

FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY
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INTRODUCTION

When we come to the chapter on Franciscan spirituality in a book like this, we are impressed by its lack of originality. This absence of a distinctive spirituality seems a sign of inferiority and we ask ourselves whether this is a consequence of a devotion to poverty which is said to be the virtue which is the true fountain for the Franciscan soul? Furthermore this spirituality offers no visible principles which are peculiarly its own, no practices which it does not share with other schools.

The devotion, dare we say, the apparently .sentimental devotion that the Order professes for the sacred humanity of the Son of God, the Passion, the Blessed Sacrament, the Blessed Virgin, is part of Christian piety. Its distinctively Franciscan character is slight. All devout souls consider it a privilege to take part.

No one denies that the Franciscan founder, Francis of Assisi, is a saint whose personality is forceful and original. Yet we cannot claim that it is his imitation of Christ that makes him unique. The very name that Christians bear shows quite clearly their dependence on Christ.

Were Saint Francis' disciples all to profess, in imitation of a few whom the Church has canonized, his marked cult of poverty, or his lyric love for creatures, or even his literal interpretation of the Gospel--because all cannot be required to go as far as the stigmata--their profession would not make them different from other Christians.

Followers of Francis seem to use the same books, to practice the same devotions, to cultivate the same virtues and (to speak for a moment in a lighter vein) they commit the same faults as do devout souls who are known to have other spiritual connections!

That some men more frequently make the Way of the Cross, while others are fond of reciting the rosary, or conform themselves to a certain method of particular examen--preferences like these do not constitute a notable, nor even an essential distinction of spiritual ways.

And so it goes. The impression persists: Franciscan spirituality is without differentiating characteristics. It is, not to press the point further, among the other more distinctively different schools of spirituality, a Christian spirituality.

Good. Let no one expect us to attempt to refute, not even to discuss, a statement which is so categorically in accord with our convictions: we forthrightly affirm our belief without any ambiguity:

The spirituality adopted by the Franciscan family:

- I. according to the example and teaching of its head,
- II. according to the principles formulated by its doctors,
- III. is purely Christian.

By that we mean that it conforms to the doctrine of the Gospels without any addition of heterogeneous elements or the subtraction of any revealed elements.

Therefore we must demonstrate and prove, first, that this spirituality is derived from the examples and teaching of Saint Francis; then, that it puts into practice the principal doctrines developed by the Order's theologians; finally, that the practices, which are inevitably the same as those found in other schools, are animated with a spirit that may not make any basic changes but, at least to speak with greater exactness, does give them new life.

Then it will be possible for us to conclude that its absolute fidelity to Revelation, certified in its origins, its systematic elaboration, its strict observance constitute an exceptional differentiation which, while hidden from human eyes, is thereby no less real and characteristic. Because, for a spirituality that wishes and must be Christian, to be Christian purely and solely is no disadvantage.

I. EXAMPLES AND TEACHING OF SAINT FRANCIS

Everyone agrees that Saint Francis understood his personal vocation to be a call to the exact imitation of Jesus Christ. Then he realized that his mission was to spread his own ideal among men. This, too, no one challenges. "Imitate me as I have imitated Christ". "Imitatores mei estote et sicut ego Christi." These words of the Apostle Saint Paul can serve as an epitaph for the life and work of Saint Francis. In the first days of his conversion, he may have interpreted in a material way the order given him by the Crucified Christ of Saint Damian to repair His ruined house. The arrival of many disciples, then the realization of the needs of souls quickly clarified his true purpose and showed him the spiritual ruins which in God's providence he was meant to restore.

Others were as ignorant of Jesus Christ as had been Francis. In that day Christians who were faithful to the Church professed a formal religion without a soul. To them Christ was a name that recalled the memory of a benefactor of times long past who in distant ages had ascended to a far away heaven. Other men, some baptized, some not, repulsed by this cold and lifeless doctrine, sought among non-believers the spiritual up-lift and satisfaction of soul, that the misunderstood official worship no longer afforded.

When Francis returned to Christ he discovered a new meaning in his life. This same return also gave a meaning to the life of men and women who were wandering like a flock more in need of shepherds than of pastures. He could not fail to see that his personal vocation and his providential mission were identical, and that the means that brought about one would also bring about the other.

"Christ is living. He loves us. Let us believe in Him. Let us attach ourselves to Him and from Him receive Life. Let us imitate Him and we will find that we are transformed into Him. Therefore let us observe His Gospel to the letter and without any additions. This is the Way, the Truth and the Life."

Do not think that this is mere conjecture. It is based on many formal documents.

As early as 1209, the first Rule presented to Pope Innocent III opens with these words: "This is the Brothers' (the word "Minor" was not yet used) rule of life: to live in obedience, in chastity, without anything of their own and to follow the doctrine and footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ". The whole spirit of this first Rule is the imitation of our Savior and is based on His words and example. Chapter 23 which is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving shows with inspired precision the motive of this "following of Jesus Christ". We will return to this text in a moment.

