosis"* (McGregor, 1981:156).

Pio was destined to spent most of his life at the friary in San Giovanni Rotondo. In 1916 San Giovanni Rotondo was situated way up on Gargano Mountain. It was an isolated place because of the problems of access. Life at San Giovanni Rotondo was harsh; no electricity, no running water and only rudimentary of sewage services. The Capuchins had arrived there in 1540 to supervise one of the poorest friaries in the San Angelo Provincial area.

Prior to Pio joining the seminary at Morcone, he experienced a vision in which he had become aware of two persons. One a majestic being of rare beauty whilst the second person stood in marked contrast. That being was of a horrible appearance and was dressed in black. The first being encouraged the young Pio, with his assistance, to go and do battle with the other horrible

and black clothed being. (Compare with Maximilian's vision of the crowns of white and red.)

This vision may have been by way of preparation for what lay ahead for Pio in years to come. A confirmation of what life dedicated to God's service would mean. Exposure to continuing struggles with that diabolical being. Or as Father McGregor puts it:

*"What the vision appears to convey
in symbolical form is that his life in
religion would be a continuous and persistent
struggle with the devil".*

(McGregor, 1981: 86)

At fifteen Pio entered the strict austere regime of the Capuchin Franciscan noviciate at Morcone on the Feast of the Epiphany, 6th January, 1903. The novices truly were discalced – meaning that they went about barefoot. In those days there was no hot water nor central heating; in the coldest weather only one room of the friary was heated and the young novices could spend just a few minutes there to warm themselves before retiring to their cells at night. However a full night's sleep would have been a luxury for the Capuchin Friars for they would rise before midnight to go to chapel for the night offices and the community's Mass was celebrated at dawn.

The training received by the young novices may have seemed harsh, but Pio's fellow novices always remembered him as being a jovial sort, a bit of a joker. A rather timid novice who was afraid to go past a room where a human skull had been placed as a reminder of life's fleeting nature was nearly at his wits end when Pio played one of his little pranks. As the poor novice proceeded along the corridor one evening, Pio hiding behind the table that held the skull, began to make spooky groans. The young novice took flight and when Pio quickly ran after him hoping to catch him and calm him, they merely

collided and fell head over heels landing in a tangled heap on the floor of the noviciate corridor. In later life Pio, when relating this story would weep with laughter. However Brother Pio:

*"never forgot what was to be his lifelong mission:
to fight against that 'mysterious being',
the 'hideous monster', the Devil".*
(Gallagher 1995: 31)

Father Piacido of San Marco in Lamis was a life long friend of Padre Pio and he tells us, that in the same way as Saint Francis of Assisi, Pio's meditation was always the pain of Jesus endured at His Crucifixion. Pio's devotion was so intense that *"in choir during prayer he would weep many tears, so much so that very often the floor would be stained"* (McGregor, 1981: 102/3).

Near the end of the First World War (during which Pio had been recruited into the military's medical corps) the events took place that would make the humble friar from Pietrelcina known throughout the world. As Pio was praying in the friar's chapel of the mountain top monastery at San Giovanni Rotondo, he fell into a state that Pio later described as being *'similar to a sweet sleep'*. Upon recovering from this ecstatic state Padre Pio became aware that his hands, feet and side were dripping blood. Just a few weeks earlier, whilst he was hearing confessions, Padre Pio had already suffered the *'transverberation'*. That is, a lance pierced his heart. It is quite easy for us to dismiss this as a figure of speech, something that only indicates an activity taking place in the soul of the holy man, or even an hallucination, however his

own words from a letter to his spiritual director can assure us otherwise.

Padre Pio wrote:

*"Don't believe then that it is only my soul
that is involved in this martyrdom.
My body shares in it also".*

(Gallagher, 1995: 79)

It is a significant fact that this '*transverberation*' took place while Padre Pio was hearing confessions. Throughout the rest of his life the demand placed upon Pio by the faithful would require him spending up to eighteen hours a day just ministering the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is of little wonder that Pio became known as a '*martyr of the confessional*', and for the next fifty years after his stigmatization, Padre Pio's routine would revolve around the daily offering of Mass and hearing confessions.

We should not make the mistake in believing that Padre Pio was not interested in the whole person, the body as well as soul. The good priest was acutely aware of the need for good and proper medical facilities for the people who lived in and close to San Giovanni Rotondo. Initially Padre Pio opened a small two-room hospital. Later he would build the biggest and most advanced medical facility in the whole of the south of Italy. When the new hospital opened in 1956 it had 300 beds. However one year later it had grown to 600 beds. By the end of Pio's life the hospital would accommodate 1,200 in-patients and it would managed a variety of out-patient clinics. The hospital continues to expand. Padre Pio's inspiration and compassion was such that currently there are retirement homes, training centres for young people, orphanages, retreat houses and a whole network of facilities to care for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of God's '*little ones*'.

STRICT COMPASSION

The compassionate Padre Pio was not so sympathetic with himself in his desire to live the Capuchin life of prayer and penance. Pio had always declared that he had *'two mothers'*: his mother on earth and his mother Mary in heaven. His devotion to his spiritual mother was such that throughout his life as a friar Pio would not go past an image of Our Lady in the friary without first stopping and saying a *'Hail Mary'*. Invariably his eyes would fill with tears. After the Office Compline (night prayers) the community would sing the Salve Regina after which, because of the good friar's weeping, the floor around Pio's place in chapel would be wet!