The Rule that Pope Honorius III approved in 1223 was more juridical and concise than the earlier edition of 1209, yet it defines the Brothers' rule of life in the same way. This time it refers to them as BROTHERS MINOR, that is to say, lesser or lessened. Their rule of life "consists in the observance of the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord, living in obedience, without anything of their own, and in chastity". In this connection it is interesting to notice that the imitation of our Lord, which was a corollary of the practice of the evangelical virtues has become the foundation of Franciscan life and that these three virtues have become the means towards this imitation.

Let us quote once again from the letter that Francis sent in 1226 to the brothers assembled in general chapter when he was too sick to go to them himself. It closes with a singularly luminous and explicit prayer which is a perfect epitome of his spiritual way and if we dare to use the word, of his theology. In it imitation is central. Here is the prayer:

"O God, Thou who art all-powerful, eternal, just and merciful to poor miserable creatures, grant that because of Thyself, Thou wilt do what we know Thou dost desire and desire what is pleasing to Thee, so that purified without and enlightened within, and enkindled with the fire of the Holy Spirit, we may FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THY SON, JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, and by Thy grace alone we may come to Thee, O most high, who in perfect Trinity and most simple Unity livest, and reignest, and glorify Thee, all-powerful God, forever and ever. Amen."

Now the Rule of the Brothers Minor is the model Francis followed literally when he first regulated the manner of life for the Poor Clares and later with suitable modifications for the Penitents.

Besides the Rule which he gave to Saint Clare we have a short letter to her which he dictated a few days before his blessed death. And if similar documents are missing for the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, this is but a textual gap for which the Father's authentic letters addressed to

"All the faithful, the heads of peoples, priests and clerics," legitimately supply. For the sake of brevity, we will not multiply quotations but everywhere and always Francis proclaims the same doctrine of the need to return to the Gospel and to the Master of the Gospel, the Lord Jesus.

Nor has he left us in ignorance as to why he has acted in this way. And on this point in particular, he who used to call himself "a little unlettered man" reveals himself to be a sublime theologian, a descendant of Paul and John.

As proof of this assertion we can first offer the Saint's ADMONITIONS which are placed at the head of the oldest collections of his writings because of their relative length and richness of content.

This work is entitled: "Concerning the Body of Christ" and it is, in fact, a study of the holy Eucharist. It is, also, a glowing and luminous demonstration of the necessity of the mediation of the Man-God, and it shows how communion with His Body makes it possible for us to share in His Spirit, and this in turn enables us to draw near to the Triune-God and makes us pleasing to Him.

A systematic analysis of the doctrine of this beautiful text may be expressed in these propositions.

Because Jesus is all: the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Beginning and the End, no one can please or serve God, except through Him. And God reveals Himself and gives Himself only in Him and through Him. In fact God is Himself invisible unknowable, inaccessible to the creature. Therefore the creature in order to know, love and serve God, needs a Mediator, One who is equal to God and men, the Man-God, Jesus-Christ.

However, it is not enough to become attached to His humanity; beyond that humanity we must through the spirit reach the divinity which belongs to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

The apostles, too, were bound by this law, they who saw Jesus in His flesh. All the more reason for it to bind us. And from this fact may be formulated the principles of our spiritual life.

According to Saint Francis, this life consists in our identifying ourselves with Jesus Christ, whom the Church presents to us, whom the Holy Ghost accredits in us, so that, by faith and obedience, we may live and act to the glory of the blessed Trinity.

Now this identification is brought about not only through the efforts of the faithful soul that tries to conform itself to its divine model by exterior imitation, it is also realized from within in a manner that is apparently figurative and obscure but which is true and efficacious: this is the fruit of sacramental communion.

Saint Francis concludes this Admonition with these words:

It is the Lord's Spirit who dwells in Christ's faithful ones, who receive the Body and Blood that are divine. In this way the Lord remains always with them according to His promise: Behold I am with you all days even unto the end of time.

Who is not enlightened and convinced by the mere statement of this doctrine? Its profundity testifies to its truth. We must remember that it is not painstakingly fashioned by a trained theologian, skilled in philosophical speculation and exegetical discussions. It comes from the heart of a little poor man who attended no school but the school of prayer, who knew no master but the Crucifix.

Francis ascended still higher, tracing the path which the doctors of his order were to follow, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus and their disciples, enlightening their genius with the brilliance of his own, like the eagle who tempts her little ones to fly and lifts them with the power of her wings.

We will quote one brilliant text. It is to be found in the "Elevations" which form chapter 23 of the Rule of 1209-1221. In a few words it expresses the saint's whole thought on the unique and necessary role of the Man-God.

This chapter is entitled, as we said before:

PRAYER, PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

It opens with the solemn words: "All powerful, most high, most holy and sovereign God, Father holy and just, Lord of heaven and earth, because of Thy sake we give Thee thanks..."

Then follows a list of the divine works which merit our praise, blessing, and gratitude. Here we must notice the place given to the unique and necessary Mediator, Jesus Christ:

"because according to Thy holy will, Thou hast created all things spiritual and corporal through Thy only Son and in the Holy Spirit; Thou hast made us to Thy image and likeness, Thou hast placed us in paradise; and through our own fault we have failed..."

"... and as Thou created us through Thy Son, because of Thy true and holy love for us Thou hast ordained that Thy Son, true God and true man, be born of the glorious and ever blessed virgin Mary and that He redeem us from our captivity by His cross, His blood and His death..."

The resemblance is evident between these statements and the sublime prologue of Saint Paul's epistle to the Ephesians: "In Christo Jesu." For it is in and through Christ, the Mediator that predestination, adoption, creation, and redemption of the elect attain their perfection in Christ, the goal of all God's loving designs and the highest point of the Apostle's thought.

In this way Francis goes beyond human wisdom. He reaches the summit of his theology with these words:

And because we are all poor sinners, we are not worthy to pronounce Thy name, therefore we pray Thee to deign to be pleased that our Lord, Jesus Christ, in whom alone Thou art well pleased, render Thee thanks for all things, together with the Holy Spirit, the Consoler. May He be pleasing to Thee and to them, because THIS SON SUFFICES ALWAYS AND FOR ALL THINGS TO THEE, and it is through Him that Thou hast granted us all graces. Alleluia!"

His Christ suffices always and in all things to God! He alone is the object of the Father's good pleasure. No one pleases the Father except in Him and through Him.

This is, for Francis, the supreme reason for His devotion to Christ and his efforts to be conformed to Him!

II. THE DOCTRINE FORMULATED BY THE MASTERS OF THE ORDER

The place assigned by the Triune-God to Jesus Christ in His work and consequently in the destiny of men, as Francis has conceived it perhaps by a pleasing intuition and one that is surely charismatic, has been treated more systematically by the thinkers of his Order. They have shown its importance and its consequences. They have applied to it all the findings of revelation and the traditional scholastic techniques. Their meditations are the basis of what we call today Franciscan spirituality.

The spirit of Saint Francis is recognizable in the speculations of the theologians of his Order, as well as in the works of its saints. We will name only the greatest and the most renowned, because here we are not interested in presenting quotations but in studying principles and practices in the growth of a living thought. The names of these men are well-known, even if their writings are not read as they should be: Saint Bonaventure and Blessed John Duns Scotus.

Besides his "Commentaries on Sacred Scripture" and his "Sermons" (those vast storehouses of theological knowledge and popular teaching), Saint Bonaventure has written works of pure spirituality. These are not merely marginal or additional works, but they are in strict dependence and vital application because he felt that all knowledge is vain that is not founded on Christ and does seek to know God in Him in order to love and serve Him. On this point the work (unhappily incomplete) which sums up all his doctrine is the "Collationes in Hexaameron." This is a synthesis of all human knowledge and it includes spirituality.

According to our present purpose let us point out a basic and definitive work "The Triple Way;" then, "The Itinerary of the Soul to God," a treatise that has been much praised, often imitated, less often understood, because it must be seen that this WAY is Christ; and finally "The Six Wings of the Seraphim," an explanation of the Christian exercise of authority. Among his lesser works we must mention "The Tree of Life," "The Soliloquy," "The Soul's Guidance," etc.

Saint Bonaventure, the seraphic doctor, is deeply penetrated and imbued with the mind of his seraphic Father. Etienne Gilson has said that in reading Saint Bonaventure one receives the impression that it is a Saint Francis who has been raised up--or who has forgotten himself--and who is philosophizing.

The second author who reveals Franciscan thought and therefore its spirituality is John Duns Scotus, honored as blessed in his Order and among Christians in the dioceses of Cologne and Nola.

On every point except the one we are going to discuss, Duns Scotus differs notably from Bonaventure. In early education, in training, in his days at Oxford as student, later as master, he deepened the understanding, which was in his very blood, of the real and the concrete. This affirmation was opposed to the speculative tendencies of continental thinkers. He entered the School just in time to profit from the works of Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Thomas, Roger Bacon and to free the pragmatic teaching of Revelation from secular infiltrations and Islamic accretions. Thus he joined his predecessor, Bonaventure, on the one point that we mentioned above, namely the interpretation of the function and mission of Jesus Christ given by their Father Francis.

Too easily is it forgotten. Too willingly and systematically is it ignored that the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, today a defined dogma, is in Scotist Christology but a corollary of the absolute primacy and universal mediation of Mary's Son, the Man Christ Jesus, "Homo Christus Jesus."

The second of the great Franciscan masters has produced no notable or well-known treatise on spirituality but he has systematized the absolute primacy on which Franciscan spirituality is founded. And he has given so many suggestions and produced so many texts that his disciples and his commentators can be guided by him.

To Saint Bonaventure and to John Duns Scotus, as to their Father Saint Francis, Christ is the highest grace God offers His creatures. Their response to this offer controls their attitude to God and this includes their religion, their "mystique," their spirituality.

Under these conditions, what place in human thought and act is it appropriate to give to Christ Jesus?

The same, these Franciscans answer, that He holds in the thought and the work of God.

They claim, therefore, that according to Scripture, in Him, who as man is called Jesus Christ, we must acknowledge the first being conceived, the first being willed by the Triune-God in their resolve to manifest "ad extra," that is outside of the intimacy of their Persons, their Power, their Wisdom, their Goodness.

Christ is the first predestined being, the first being allowed to share in the life and happiness of God. And this without any other motive than the divine free will, through a personal union with the Son.