Padre Pio was so tendered hearted that whenever friends or relatives would take their leave after visiting with him, he would shed a few tears and would say to them, *'Do you have to leave now?'* he would ask. *'Will you come back again soon?'*

Yes Padre Pio was soft-hearted, but he could also be very severe. Those who attended the Sacrament of Reconciliation out of mere curiosity about the *'the stigmatized priest'*, or those with no intention of making amendments to their way of life, Pio would send them away with a flea in their ear, telling them not to come back until they were truly repentant. No one could fool Padre Pio. He always knew when a penitent missed something out of his or her confession. Initially Pio would gently question them, *'Are you sure'*, he would say, *'that you have confessed everything? Have you forgotten such an incident in such a year?'* There was one occasion whilst he was hearing confession that a penitent came into the box and was too embarrassed to admit that it had been twelve years since their last confession, so instead they said that it had been only three years! Padre Pio was nobody's fool and the confession did not proceed any further. Pio spiritual vision had enabled him to see through the penitent deception and he immediately said, *'You*

unhappy wretch, you leave the other nine years to me. Be off with you'. Padre Pio had been blessed with the powerful gift of the spirit, discernment of souls, and as such he always had the best interests of the person at heart, knowing exactly how to act in each case. In this particular example, and others, the penitent went away stricken with grief but was able to return to make a full and proper confession. In fact a far better confession than merely being permitted to just '*paper over the cracks!*'

SUFFERING FOR THE FAITH

Those who knew Padre Pio personally, as well as his fellow friars, are able to testify to his remarkable holiness and humility. Pio said that he could hear a voice within him that reminded him that he was to become holy and that he was to make others holy too. One day he wrote to his friend Nina, requesting that she pray for him "*for the grace to make me a less unworthy son of Saint Francis*" ('LETTERS TO NINA CAMPANILE', NOVEMBER 1922). This did not stop him, however, from suffering at the hands of the Capuchin Order and the Church. In fact, as the people flocked to the friary at San Giovanni Rotondo in ever-greater numbers, there were times when San Giovanni Rotondo appeared to be under some kind of siege. It became necessary for the Holy See to take action, partly to protect Padre Pio himself, by placing restrictions on his ministry. This endeavour was to try to put a stop to some exaggerations or false claims that were made about him by those eager to seek him out.

On two occasions Pio was forbidden to celebrate a public Mass or to hear confessions. The good friar was obliged to live as though he was under house arrest. Woe betide anyone who tried to criticize the Church whilst in

Pio presence. Padre Pio's understanding of the Church was that Our Lord Jesus Christ founded it on Peter, and that it is our spiritual mother. *'How can you not love your mother'*, Pio would say, *'even when it is her hand that disciplines you?'*

Padre Pio, like Saint Francis of Assisi before him, was granted many spiritual gifts. For example it was not unknown for the good friar to have been in two places at the same time. This sounds not only ridiculous, but equally impossible. Yet as McGregor maintains that this is a *"charismatic activity known as bilocation for which Padre Pio became famous in later years"* (McGregor, 1981: 111/112). One such incidence of bilocation occurred while Pio was still in residence at the friary yet at the same time was with General Cadorna who was on the verge of committing suicide after the defeat at Caporetto. Father Stefano Manelli records that *"Padre Pio appeared in his tent and persuaded him to lay aside his pistol"* (Manelli, 1999: 73). Cadorna had never met Pio before that appearance and it was not until he visited the San Giovanni Rotondo friary some time afterwards that he saw and immediately recognized Padre Pio. There are other similar accounts for example at the birth of Giovanna Rizzani (see Gallagher, *'PADRE PIO – THE PIERCED PRIEST'*, Chapter 6, Fount, 1995).

Pio was also used to bring Christ's healing to many individuals. There was the case of Anna Gemma di Giorgi of Ribera, Sicily. Gemma was unfortunately born without pupils and the doctors at Palermo assured her parents that the child was blind and that nothing could be done to restore her sight.

A relative of Gemma's, a nun, sent a letter to Padre Pio asking for his help after which Pio appeared to her in a vision assuring the nun that he would pray for Gemma's healing. Gemma was seven years old and about to make her first communion, a common practice in the Catholic Church where a child can be admitted to communion, but only on special occasions, before confirmation. Her grandmother felt moved to make the journey with Gemma to San Giovanni Rotondo to seek out Padre Pio for this very special occasion. Manelli states that:

"after Padre Pio heard her confession and gave her, her first Holy Communion, tracing the Sign of the Cross on her eyes with his stigmatized hand, that she proved to everyone's satisfaction that she had fully received her sight".

(Manelli, 1999: 78)

Gemma would later become a religious sister joining a convent of the Handmaids of Divine Mercy.

Of course Gemma was not the only person to receive Christ's healing at the intercession of Pio. Gallagher, *'PADRE PIO – THE PIERCED PRIEST'* (1995: 155 following) relates the story of an English chemist, Cecil Humphrey-Smith, an employee of the Heinz corporation who was hurt in a road traffic accident and taken to Piacenza Municipal Hospital. After the intervention of his friend Marchese Bernardo Patrizi who contacted Padre Pio, Cecil would also be healed. Ruffin, *'PADRE PIO: THE TRUE STORY'* (1991: 200) relates for us the story of Sister Teresa Salvadores, superior of the Escuela Taller Medalla Milagrosa in Reducto who had equally received healing at Pio's bidding.