In the communication of His blessed fullness to a uniquely, privileged being, God finds not only an adequate manifestation of Himself, but also in the adoration, love and service of this privileged being, an adequate return of His gift. Christ's response to these advances of the Triune-God satisfy, as a matter of equality, the plan of love that decided God to abandon His blessed solitude. God could have stopped there. His work was perfect. This assertion is capital in the Franciscan mystique. It must not be forgotten.

God went still further. He pushed, as it were to excess, the communication of His life, of His activity, of His happiness. With His First-born He associated companions, brothers, but this communication is as it were an overflow of benevolence which has been previously rewarded, repaid, balanced by the absolute value of the homage paid the Triune-God by His Christ, the Man-God, in return for His first gift. No ingratitude, were any to appear among the beneficiaries of His overflowing gift, could count because of the return Christ has already made.

Now it is because of Jesus Christ, at His request, to His credit and according to His plan that in Him, for Him and through Him all creatures in their turn receive their being. Of all these creatures in heaven and on earth, organic, inert, voiceless, intelligent, free, Christ is the principle of their creation.

So true is it that Christ depends on no creature, that on the contrary without Christ no creature would exist.

He is also and primarily the cause of the predestination of free creatures - angels and men. These moral and spiritual creatures are from the beginning established in the order of charity, that is to say they are predestined to share in the personal life of the Triune-God. In Christ they are called to glory. Because of this glory, graces are prepared and offered to them which will make them capable and worthy to receive it. These graces were merited for them by Christ. For this reason they are created in a nature adapted to this grace and to this glory.

Let us study the order, or, if we prefer, the hierarchy of the manifestations of divine charity, of the God who is Love.

Eternally, essential Love subsists in a trinity of Persons The going out of the Son, willed absolutely for its own sake, is the Incarnation and gave God "One who loved Him". Further manifestations are:

1.--the adoption of spirits, the ordering of grace to glory, of nature to grace; predestination; the Incarnate Son is the first-born of many brethren;

2.--the creation of beings according to their nature, decreed and accomplished to realize the gift already decided upon; the Son Incarnate is the model (the archetype) and the artisan of creation;

3.--the revelation to free beings of God's plan: the Son Incarnate is the image and spokesman of the Father.

From the essential function of the Incarnate Son, Christ Jesus, results the necessity and efficacy of His mediation. He is the only mediator between God and men. Because all depends on Him, all comes from Him, passes through Him from God to other beings, in existence, in action, in knowledge, merit and reward, so all returns to God through Him. What has value, has value only in Him. God knows, wills, approves only Christ, or in Christ, or because of Christ. Reciprocally no one knows God, loves God or serves Him efficaciously, no one comes to God, no one pleases Him but in Christ and through Him.

Christ, the principle of God's works is the means (medium) of created activity, He is the center of the Universe.

Furthermore whoever lives, thinks, loves, acts, serves in Him can be sure of God's good pleasure; the infinite pleasure taken by the Father and the First-born give value to the works of all His other children. This is the second important affirmation of Franciscan "mystique." It must be remembered.

The all-loving plans of the Triune-God unfold in this manner.

Created later, the free creature (restrictively man) did not maintain the high level of his vocation and fell by sin, both original and actual.

1.--His defection does not destroy all order that is not based on him; it does remove him from this order. Sinner, as he is, he is still, despite his rebellion, subject to Christ, tributary to Christ in his being, in his life, in his end.

2.--And if Christ, in His goodness, is pleased to repair man's fault, He does not need to create a new order, nor to impose it by force, but simply to restore the primitive order which although violated is permanent and to which the repentant guilty creature can return.

3.--Franciscan spirituality represents in this way the mystery of the Redemption with its proper object, distinct from that of the Incarnation and apart from the role of pain, passion, and compassion.

God is not the implacable redresser of his offense, but a loving Father who authorities His eldest Son, His beloved Son to devote Himself to the salvation of His rebel brothers and makes it possible for Him to make this reparation by giving Him a freely-chosen power of suffering, extraordinary and miraculous.

Christ is not the victim of a sanguinary prosecution, which takes delight in torturing One who is innocent in place of those who are guilty. He is a friend who offers Himself spontaneously, out of love for Father and children, to draw His guilty loved ones from the abyss where they have hurled themselves and to ransom them at whatever cost to Himself.

Compassion, in souls who have been redeemed at so high a cost, is less a debt that has been contracted or a payment, but rather a voluntary imitation; and pain that is accepted, even deliberately sought in penance, becomes not so much a disciplinary procedure but is rather a return of love: Christ loved me and delivered Himself up for me!

From this absolute priority of the predestination of Christ Jesus; from His universal primacy over all creatures; from the subordination of all other destinies to His own; from the necessity of His mediation flow consequences that limit, determine and govern all Franciscan spirituality.

I.--God's work is done in unity. It is not made up of disparate and heterogeneous parts. Seemingly this, too, is true of man's total existence.

Because all creatures owe their being to Christ and are ordained to Him as to their end, in their activity and their destiny, the order of the world is Christian. Nothing in the world, nothing that has ever been in the world, nothing that ever will be in the world can be pagan, or apart from God or contrary to God, nor bad in itself, nor even dangerous. The revolt of sinners, the disorder of original or actual sin made right by grace, promised or given, can harm their free and responsible agents since they are for all the others an occasion of common effort, or of merit.

Under the various forms of temporal trial and eternal fulfillment, of activity by the individual, the family or civil and ecclesiastic society, of personal or liturgical piety, of human labor, of scientific or moral culture, man's life remains one and the same.

All in Christ and through Christ are unified and tend to charity, that is God's love for man and man's love for God, man's love of God and of his neighbor man's salvation and God's honor.

II.--Free creatures, angels and men (here we are especially interested in the latter), are established from the beginning in the order we call supernatural. Their "nature", their end, their actions are supernaturalized, whether they know it or not, whether they want it or refuse it. To remain in the truth, in the objective and ontological reality of their psychology and of their history, we must therefore never forget the secret presence of the internal activity of this element which is not logical but vital. The ascetic and the apostle ought to count on it. He ought always remember that the just man lives "supernaturally", as in his normal state, not through his individual effort but through communication in the life of Christ. The sinner and formal infidel do not live "supernaturally", consequently they are in a state of violence from which the whole power of the divine order tends to withdraw them, just as the law of gravity tends to draw bodies to their center. In the same manner a stone held in an instable position is not withdrawn from the pull of gravity, so the sinner is not excluded from the order he is violating, on the contrary he is being constantly invited to integrate himself in it once again. There is great power in this thought for those who seek to convert souls!

III.--The whole work of the salvation of men is already truly accomplished by Christ, not only in His title of Redeemer which is, so to speak, only accessory, but in His deeper and essential title of Principle of predestination and creation. As a matter of fact each one must do this work for himself, surrendering himself to whatever demands are made by Christ and by his coheirs in this great act of collaboration because, although "salvation is a personal work, it is not individual".

Nevertheless, no one is asked to work for a vague and uncertain result. No: the result is secured and success is certain. Because the efforts made by the faithful soul who works for his salvation, and the functional or ministerial efforts of the apostle who labors for the salvation of his brothers are in reality the works of Christ Himself, so they are bound to attain this end and please God.

IV.--The formula that sums up Franciscan spirituality is this: "I live now not I but Christ lives in me".

The efforts required, the practices proposed, the exercises undertaken, are obviously those recommended in other schools of spirituality. But there is a difference.

1.--Here, efforts and practices, are no longer those of a human activity - even supported by grace--which seeks by these means to win Christ, but the manifestation of an activity which is already informed and animated by the Spirit of Christ, as by an inner movement and control.

2.--They are unified among themselves and identified with the very life of which they are an expression because they are the action of the Head in the members, of the sap in the branches.

3.--Among these different exercises, the liturgy and the sacraments hold a more esteemed position than private practices such as examen and meditation because they are of divine and ecclesiastical institution and their authenticity and efficacy are divinely assured.

V.--Charity gives life to this spirituality when it begins, as it progresses, until its end. Motives of fear and hope are neither disdained or underestimated, but they are kept in a subordinate position, enlivened by faith which provides their objects and by love which widens their horizons.

Christ loved me and delivered Himself up for me, this is the motive of conversion, perseverance and consummation. The dominant motive of charity, truly affecting unity of life, of activity and of fruit between Christ and the faithful soul, not by outward imitation but by an inner transformation is the formal work of the blessed Eucharist. It is known first by faith, is accepted by the will, and realized in every domain, and when the goal is reached it can be consciously verified. This awareness can be considered as the summit of mystical union, the prelude to eternal union where Christ will be all in all in God, according to His promise: "I will manifest myself to him".

VI.--According to the Franciscan "mystique" (in the modern and restricted meaning of the word, that is: "new" relations of "conscious" intimacy with God) the place accorded Christ, the object and means of contemplation according to man's whole being, is fixed according to the same principles.

Since Christ is by nature--can we say, and not by a subsequent and arbitrary will of God--the sole mediator between God and men, no one comes to the Father except through Him and in Him. In return, no one is pleasing to the Father and heard by Him except in Christ and through Christ. Nor does the Father ever hide from anyone who asks for Him in the name of and out of love for His Beloved: whoever the soul may be, the Father welcomes him and answers his prayer.

Taught these truths, the Franciscan soul does not pretend to present himself alone before God, not to know God except through the visible image which He has pleased to give us of Himself. To see the Son is to see the Father.

On the one hand the Franciscan soul does not in his unworthiness place any obstacles to divine favors because his unworthiness is fundamental; to free himself of this unworthiness, would that not be to imply that these favors can be merited and reduced to something that man can condignly acquire? The Franciscan asks and waits.

On the other hand, the soul will not admit that the holy Humanity can be an obstacle to the knowledge of God: but through the wounds of Jesus crucified, he will try humbly to attain to the contemplation of the Trinity.

This point is also characteristic: the God of the Franciscan soul is indeed the Triune-God, the Father of Jesus Christ, the living God and not the abstract God of philosophers and savants.