Padre Pio would be appointed as the spiritual director and teacher to the junior seminary. Father Federico in particular was said to have been effected by "*Padre Pio's prayerfulness*" (McGregor, 1981: 184). Indeed many people both lay individuals as well as those within the Order, sought out Pio as their spiritual director.

AN IMPORTANT LETTER

A certain young bishop from Poland had arrived in Rome at the time when the Second Vatican Council was to be convened. The bishop sent an urgent message to San Giovanni Rotondo asking for Padre Pio's prayers for a friend of his, a mother who had four children and who was about to undergo surgery for a cancerous tumour. Two day later whilst the surgeons did a final pre-operative examination they found that the tumour had completely disappeared. The Bishop was called according to Gallagher, '*PADRE PIO – THE PIERCED PRIEST*' (1995) Wojtyla, who in 1978 became Pope John Paul II, wrote back to Pio thanking him for his prayers. During the 1960's Padre Pio received some 5,000 letters each month sent to him from all parts of the world. Yet he told a young friar assisting him to keep Bishop Wojtyla letters as, '*One day they will be important*'. Pope John Paul II made a pilgrimage to pray at the tomb of Padre Pio.

As a young priest, Pio had been able to keep up with a mound of correspondence both with his spiritual directors as well as with his ever-growing number of spiritual children. As word spread about this humble friar he became besieged in the confessional all day, every day. Padre Pio was to write one last letter just before he died in the September of 1968.

Pope Paul VI had just issued his encyclical called '*Humanae Vitae*' which was to cause much controversy both from within the Church as well as from secular society. Padre Pio send a message to Pope Paul VI assuring him of his own undying loyalty and thanking the Pope for having the courage to uphold truth in that important document.

THE EFFECTS OF PADRE PIO CONTINUES

A very close friend of my own called Ann Young, who had been going through a very rough time, had been invited to go to Romania to help with renovation work at an orphanage. On the one hand I knew that anyone would benefit from giving up a week's holiday to undertake such worthy work. Equally I knew that the impact that the situation would have would be very hard, especially for Ann. I supported her endeavour, affirmed her, and explained that I felt it was an opportunity for real growth, but growth that would cause pain. So to assist and support Ann's venture, I told her that no matter what, I would always be with her in spirit. I had been aware myself all that week of being with Ann in a positive spiritual way. She knew herself just how much that I had wished to be able to go there myself, but unfortunately that was not possible for me.

Just over half way through her week she reached a crisis point and needed to find a place where she could cry in private. The poverty and the situation were all too overwhelming. As she sat on the stairs, Ann became aware of the presence of another individual. When she looked up, she saw myself standing over her, calming and reassuring her. She immediately drew strength from that experience and went on to complete her work. She is now a much stronger person.

During Padre Pio's life time small groups of people had gathered around him that were eager for his guidance in their spiritual pilgrimage. This was to be the beginnings of what would later become the Prayer Groups under his direction. Such groups exist in England, as well as elsewhere, and more information may be obtained from The Padre Pio Information Centre, Tankerton, Kent, CT5 2DF (telephone 01227-274050 or Fax 01227-276136).

One may presume that once the holy friar had passed on to his heavenly reward that the numbers of pilgrims who had flocked to San Giovanni Rotondo during Pio's life would have, at the very least, dropped to a more manageable number. In fact it is quite the opposite. According to the Padre Pio Information Centre during 1998 there were over six million visitors. Work is nearing completion on a new larger church together with a pilgrim centre, which will cater for those who wish to say a prayer and have a quiet moment in the friary's crypt at Padre Pio's tomb. Not to mention to petition the saint's prayers in heaven for their very special needs.

Around the world today there are thousands of prayer groups under the patronage of Padre Pio. These are principally made up of those who have found much inspiration from the example of this Capuchin saint. Padre Pio's call to holiness is for all. However it is true to say that this phenomena and Padre Pio's charisma is unique, but it was always subjected to his spiritual directors and under holy obedience.

At the end of the twentieth century, more people than ever are aware of the Padre's appeal. To an all too sceptical world Padre Pio had shown that heaven and hell are realities. His example reminds all Christians that they

were baptized into the death and Resurrection of Christ when they became members of His mystical body, the Church. Furthermore Pio shows priests that theirs is a precious and a sacred vocation: representing Christ at the altar where His sacrifice is renewed every day, being like Christ, the High Priest, a bridge between God and humanity.

CHAPTER EIGHT: **CONCLUSION**

Giovanni de Pietro de Bernardone, a very well-loved figure in church history and is better known to us today as Saint Francis of Assisi. St. Francis was not always the pious figure depicted in our art, for he, like all young men, loved life, and was often inclined to be irresponsible and embarked upon a military career without really thinking it through. God came to Francis whilst he was a prisoner of war and from that time began working the transformation that would lead him to the Church of San Damiano where Francis knelt before the crucifix and heard the Almighty's call to "*go and repair my house*". When Jesus calls us to lose our lives for His sake He calls us to destroy any trace of selfishness that may remain within ourselves. Francis was troubled by his mystical experience and interpreted his call in a fundamental way. Had God called him to rebuild his very soul? This is the fundamental question this thesis has sought to address. After a period of fasting in some caves near to San Damiano he became a changed man and dedicated himself to God's service.

St. Francis of Assisi did not take refuge from the world in nature, rather he saw in creation objects of love, which pointed the way back to God. It was for this reason that St. Francis sought out and enjoyed the solitary life. It is even reported that he would preach to the animals and the birds that were said to appreciate his sermons. It would do the Poor man of Assisi less than justice, however, only to look at this part of his spirituality for his major concern was that of the city where he preached the Gospel whilst living in total poverty amongst the very ordinary people of life. According to the '*ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CATHOLICISM*' (1995: 540) by 1221 between three thousand and five thousand souls had dedicated their lives to God with the Franciscan Order and the numbers of friars in the 1990's are: 19,000 Friars Minor, 11,300 Capuchins and 4,300 Conventuals. St. Francis of Assisi is one of the most revered saints in Christendom and is often seen by Christians as one of the most noble, Christ-like figures who has ever lived.

Jesus of Nazareth used the image of the lighted lamp in the parable of '*Lamb under a Bowl*' (Luke 8:16-18) to set out God's purposes. Unlike the mystery sects, in Christianity there is nothing hidden from the eyes of the people to whom the Gospel is preached. By sending His Son, God is not concealing His purpose. Jesus is revealed for all to see. Jesus may have lived in obscurity from the time of His birth until the beginnings of His ministry, but in that ministry Jesus chose the path of poverty and suffering. St. Francis lived such a life and instructed the friars that complete poverty would release them from the problems of this world and hence they would become more joyful before the Lord. A good example of this teaching from modern day individuals would be that of Mother Theresa of Calcutta. Such was the friars' dedication to poverty that it impressed Bishop Guido as well as the local clergy.

The example of St. Francis shows that through suffering we learn and God is glorified. The Christian really has no other option than to accept this road for it is part of the Christian vocation. We are still living in times when religion in all its forms is frequently used and abused for the vested interests of politics and economics. True religion teaches us to let go of our illusions, including our very own selves. We have been so conditioned by a consumer mentality that we would rather cling to those things that are of no real consequence to authentic Christian living. We are conditioned to act mainly on the basis of gaining and losing. Many individuals have simply lost impetus, lost sight of life's true goal: to be one with the Ultimate Reality – for the Christian that is God the Father of Jesus the Christ. Padre Pio, Maximilian Kolbe and Jerzy Popieluszko have all suffered for the love of Christ, they knew that their vocation would lead them by way of suffering, and through it they have given greater glory to God and encouraged many others to follow in the steps of the Gospel life.

For the Christian Jesus Christ embodied the true meaning of the Biblical light. St. Francis of Assisi had brought that same light into the dark recesses of the medieval church. He took that light and shared it with others, for example when St. Francis went to the Crusades, to the leper communities, to the dungeons, and not forgetting the poor. Francis in following his vocation generously emitted this light without thought of cost of it to himself. In the 'MAJOR LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS' Saint Bonaventure wrote of the saint that,

*"By the glorious splendour of his life and teaching
Francis shone like a day-star amid the clouds and
by the brilliance which radiated from him he guided
those who live in darkness, in the shadow of death,
to the light . . . bringing good news of peace and salvation to men."*

The world of today with its wars, floods, of crime and self-centredness can seem dark and uninviting. Even so there are those who catch a glimpse of Francis' vision and are warmed by its charisma. John Bradburne's pilgrimage to God took him to Zimbabwe where he brought the light and love of the Gospel into the lives of some lepers. The world owes a great debt to those, like John, who have given up all to follow Christ through the example of St. Francis and according to his *Rule* down through the ages to this very day.

At the turn of this new millennium, for example, a new Franciscan Order became established in a friary in Canning Town, London. This new community is a reformation of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin that was founded by eight friars during 1987 in New York, U.S.A. This new community is called the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (CFR) and they feel themselves

called to:

- Personal Renewal;
- Church Renewal; and
- Renewal in the Franciscan and religious life,

in accordance with Vatican II and focusing on service to the poor and marginalized and upon evangelization. This is not such a startling occurrence for hundreds of reforms in the Franciscan religious life have taken place over the last eight hundred years which can be attributed to the example given by St. Francis himself who lived the Gospel life so perfectly. The problem that the Franciscan communities face is this that no one can live up to the saint's example so perfectly and thereby the Franciscan life goes on evolving, growing, renewing itself and carrying its followers onwards in the way of Jesus.

The ministry of the Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal is a non parochial based ministry whose life is focused on the poor and often working one to one with them. Their evangelization programme takes the community into the work of parish missions, youth retreats, conferences, and street missions. Spiritually they, like their patron, have a desire for poverty of life, living simply and live in small groups of friars in the poorest areas of our towns and cities. Theirs is a life that is meant to give a direct challenge to the materialistic society that we all live in today demonstrating that there are alternative ways of living out one's life other than those presented to us through the mass media and advertising. Like their Blessed Father Francis, they too have an Eucharistic centred life, preach an orthodox faith to provide direction to a spiritually thirsty society. The witness of this is community is a prophetic stance against the growing paganism in today culture. They value all human life as a gift of God, a creation in God's own image, thereby

providing a challenge to the growing view that life is in some way a disposable commodity (i.e. against euthanasia, abortion, and mere machines to unscrupulous employers).