VII.--In Franciscan asceticism, therefore, there is no question of introducing the supernatural into one's actions or into one's life, as something that comes from above or from outside. Nor is this done, as it were, by constraint or by force. Our desire is to be clothed, not despoiled, in order that what is mortal in us can be absorbed by life. To do this all that is necessary is:

1.--to admit according to the revealed doctrine that our whole life and all that we do are truly supernaturalized in truth and in fact by a fundamental dependence on Christ and through His life-giving influence;

2.--to realize this doctrine, by making ourselves docile and attentive to Christ's will as it is revealed to us, moment by moment, by the common precepts and the duties of our state, circumstances, inspirations or impulses of the Spirit of Jesus, under the direction of the Church;

3.--to accomplish this will with joy, confidence, submission, generosity; not fearing that this attitude of basic deference to Christ will paralyze initiative; only the sallies of self-love will be mortified and these are

always ready to substitute themselves, under the pretext of zeal, for the spirit of Jesus.

III. ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

Who can fail to see that this spirituality generates joy, optimism, generosity and sacrifice, because it is based on charity, confidence and humility as is amply attested by the life and number of the saints of the Order?

I. How can we explain the attitude of the Franciscan soul?

1. Towards God.

Whatever may be the sum total of the creature's resistances and defections, the soul knows that the loving plan of the Trinity is not frustrated. This has been perfectly accomplished and can never be undone. Besides, to give glory to God and to rejoice with Him, the soul need not have recourse to this supposition (a horrible thought if we dwell on it), that hell glorifies God as much as does heaven. For such a soul it is enough to know that Christ has, in advance, given all due adoration, all due service, and that through Christ and in Christ, the soul may worthily adore, love and serve God. The soul may love Him above all things and more than self, without needing to be pleased with a profit from the unhappiness of any creature.

2. Towards creatures.

The Franciscan finds all creation good. All creation is his brother. It contains no hidden snares. It lifts him to God. He can trust it, use it, enjoy it with thanksgiving and discretion. "Tamquam non utentes." He uses, as if not using, all the good things that it offers him according to the divine order and plan.

Men, more than all other creatures are dear to us. They are our brothers. Redeemed by Christ, they are coheirs with Christ, God's children by the same title that we are. Fraternal charity is for us a privilege that we ought to enjoy rather than a duty that we must perform with pain. We do not look upon ourselves as enemies, but as ignorant men who are to be drawn to the truth, as wanderers who are to be led back to the way, as dead men to be brought to Life.

This work of life and love is to us more precious and seems more urgent, more easily accomplished and more likely to succeed, because it is Christ's work not our own. Moreover, collaborating with us in this work are all the orders of the world, the activity of spirits, the invitations of grace. And whatever seems to resist us, may do so only because of our ignorance and may in reality be enveloped by the Savior's charity. So we treat, neither Truth nor Life, as if they were our own possessions, nor

do we act as if God's glory were our own and could be harmed when we harm ourselves.

3. Towards oneself.

The discipline whereby the ascetic controls his faculties and his senses in order that they be docile and faithful to the directives of the spirit of Jesus, is for the Franciscan not a work of violence, repression or destruction but of growth and perfection. According to other schools of spirituality the old man is enemy number one, he must be hounded until death. To the Franciscan he is a brother in chains who must be freed from his fetters. Nature is a daughter of God and therefore good: all she needs is discipline. Brother Francis himself admitted that "brother ass" had served him well and he reproached himself for treating him so badly on many occasions. So it is our duty to be fully and totally ourselves, that is to say "each one must in his own way be Christ".

The abnegation required of us, as it is of all Christians, consists in substituting for our imperfect thoughts, wills and feelings which are so often centered on a visible good, the perfect thoughts wills and feelings of Christ which are raised to the unseen good above. We write enunciation, we read plenitude. Sorrow is for us not an end in itself but a means of giving proofs of our faith and thanksgiving to Christ who was crucified through love.

II. Fully conscious that alone we can do nothing and that Christ Jesus our head can and wishes to do all in us and with us; conscious, too, that as a matter of fact He has already successfully done all, our joy is immense and our hope unshakable. When we humble ourselves before Him, when we unite ourselves to Him, when we substitute for the imperfection of our ways and our works His plenitude and perfection in the adoration of the Blessed Trinity, the loving service of God and of neighbor, we can repeat with certitude, knowing the full meaning of our words: "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me; for what I now do in the weakness of the body, I do through faith in the plenitude of Him who loving me has given Himself to me and for me". "With Christ I am nailed to the cross". "Christo confixus sum cruci." Crucified with Christ, we are happy on the cross through which with Him we reconcile all things to God.

The Franciscan soul is never alone whether he presents himself before God or whether he goes to serve his brethren. He knows that he is always "in Christ Jesus", "in Christo Jesus," guided by the Spirit of Jesus and that he acts according to that guidance.

Through Christ and with Christ, the Franciscan adores, praises, prays. This "elan" towards God is paralyzed neither by unworthiness nor powerlessness, because, although he comes empty-handed and unadorned, he is rich with the graces and merits of his Mediator who is always living to intercede for him with God. Like Christ and with Christ, the Franciscan adores, exalts, pleads and repairs for the Church. Christ is dearer to him than he is to himself.