Father John Armitage, parish priest of the Roman Catholic Church of Saint Margaret's, Canning Town was aware that the church was failing to reach the poor, the marginalized, the outcast and the homeless within his inner city parish. He also knew that the Church may appear to be part of the establishment and its buildings and organisation off putting to the very people who the Church needs to help. The Franciscans have a the reputation for being able to reach those very same individuals because the Franciscan brothers and sisters have rejected worldly wealth, power, and status precisely to be open to the needs of the poor. Neither do they live in large monastic buildings which in themselves can be an obstacle preventing the poor from having access to the religious brothers and sisters. It was for this reason that Fr. Armitage invited the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal to establish a friary within his parish to work alongside and to bring the Gospel to the poor, the marginalized, the outcasts and the homeless.

The friars have converted the church hall into their new friary and according to *'THE CATHOLIC HERALD'* (15th September, 2000) had already *"begun their work with the poor and the homeless."* The friars have started a lunchtime drop-in centre as well as working at a night shelter for the homeless which is run by seven different churches. We should compare this ministry to that of Brother Douglas, SSF, (see Chapter Two, Part Three, The Anglican Franciscans of this thesis) who felt that his vocation was to work with the poor and homeless. In an interview with the writer Father Richard, CFR, stated

that the community had established a basket ball club as part of its outreach to Canning Town's young people. He went on to give an example of how the presence of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal had directly affected those who were their neighbours. At the lunch-time drop-in centre a young man who had been running away from life and had many problems became a visitor to the facility. He was able to access the help he needed from the friars to face up to his problems and was given the strength to return home, and attend a rehabilitation programme. Brother Nicholas told the writer that he had chosen this way of life, a life amongst the poor, the homeless, the outcast and the marginalized precisely because he wished to be a witness for Christ to the people with whom he is now working with in London's Canning Town. It is in this way, for there can be no other, that Brother Nicholas helps the poor to know that they are loved and valued human beings. This, he said, is what Christ taught us to do and what St. Francis did successfully.

Commenting on the difference between the work of Christian ministry to the outcast, marginalized, the sick, and poor, etc. and social work Devananda quotes Mother Teresa of Calcutta saying, *"The difference between our work and social work is that we give wholehearted, free service for the love of God"* (Devananda, 1986: 87).

Materialism dominates the western world we live in today as it did in Saint Francis' day. We all fall victims to it. The adverts never stop telling us that we must have the latest what ever if it is if we are to be a successful wealthy person and not to have it means that in some way we are in some way less of a person. How many times do we stop and consider what is on offer and ask this question, *'why do I need it?'* Pope John Paul II's describes our

western culture as one of *'super-development'* in his encyclical, *'ON SOCIAL CONCERN'*, which is at odds with our true happiness as is poverty and underdevelopment:

"an excessive availability of every kind of material goods . . . And at the same time a radical dissatisfaction The more one possesses, the more one wants, while deeper aspirations remain unsatisfied and perhaps even stifled".
(28)

John Paul II's teaching is that there is a difference between *'having'* and *'being'* and – between *'needing'* versus *'wanting'*. Possessions are meaningless unless they can contribute to the development, maturing and enrichment of our spirituality as was realised by Father Charles de Foucauld. The true value of wealth is the power to alleviate suffering, provide education, and eliminate hunger, in fact to give it to the poor. When we live simply as taught by Saint Francis' example, the poor are then enabled to simply live.

The early Church was well aware of the existence of sects who proclaimed that they alone had the true faith, for example the Waldensians or the Humiliati. Such sects would claim to know some secret divine knowledge which they alone were the guardians. This knowledge, these secrets, could only be given to their followers. They were never to be revealed to outsiders. The initiation of adherents into such mystical sects would first need to undergo a long process of instruction and often the performance of bizarre rituals. (Compare this with the sects of Charles Manson, or the Davidic sect, or perhaps a sect better known to many individuals in today's society, the Jehovah's Witnesses.)

The Pontifical Biblical Commission has published a paper on, *'THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE IN THE CHURCH'*, which highlights the ease in which Christians can slip into relying upon their own perceptions of Jesus:

"Some seek above all to find in the Bible the Christ of their own personal vision and, along with it, the satisfaction of their own spontaneous religious feelings".

Yet equally it is the nature of the Christian faith that will guard Christians against this kind of self-deception. For they know that Christ calls them to deny themselves and take up their cross. By following in the footsteps of Christ, He can then enlighten their minds and can illuminate their darkened intellects and it is in this way they we can know Him more fully.

Revivals are a key feature of Christianity. Without revivals the church would have gradually died away and lacked the essential characteristics that Christians now take for granted. John Wesley, George Whitfield and Howell Harris brought about Christian revival in England and Wales during the eighteenth century. They preached in churches, in the open air, in fact wherever they were able. These men of God travelled throughout England and Wales and travelled over a quarter of a million miles. As a result of his work and by the grace of God John Wesley brought about a significant change in the spiritual and moral climate of this country. Christian Rallies organised by internationally renown evangelists such as Billy Graham and Arthur Blessed have provided a focus on the need to review, renew and resurrect the dormant faith of individuals and instilling a greater devotion and animation into their lives in our post Second World War generation.

When we look back over the last three millennia we can see the alternating effects of decline then renewal. There have been periods of great faith and devotion only to be followed by a decline in spirituality accompanied by dead formality. The early days of the monastic movement are a good example of the growth of faith and devotion as is evident from what we can learn from the life of St. Francis of Assisi. The charismatic renewal that is sweeping across the churches of all denomination in this generation seek to explain God's sovereignty solely in terms of the power of the Holy Spirit and His ability to change whole communities as well as individuals. The two primary characteristics that point to God's sovereignty are:

1. Increased Prayer – as people have grown deeply discontent with the state of their dying churches; &
2. True Repentance – meaning in word, thought and deed

together with a desire to change one's life.

The twentieth century has witnessed something of a revival of Christianity in the world. For example according to the charitable organisation 'Aid to the Churches in Need' annual report for the year 2000 the Catholic Church continues to grow and have an impact on people's lives particularly in the former countries of Soviet bloc and in China. 'Aid to the Churches in Need' is an organisation that was established by a Belgium priest called Fr. Werenfried van Straaten, O. Praem., whose goal it is to support the work of the church in the former eastern bloc countries as well as impoverished countries. The evangelical movement has had much success in North America and is rapidly expanding into the Third World countries. St. Francis' three principles of, Catholic fellowship; evangelical faith and radical freedom delivered in a ministry of reconciliation and redemption is as much needed today as they ever have been. St. Francis challenged those of his day with the radicalism of fundamentalist philosophy that commended the New Testament norms of love and justice that was appealing to the masses then as it is today.

'THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH' affirms that baptism is the principal place for conversion; but Christ's call continues throughout our lives:

"Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This second conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, 'clasping sinners to her bosom [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal'. This endeavour of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart", drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first".

('CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH', 1994:1428)

The Holy Spirit can cultivate within the hearts of men a humbled, contrite and converted heart. In grasping the depth of God's mercy mankind's hearts can be converted anew. We can find this self-evident feature in the life of Charles Colson, who was imprisoned for his part in the Watergate conspiracy and who was subsequently converted to Christ whilst in prison. This conversion completed changed his life and his life direction. He is now dedicated to serving Christ through the foundation of the Prison Fellowship. In an interview given in January's edition *'BIBLE ALIVE'* (1999: 53) Mr. Colson makes the following comment on the process of conversion, *"Conversion may occur in an instant, but the process of coming from sinfulness into a new life can be a long and arduous journey".*

Society today appears to be content with the view that right and wrong, truth and untruth; reality and illusion are all a matter of opinion or point of view. What appears frightening is that we have lost a sense of the absolute, of the black and white, you can do this but you mustn't do that. Do you believe your politician, the weatherman or the estate agent's description of a highly desirable property? No, why? Simply because we all know that for some people truth has become something relative, merely a matter of opinion. It is in this vacuum that there are those in society who seek out the absolute and there are many cults who will say, we have that truth. However the Spirit of truth resists this current trend. The Holy Spirit witnesses to the fact that truth is not an idea, a concept, relative, something we discard or trample upon – because truth is a person and this person is Jesus.

Christians are compelled by the Holy Spirit to witness to this truth. Each day the Christian shall have several opportunities to witness to truth. To witness that for them Jesus was more than just a good teacher. There is more to Him than a mere fine example of humanity. Even though Jesus was, of course, both of those things because for the Christian Jesus is God in human form. This is a central truth and the basis for the Christian's faith and that we are all made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26) and that we all possess a sublime and eternal dignity. Hard as it is for some to hear but human beings have the right to life: this truth the Christian needs to proclaim clearly, unambiguously and loudly in today's culture of death – of abortion and euthanasia. Of one thing we can be certain, once a person is committed to standing up for the truth, persecution is just a short step away. To deny this truth is to diminish ourselves to the level of a disposable tissue. Jesus' taught that those who listen to Him are on the side of truth, but also warns that the world does not want to hear this Gospel and those who preach it will be despised and hated.

St. Francis' life clearly demonstrates that Christians need to cultivate an attitude of heart that yearns, even groans, for spiritual growth. A disposition of humility, of a consciousness and sensitivity to God's greatness compared to our own smallness. It's an understanding of God's generosity, kindness and love and desiring nothing else than to please Him. St. Francis was open to the will of the God: and sought that will through the Scriptures and through prayer and placed himself at God's service, this lesson is what he has left behind for the Christian to follow whatever it may mean for them in their lives. This is also of course, a good description of the Blessed Virgin Mary who had a special place in Saint Francis' spirituality. Mary was totally open to the working of the Lord's plan of salvation and therefore became part of that plan herself and was instrumental in bringing the Good News to mankind.

During the Crusades between Christendom and the Saracens of Egypt, St. Francis felt himself called to the role of the peacemaker. Scriptures says, *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God"* (Matthew 5:9 – New International Version). St. Francis fundamentally accepted the authority of the Scriptures. For him he could do nothing other than fulfil that role. Islam views Christians as one of the three peoples of the Book and thereby Sultan al-Kamil was very happy to listen to what Francis had to say. On 6th and 7th May, 2001, we witnessed the pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II to the Middle East visiting Damascus and a mosque that reportedly has the tomb of John the Baptist's head and the window from where Paul of Tarsus escaped. The Pope's message to all who would listen follows the example of St. Francis for it was one of peace, peace between the self same three

people's of the Book. A national tabloid, *'THE MIRROR'* (Monday, May 7th, 2001) reports the Pope as saying that, "*Christians, Muslims and Jews are called to work together to bring about the day when the legal rights of all peoples are respected and they can live in peace and mutual understanding*".