For Christ and with Christ, he serves. Set-backs have no meaning for him. His works are not his own. His zeal is all the greater because he is personally disinterested. Temporal success is not his goal, either in the conquest of souls or the slower, harder conquest of self, because the Master looks to the effort and gives no creature the glory of achievement. Is it not the Master who acts through and with and in the soul? To Him be all honor because from Him comes the power to will and to act!

III. To complete this synthetic exposition of Franciscan spirituality we must now show the role and the relative importance of devotions that are part of the spiritual life.

1.--The Eucharist, sacrifice and sacrament, is an anticipated realization, at once symbolic, figurative, actual and efficacious of our life in Christ, of Christ's life in us, of our union with God in Christ. The Franciscan knows with the certitude of faith that he already possesses the object of his hope and of his love, so he is not overly concerned about some form of a higher and more or less unverifiable experience of these realities. In spite of this--or perhaps because of this--charismatic prayer has never been lacking among Franciscans.

2.--The Imitation of Christ is for us not one means among many other equally good means. Nor is it even the best means. It is the only and essential means and without it there can be no conformity. This is true because conformity is not a series of exterior acts designed to produce some outer resemblance. It is a vitalizing effort to reproduce in the disciple by interior assimilation the Master's life and ways, just as children resemble their parents. It follows that this identification is the result rather of eucharistic communion than of any personal striving.

3.--The Holy Ghost, as is now transparently evident, cannot even be, for the Franciscan, the object of an excellent devotion. He is in fact the devotion. By this we mean that He is the inner principle of Franciscan spiritual life, the dynamic of Franciscan activity, the author of a living transformation in Christ. As a result the soul, like a child, is freed from the letter that kills. Christ's life, through the power of the Spirit of Christ and the collaboration of our Lady, becomes the soul's life.

4.--Because our Lady is, with her divine Son, the object of the same divine decree, she is His Co-Mediatrix in creation, redemption, distribution of grace and entrance into glory. In Franciscan spirituality her place must be next to Christ, after Him and with Him. She is the Mother of Christ the Head by God's choice and her own consent. She is also the Mother of His members

5.--of the Mystical Body, the living center of the Franciscan soul. This three-fold Church triumphs in the heaven of angels and saints, suffers in purgatory, and struggles on earth where it is visible and invisible, hierarchic and spiritual. From this Church the soul receives doctrine and sacraments, to this Church the soul returns love and obedience.

6.--The reception of the sacraments and liturgical life are neither supplementary nor superfluous, but as we observed when discussing the Eucharist, the Franciscan knows that Mass, public prayers, and sacramental ceremonies are means of union with Christ--peerless, authentic and divinely efficacious because of their institution. They are valued highly but other means

7.--for example, such ascetical exercises as examen or meditation are not for that reason neglected or despised. The latter is not to be confused with prayer because the enlightened Franciscan docile to the Holy Spirit and conformed to the acts and thoughts of Christ (that is to His mysteries and His states) is by nature contemplative and Christ is the object and means of a tender knowledge of God, of a wisdom which is eternal life.

These examples will suffice. They show that the introduction of these devotions does no violence to our theses and adds nothing incongruous. On the contrary, they serve to bring out the integrity and true meaning of Franciscan spirituality. They do not endanger its unity nor obscure its pattern.

IV. We have seen that the practices of virtue of the Franciscan are those of every Christian soul. Yet we allowed ourselves to claim at the beginning of this chapter that these practices which are to be found in every school have here a spirit that if not essentially different, is at least fundamentally new.

This is the spirit of the first beatitude:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Lest this study be incomplete and our readers be deceived, we must now show how the virtue of poverty gives a special modality to Franciscan spirituality, and we must describe the spiritual reality that is hidden in this word.

It is along this path that the Franciscan follows his guide and grasps, adopts and fulfills his highest purpose more perfectly and more profoundly.

Francis is not merely poor. He is the poor man, the little poor man, "pauperculus, il poverello." How far he carried poverty, renunciation, disappropriation, there is no need to repeat--the facts are well known. His poverty is legendary. Excesses and unjustifiable exaggerations have been imputed to him. There is a proverb "Loans are made only to rich men," and it is true that of the plenitude of Franciscan poverty practices are alleged that verge on the superstitious.

Saint Ambrose, in accord with all the Fathers and Doctors justifies the choice of poverty as the foundation of the spiritual edifice on the grounds that the root of all evil springs from its contraries, cupidity and avarice.

But Francis was not guided by dialectics. He was not influenced by theories of asceticism or social economy. Love was his lodestar. He loved Christ and wanted to make himself in all things like Christ. He saw that Christ taught poverty by word and example. He willed to make himself poor. He exhorted his followers to live in poverty and by poverty.

Rich as Christ was, for our sakes He made Himself poor. "For you He was made poor". "Propter vos egenus factus est." Beyond the state of need to which Jesus reduced Himself during His mortal life, Francis discovered the deep and radical self-stripping of which this external poverty seemed to be the sacrament: "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant." "Semetipsum exinanivit, formam servi accipiens." Francis united himself to the mystery of the annihilations of the Incarnate Word. He considered Christ as stripped of human personality in favor of the person of the Son, not claiming the condition of God to which He had a right, or the condition of a free man which might have been His. He made Himself like the most wretched among us, like slaves without civil rights, like criminals condemned and punished.