To be a Christian is never easy. Christians need to ask themselves, '*How well do I know Jesus?*' St. Francis was called mad because the people could not understand what he was trying to do. To live the Gospel life is to swim against the prevailing current. To do this can cause tensions in a person's life. St. Francis teaches that the Christian should tackle this by living in humility and repentance and acknowledge one's need of God's grace. His whole mission in life was quite simply to know Jesus in a deep personal way.

What does this mean and what can Saint Francis teach the Christians of today? Firstly, Christians are called to live for Christ and not to live in a self-satisfying, self-serving way. Secondly, that Christ must be at the centre of their lives and not they themselves. Thirdly, that they must submit themselves to the Father's will, just as Jesus submitted Himself. The choices that Christians make in their lives must to be subject to the following benchmark questions:

- Does the Father want this for me?
- Does this please the Father?

This is how Saint Francis lived his life and what he felt to be the very core of taking up his Cross and denying himself.

APPENDIX A

THE 1223 RULE OF THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR

(This Rule is still observed by the Franciscans to this day.)

CHAPTER ONE

In the Name of the Lord begins the life of the Friars Minor.

This is the Rule and way of life of the Friars Minor: to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience, without personal belongings and in chastity. Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to his Holiness Pope Honorius and his lawfully elected successors and to the Church of Rome. The other friars are bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors.

CHAPTER TWO

*Of those who wish to Take Up this Life and
How they are to be Received.*

If anyone wishes to take up this way of life and join our brothers, they shall send them to the Provincial Ministers; to them alone, and to no others, permission is given to receive brothers. The ministers shall carefully examine them in the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church. If they believe all these, and will confess them faithfully and observe them steadfastly to the end; and if they have no wives, or if they have them and the wives have already entered a convent or after taking a vow of chastity have by the authority of the bishop of the diocese been granted this permission. the ministers shall tell them, in the word of the Gospel (Matthew 19:21), to go and sell all they have and give it carefully to the poor. If they are not able to

do this; their good intention is enough. It is absolutely forbidden to leave the Order.

The friars and their ministers must be careful not to become involved in the temporal affairs of the newcomers to the Order, so that they may dispose of their goods freely, as God inspires them. When this has been done they shall be given the garments of the probationers: two gowns without hoods, a belt and trousers, and stockings and a cape reaching the belt. After the probationary year is over, they shall be received into obedience, promising always to observe this way of life and the Rule. Those who have promised obedience shall have one gown with a hood and another, if they wish it, without a hood. Those who really need them may wear shoes. All the brothers shall wear humble garments, and may repair them with sackcloth and other remnants, with God's blessing.

I warn all the friars and exhort them not to condemn or look down on people whom they see wearing soft or gaudy clothes and enjoying luxuries in food or drink; each one should rather condemn and despise himself.

CHAPTER THREE

Of the Divine Office and Fasting, and how the friars are to travel about the world.

The clerical brothers shall perform the divine service according to the order of the holy Roman Church and so they may have breviaries. They shall fast from the feast of All Saints to the Nativity of the Lord. All the friars are bound to keep the Lenten fast before Easter, but they are not bound to fast at other times, except on Fridays. When there is compelling reason the brothers shall not be found to observe a physical fast.

But I advise, warn and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ that when they go into the world, they shall not quarrel, nor contend with words, (cf. Timothy 2:14) nor judge each other. But let them be gentle, peaceable, modest, merciful and humble, as is fitting. They ought not to ride, except when infirmity or necessity clearly compels them to do so. When they enter a house, they should first say, '*Peace to this house*' (cf. Luke 10:5) and in the words of the Gospel they may eat what is set before them (cf. Luke 10:8).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Friars are Forbidden to Accept Money.

I strictly command all the friars never to receive coins or money either directly or through an intermediary. The ministers and guardians alone shall make provision, through spiritual friends, for the needs of the infirm and for other brothers who need clothing.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Manner of Working.

The friars to whom God have given the grace of working should work in a spirit of faith and devotion and avoid idleness, which is the enemy of the soul, without however extinguishing the spirit of prayer and devotion, to which every temporal consideration must be subordinate. As wages for their labour they may accept anything necessary for their temporal needs, for themselves or their brethren, except money in any form. They should accept it humbly as is expected of those who serve God and strive after the highest poverty.

CHAPTER SIX

*That the Friars are to Appropriate Nothing for Themselves.
On Seeking Alms; and on the Sick Friars.*

The brothers shall possess nothing, neither a house, nor a place, nor anything. But, as pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving God in poverty and humility, they shall continually seek alms, and not be ashamed, for the Lord made Himself poor in this world for us.

If any of them fall sick, the other brothers are bound to minister to them as they themselves would wish to be ministered to.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Of the Penance to be Imposed on Friars who Fall into Sin.

If any of the friars, at the instigation of the enemy, fall into mortal sin, they must have recourse as soon as possible, without delay, to their provincial minister, if it is a sin for which recourse to them has been prescribed for the friars. If the ministers are priests, they should impose a moderate penance on such friars; if they are not priests; they should see that some priest of the Order, as seems best to them before God imposes a penance. They must be careful not to be angry or upset because a friar has fallen into sin, because anger or annoyance in themselves or in others makes it difficult to be charitable.

CHAPTER EIGHT

*The Election of the Ministers General of the Order
and the Pentecost Chapter.*

The brothers are always bound to have a member of the Order as their Minister General, who is the servant of the whole fraternity, and they are strictly bound to obey him. At his death the Provincial Ministers and the Custodes are to elect a successor at the Pentecost Chapter, at which the Provincial Ministers are bound to assemble in the place designated by the Minister General. This Chapter should be held once every three years, or at a longer or shorter interval, if the Minister General has so ordained.

If at any time it becomes clear to all the Provincial Ministers and Custodes that the Minister General is incapable of serving the friars and can be of no benefit to them, they who have the power to elect, must elect someone else as Minister General.

After the Pentecost Chapter, the Provincial Ministers and Custodes may summon their subjects to a Chapter in their own territory once in the same year, if they wish and it seems worthwhile.

CHAPTER NINE

Of Preachers.

The friars are forbidden to preach in any diocese, if the bishop objects to it. No friar should dare to preach to the people unless he has been examined and approved by the Minister General of the Order and has received from him the commission to preach.

Moreover, I advise and admonish the friars that in their preaching, their words should be examined and chaste. They should aim only at the advantage and spiritual good of their listeners, telling them briefly about vice and virtue, punishment and glory, because our Lord Himself kept His words short on earth.

CHAPTER TEN

On Admonishing and Correcting the Friars

The Ministers, who are the servants of the other brothers, must visit their brethren and admonish them, correcting them humbly and charitably, without commanding them anything that is against their conscience or our *Rule*. The brethren, however, should remember that they have renounced their own wills for God's sake. So I strictly command them to obey their Ministers in everything that they have promised God and is not against their conscience and our *Rule*. The brothers, who are convinced that they cannot observe the *Rule* spiritually, wherever they may be, can and must have recourse to their Ministers. The Ministers, for their part, are bound to receive them kindly and charitably, and be so sympathetic towards them that the friars can speak and deal with them as employers with their servants. That is the way it ought to be; the Ministers should be the servants of all the friars.

With all my heart, I beg the friars in our Lord Jesus Christ to be on their guard against pride, boasting, envy, and greed, against the cares and anxieties of this world, against detraction and complaining. Those who are illiterate should not be anxious to study. They should realize instead that the only thing they should desire is to have the spirit of God at work within them, while they pray to Him unceasingly with a heart free from self-interest. They

must be humble, too, and patient in persecution or illness, loving those who persecute us by blaming us or bringing charges against us, as our Lord tells us:

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you".

(Matthew 5:44 — New Revised Standard Version.)

"Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven".

(Matthew 5:10 — New Revised Standard Version.)

"But the one endures to the end will be saved".

(Matthew 10:22 — New Revised Standard Version.)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Friars are Forbidden to Enter the Monasteries of Nuns.

I strictly charge all the brethren not to hold conversation with women so as to arouse suspicion, nor to take counsel with them. No brother may enter the monasteries of nuns, except those who have received special permission from the Apostolic See. They are forbidden to be sponsors of men or women lest scandal arise amongst or concerning the friars.

CHAPTER TWELVE

*Of those Who wish to go Among the Saracens
And other Unbelievers.*

Whoever of the brothers by Divine inspiration may wish to go among the Saracens and other unbelievers shall seek permission from their Provincial Minister. The Provincial Ministers, for their part, are to give permission only to those whom they see are fit to be sent.

Furthermore I charge the Ministers on their obedience that they should ask from the Pope for one of the Cardinals of the holy Roman Church to be governor, protector, and corrector of this fraternity, so that we may be utterly subject and submissive to the Church, steadfast in the Catholic faith, may we live always according to the poverty, and the humility and the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we have solemnly promised.

Francis of Assisi

(Compiled with the assistance of:
Source Documents – For the Living Tradition of
The Society of Saint Francis, 1978: 9-15;
Moorman, et al.)

APPENDIX B

CANTICLE OF BROTHER SUN

O Most High, Almighty Good Lord, God:
to You belong praise, glory, honour and all blessing.

Praised be my Lord by all His creatures:
and chiefly by our brother sun,
who brings us the day and brings us the light.
Fair is he, and shines with a very great splendour:
O Lord, he points us to you.

Praised be my Lord by our sister the moon:
and by the stars which you have set clear and lovely in heaven.

Praised by my Lord by our brother the wind:
and by air and cloud, calms and all weather,
by which you uphold life in all creatures.

Praised be my Lord by our sister water:
who is very useful to us and humble and precious and clean.

Praised be my Lord by our brother fire,
through whom you give light in the darkness:
and he is bright and pleasant and very mighty and strong.

Praised be my Lord by our mother the earth,
who sustains us and keeps us:
and brings forth fruits of different kinds,
flowers of many colours, and grass.

Praised be my Lord by all those who pardon one another for Your love's sake:
and who endure weakness and trials.

Blessed are they who calmly endure:
For you, O Most High, shall give them a crown.

Praised be my Lord by our sister the death of the body,
from which no one escapes:

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are they who are found walking by your most holy will;
for the second death shall have no power to harm them.

Praise and bless the Lord, and give thanks to Him:
and serve Him with great humility.

(The Daily Office – SSF, 1981: 331/2)

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