"Nudum nudus sequitur." But who is there who will not admire the deep theological insight of this little unlettered man and the likeness to His divine Savior to which it brought him?

According to his Father's example the Franciscan finds in evangelical poverty, most vitally in Jesus Christ poor, the rule of his life, the form of his spirituality.

He lives not only in poverty (to please God, all disciples of His crucified Son must do this), he also lives by poverty, so that this poverty which according to other schools is only a secondary virtue connected with temperance, becomes for him the means of inner union and transformation in God.

Every school of spirituality manifests some special aspect of the inexhaustible plenitude of Christ's sanctity. It is this that gives it a special "cachet," a center of spiritual unity, a way of holiness. As a matter of fact, the end of every school is charity and the ultimate means is humility through which charity flourishes, because charity is a theological virtue and a gratuitous gift which is neither acquired nor merited. It is God's overflowing gift to the soul He loves, because of His exceeding love. "Propter nimiam charitatem." But in which soul? In the humble soul, emptied of self, stripped of self, in other words in the soul reduced to its essential poverty. Humility makes room for charity, charity fills the soul in the measure of its poverty.

In humility, in the emptying of the old man, as Saint Augustine calls it, Francis saw an aspect--but only one aspect of poverty. Rightly so. Poverty, Saint Ambrose affirms, is more vast than humility. It is also more loving. If it empties man of self, it is for the sake of a more perfect plenitude. Christ, being rich, made Himself poor, to enrich us.

Notice how every virtue can lead to poverty because all virtues suppose or impose some kind of renunciation or disappropriation. Faith surrenders reason's certitudes. Hope gives up earthly cravings. Temperance (and this

includes chastity) deprives the body of its pleasures. Let it not be said that these renunciations are made for the sake of a better good, for that is their meaning. Charity, in its turn, strips man of what he has most at heart: his longing, his need to be a center, to make himself the equal of God.

For Francis this is the efficacious value of poverty. It is not to be understood in the use of things, pushed even to the most extreme needs. It requires man's sincere correspondence to his condition as creature.

In Franciscan asceticism, poverty is seen to be a fount, a source of virtue whence all other virtues flow, whether they are exercised towards God and His Christ, towards neighbor or towards self. This is its exacting ideal of a never satisfied love, a Christocentric virtue, the epitome of all theory and all practice. We end where we began. Poverty has gone full circle. Daily practice proves that all can and all must come from Christ, the first Predestined, the universal Mediator, the Cause, the Exemplar, and the End of God's work.

V. Before concluding, let us confirm the efficacy of this doctrine by citing the number of those who, inspired by its lessons, have been acclaimed by the Church for their holiness. These figures speak with an eloquence all their own.

The litany of saints approved for Franciscan use contains the names of 30 martyrs in six different categories, besides Saint Fidelis, as well as 33 confessors and 14 virgins or widows.

It would be beyond the scope of this work to list these servants of God and to add the names of the blessed. Such an enumeration, however, would excite wonder, because it would include men and women of great renown and of widely different social classes. More useful is the observation that a saint recognized by the Church never leads his or her heroic life in isolation. On the contrary such an ardent soul is a center of faith and fervor.

Before the days of the pontificate of His Holiness Pope Pius XII, the Franciscan family gave the Church 121 saints (61 in the First Order, 6 in the Second and 54 in the Third) and 352 blessed (118 in the First Order, 22 in the Second, 92 in the Third). These Tertiaries were monarchs or merchants, working men or women who won their holiness in the world and helped to make the world holy. In the twentieth century, 91 Franciscans have been canonized or beatified. Of these Pius XI canonized five and Pius XII has added new names to the list, let us mention only Saint Jeanne of Valois and two French Franciscans among the 29 martyred by the Boxers in 1900 and who are now blessed.

More than 550 causes have been introduced in Rome. Almost one-third, that is about 180 of these causes are Franciscan. Four of these servants of God are our contemporaries.

By its fruits, our Lord has told us, the tree is to be judged.

CONCLUSION

May we not claim (unless we are completely and blindly deceived) that we have achieved our purpose and have shown that the spirituality adopted by the Franciscan family is:

- 1.--conformed to the examples and teaching of its founder,
- 2.--signally faithful to the doctrines laid down by its teachers and based on revelation,
- 3.--and that its devotional practices are inevitably the same as those found in other schools, yet their spirit is, if not entirely its own, at least and more correctly basically made new.

To this spirituality no extraneous elements have been added From it no revealed doctrines have been subtracted. It is purely and solely evangelical. In it Christ is all: foundation and crown, door and key, way and goal, truth and life.

So absolute a fidelity to revelation, attested to at its inception in its consistent development in its strict observance, leads to a result that is distinctively and really its own even though hidden from human eyes.

"God forbid", the Franciscan can repeat in the words of the Apostle Paul, in the words of his own father Francis, in the words of his masters,

"God forbid, that I ever glory in aught else than in Jesus, my crucified Lord. To Him be honor, glory, love eternally. Amen."